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Kasserian Injera: And How Are the Children? The Lived Experiences and Perceptions of Participants, Black and White, Who Attended Both Segregated and Desegregated Schools

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Kasserian Injera: And How Are the Children? The Lived Experiences and Perceptions of Participants, Black and White, Who Attended Both Segregated and Desegregated Schools

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Dedication

I remember my Great Grandma Ella who was blind and died at the age of 107 years old. I remembering sitting on her lap. She would revisit and recount her life, in a gabbled voice, with her family. Her grandparents were slaves, born in America to the lash and the whip. Grandma Ella, Grand-MaMa Julie, my father Sam Whitfield Sr., and myself represents the sixth generation removed from chattel slavery. Grandma Ella's grandparents represents the sixth generation that exited in human bondage. This moment of educational attainment is foremost in my mind in recognition of generations past.

This work is dedicated foremost to the memory of those who had the ability, but not the opportunity of intellectual pursuit. To every individual who champions the clarion call of liberty and freedom for all people without regard to race, creed, color, religion, gender or sexual orientation, I dedicate this work.

I am truly the product of such struggle, commitment, perseverance and sacrifice that was privileged, to me, long before I could ever understand and/or appreciate it. To those who sacrificially paved my way, I am thankful, forever grateful, and humbled. My debts of gratitude to those who sacrificed for me cannot be contained in this narrow and limited work. However, I am committed to continue the work.

Explanation of the Title: Kassserian Ingera

The title Kasserian Ingera is taken from the mighty Masai tribe of the African continent. Historically, the Masai were considered fierce warriors. Upon greeting one another including strangers, the Masai would state Kasserian Ingera which translated to "and how are the children?" This was one of several questions one may be asked even today when encountering a member of the Masai tribe. It is the intentional acknowledgement of value and significance being placed on one of the most vulnerable within their society, as well as our society. It is my opinion that this research asked the same question relative to the phenomenological experience of segregation and desegregation within the public-school system, by using the actual voices of a small sample of former students who lived it; and, how are the children?

Abstract

This study was guided by the following research question: *What are the perceptions and experiences of participants, Black and White, who attended both segregated and desegregated schools*? This phenomenological research study was conducted using two focus groups divided homogenously into one Black focus group and one White focus group. The Black focus group consisted of three Black females and two Black males. The White focus group consisted of six White females. The findings related to the research revealed that the Black focus group and the White focus group looked at this phenomenon differently along racial lines. These former students actually lived this experience and the effect, according to this research, lingers even today. The research study provided important sociological data about this crucial moment in the history of Arkansas, and in the United States. If we are to create a more equitable society, it is imperative that we understand historic events and phenomena, not only through the perspectives of the majority, but also—just as importantly—from the perspectives of those who lacked such privilege.

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Chapter I: Introduction

America has a long and difficult history regarding race, and the educational arena is not exempt. The struggle for Blacks to receive education has endured through slavery, Reconstruction, and Jim Crow Laws; in addition, it has persisted through "separate but equal" and court-mandated desegregation. Today, despite hard-won advances through the decades, school districts across the country are re-segregating. This growing trend threatens to undo progress gained and reverse the clock to a time when the color of your skin determined the quality of your school system (Garland, 2012). There is no one more qualified to speak on the potential issues of re-segregation than the students who lived during the days before *Brown v. the Board* (1954) was a staple in the history books.

As a small piece of America, Arkansas is no stranger to racial problems. For generations, many Black citizens labored in the cotton fields and other low-level employment opportunities because little else was afforded to them. Blacks were further confronted by rules and codes used to keep them within confined and pre-determined social spaces in the society. At its core, life was hard, very hard. The participants in this study were students at Arkansas schools during the desegregation era. Arkansas was an appropriate place to conduct this research because its desegregation implementation has been so fraught and so public.

This research study examined the lived experiences of former Arkansas students, Black and White, who attended both segregated and desegregated schools. A review of the literature indicated a great deal of research which evaluated the experiences of Black students during the period before and after the integration of schools; however, research focused on the experiences of both Black and White students during this time is quite limited. To understand school systems of this era, it is historically important to also

understand the political systems at the local, state, and national levels in which segregated schools operated before the Supreme Court's 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (Neier, 2014). It is even more important to understand the effect this phenomenon had on those who physically implemented the desegregation mandates of the courts: the students. The purpose of this study was to contribute to the body of research, the specific narratives, and reflections as expressed by the students themselves. The results of this study offer insight into the ongoing efforts of school desegregation, as well as current initiatives of school re-segregation (Stancil, 2018a).

Background of the Problem

Although the end of the Civil War brought liberation to four million former slaves, this newfound freedom came with a cost. The end of slavery brought about movement and self-determination for freedmen. This newfound ability of Blacks to make decisions, which had been the right only of White men, did not bode well with many Whites. In the aftermath of Abraham Lincoln's assassination, President Johnson warned that a system of terrorism was pervasive in southern reaction to former slaves (Young, 2015).

Education was important to Blacks while under the bonds of slavery, during the fight for freedom, and especially after the Civil War when slaves were freed. As many freedmen within the south received very little education, their knowledge was limited to the land they had worked on their entire lives. Blacks recognized the ability to be educated was paramount in the American experiment of citizenship, and many Blacks advanced their cry for education (Reulas, 2017). In response, the south fought to devise systems to keep freedmen as close as possible to their former slave status, which created

restrictions on Blacks that came to be known as “Black Codes” or “Pig Laws.” The purpose of these laws was to restrict Blacks from possessing the fullness of citizenship, especially after Southern Reconstruction ended around 1877 (Semuels, 2017). In many facets, criminalizing and subjugating Black lives were the cruel and severe responses of societies to the “Black Problem,” or what history has called the“Negro Question.” State legislatures changed criminal codes to specifically target Blacks by enacting and expanding existing laws (“Jim Crow Laws”, n.d.). “Black Codes” placed various restrictions on Blacks with the sole intent of maintaining the basic premise of White superiority. Categories of these codes included unfair criminalization, unfair vagrancy laws, unfair job discrimination, unfair legal proceedings, and unfair denial of the right to obtain an education (Mungo, n.d.). According to Pilgrim (2012), “Black Codes” and “Pig Laws” had more than a passing resemblance to the system of subjugation from which Blacks had only recently received liberation (Pilgrim, 2012).

One of the essential tenets of Jim Crow was that Blacks and Whites were to be educated separately. The education system that came to dominate the mainstream of American life had been designed specifically for White males, as opposed to any other race or gender (Allen, 2008). The actuality of “separate” school systems for Black and White students bore little to no resemblance to “equal,” a distinction which would eventually be challenged. In 1896, Homer Plessy challenged the Jim Crow train system by refusing to sit in an area designated for Blacks in Louisiana (Foner & Farraty, 1991). Plessy was arrested, and he sued based on the 14th Amendment’s Equal Protection Clause. The presiding district court judge, Judge John Ferguson, ruled against Plessy. Next, Plessy appealed to the United States Supreme Court, which

delivered its verdict and sustained the constitutionality of Louisiana's "separate but equal" clause (Brown v. Board, 1954; 163 Cong. Rec 537,1896).

"Separate but equal" became both the "de jure" and "de facto" law of the land for almost 60 years in America's public education school system. In 1954, "separate but equal" was challenged again in *Brown v. Board*. This case eventually consolidated four separate cases, and was led by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples on behalf of both Black elementary and Black secondary students. These Black students were denied admission to White public schools based primarily on race (Brown v. Board, 1954). *Brown v. Board* initially involved the inequitable allocation of resources under the "separate but equal" arguments as supported by the states.

Brown v. Board was decided on May 17, 1954. The Supreme Court affirmed that the segregation of public education solely based on race was a violation of the 14th Amendment's Due Process Clause, as it was detrimental to students of the minority race. The court also emphasized that the doctrine of "separate but equal" has no place in public education (Brown v. Board, 1954). The following year, after deliberating *Brown v. Board II* (1955), the Court ordered school desegregation. As a result of *Brown I* and *Brown II*, the integration of public school facilities became the supreme law of the land (Brown v. Board, n.d.).

Statement of the Problem

Between the landmark Supreme Court cases of *Brown v. Board of Education I* (1954) and *Brown v. Board of Education II* (1955), the integration of publicly funded schools became law. The timeframe for this mandate was in and of itself vague, with Brown II directing desegregation measures be implemented "with all deliberate speed."

The impact filtered down from the individuals deciding these cases into American homes everywhere, as students were ultimately required to execute the mandate at its base level. Klein (2016) declared that children were the foot soldiers in the battle to attain an adequate and equitable education.

Lack of information addressing both Black and White student perspectives about living through the experience of desegregation represented a gap in the literature that made this study necessary and its results valuable. This research examined the lived experiences and perceptions of these former students, both Black and White, and the lasting impact it has had on their adult lives.

The implementation of school desegregation mandated the mass, systematic integration of racial groups who had never until that point occupied the same spaces while matriculating in public school settings. Many students who started their school careers in segregated school spaces before *Brown v. Board of Education* would now complete them in desegregated school spaces after those decisions (Klein, 2016). These individuals' experiences should be both recorded and examined for reasons of posterity, history, sociology, and psychology. Their voices must be heard in the context of their individual experiences, as they were called upon to operate in systems which many were too young to understand at the time. Furthermore, this study captured the reflections of these former students, while they are still here to tell their individual stories. Each story taught us something significant about this unique – and uniquely fraught – time and place in American history. These stories also helped us understand what it means for the nation to seem to be returning to a similar such time and place through de facto re-segregation efforts currently underway.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study rests on the gains that Black and White Americans have made since the time of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decisions – gains now being threatened both by a relaxing of desegregation efforts and by attempts – through policy or practice – effectively to re-segregate. The lived experiences and reflections of both Black and White former students are vital to the unofficial, but significant dialogue the nation must embark upon – especially, during these times of political uncertainty. This dialogue may be as important today, as it was in the 1960s, '70s, and '80s. Without a renewed dialogue on the effects of segregation, the gains of yesterday may be eroded for current and future American students. The participants in this study not only shared their individual experiences, but also conveyed what it would mean to them if the nation was thrust backward in relation to desegregation mandates through lack of fidelity with, or abandonment of, desegregation initiatives by the courts.

By investigating the phenomena of segregation and desegregation, the researcher explored the effects the *Brown v. Board* decisions had on each participant. The participants were assigned to focus groups according to race. There were five Black participants (two males, three females) and six White participants (all female). First, I as the researcher explored how the affected individuals felt about their schools in first the segregated and then the desegregated systems. Next, I examined how these former students had viewed themselves in the educational environment, and how they viewed those of different races after their schools were desegregated. Finally, I explored with the participants any changes that they felt had resulted over time from being a part of desegregated schools. The participants reflected on the impact this phenomenon had on

their lives through three distinct time periods including: during desegregation, years after desegregation, and today.

An additional significant aspect of this study was its illumination of the importance of today's school student populations reflecting the rich diversity of races, cultures, religions, and sexual orientations present in the wider society. By recognizing and appreciating the persons next to whom they sit within American classrooms, today's students will better appreciate – and will be better prepared to contribute to – the wider world ("How Desegregation Changed Us", 2004).

According to data from the National Center for Education Statistics, the number of segregated schools doubled from 1996 to 2016 (Stancil, 2018b). The lived experiences and current perceptions of participating former students added vital knowledge to the research base, and must continue to be studied before lost to time and posterity. This research study represented American history, even if it is painful history to revisit. This study is not Black history and it is not White history, but it is American history.

This research study's results should be used to personalize policies that are sometimes blurred by numbers and bureaucracies, rather than sharpened into focus by the personal and lived experiences of those who were most directly impacted by the tumultuous times of desegregation. These experiences added to the somewhat limited existing literature focused on the effects of segregation, especially in the context of current efforts to re-segregate American school systems. Governments, historians, students, businesses, and other concerned stakeholders should all benefit from this research study.

Research Question

To gain an in-depth insight into how Black and White participants perceived their lived experiences during the eras of both segregation and desegregation, this research study was guided by the following research question: *What are perceptions and experiences of students, Black and White, who attended both segregated and desegregated schools*?

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative research design. This design allowed the researcher to capture the experiences and perceptions of both Black and White individuals within the study. To attain the in-depth insight needed for this research model, this qualitative research design used a phenomenological approach that centered on the actual lived experiences of the research participants. In addition, the researcher used Critical Race Theory and Convergence Theory as a framework to further guide the understanding and meaning of the lived experiences of the participants.

Qualitative research data is non-numerical data that studies human behavior, which relies on the analysis of narrative, and makes meaning of these behaviors from the perspective of the participants to aid in interpreting the social context (Crossman, 2018). Qualitative research seeks to give meaning to lived experiences through the perspective and eyes of the participants. This type of data is collected through a biography, case study, historical analysis, discourse analysis, ethnography, grounded theory, or phenomenology (Hammarberg, Kirkman, & de Lacey, 2016). This qualitative study utilized the tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) as the framework for understanding the

lived experiences of Black and White students, who attended both segregated and desegregated school systems.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope

This qualitative study examined the lived experiences of Black and White participants who attended both segregated and desegregated public school systems. The primary assumption of this study was the participants involved would have memories of their experiences at first segregated and then desegregated schools. The education level and socio-economic status of each participant was significant to this study. These factors were examined to gauge how participants felt and how they were affected by their experiences in segregated and desegregated schools. All participants graduated from high school. Further assumptions were that participants would be honest in regard to the questions asked during the data collection process. For this study, the researcher intentionally divided the participants into Black and White groups on school segregation/integration; however, the study also attempted to include equal numbers of participants for each gender, to account for race-gender intersectionality and its possible relation to this specific time period. The researcher was unable to secure White males for this study, although multiple attempts were made to do so. To qualify for the study, participants lived in Arkansas and attended public schools during segregation and desegregation.

Due to the late date, this research was limited because the de jure shift from segregation to desegregation occurred over 50 years ago. The researcher anticipated participants may well recall some events which were uncomfortable and some memories that they had tried consciously to forget.

Another potential limitation of the study was the researcher's long-standing interest in, and awareness of, the topic of school desegregation. The researcher was quite aware of this phenomenon from collegiate studies, and – more powerfully – from prior conversations with older siblings regarding this time period.

Definition of Key Terms

- *Jim Crow*: This was the title given to rules and systems used to enforce segregation in America for over 60 years (Pilgrim, 2012).
- *Desegregation*: This refers to the ending of the separation of people based on race, gender, or national origin ("Segregation", 2016).
- *Integration*: This refers to the bringing together of separate people or things.
- *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954)*: This landmark legal case outlawed public segregated schools in 1954 (Millhiser, 2014).

Summary

The desegregation of public schools with the decisions in *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka* was a huge step toward the process of racial integration for America. Despite the decision, it did not come with applause and enthusiasm on the part of many citizens. Many schemes were devised to circumvent that decision and those results remain evident today (Mahnken, 2018). While some integrationists assert full implementation of the desegregation of public schools has not happened, there is a growing trend toward re-segregation. Experts argued that whatever gains were made since the Brown decision are at risk of being lost due to concerted efforts of re-segregation (Bolton, 2009). The lived experiences of individuals who personally experienced the events leading up to, during, and since desegregation should be

recognized as a valuable addition to the existing body of literature. This research study captured these experiences at a critical time in the life of these individuals. These participants were able to reflect on segregated schools, integrated schools, and what it means for our nation to regress back in time. The participants provided a glimpse into days where the education system ensured that life opportunities were limited for Black Americans and greater for White Americans.

Chapter II: Literature Review

The purpose of the literature review was to understand the historical implications that the integration phenomenon had had on both Black and White students who attended first segregated and then desegregated schools. This study examined how desegregation affected the lives of these students based on their individual experiences and perceptions. This chapter addresses several elements of student interaction and school desegregation including the following: the historical legacy of segregated schools, the historical legacy of desegregated schools, the challenges with desegregation initiatives, the impact of segregation on African American students, the impact of segregation on White American students, the case against integration, re-segregation today, school desegregation – Arkansas style, and the Pulaski County Special School District desegregation mandates.

The Historical Legacy of Segregated School Systems

During the 18th century, slaves were not permitted to learn to read. Due to Black literacy and education being considered a threat by White slave owners, they imposed barriers to prohibit literacy (Williams, 2005). Southern states passed laws which prohibited slaves and free persons from receiving public education ("Slaves and Free Persons of Color", 1831). As a result of these laws, literacy and education became synonymous with freedom. Slaves were known to use manipulative methods to learn to read, despite its illegality ("School Desegregation", 2005). During the Civil War, many Black soldiers took a special interest in both freedom and learning. After the Civil War, former slaves met fierce opposition in their attempts to be educated. Former slaves saw education as paramount to self-determination (Williams, 2005).

Assimilation Assistance: Freedman's Bureau and Others

The end of the Civil War ushered in a period known as "Reconstruction." To better deal with the mass of newly freed former slaves, the United States Government created the Freedmen's Bureau in March 1865. The bureau's goal was to help integrate the freedmen into American society. Freedman Houston Hatfield Holloway wrote concerning the transition, "For we colored people did not know how to be free, and the White people did not know how to have a free colored person about them" ("Library of Congress", n.d., para. 1). Former slaves placed great value in being able to read and write. The assistant commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau of Tennessee noted that former slaves highly yearned for an education both for themselves and their children (Smallwood, 2006). Although the Freedmen's Bureau was established to assist the four million former slaves, it also helped destitute White southerners (Erickson, n.d.).

In addition to the Freedmen's Bureau, other organizations also developed ways to assist the former slaves as they adapted to a life without slavery. This assistance was not always welcomed by southern Blacks, who felt some northern Whites and Blacks behaved as superior to southerners recently released from slavery. Nevertheless, both White and Black missionaries from the north were instrumental in assisting former slaves in learning and in formalizing church worship (Brosnan, 2016; Maffly-Kipp, 2001). White and Black missionaries introduced a sedate and intellectual form of worship rather than the drumming, dancing, and moaning reminiscence of African traditions which had long been incorporated into their southern religious practices ("Black Church", n.d.). Whereas, former slaves who viewed the oral tradition and

emotional experience important to worship, the northerners believed the ability to read the Bible was commensurate to the Christian faith. This was also reflected in the missionaries' belief that marriage was preferred, rather than the past experience of former slaves who were not required to marry based on their condition and state of servitude (Brosnan, 2016). With or without the assistance of White and Black northerners, Black schools and churches became important hubs within the Black Southern communities. These hubs became the consistent targets of White resentment and resistance to the citizenship status afforded former slaves after the Civil War, during Reconstruction, and leading to the civil rights era (Mellowes, n.d.). One lasting result of segregated schools after the Civil War was a continual imbalance in funding between schools attended by White students and schools attended by Black students.

The Case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*

In 1896, Homer Plessy, a man one-eighth Black, and seven-eighths White purchased a first-class ticket on a train and was arrested because he refused to move to the segregated train section reserved for Blacks based on Louisiana law. Plessy's purpose was to legally challenge Louisiana's "separate but equal" law, alleging his citizenship right to sit anywhere on the train. The prosecutor argued the state's police powers and duty to protect the health, safety, and welfare of White citizenry from the proximity of odorous Blacks necessitated the law. Plessy's lawyer argued that continued servitude and denials of rights, privileges, and citizenship made the law unconstitutional (Irons, 2004; Plessy v. Ferguson, 1896).

The presiding judge in the case was Howard Ferguson. Judge Ferguson ruled the state of Louisiana had a right to segregate its facilities, and that the rights of Plessy were

not violated. Plessy appealed the decision to the United States Supreme Court (1896), which ruled segregation was legal based on the "separate but equal" premise as argued by the state of Louisiana (Jager, n.d.; Plessy v. Ferguson, 1896). The judicial presumption of differences within the public transportation system, educational facilities, and other tenets of Jim Crow and the Black Codes, maintained that, although the races were separate, they were for all practical purposes, treated equally (Folkenflik, D. 2019). This was almost never the case in reality.

"Separate but equal" became the legal law of the land for the next 60 years. The legal foundation was laid, and segregation prevailed in many areas of American life, including public facilities and the public-school system. Although public schools remained segregated due to *Plessy v. Ferguson*, other individuals, groups, and organizations championed full and immediate integration based on the effects that segregated public facilities and schools had on African Americans (Ivierjia, 2010; "NAACP Legal History", 2017).

Cases between *Plessy* and *Brown*

In the early 1900s, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) began fighting to overturn the Plessy decision and combat the national ills of segregation. NAACP also participated in lesser known legal battles such as *Murray v. Maryland* (1936) which desegregated the University of Maryland law school, and *Gaines v. Canada* (1938) which opened the door for the first Black law student to attend the University of Missouri. In 1940, the NAACP challenged all-White primaries, and in 1946, the Supreme Court abolished enforced segregation on buses and trains involved in interstate commerce ("NAACP Legal History", 2017).

The strategy of the NAACP developed by attorney Charles Hamilton Houston, the forerunner to Thurgood Marshall, was to sue the states based on inequity in the Black and White facilities. Facilities specified for Black citizens and for White citizens were anything but "separate but equal," Houston surmised; and the states involved in equity litigation could not afford to bring Black facilities to par with the facilities afforded to White citizens. The inequities in segregation presented the opportunity to address concerns without going as far as dismantling the 1896 decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. This challenge of *Plessy v. Ferguson* would have to wait for the right time and the right moment ("Charles Hamilton Houston", 2011; Simmons, 2012).

As early as 1946, in *Mendez v. Westminster,* and in other high court cases, the premise of desegregation lawsuits was that separate was indeed far from equal in the educating of students not classified as White (Strum, 2016). In 1951, Black students from a locally segregated school in Adkins, North Carolina, were given a class assignment to create an ideal school. Reflecting on this assignment, the students concluded the local White school contained the components of what they determined to be an ideal school. Secretly, without the knowledge and consent of parents, school officials, or others, the student body confronted the local school board regarding the inequity and refused to return to school for a week. The physical plant was renovated 18 months later; however, Adkins school district did not desegregate until 1970 ("School Segregation", n.d.).

The Landmark Case of *Brown v. the Board of Education*

Eventually consolidating four separate cases, *Brown v. Board* (1954) was led by the NAACP on behalf of Black elementary and secondary students who were denied

admission to White public schools based primarily on race ("Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka I and II", n.d.). The poor allocation of resources was only part of the effect segregation had on African American children. Segregation also had a drastic internalizing effect on African American students within the public educational system. To substantiate the psychological consequences of segregation on African American children, the NAACP lawyers who represented the children called Drs. Kenneth and Mamie Clark as expert witnesses. The Clarks were psychologists who developed the now famous doll experiment 14 years prior to *Brown v. Board* (1954). In the experiment, Black elementary students were presented with a White doll and a Black doll and asked which doll they would rather play with; which one was nice; which one looked bad; which one had the nicer color; and which looked the most like them. The experiment showed that the Black children had a clear preference for the White doll (Clark & Clark, n.d.). The Clark's doll experiment and reported findings were instrumental in showing how African American students processed and internalized segregation (Clark & Clark n.d.).

In 1954, the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Brown* that the separate facilities of African American students in public schools were a violation of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, and were thereby unconstitutional ("Documents Related to Brown", 2016). This decision laid the groundwork for desegregation compliance efforts that continue to this very day. As the United States struggled to integrate many areas of public life, public education has often been the most visible example. Integration, much of it through federal mandates and court oversight, has continued to face resistance (Waugh, 2012). In his work*, Brown in*

Baltimore: School Desegregation and the Limits of Liberalism, Howell S. Baum set a clear distinction between desegregation and integration (as cited in Katz, 2012). Howell described desegregation as the removal of the legal ordinances between Black and White students in the classroom, and integration as White and Black students actually going to school together. Therefore, Baum argued, it was possible for desegregation to be successful while integration may be a failure (Katz, 2012).

The Challenges to Desegregation Initiatives

Efforts throughout the decades to desegregate certain public facilities and schools within the American racial structure were not without opposition. The challenges came early and have persisted in the public domain. Efforts to resist integration took on many forms including school closure, White flight, and private school enrollment increases (Perea, 2010). The culmination of many factors involving the great experiment of desegregation has impacted society since its court-ordered implementation in 1954. At the time when he argued *Brown*, Thurgood Marshall – the acclaimed lawyer for the NAACP – optimistically anticipated all American schools would be completely desegregated within six months. In 1964, ten years after the decision, a Department of Health, Education, and Welfare study revealed that only about 2.4 percent of African Americans living in Southern states were attending integrated schools ("School Desegregation", 2005).

After the Civil War, one result of segregated/desegregated schools was a continual imbalance in funding between schools attended by White students and schools attended by Black students. Schools attended by White students received far greater funding and support. As true as this was in 1954, recent data make clear predominantly

White schools tend to remain much better-funded than schools serving larger numbers of students of color (White, 2015).

"All Deliberate Speed"

In 1954, the Supreme Court opened the doors to desegregation with its landmark decision in *Brown v. Board*. The Court spoke with a unanimous clear voice regarding this very sensitive issue to many White Americans. Although it was argued that the court had neither the "purse nor sword" to enforce Brown directly, Eisenberg (2014) claimed, the decision's impact lay in its indirect ability to tear down the legal sanction of the state to uphold racial superiority.

It is clear that the 1954 Supreme Court ruling focused the nation on integration for generations to come, but it was not until *Brown II* that the actual framework was addressed. In *Brown II*, the Court established a timeline on desegregation efforts of "all deliberate speed." This lax timeline allowed those opposed to desegregation to resist, stall, and delay desegregation efforts (Pratt, 2009). Brown (2016) stated that "all deliberate speed" resulted in reality in a much slower pace of change.

"All deliberate speed" did not translate well into educational policy. Pratt (2009) asserted that the lack of a specific date and time for implementation proved to be ineffective because it had no monitoring component. In educational jargon, it is commonly believed what gets monitored is usually what gets done. Although the courts did not specify a time for desegregation implementation, it did provide the basis for oversight of school desegregation at the federal court level. The federal courts were assigned the oversight of integration policy, monitoring, implementation, and revision of desegregation plans (Frankenberg, 2014).

Some schools did desegregate in accordance with immediacy as intended by the courts, but many refused the urgency. Desegregation efforts took a long time to occur in many schools across the nation, as districts implemented "all deliberate speed" at different levels and timelines. For example, cities like Nashville wanted to stair step desegregation through one-grade-a-year processes, which implemented little to no changes after the first year of the *Brown v. Board* (1954) decision. Nashville began the implementation of school desegregation only after urged to do so by Black attorneys Z. Alexander Looby and Avon William, Jr. These men evolved into distinguished civil rights attorneys (Summerville, 2010).

Many other cities and school districts also enacted the guideline of "all deliberate speed" extremely slowly or rebelled altogether. Indeed, some school districts like Prince George County in Virginia simply closed their entire district as opposed to complying with court-ordered desegregation mandates. This strategy lasted over four years with Black students suffering the most loss, as White students were sent to privately-funded public schools. Many Black students, who were denied educational opportunities as a result of the four-year closure of the Prince George County schools, never recovered (Prince Edward Schools, n.d.). According to Millhiser (2014), ten years after the Brown decision, only one in eighty-five Black children attended desegregated school systems. In 1969, the court came back in *Alexander v. Holmes*, which emphasized integration must occur in conjunction with an immediate plan developed for desegregation (Chen, 2016).

Little Rock Central High School

In 1957, three years after the decision of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954), the nation and the world were introduced to the Arkansas Bible Belt and Little

Rock Central High School. Like so many other school districts, the Little Rock School District failed to comply with the ruling of the court. Nine students enrolled to become the first Black students to integrate the most prestigious school in Arkansas. As they started their first day of school, they faced a hostile crowd who yelled, cursed, and even spit on them as they walked into the building. The students proceeded forward to chants from those who refused to cotton to integration (Mai, 2017).

Governor Orval Faubus was, by most standards, a moderate governor for his time. In anticipation of the Black students coming to the school, the governor sent troops from the Arkansas National Guard to interfere with the Black students' entrance. As the students approached the building, the national guard blocked and prohibited their entrance. Kirk (2007) asserted Governor Faubus dispatched the guard, not to protect the students as he claimed, but to hinder their constitutional right to be educated at Little Rock Central High School.

Anti-Busing and Housing Problems

During the 1970s, desegregation mandates continued to move at a slow pace. Many people who opposed desegregation initiatives saw the issue of busing as a target point in the discussion. Busing was very unpopular from the onset. This element of desegregation initiatives usually involved sending minority Black and Hispanic students into schools that were more affluent and suburban. The 1970s and 1980s saw an increase in attempts to stop forced busing of students. President Richard Nixon was instrumental in helping the nation remove the original intent of integration and reduce it to a question and issue of school busing. According to Sustar (2013), integration advocates missed this sleight-of-hand transition, and vast opposition to busing reached

both President Nixon and the United States Senate. While anti-busing legislation was being debated in the Senate, one of the most well-known opponents of forced busing was the freshman senator from Delaware, Joe Biden (Quinlan, 2015).

Another challenge to integrated school systems that facilitated the separation of the races was obviously housing. Housing policies were one of the greatest sustainers in the separation of the Black race from the White race or other minority populations. Unfortunately, the United States is still grappling with this type of discriminatory practice today. In analyzing the issue, Quinlan (2015) argued that although many may agree that fair housing and non-discriminatory housing practice should be the standard, the reality is that many others still adhere to a belief in NIMBY-ism, or "Not in my backyard" (p. 3).

Even in cases where schools successfully integrated over the years and were officially released from court supervision, the racial divide proved prominent even after the school's release. Several years after forced integration and consolidation of the two largest schools in Tuscaloosa, Alabama into one school, the district thrived – if uncomfortably, at first. The district received both academic and athletic awards and accolades. Despite these successes, the district was granted unitary status and released from the desegregation mandates in 2000 (Hannah-Jones, 2014).

Within ten years of receiving unitary status, the district lost many of the racial gains that were required under desegregation mandates. The flagship high school which resulted from consolidation, now serves the majority of the Black/low socioeconomic student body in the school district. Hannah-Jones (2014) stated:

> …while segregation, as it is practiced today, may be different than it was 60 years ago, it is no less pernicious . . . it involves the removal and isolation of poor Black

> and Latino students, in particular. In Tuscaloosa today, nearly one in three Black students attends a school that looks as if Brown v. Board of Education never happened. (p. 2)

The Impact of Segregation on African American Students

Historically, there was little doubt that the necessity and drive to integrate schools within the United States came from Black people, who saw school integration as a way to continue to push the envelope of racial justice and demand the nation live out its promise that "All men are created equal." Prior to the *Brown* decision, inequities abounded. The belief held that if Black students were educated with White students, then Black students would receive a quality education, if for no other reason than proximity (Lee, 2007). Thus, integration became the focus of organizations such as the NAACP (Pratt, 2009).

Segregation impacted the lives of African American students who had the opportunity to live through the phenomenon of being initially assigned to segregated schools, and then transitioned to integrated schools. This impact was clearly understood in Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren's majority opinion when he wrote,

> Segregation of White and colored children in public school has a detrimental effect upon the colored children. The impact is greater when it has the sanction of the law, for the policy of separating the races is usually interpreted as denoting the inferiority of the negro group… Any language in contrary to this finding is rejected. We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of separate but equal has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. ("Separate is Not Equal", n.d., para. 3)

Separate educational facilities were declared inherently unequal by the Supreme Court. Incidentally, it was commonly known Black schools operating at the time of segregation were ill-equipped as compared to the schools attended by their White counterparts. Segregated schools usually had fewer resources and higher numbers of students who were from families who were economically disadvantaged (Armen, 2010). Despite these factors, some researchers questioned whether relocating Black students from their schools into schools that were better resourced was the best answer. Jenkins (2014) wrote,

> The reality is that Black families faced heavier burdens with the desegregation mandate than Whites. Black children spent more time commuting, Black schools were closed to make desegregation more convenient for Whites (and to prevent their flight to the suburbs or private schools), and Black teachers and principals were fired when White and Black schools were merged. Estimates show that more than 82,000 Black teachers provided instruction to a Black student population numbering around two million in 1954. Within a span of 10 years, around 40,000 Black teachers lost their jobs. Ninety percent of Black principals lost their jobs in 11 Southern states. (para. 6)

Before integration, a culture of expectations from Black teachers within all Black schools existed within the Black community. A clear connection existed between the school and the community in which the school was located. The strategies and methods to teach such students, who were mostly from very dire circumstances both socially and economically, were seldom if ever replicated in the desegregated schools. Experts

argued, this loss or disconnection would have a detrimental effect on Black students progressing within integrated school systems ("School Segregation", n.d.).

Though there were some unintended negative consequences of desegregation, research revealed Black students also benefited from being integrated into schools with White students. A recent study by the Gerontological Society of America was conducted on students who attended a segregated school system as well as those who attended integrated school systems ("School Segregation Still Impacts", 2015). The study sample included 420 urban, community-dwelling African Americans ages 50 and older. Of these, 118 had attended desegregated schools, and 302 had attended segregated schools prior to the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision. The baseline results of this study revealed that the students who experienced desegregated schools scored higher on the cognitive and performance tests. The results also noted that the segregated student group did not show a cognitive decline overtime. This meant early differences in schooling may have affected cognitive performance levels, but not necessarily rates of decline in performance. Some researchers believed the difference in the functioning of both groups was based on the better funding of the desegregated sample, which contributed to the cognitive advantages in different sample groups ("School Segregation Still Impacts", 2015).

Studies also suggested a link between the achievement gap in Black students who were currently assigned to segregated schools. Although some research showed the achievement gap decreased in desegregated schools, the causes behind this link were still being investigated by researchers (Reardon, 2015). Reardon (2015) insisted segregation based on race had a strong detrimental impact on the race that faced exclusion or

discrimination. After surveying over 600,000 students and 60,000 teachers from over 4,000 schools, sociologist James Coleman concluded in his government report a student's success in school was primarily based on that student's family background, and a diverse socioeconomic mix within the classroom (Dickinson, 2016).

In 1966, Coleman released his study entitled "Equality in Educational Opportunity." According to Coleman, the best predictor of student success was the socio-economic status of the family a student comes from, as well as the socio-economic status of the classmates within the school, as opposed to the race of the student (Kalenberg, 2016). The Coleman report attempted to address two major issues within public schools: the amount of segregation in America's schools, and segregation's effect on educational outcomes for Black students (Rivkins, 2016).

It seemed integration had a positive effect on students, and segregation affected students negatively. Black (2014) asserted segregation hurts the races in different ways: Black students are hurt academically; whereas, White students exhibited negative social concerns regarding various and different cultures when integration was not the standard policy. These data verified the necessity of policies to support desegregation and diversity in the classroom, the results of which benefited both Black and White students.

The Impact of Segregation on White American Students

By critically understanding the research and effects of desegregation on African American students, it is also necessary to understand the effects it had on White American students too. Indeed, it was important to acknowledge that desegregation had a profound, lasting effect on both races (Witt, 2016).

The litigators of *Brown* saw what they thought was the benefit for Black students being educated alongside White students. However, little thought, if any, was given to the benefit of White students being educated with Black students. This was a source of debate among researchers for several years. The research ultimately found that White students who attended schools with Black students did not fall behind academically. In contrast, experts argued, White students were hurt when they were segregated into schools that had limited to no diversity (Gershon, 2016). Baum also asserted that in spaces where Black and White students were allowed to integrate appropriately, both groups benefited (Katz, 2012).

Lee (2007) explained research that revealed schools with a significant proportion of Blacks were likely to negatively affect achievement in Black students, but the proportion of Blacks had little to no effect on students who were White. Kamentz (2015) posited three benefits of White student attendance with Black students, which included:

- academic standing remains constant as when in schools with majority White students,
- diversity grouping makes people work smarter and harder, and
- students become more empathetic and less prejudiced.

Rizga (2016) insisted integrated schools were also critical in preparing students to compete in an increasingly global market. Researchers found skills such as cross-cultural collaboration, critical thinking, critical problem solving, and critical skills for competing nationally, as well as the global market were best fostered within a diverse environment (2016).

Desegregated schools were not only beneficial to Black students, but tangible benefits were also evident to White students as well. Desegregation initiatives showed to have a positive effect on increased tolerance levels and cross-cultural dialogue. In addition, desegregation initiatives impacted society by minimizing racial bias, providing a level access to resources, and preparing students to compete in an increasingly global economy ("The Benefits of Socioeconomically", n.d.).

The Case Against Integration

The Eugenics (Greek meaning "good birth") movement took root in America during the early 1900s. The movement and philosophy were easily applied to certain categories and races that were thought to be less desirable. The Eugenic movement was a scientific movement whose ideologies focused against the poor, the uneducated, and the minority populations. Eugenicists sought to build master people who would soon populate a so-called master race. Although the superiority of race has no scientific basis, its premise was used as a justification for race superiority until the end of World War II. Unfortunately, ideological offspring of eugenicists exists today, influencing the ability for all people to receive an equal and equitable education (Rivard, 2014). A more recent and notable look at this scientific methodology and its application to race was the 1994 publication of *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* by psychologist Richard J. Herrnstein and political scientist Charles Murray. Herrnstein and Murray (2017) addressed the racial divide in a seemingly nonchalant manner. If not for further additional investigation and analysis, it could easily appear to be authentic in every aspect. According to Momone (2017), while the authors did not explicitly endorse

racial superiority as the creative motive for this work, they allowed the reader to conclude it without asserting it directly.

The voices against desegregation at its onset were louder than the voices for integration immediately following the decision in *Brown* ("How Desegregation Changed Us", 2004*)*. Historical records also revealed that voices against integration had been heard since the time of the decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Segregationists viewed integration from several perspectives and claimed:

- it not a constitutional requirement,
- it is a states' rights issue and should be left to the states,
- it poses no harmful effect on either race, and
- educational equity will come in time and should not be rushed. ("The Segregationist", n.d.)

Other voices countered the segregationist perspectives with their own rationales. African American Booker T. Washington (1915) noted,

> It is probably useless to discuss the legality of segregation; that is a matter which the courts will finally pass upon. It is reasonably certain, however, that the courts in no section of the country would uphold a case where Negroes sought to segregate White citizens. (para. 2)

When considering the important institutions charged to retain segregation, Rothstein (2013) submitted that the federal government was culpable. The federal government helped maintain segregated neighborhoods when specifically placing housing for poor Blacks in the poor Black neighborhoods, and housing for middle-class Whites specifically in White neighborhoods. The Federal Housing Administration and

the Department of Veteran Affairs also contributed to the racial status quo in their benefits and programs. Bank regulators and the Federal Reserve also had restricted policies to keep the races separated. Although it was not always the written policy of these institutions, it was their practice (Rothstein, 2013).

Re-segregation Today

Over 60 years after *Brown v. Board* (1954), the status of public education remains an issue. Some research indicated that as neighborhoods became more segregated, the inevitable effect was that schools were becoming more segregated as well (Frakenberg, 2014). When the *Brown* decision was handed down, it involved both Black and White students. Currently, the nation has seen an increase in the number of Hispanic students, and they are now the biggest minority population in the nation. The Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush years offered school choice as a pushback against desegregation (Black, 2014).

Unfortunately, segregated schools are making a comeback. The courts started rolling back the gains of desegregation in the 1990s, which caused progress made by African Americans to integrate schools disappear at a rapid pace. In 2011, the percentage of Black students in the south attending majority White schools decreased even lower than it had been ten years after the *Brown* decision was handed down (McArdle, 2012). While Black students have achieved minimal gains, the gains for Hispanic students are even lower (Childress, 2014).

The roots of segregation are closely connected to housing and poverty. The shift of schools back to individual communities likely created an atmosphere where the children of Black and White parents today are likely to have less contact with students of

other races than their parents did while growing up in integrated school systems. Black and Hispanic students are disproportionately affected by this as compared to White and Asian students (Tatum, 2014). Due to White flight, it is estimated today that roughly half of all Black and Hispanic students attended schools that are 90 percent non-White, and that White, better-funded schools spend more per pupil and have higher test scores (Gelbelhoff, 2016).

As schools are re-segregating, *The UCLA Report on Civil Rights,* asserted that attention should be prioritized in the areas of seeking housing equality, redistricting to diversify school populations, and shifting the missions of charter schools to pay better salaries to teachers (Childress, 2014). The report predicted these re-segregation issues would get worse unless state and federal governments intervened to bring equity to the process. The report also found that almost two-thirds of school districts formerly under desegregation mandates were released by the federal courts. The majority of desegregation was focused primarily in the south; however, less monitoring by the courts caused former gains to diminish (Childress, 2014). With the current trend heading towards re-segregation, it seemed the gains of integration would be lost, and future generations would suffer as a result.

It may seem strange, but America is still debating the merits of desegregation. Currently, many states have been declared unitary; thus, the states have been released from court-ordered supervision and oversight (Black, 2014). Available research has provided clarity regarding the advantages that desegregated schools have on students, both Black and White ("Better use of information", 2016). Although many factors could affect student achievement, research showed that student achievement was not negatively

affected by students attending integrated schools. The evidence was also clear that without intervention being implemented, the segregation of students would increase (Jenkins, 2014). What many of these contentious decisions disregard was the question of "What is best for the child?" As one expert noted, children were not born to racial prejudice, but they were taught to carry this burden upon the nation ("Desegregation in Theory", n.d.).

School Desegregation – Arkansas Style

Before being called the "Natural State," Arkansas was known as "The Land of Opportunity." In the case of opportunity, Arkansas led the nation as the state with the most visible example of desegregation implementation within the nation. Although the voices of the segregationists came to outweigh the voices of the integrationists, the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act helped school boards and the state to become more receptive to the process on desegregation. Kirk (2011) stated,

> The lost years of school desegregation in Arkansas had profound consequences. School administrators used the intervening period to craft longer-term strategies to stall the meaningful integration of schools. Where desegregation did take place in the state before 1966, African American teachers found themselves without any job protection and summarily dismissed from closed Black schools. In many ways, the policy of gradualism proved the worst of all possible worlds for African American Arkansans, forcing them to accept responsibility and bear the brunt of the pain for school desegregation while delivering few tangible gains. (para. 4)

Kirk also asserted that the success of early integration policies was more aligned in Arkansas areas where the White population outweighed the Black population. Early

after the *Brown* decision, this was evidenced in the decision of several school districts adopting desegregation mandates based primarily on financial reasons that involved low student populations. In 1954, Charleston, Arkansas, desegregated its school district. It became the first school district in the former confederacy to do so. This was led by the city's attorney Dale Bumpers, a future governor and senator from Arkansas. Three days after the *Brown* decision, the Fayetteville school board announced it would desegregate its nine Black students into the 500-White-student populated high school. The district was transporting these Black students to Black schools up to 150 miles away at a cost of $5,000 a year. Superintendent of schools Wayne White remarked to reporters that segregation was neither sustainable nor affordable (Kirk, 2011).

Arkansas took on a very southern style of resistance to the implementation of desegregation mandates. Because of this approach, the desegregation of schools in Arkansas did not occur at a rapid pace within the state, although there were exceptions in certain school districts. The Little Rock School District used a strategy to slow the implementation by using Act 461 of 1959. *The Arkansas Pupil Assignment Law* slowed the influx of Black students into the district, by only assigning Black students who met a certain criterion established by the board for admission to previous all-White schools (Lind & Bell-Tolliver, 2015).

Pulaski County Desegregation Mandates (Plan 2000)

The Pulaski County Special School District (PCSSD) is one of the three largest school districts located within Central Arkansas. The other two districts are the Little Rock School District and the North Little Rock School District. PCSSD is currently engaged in a 36-year-old lawsuit initiated by the LRSD. The LRSD district sued PCSSD

and the North Little Rock School District (NLRSD) by contending that both PCSSD and NLRSD were attracting White students, who represented much of the tax base, leaving the LRSD disproportionately minority. In 1982, the LRSD asserted students were leaving its district (White flight) for the two other districts outside the city limits and increasing minority enrollment (Warren, 2017). LRSD sought to consolidate school districts. In 1984, the court held the school districts were unconstitutionally segregated. All three districts were placed under court supervision until "declared unitary." Unitary status represented the court's approval of individual elements that the courts found the district to be in violation of, such as gifted and talented, extracurricular activities, student achievement, facilities, and others (Warren, 2017). As school districts attained unitary status, they were released from court monitoring in that category until they were released from all categories and declared completely unitary.

In 1985, the courts placed the LRSD boundaries in line with the city limits, which caused the loss of 8,000 students and 14 schools to LRSD (Warren 2017). The ratio of Black to White students in LRSD went from 70 percent Black and 30 percent White to 60 percent Black and 40 percent White, respectively. In 1989 and 1998, the district entered into agreements for new desegregation and education plans with the current plan representing the 1998 agreement called Plan 2000. From 2002-2006, all three districts asked to be released from court supervision, and all were rejected by the courts (Warren, 2017).

In 2014, both LRSD and NLRSD were declared unitary in all areas. The PCSSD remained in desegregation in three areas: student achievement, facilities, and discipline (Warren, 2017). The PCSSD's desegregation plan was addressed by students being

classified in two categories “Black” or “non-Black.” This desegregation plan addressed other marginalized individuals minimally, as few Hispanics were in the Little Rock area during the time this lawsuit was filed by the LRSD (2017).

Contrary to the notion that Black students would receive a better education if they were educated separately from White students, the reality was easily seen in the historical distribution of per-pupil expenditures for students within the PCSSD. In its first year of existence, operating dual systems based on race, the district spent $65 per White student, while spending only $23 per Black student. This disparity was also seen in the duality of pay to teachers. White teachers received $756 as an annual salary the first year of the district’s existence, while Black teachers received $532 annually. This represented a 30% difference and revealed only a small portion of the inequities that the Black community faced that the White community never had to consider (Stewart, 2017). The data results were not exclusive to this school district, but rather reflected the norms of schools during segregation. Segregation carried with it a price, and the children had to pay – the Black children.

Conclusion

This literature review attempted to present the historical setting between the end of Jim Crow segregation, and the beginning and continuing process of current desegregation efforts. The students who bridged the gap between the two very different systems were the front line soldiers of this specific time period. These students sacrificed both body and spirit to bring equity to all peoples of the nation. The famed Little Rock Nine have been reduced by death to eight. However, theirs is not the only story, but as Elliot (2017) affirmed, theirs is a righteous story, as they led the way and blazed the

path. Their courage allowed so many others to come after them. They were taunted, spit on, and harassed simply because they wanted to share the benefits and wealth of this nation.

The participants involved in this study were not members of the famed Little Rock Nine, who desegregated Little Rock Central High School. The participants within this study share a common trait with little Rock Nine, though, in that they were the first in their neighborhoods and respective communities to desegregated their schools. These participants were affected, then, and those experiences are felt by them even today.

This literature review provided context about the environment, the time, and the persons who walked this path. The data supported the view that integration was positive for all races and the need for continued advancement of integration efforts (Black, 2014). Learning from those who experienced integration first-hand will only add to the body of knowledge and literature on the effects of segregation and desegregation in this country.

Chapter III: Research Methodology

After the Civil War, the integration of the races began a struggle that continues today. When the Supreme Court affirmed the government-sanctioned separation of the races in *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896*,* "separate but equal" reigned as the "de jure" and "de facto" law of the land for almost 60 years. The education system that came to dominate the mainstream of American life was designed specifically for White males, as opposed to any other race or gender (Allen, 2008). Segregated schools attended by White students received far greater funding and support. In 1954, this assertion was true, and scholars have determined that data revealed this practice is sadly still evident today (Buszin, 2013; White, 2015).

On May 17, 1954, in the case of *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka,* the Supreme Court ruled the segregation of public education based solely on race was a violation of the Due Process Clause of the 14th Amendment and detrimental to students of the minority race. During the late 1950s and 1960s, Black and White students experienced the real-life effects of desegregation in their schools. The testimonies of these students are vital today, especially as a new wave of more nuanced, but no less damaging segregation threatens to again isolate minorities into low-performing schools.

This study was valuable in adding to the existing body of literature by providing information on both White and Black students who had lived through a unique educational phenomenon – the desegregation of the public schools. These personal experiences offered insights into their perceptions and feelings regarding this critical historical period in American life. This study examined how these experiences impacted their lives as a result.

Research Question

Segregation and desegregation played an influential role in the life of the American public and the American public-school system in the latter half of the 20th century. The implementation of school desegregation mandates required the mass, systematic integration of racial groups (Black and White). These groups had never occupied the same spaces while matriculating in public school settings. Many students who started their school career in segregated school spaces before *Brown v. Board* (1954) would remain there until they graduated years later. The lack of testimony from those who lived during this time exposes a gap in research from this time period. The participant's stories taught us about what happened then, so we can more fully appreciate the imperative that we avoid reverting to segregated schools and communities.

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions and experiences of a select group of individuals who had attended both segregated and desegregated schools as students. These individuals participated in a social experiment which had not been undertaken to any large degree before the decision in *Brown v. Board* (1954). The differing experiences of both Black and White students seemed to have been overlooked in the majority of the research literature. There was some existing research focused on the impact of desegregation on Black students; however, minimal research has evaluated the experiences of both Black and White students to gauge how their perceptions and experiences were alike, but also different. In addition, this researcher wanted to ascertain how these former students perceived their educational experiences and how they impacted their successes and failures later in life.

To gain an in-depth insight into how former Black and White participants perceived the lived experiences of both segregation and desegregation, this research study was guided by the simple, but foundational research question: *What are the perceptions and experiences of participants, Black and White, who attended both segregated and desegregated schools?* This study was valuable in adding to the existing body of literature by providing information on both White and Black students who lived through a unique educational phenomenon. This research study offered insights into the participant's perceptions and experiences regarding this critical historical period in American life. This study also examined how these experiences impacted their subsequent lives.

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative research design to best capture the experiences and perceptions of both Black and White individuals within the study. This qualitative research design used a phenomenological approach that centered on the actual lived experiences of the research participants. The researcher utilized an interview process to attain the necessary depth needed for this research model. In addition, the researcher used the Critical Race Theory and Interest-Convergence Theory as a framework to further guide the understanding and meaning of the lived experiences of the participants.

Qualitative research is defined as, "…an approach to the study of human behavior that relies on the analysis of narrative data to create an interpretation of the meaning of these behaviors from the perspective of the participants themselves, within their own social context" (Cobb & Forbes, 2002). Qualitative research seeks to understand the world by attempting to give meaning to social phenomena by human interpretation

through multiple systems of inquiry. Those systems include biography, case study, historical analysis, discourse analysis, ethnography, grounded theory, or phenomenology (“Nursing Research”, n.d.).

This qualitative study utilized the tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) as the framework for understanding the lived experiences of Black and White students who attended both segregated and desegregated school systems. Critical Race Theory was originally developed for use within the legal system as a method to explain how institutionalized racism is engrained in the American legal system ("Critical Race Theory", n.d.). CRT has since been applied and theorized for education and other areas where racism is institutionalized and challenged the many ways in which race and racism play a major role in education during both the past and present (Allen, 2017). Critical Race Theory is designed to understand the individual lived experiences and perceptions regarding the participants involved in this phenomenon.

CRT examines White supremacy and its continued outcomes in areas such as sociology, ethnic studies, women studies, and education. CRT seeks to understand the pervasiveness of race in the American psyche and its influence on laws, policies, and the educational system ("Critical Race Theory", n.d.). It views race as a social construct rather than a concrete verifiable fact based on biological differences among people. In essence, CRT views race as a way of marginalizing one set of people over another for the benefit of the dominant group (Allen, 2017; "Critical Race Theory", n.d.).

Interest-Convergence Theory was developed law professor, Derrick Bell, in 1980. Bell posited a different view as to why the courts found in favor of the plaintiffs in *Brown v. Board* (1954). Bell argued that the courts outlawed “de jure” segregation of the races

after the nation found itself in a Cold War with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), and needed desperately to win the support of developing nations (Caraballo, 2009). Bell suggested the ruling in *Brown v. Board* (1954) was part of the plan in fighting the Cold War, as well as being a show of support to those African American veterans who fought in World War II (WWII). The support by the courts also helped in the development of the south, which lagged behind the rest of the nation both before and after the Civil War. Bell also surmised that Whites supported the initiatives and efforts of Blacks, only after the interest of Blacks overlapped with the interests of Whites, who possessed the political power to make and approve such a drastic change to the status quo.

Participants

This qualitative research study included a sampling of eleven participants – five Black, six White – who met the pre-established criteria for participation. Although others certainly met the criteria, the researcher sought approval to limit the number of participants, in order that there would be adequate time to conduct in-depth focus group interviews with participants. The participants consisted of two Black males, three Black females, and six White females. The researcher attempted to vary the socio-economic and education levels of the participants, as well as the age range.

The study participants were to be evenly divided by gender and race in order to examine whether intersectionality occurred. However, intersectionality was not a primary focus for this study since no White males were available. Intersectionality is defined as an overlapping of different factors within an individual that may subject an individual to discriminatory practices within a minority class. Crenshaw (2016) coined

the term *intersectionality* as a way to explain the dynamic between co-existing identities and the systems used as methods of oppression with regard to the identities. For example, a Hispanic male who is homosexual may experience intersectionality. Although the term is usually applied to women, it was argued that intersectionality can occur within any gender (Williams, 2017).

The population of this study specifically consisted of those who resided in the state of Arkansas during the time of segregation and desegregation but may currently live in different geographic locations today. The sample chosen for this study represented a small number of students who attended both segregated and desegregated schools within the state. Therefore, their lived experiences and perceptions provided a glimpse into the world these participants and other students had experienced as children, adolescents, or young adults.

This study also drew upon people from both the researcher's personal and professional networks who had been educated in both segregated and desegregated school systems or worked within those settings. In keeping with Sutton and Austin's (2015) assertion, the personal insights and experiences of the researcher conducting a qualitative study were vital to capturing and delving deeper into the topic of study. Accordingly, this study relied on the researcher's personal knowledge and experiences regarding this event in history, its impact on those aforementioned, and the researcher's previous studies while attaining a degree in history. This research study topic was originally conceived from the researcher who is from a family of 13 brothers and sisters, some of whom had attended both segregated and desegregated school

systems. Full transparency necessitates I share that one of the persons who served as a participant in this study was a sibling of the researcher.

In qualitative research, it is important that the researcher is conscious of his or her bias with regard to the study ("Organizing your Social Sciences", n.d.). Although this awareness is important, the researcher believed this same consciousness or acknowledged lack of total objectivity was effective in helping the lived experiences of the participants and their post-perceptions reach past the surface generalizations. The outcomes of this study were deep, detailed, and rich descriptions of segregation and desegregation, which allow the readers to make their own determination as to whether the accounts of the time, place, and event being described seem applicable to or consonant with their own experiences and understandings.

This study was valuable in adding to the existing body of literature by providing information about both White and Black students who had lived through a unique educational phenomenon. This study's results offered insights into the participants' perceptions and experiences regarding this critical historical period in American life. This study also examined how these experiences impacted participants' subsequent lives as a result.

Data Collection

The data collection process for this study consisted primarily of semi-structured focus group interviews among the 11 participants. I as the researcher employed relatives, daily acquaintances, colleagues, and friends in the hope they had contacts from various parts of the state who met the criteria for participation in this study. I also attended churches to announce this study, especially since it involved former students who were of

retirement or senior age. Proper contact was also made through e-mail, phone, and word of mouth. Individuals who consented to participate in the study – including those of my relatives who wished to be included – were informed of their rights to opt out of the investigation at any time up to its completion. Additionally, participants were informed of their rights to privacy in relation to this study. Most participants were assigned pseudonyms in order to ensure their confidentiality. The researcher's own family members requested their actual names be employed throughout the study.

The focus group interviews took place in settings that were most comfortable to the participants. I created interview protocols which provided guidance for each focus group, but also allowed for the interview to expand into other topics that the participants might opt to discuss that veered from the initial purpose (Doyle, 2018). Such semi-structured focus group interviews allowed participants to open up in a relaxed manner during the interview sessions. The interview protocol included open-ended questions designed to engage the participants in a conversation regarding their experiences with segregation and desegregation, but also about their lives following graduation from school. As the sole interviewer, I made a concerted effort to be sensitive to each participant in relation to life factors such as school, work experience, socioeconomic class, and others (Conradin & Heller, 2017).

Prior to the interviews, planning and preparation were important to the trustworthiness of this study. In order to enhance trustworthiness, I piloted interview questions with non-participants before interviewing the first focus group in order to gauge and refine the wording and accuracy of each question. There were two separate focus group interviews held in relation to this study. The focus groups were organized by

race. One focus group included only White participants; the other consisted only of Black participants. I attempted to structure the interview protocol in such a way as to respect the participants' time. I did not want to cut any participant's contribution short. I allowed each participant the opportunity to share all that he or she wanted to say. Each focus group interview ended with each interviewee being asked if there was anything he or she would like to add to what had already been said. The transcripts of these interviews were analyzed through the lens of the Critical Race Theory, and to a lesser degree the Interest-Convergence theory. In keeping with the interview protocol, each interview addressed participants' perceptions and experiences in attending both segregated and desegregated schools.

Ethical Considerations

This qualitative study required the cooperation and participation of human subjects. There was an acknowledgement that the time period being investigated in this study was very turbulent, and that it therefore had the potential to bring back memories that were very uncomfortable for the participants. The essence of this study was asking participants to relive, or revisit that time period of their lives, and to consider the effects it potentially had on them to this very day. The contributions made by the participants of this study added to the body of scholarly literature – not least, in relation to what others have termed the re-segregation of schools that is happening increasingly in our educational institutions today.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was required for the purposes of this study. IRBs are established to govern research that involves human subjects. The

IRB at Arkansas Tech University provided consent to conduct interviews as the method of data collection for this study.

I acknowledged that the participants in this investigation may include one or more of my family members who had experienced both segregated and desegregated school systems first-hand. From past conversations within my own family, I determined that such voices would add valuable perspectives to this study. Patton (2015) argued, "Qualitative research depends on, uses, and enhances the researcher's direct experiences in the world and insights about those experiences" (p. 58). Most participants in this study did not know the researcher well.

My current professional role entails serving as the director of pupil services for the Pulaski County Special School District, which is in central Arkansas. I am responsible for overseeing district-level compliance efforts with court-ordered requirements stemming from a desegregation lawsuit that was brought 35 years ago. This study was rooted in a desire to ascertain a better understanding of the physical, mental, psychological, and emotional states that young people experience during such the transition from segregated to de-segregated educational settings.

Both validity and trustworthiness are very important aspects of this study. These elements represent the essence of this study. However, I do acknowledge that other researchers argued the validity and trustworthiness to be a conflict of interest for this type of qualitative study. Patton (2015) claimed, this neutrality concern from critics involves the researcher being too subjective, as well as having contact too close with the people and situations being studied (Patton, 2015). He further pointed out the naiveté of anyone

claiming absolute objectivity at the onset of considering the social purposes of human research (Patton, 2015).

My interest in this topic derived from lifelong interests and conversations with family members regarding matters of race. In addition, I have personally experienced some of the fallout of desegregation while matriculating through the school system in my hometown of Helena, Arkansas. From my earliest memory, I realized schooling for me was different than it was for my White classmates, but I did not have the vocabulary to express what that difference meant in the scheme of education. I came to understand the racial dichotomy more as I matured through the school system. Nevertheless, the educational system left gaps within my learning that were not based on my ability or desire, but rather on preconceived notions of what constituted intelligence according to racial identity. This experience created a desire in me for social justice and equity that continues to drive my worldview.

Summary

This chapter described the qualitative research study through which the researcher sought to understand how Black and White individuals who had attended first segregated and then desegregated schools recalled their school experiences. Semi-structured focus group interviews with eleven individuals was the method used to gather the data analyzed through the lens of the Critical Race theory to address the researcher's question. Of the eleven participants, six were White (all female), and five were Black (three females, two males). Participants were properly informed and briefed of their rights to end their participation at any time without fear of reprisal or consequences. My study captured the lived experiences and perceptions of both Black and White former students who attended

both segregated and desegregated school systems in the state of Arkansas after the *Brown v. Board* (1954) decision. A review of the research indicated a gap in the literature regarding both races' perceptions and experiences.

The data collected for this study were analyzed for the purposes of similarities and differences. The data were also analyzed in relation to any other trends that were determined from the research outside of the initial research problem or question.

Chapter IV: Analysis of Data

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions and experiences of participants, Black and White, who attended both segregated and desegregated schools. This study consisted of two focus groups, which were organized homogeneously according to race by design. To foster the participants' candid dialogue about their experiences with this phenomenon, this study involved one pilot study interview which was held at St. Matthew #2 church in Morrilton, Arkansas. After the pilot study interview, the two focus group interviews were held at the district administrative building of the Pulaski County Special School District (Little Rock, Arkansas) in the superintendent's conference room. Both focus group interviews met for slightly over two hours. The focus group time extended organically as a result of the participants' interest with regard to the topic being discussed.

The two focus groups totaled 11 participants. The participants were assigned to specific focus groups according to their identified racial background—Black or White. The Black focus group consisted of three female participants and two male participants. The White focus group consisted of six participants, all of whom were female. While the submitted Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval request called for dividing the racially homogeneous groups into equal numbers of men and women, the researcher was unable to secure any White male participants, despite numerous attempts at recruitment.

All focus group participants attended both segregated and desegregated schools in the state of Arkansas during the time of their grade school matriculation. Some participants attended the same school throughout; others attended schools across different

locations within the state. During the recruitment process, a reasonable attempt was made to vary the geographical location of research participants within the state as well.

An analysis of the transcripts from both focus groups yielded several themes as well as sub-themes. Several of these themes also comported with Critical Race Theory in how the process of segregation and desegregation had either challenged, or sustained participants' perceptions of the core of Whiteness throughout both processes. As such, this was reflected in the tenets of Whiteness as property, story-telling and counter-storytelling, and the social construction of race. Fear was expressed in both focus groups either directly by participants, or through the use of language that – by softening the participants' points – betrayed their levels of discomfort. Story-telling was used within the focus groups as a way to explain some elements of the experience/phenomenon.

The Black participants' use of terms such as reluctance, hesitation, anxiety, and tension evoked the idea from Critical Race Theory of Whiteness as property. This tenet addressed the fear within the transition between the segregated and desegregated schools as well as the daily experience of the phenomenon. The White focus group expressed minimal terms that indicated fear and anxiety in relation to the process of school integration. Any reference from White participants regarding the above terms were associated with modern contemporary issues as opposed to the time during which they matriculated as students.

Another tenet of Critical Race theory evident within the study was Racial Realism. Within this tenet, racism can and will have a definite effect upon the subordinated race, while affecting the dominant race to little or no effect. Some participants expressed definite impact because of the phenomenon; whereas, others

viewed the phenomenon as having had little to no impact. These perceived differences materialized in the Black and White focus groups respectively. Racism, discrimination, and subjugation at the time of the transition from legally segregated schools to ones desegregated by court order were the social norms within the state of Arkansas, which had a definite impact on the educational experiences of participants in both the Black and the White focus groups. The experiences ranged from low impact to extreme impact based on where a participant fell on the racial divide of the state.

Review of the Research Question

The research question for this study was specifically designed to further understand the experiences and perceptions of individuals, both Black and White, who had attended both segregated and desegregated schools. This research represented a phenomenological study and was guided by the following research question:

What are the perceptions and experiences of participants, Black and White, who had attended both segregated and desegregated schools?

Study Participants

This study consisted of two focus groups totaling 11 participants divided homogeneously by race. The Black focus group had three Black males and two Black females. The White focus group consisted of six White females. All participants self-identified as being part of the current "middle class" of society, based on their levels of education, employment, and socio-economic status. The participants were from various geographical locations within the state of Arkansas, although several participants had been students within the same school during grade school. Participants were assigned

pseudonyms to maintain their confidentiality. A brief description of each participant is included below:

- *Jackie* is a Black female from Crossett, Arkansas. She attended a segregated school until seventh grade and graduated from an integrated school in the mid-1970s. She spent her career as an educator and school administrator.
- *Shawn* is a Black male from Helena, Arkansas. Shawn attended both a segregated elementary school and junior high school. During the mid-1970s, he graduated from integrated Central High School in Helena, Arkansas. Shawn continued his education after high school and graduated from law school. He worked as both an attorney and judge. Eventually, Shawn retired from a federal position within another city in the state of Arkansas.
- *Rickey* is a Black male from West Helena Arkansas. He attended both a segregated elementary school and middle school. Rickey's elementary school was located within his community. In the late 1970s, he graduated from Eliza Miller High School. He continued his education and graduated from college in the early 1980s. Rickey retired from both the National Guard and a state position where he worked in youth services.
- *Louis* is a Black male born in central Arkansas. He attended Eastside Menifee from kindergarten through ninth grade in Menifee, Arkansas. After ninth grade, Louis attended the integrated Morrilton High school. Today, Louis' company is recognized as one of the distinguished Black-owned businesses in Arkansas.

- *Sharon* is a Black female from Conway, Arkansas. During Head Start and first grade, she attended the segregated Pine Street Negro School. For second grade, she attended segregated Ellen Smith Elementary School. In the early 1980s, she graduated from Conway High School. Currently, Sharon owns one of the distinguished Black-owned businesses in Arkansas.
- *Wanda* is a White female from Little Rock, Arkansas. She attended a segregated school until eleventh grade when her high school was desegregated. She recalled that her brother graduated from Little Rock Central High school next to Ernest Green of the original Little Rock Nine in 1957. She has vivid memories of being a cheerleader while in school. She is a retired teacher from the Pulaski County Special School District.
- *Elaine* is a White female from Little Rock, Arkansas. She attended Forest Heights Junior High School. During tenth grade, she attended Hall High School when the desegregation mandate was implemented. Elaine remembered that her church took a strong stand on social issues during the implementation of the desegregation mandate.
- *Betty* is a White female from Little Rock, Arkansas. She has clear memories of the turmoil that happened at Little Rock Central High School during the time of school desegregation. She remembered seeing the riots and the soldiers carrying guns. Her brother graduated from Little Rock Central High School in 1957. However, she attended Fuller High School her senior year. At the time, there were no tensions as a result of the desegregation implementation. She recalled it was a very successful school year.

- *Carol* is a White female. Carol remembered that she was in the eighth grade when her school desegregated at Fuller Middle School. She did not remember any problems regarding the desegregation implementation. Carol remembers when Black students joined her school. During the time of the desegregation implementation, her grandfather owned a store in the College Station residential area. Currently, she is a retired teacher who taught school in the Pulaski County Special School District.
- *Lisa* is a White female. In the fourth grade, she attended Meadowcliff Elementary School when desegregation occurred at her school. She recalled that the desegregation process was somewhat difficult. She graduated from Little Rock Central High School. Currently, she works as a school counselor at Little Rock school.
- *Paula* is a White female. During the time of the desegregation implementation mandate, she attended both Fuller Junior High and Fuller High School. During this time, Paula recounted that she had no issues and concerns. Currently, Paula is a homemaker who resides in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Research Findings

Three focus group interviews were conducted for this research. The first focus group was assembled as a pilot to measure the validity of the interview questions. The subsequent focus group interviews were used as the research arm for this study. This research compares and contrasts the Black focus group to the White focus group studying the same phenomenon. The focus group interviews were then analyzed and

coded. Several themes emerged from the research. The themes did differ between the Black focus group and the White focus group. Critical Race Theory was used in the analysis of the participants' responses. Three themes emerged from the Black focus group: (a) mixed expectations, (b) loss of school/community ties, and (c) "i'll show them." Three themes also emerged from the White focus group: (a) no difference, (b) busing/loss of community school, and (c) respect for all.

Overview of Findings

Black focus group. Black participants' mixed expectations were evident through the analysis and coding of the transcript from their focus group. For purposes of clarity within the research, mixed expectations refer to Black participants' perceptions of expectations that were held for them. Five of the six Black participants perceived expectations for their learning in segregated schools were high and routine. Five of the six Black participants perceived expectations of learning within the integrated schools were very low, and sometimes non-existent. One participant saw high expectations in both the segregated and integrated school settings.

The majority of the Black participants felt their teachers in the segregated schools had high expectations for their learning. Participants felt that they were encouraged and given enough assistance to accompany and support their learning. Louis stated, "They wanted to make sure that you got the information…They would always encourage you. You always could hear some encouraging words." Louis also commented on his transition to the integrated school, "When I went to Morrilton High School, it was (like) here is the information, and you did the best you could. It wasn't no encouragement."

With about as much candor as one could muster about the childhood experience of having been unprepared for such an occurrence, Sharon shared a memory that had a visible effect on everyone within the room.

Sharon stated the following:

> That was one of my bigger difference, like you say the teachers… Like I said, I was so young and stuff I didn't even understand what was going on as far as integration. At the Black school, like I mentioned before, the teachers were loving. They would get onto you, but they would hug you and cuddle you and tell you that they love you.
>
> It was a memory that I had that I will never forget. When I went into second grade {at the newly integrated school}, I don't know if everybody did this but we would take naps. We had these little mats and we'd take naps. There was this one teacher, my second grade teacher, I remember her going around and looking at everybody and standing over them. She came up to me and she stood there.
>
> I played like I was asleep, closed my eyes. She just stood over me for longest. I'm like, what is she doing? Then she took her foot and she just kind of kicked me, like with her foot and I'm like oh my goodness, you know. She was just a real cold person, just a real cold person. I remember telling my sister and she didn't have nothing real nice to say. She wanted to go up there, but my grandma kept her from going.
>
> Second grade was just not a pleasant time and we were very poor. We would have little projects and of course we did them in the Black school

but thing that they wanted you to have, it cost money. Some of that stuff you had to bring to school cost money. Of course, most of the time I didn't have it. I just remember her looking, 'You don't have this? Why don't you have this?'"

She pointed that out, "Now the third grade was better because my teacher from first grade at the Black school, that was my teacher. She came over there. It was just like a whole new world. You know, I enjoyed it. The way she was loving and she had to go do some of the things they told them to do that they had to do at that school, but it was just a much better time when she came.

Jackie recounted her experience in segregated schools by sharing:

They went beyond to ensure that I was successful. They pulled things out of me, they saw potential, and wanted me to move on, wanted me to be the best I could be." Recalling her experience in the newly integrated school, she remarked, "It changed when I went to the White school. I was just another person there. There was no one there that I saw as my supporter. At the Black school, my teachers were supporters as well and I lost that when I went to the White school.

Rickey's experience in both settings differed from the other participants'. He recalled:

I feared the teachers {in the segregated school}. I thought the teachers were so mean. As I went on, I found out how much they really cared for

> us…when I went to the integrated school, I was fortunate that I knew most of the teachers.

Rickey stated earlier that he did not integrate a White school; White students integrated his Black school. Rickey continued and recounted a story about his twelfth-grade school year.

Ricky continues:

> I'll share this story with you about how good the teachers were. When I got to be twelfth grade, his name Charlie Seaton, we called him Prof Seaton because he was the teacher of teachers. Nobody in Helena had more of an impact on the school system than Prof Seaton. When Prof Seaton walked in a room and talked to folks about what was going on, he wasn't afraid of nobody and he wasn't afraid to put things he thought he saw wrong on the table, believe me.
>
> We integrated in 1970. When the first class of 1970 graduated, they were trying to figure out who was going to be the valedictorian. They ended up having a student that was White as valedictorian of that class. Prof Seaton disagreed with it. He said, 'Eliza Miller had the best students ever.' He said, 'Those students took calculus and math and those college level classes.'
>
> They assigned a mediator to figure that out. The first graduate of the first integrated school was a Black guy. They changed it. They flipped it. His name was King Bell. I'll never forget it. I learned that from Prof Seaton

> in his living room. But the teachers were the best. They took care of us and they made sure that we did the right thing.

During the focus group with the Black participants, the second theme that emerged was the loss of school and community ties. Indeed, this theme emerged in both the Black focus group and the White focus group. Participants lamented the loss of community schools and the relationships, which bonded such communities with a negative impact. The Black focus group consistently spoke about how teachers were invested in the communities because they lived, shopped, and attended church in the areas in which they taught.

This was expressed in a comment from Jackie as she stated the following:

> We were told second semester of my seventh-grade year ('68/'69) that all schools in Crossett were going to be integrated, which basically meant the Black schools would close and all the Black students would now be Crossett High School Eagles.
>
> We had been the T. W. D., Thomas William Daniels, Tigers. That was our identity. That was our self-worth in the community. We identified with that. That was our family. We were forced to pull away from our f family because we had to go to what was now a desegregated school, but it was the White school. It was their school. They didn't come to our school. We went to their schools.

Sharon also recalled her separation from her community-based school.

She recalls:

> I just remember being so scared and afraid. My house was right across the street from my school, and if something came up, it got hurt or anything, I could just run home. My grandma was just right there. But now I'm like I've got to go away...I've got to get on this bus and go way across town." She recalled wondering, What am I going to do if something comes up?

Shawn associated the loss of school/community connections with the loss of Black educators and influential Black leadership, including the dismantling of school discipline.

Shawn proclaims the following:

> Integration has caused – one of the downfalls has been the lack of discipline of our kids in this time.…and I say it for reasons that many people might not agree with me, but when we were in segregated schools, and it has been stated here, teachers could whip the child. They could whip the child. They did not beat them, but they could whip the child and nothing was said when the child got out of order.
>
> But when we went to integration here in Arkansas, you could not whip a child, White or Black, because White people did not want you to whip their child. The White kids knew that. From that, it spilled over into the Black community that you can't tell these kids anything anymore because of what has happened. And that is one of the downfalls of integration.

Shawn further addressed the make-up of the school governing body—the school board. In response to the leadership of boards and Black advancement during those times.

He posits:

> School boards across the state of Arkansas were all White. So who put teachers in position? Who gave teachers contracts? Who pulled contracts from the teachers? The school board. They all White. When they went to integration, those teachers, we had Black teachers with thirty and forty years of service in this community, and they were relegated to positions of nothing!

Other Black participants stressed the relationship between the school and the parents, as well as how teachers would go the extra step to aid students in learning. When transitioning into the integrated school, participants expressed, the community was no longer as effective as when the schools were segregated. "Every teacher knew your parents and your parents knew your teachers because they were right there together…. So it was really good," said Rickey, the relationship developed between Black teachers and the community.

Jackie remarked about the teacher community relationship

She recounts:

> Not only did my teachers live in my community, they also went to my church. We all attended the same church so I knew them every day of the week, Sunday as well. So they had that genuine level of respect for me and my other classmates.

For each participant, except for Rickey, the integration of the schools had a detrimental effect on the school community relationship that existed prior to

integration. Rickey indicated that the White students were integrated into his existing Black school; therefore, his school, home, church, and community existed within the same geographical location as pre-integration. All other participants clearly addressed the discrepancy between the school community relationship after integration.

The final theme for the Black focus group participants was summed up by the often-cited comment, "I'll Show You." This theme had the most literal and predominant reference to the interactions and experiences of the Black participants' perceptions of White teachers, administrators, and others, who questioned their ability to succeed in light of the pressures integration exposed to them. However, this reference also had some connotation to those who were the Black participants' greatest cheerleaders. This can be seen in the participants' recitation of their parents' and teachers' expectations for them, both prior to and throughout the process of, being integrated into historically White schools.

"Showing them" is also reflected in Rickey's statement.

Rickey reports the following:

> So what I want to say in all of this is that what...I have to always remember most is my identity. I always have to remember who I am. I can never forget that...I mean they instilled some value in us that is more valuable than the richest gold…So we don't have to be ashamed. At least I'm going to tell you that I'm not. I will never walk one day in my life and try to forget about my identity, and where I come from and what has happened.

This represented a line of thinking among participants that there was some sort of debt imposed upon on them by parents, teachers, and other in their communities to be able to fulfill their abilities. Shawn portrayed this expectation in terms of his decision to attend Little Rock Central High School under the Freedom of Choice plan. He made the decision to attend this integrated school.

Shawn reasoned that he made this decision because:

> They said I couldn't do it. They said I couldn't do it but I did. It took my family, it took those teachers. It took the people in that community. It took my church to push me to that level that yes, I can do it.

"Showing Them" also reflected the sentiment of a participant who wanted to live up to a high standard that a White teacher had set for her.

She recounted:

> Like I said earlier, the one teacher was like my worst teacher, one of the worst deals that I went through. But at the same school, at Ellen Smith Elementary School when I got to the fifth grade, a White teacher, Mrs. Dunlap, I'll never forget her. She was one of the best teachers that I had, and she told me, "You can be whatever you want to be. Lift up your head. Don't let nobody tell you that {you can't succeed}. if integration had not happened, I would have never met her, you know?

The most hardened rationale behind the theme of "Showing Them" was participants' rejection of their perceived inability in the eyes of the White ruling class including those who were tasked with the responsibility of teaching them. This reflected their conviction to show their doubters their individual determinations to attain great

heights, in spite of the low expectations and occasional roadblocks, which were placed before them during this time of transition.

This determination can be seen in Louis' recollection of the integration phenomenon.

Louis states:

> The most important thing that I got out of this experience was to never quit no matter what the environment was or no matter how you was discouraged by what someone said or an instructor said, know that that's not who you are. You can overcome any given situation if given the right resources, you can figure it out. Even not given the right resources, you can figure it out!

Louis also recounted, he was drilled to do his best and instructed he would have to do more than the White kids to be accepted. This was the expectation of Black parents, relatives and community members during this time and place.

Jackie described her experience with having low expectations set for her in the integrated school, which prompted her to build upon the strength that she had gained in her segregated school.

She recalls:

> I don't know that there were really any expectations for me that came from the teachers or the administrators at the integrated school, but you know the academics were there if you wanted it…, so I put everything into it to achieve on my own academically. It wasn't that I got a lot of help or

> support from the teachers there that made me academically successful. It was what I put into it that made me academically successful.

Participants were clear that teachers made a great difference in the success that students did or did not achieve. Overall, the participants perceived that teachers in the integrated school did not demonstrate the same level of caring and respect as teachers in the segregated school had done for them. Some participants, such as Jackie, believed the strength she obtained from the segregated school helped her to withstand the culture she encountered at the integrated school. Shawn recalled that Black teachers actually prepared Black students by informing them White teachers at the integrated school were, "Going to think you are not able to do this job. They think you can't do it, but you can do this or anything you want to do."

White focus group. Three themes emerged from the White focus group including: (a) no difference, (b) busing/loss of community school, and (c) respect for all. "no difference" represented the perception of the White focus group that they experienced little, if any, changes in school because of the arrival of Black students to their schools. This theme was recurrent throughout the interview process.

Carol was the first participant to speak within the White focus group. Within her second sentence, Carol remarked:

> I didn't notice any difference, I noticed that one day we were all White and then we had Black students join us. I don't remember that there was ever any unusual activity or anything that truly changed from that point. They were just in our class and that was it.

This statement came in response to the first question asked of the focus group. The interview question asked participants to recount their transition from the segregated school; in their case the White segregated school to the integrated school. Some of the White participants wanted to address the questions only in respect to the desegregated schools as opposed to both the segregated and desegregated school. Carol acknowledged, she, "…did not notice any animosity. So that was my initial first impression is that they joined us, and I'll leave it at that!"

Other participants echoed this sentiment as well.

Wanda lamented:

> The only memory I have, I have no memory of any problems, but I remember we were nervous. We were a little bit nervous, because we knew new students were coming to our school, and we were nervous about how that was going to go." During her senior year, Betty also stated that, when she got to Fuller High School, she too did not remember any problems. She further stated, "I don't remember any tension…I don't remember any negative situation at all.

Betty also attributed the same sentiment that the desegregation experience presented no difference to the fact that she along with others from her school lived in an integrated neighborhood.

She recalled:

> I grew up in East Little Rock all my childhood years, and it was a mixed neighborhood. We had Black, White: we had Polish, German, a lot of immigrants from Europe, and we got along with each other. We played

> with each other. We didn't know we were different. I ate with my Black friends. They ate at my house. The mothers all doctored everybody's boo-boos. We did not know we were different, and I don't regret my childhood.

In addressing the differences she saw at an integrated school, Lisa spoke about the increase in Black teachers as time passed within the integrated school. She explained, "…the difference in the environment was as I got older we did have more Black teachers. Between me and my friends, there was never any conflict. I mean, I'm sure there was somewhere, but I didn't see a lot of conflict."

The second theme that emerged from the White focus group was that desegregation resulted in busing, as well as the loss of community. Students from schools located within their communities were transported to schools at greater distances and with far less convenience and proximity to their homes. White participants not only spoke of these effects it had on their transition as students, but also the impact it had upon their family members.

During the year in which her schools were desegregated, Lisa reflected on the difficulty of that transition.

She recounts:

> The transition year I think was just so difficult because nobody was happy, because nobody wanted to leave their, as far as little kids, nobody wanted to leave their homeschool and then they were changing it every year. And you never knew what was going to happen next... But you know, I don't think the kids were nearly as effected as much as the parents were.

When asked a follow-up question regarding busing, Lisa replied, "What I remembered seeing on the news and my parents talking about how this doesn't make sense. That's one of the things I still remember is us watching the news and you know, both sides were unhappy."

Wanda remembered a story she heard about a student who lived one block from Little Rock Central High School but chose to attend Joe T. Robinson High School.

She explains:

> When I was a homebound teacher, I had a student that lived about a block, and attended Joe T. Robinson. That made me think of Joe T. Robinson. An administrator friend of mind here said that it would be cheaper to buy...that child was on homebound, it doesn't matter for what reason, but when he went back to school he was going to be taking a cab because he was the only one in that neighborhood that wanted to go to Joe T. Robinson, and it was an M to M transfer.
>
> So an administrator here in our district said we could afford to buy that family a car more easily than busing that child to and from school. I just thought that was interesting. But he wanted to go to Joe T and he got to go but... it was a long way.

At that time, Erika explained her stepfather was a pastor of a church who took a strong stance on social issues and served as a mediator for Black students. She further shared her biological father worked as a full-time national guardsman.

She states:

> I can remember him making statements, being angry about having to drive {her brother} over to school a distance and that he remembered when he was called out and he had to go over there and stand in all that mess {the crisis at Little Rock Central High School}.

The last theme that emerged from the White focus group was "Respect for All." This theme reflected a perception shared by all White participants in the focus group. During the White participants' upbringing, and within their communities, there was a high degree of expectation that all persons regardless of race, creed, or color should be respected and treated with dignity. As participants attested this expectation was promoted consistently in their individual homes, this theme largely parallels the previous theme that participants experienced "no difference," because of the desegregation of schools.

Carol commented the following:

> My grandfather owned a grocery store in College Station, so we grew up fully exposed to people of different races. Later within the interview, Carol recounted her parents' admonition, "You make sure that you get along with everybody." And that was, you know, it didn't make any difference: you were going to school so you made sure that you got along. That was the way we…that's what I was told in the house.

Betty directly agreed with these statements.

Betty explained:

> Respecting everybody was the way we were raised. We didn't know we were different like color because we grew up together. It's when

> this Central High crisis happened and somebody says, 'Hey, you're different, you don't need to go to school together.' I'd never thought about it before.

Elaine remembered her mother's directive, "'Get along with everybody. God put us here. We're supposed to all live together. We all get along.'"

She further explained:

> You know she loved everybody. It just didn't matter who they were or what color they were or where they came from. That's just kind of how we were brought up, you know, just kind of being a part and kind of seeing both sides.

Participants also spoke about how many White adults were working with Black people in their occupations at the time of desegregation, thereby creating cohesive relationships before the school integration phenomenon occurred.

Lisa remembered:

> I think, as far as racial issues between the children, I don't think there was such an issue because our parents all, I mean my dad, he worked at 3M Company in Granite Mountain. So, he worked where there were Black and White workers, and they worked together all the time.

Betty reiterated that her education in both the segregated school and the integrated school were pretty much the same.

She recalled:

> I think we just felt like everything was pretty much as normal. I don't remember. I was treated fairly in both situations. Of course, I was taught

> to respect authority. I knew if I didn't it was going to be you-know-what to pay when I got home. We feared making a mistake and messing up in school. I think everyone was treated fairly and justly, and I don't remember any difference.

Summary

Perceptions and experiences of this lived phenomenon differed greatly between the Black and White focus groups. This phenomenon was better understood in the context of the time it occurred, as well as the position each participant reflected upon during the focus group interviews. During the time of this experience, most of the participants were very young and likely did not fully understand the historical significance they were playing at such a critical point in time.

Throughout the interview process, no participant addressed any preparation they were provided prior to being placed into desegregated schools from segregated ones. This is in contrast to the images of the Little Rock Nine, with Daisy Bates preparing and coaching those black students on expectations and responses. Based on the participant experiences, it can be concluded that all participants were left to "figure it out." Nevertheless, the White participants simply existed in the normal realm of life that they always had experienced, while the Black participants faced new challenges as a result of the desegregation of schools.

During both focus groups interviews, the participants were willing and eager to share their thoughts and perceptions in respect to what happened during this time in history, and the impact that experience still has on them to this very day. Overall, the Black students did not feel a sense of connection and belonging after being removed from

segregated schools, whereas the White students never lost a sense of connection and belonging. The White students spoke about the inconvenience of losing their community schools because of desegregation, with most of the inconvenience being placed on their parents.

The White focus group wanted it understood early in the interview process that they saw little, if any, differences between the segregated and desegregated schools they attended both individually and collectively. This theme was constant and recurring. The Black focus group members gave the impression that sometimes made me feel as though they were reliving the experience as they recounted it during the focus group.

Both focus groups agreed that they both lost an important piece of their community with the desegregation mandates that had been imposed upon them. The White participants addressed the loss of community schools and how ridiculous it felt attending a school that was far removed from their homes. Said one participant in this vein, "You don't even want to get us started on the busing issue."

The Black participants expressed a feeling of loss of community, and of teachers and administrators within the community whose lives had intertwined with their own, not only at school, but at church and in the community. These Black participants recalled feelings of loneliness and uncertainty when they left their segregated schools, and feeling even more lost when attending a desegregated school with little support to help them maneuver through this unfamiliar experience.

In both focus groups, several participants addressed the benefit this phenomenon had on their views regarding individuals of other races. Participants also shared that this

life experience helped them better understand and appreciate all people they encountered throughout their lifetime, especially those who may have been different from them.

Chapter V: Conclusions

Chapter V describes the lived experiences and perceptions of participants, Black and White, who attended both segregated and desegregated schools. This study consisted of two focus groups totaling 11 participants. Participants were assigned to homogeneous groups by race (Black or White). The researcher facilitated both groups. Each focus groups session lasted slightly over two hours. The participants involved in this study all resided within the state of Arkansas; in most instances, they were from different locations than where they were in school and experienced the desegregation of the schools.

Presentation of Findings

This research study produced several findings, which were different for each focus group, but one finding was similar for both groups. Three themes emerged from the Black focus group: (a) mixed expectations, (b) "I'll show them," and (c) loss of school/community ties. Similarly, three themes emerged from the White focus group: (a) no difference, (b) respect for all, and (c) busing/loss of community schools. The third theme reflects a likeness for each group.

This study examined and analyzed how each participant internalized the phenomenon of desegregation, as well as the effects that the experience did or did not have on their lives since leaving school. While recollections differed from person to person, and from focus group to focus group, there were several consistent findings across racial groups.

Summary of the Research Question

The research question that guided this study was, "*What are the experiences and perceptions of participants, Black and White, who attended both segregated and*

desegregated schools?" Both focus groups were instrumental in contributing to this research. The Black focus group was reflective and analytical in their expressions and the effects of this experience, both at the time it happened and presently in their lives. The White focus group was consistent in their collective analysis of the phenomenon and what it meant to their lives before and after the phenomenon.

All participants in this study attended both segregated and desegregated schools in the state of Arkansas. Some participants attended the same school throughout their grade school years; others attended more than one school. An attempt was reasonably made to vary the geographical location of participants within the state.

Review of the Literature and the Findings

The findings of this research study revealed that segregation and desegregation affected participants differently, according to whether they were White or Black. With very few exceptions, participants reflected upon this phenomenon through racialized lenses.

Participants in this investigation were vivid and candid in their descriptions of how they felt about segregation, the process that led to the desegregation of their local schools, and the subsequent transition to their desegregated schools. A review of the experiences and perceptions of participants – both Black and White – are discussed in more detail in this chapter.

From the time of chattel slavery, until the decisions handed down in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, segregation of the races was the norm and custom of American life for Blacks and Whites. This norm was both imposed and enforced by the White dominant population. Challenges to this phenomenon came in the form of lawsuits

such as *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, but to no avail (Folkenflik, 2019). The laws codified and reinforced this division. By the time of the *Brown* decisions, the NAACP started to litigate segregation on a basis of the inequities of separate but equal facilities ("Charles Hamilton Houston", 2011).

In this research, Black participants specifically addressed the inequities of the facilities and operations in both Black and White segregated school settings before the time of desegregation. Clearly, the Black participants saw a distinction between both the segregated and the desegregated schools. Even the Black participant who acknowledged little differences in most instances spoke of "men in the community," who would take care of issues within the school as part of their service to the community, as opposed to what was budgeted through school funds for operations. The White focus group saw little difference between the two different settings.

The inequities of facilities were evident within the segregated schools. This was commensurate with other elements of segregation that advantaged the White race both during the time of segregation and since. Inequities of facilities were not the only element of segregation that had a detrimental effect on Black citizens during this time period (Rothstein, 2013). The NAACP also argued that segregation had a detrimental effect on how Black students viewed themselves. The NAACP argued that segregation had a negative psychological effect on Black students, and this was substantiated through the work of the noted Social Psychologists Mamie and Kenneth Clark (Debakcsy, 2018).

The Clarks' test, although small in sample size, represented a view of how black students internalized the racial systems that they did not many times understand ("Kenneth B. Clark", n.d.). The reflection of this effect was seen in the Black focus

group specifically, whereas the White focus group participants seemed to view this as normal or not out of the ordinary.

The Black focus group and the White focus group differed greatly in terms of their perceptions of the desegregation of their schools—a reality that reflected the existing literature on this topic.

The Black focus group collectively spoke of their initial reluctance, frustration, and anxiety regarding their transition from attending segregated schools to newly integrated ones. This was likely attributed to them not fully understanding the entire scope of what happened in the transition phase, based on most of the Black participants' experience of integrating formerly all White schools. Only one of the Black participants described White students entering his formerly all Black school.

Several of the Black participants referred consistently to "their schools," meaning the Black schools that they had attended before integration. This was new to the researcher, hearing that the Black participants had not all desired to be integrated into the previously all-White schools. Likewise, this contrasted with what noted organizations such as the NAACP had advocated in their championing of the integration of public schools (Pratt, 2009).

Black participants also spoke of the loss of their communities' Black schools as a result of integration. The participants also spoke of Black educators' loss of jobs and positions as a result of integration measures. Some participants remembered Black school personnel who were assigned to lower positions than what they held previously as integration unfolded.

The noted sociologist Peter Marris, studying displacement as a result of slum clearance, described having observed a result similar to what the Black participants in this study expressed in relation to being made to leave their previously all-Black schools in order that they integrate previously all-White ones. "For some," Marris (1974) explained, this kind of loss "may be a profound disturbance from which they will never recover" (p. 44).

Indelible in the recollections of most Black participants were their experiences with White teachers whom they felt had treated them with little or no regard, despite their duty to educate them. Numerous Black participants spoke of the empathy, care, and concern they were denied by certain White teachers.

Black participants described a clear difference between the level of care and concern they received in the segregated schools, as opposed to the level of care and concern they received after moving into the integrated schools. They expressed that, at the segregated school, care and concern were parts of the communities in which they resided. This was expressed by recounting how many different teachers and administrators they had during their segregated experience. These teachers and administrators were also members of the churches they attended, and other community organizations in which they or their parents were actively engaged.

These participants even viewed corporal punishment as part of that care and concern, which expressed to them there was an expectation for them to succeed academically as well as socially within the community. Black participants spoke about the differences in the resources between the segregated and integrated schools. The resources within the White school were far superior as compared to the Black

participants' former schools. One participant spoke of the Black school having volunteer community members fixing things within the segregated school, as opposed to the district-funded system of care that was in place within the mostly White schools that they eventually integrated.

Black participants relied heavily on what their parents and community members expected of them in relation to respect for self and others. Education was stressed as a means for self-improvement, which was a way for Black people to distinguish themselves. High scholastic achievement became a way to show others that one was just as good, or better than, those who promulgated ideas of racial superiority. With respect to the formerly all-White schools that most Black participants integrated, any expectations that were imposed upon these participants were said to have been low.

The Black participants were clear in recounting the perceived unfair and unjust treatment they experienced in the formerly all-White school into which they were integrated. There were some instances in which Black participants spoke highly of teachers, particularly White teachers, who really encouraged them to achieve higher levels than were routinely expected of them. Black participants recounted experiences fondly when they reflected positively on the interactions they had with teachers and administrators of the other race within the desegregated schools.

Most White participants in this study clearly did not experience any dramatic or drastic change associated with the desegregation of public schools. White participants saw Black students coming to their existing White schools, as opposed to the White participants going into existing Black schools. The perceived psychological or emotional toll on White participants was limited as opposed to that of their Black counterparts. It

was more the process that Black participants needed to switch schools and leave behind the support networks they had enjoyed in many Black-only schools. The White participants did not seem to experience any such loss as the Black participants clearly did.

The Black participants were also keenly aware that, despite being officially integrated into predominantly White schools, they were largely segregated within the schools once there. This too was a source of conflict and concern for participants, who recalled the disproportionately high numbers of Black students in their new schools' special education classrooms, and low numbers of Black students included within their new schools' gifted programs or advanced classes.

The Black participants in this study also spoke of rigorous course offerings within the newly integrated schools. In the segregated school, the popular courses were shop, home economics, and other such classes that prepared students to enter the workforce immediately after high school. Participants described the integrated schools as having courses that served to challenge students who intended to pursue post-secondary education.

The White Focus Group

The White focus group and the Black focus group differed in their perceptions and experiences of the desegregation of their schools. While members of the Black focus group described the pressures associated with moving from segregated schools into desegregated ones, White focus group members described no such misgivings. This may be attributed to the fact that most of the Black participants were integrated into what were

formerly all-White schools, whereas the White participants reported remaining in the same, previously all-White schools in which they had started their schooling.

It must be openly acknowledged that this study was predicated upon the presumption that differences would exist between how White participants and Black participants experienced the desegregation of schools. Such differences reflected the socio-cultural differences of the time, especially in segregated spaces in America. Even today, differences clearly exist between the lenses of many historically oppressed people, and the lenses of those who were the oppressors, themselves, or their descendants.

The White participants in the focus group were eager to express their perceptions and experiences. The first question asked participants to recall their transition from segregated schools to desegregated schools. The first participant hastened to volunteer, "I'll take it first. I was in the, I believe, the eighth grade. I didn't notice any difference."

The sentiment "I didn't notice any difference," was pervasive throughout the discussion of the White focus group. The questions asked to each White participant sought to elicit their experiences about the transition from legally segregated schools to schools desegregated by court order. White participants tended to limit their responses to addressing only their interactions within the newly integrated schools.

In trying to understand this recurrent response among participants in the White focus group, the researcher could only surmise that participants wanted to make it clear that their own experiences were not at all like those experienced at Little Rock Central High School, which drew nationwide—even international—attention. The White

participants seemed to frame their answers to most focus group questions in relation to Little Rock Central.

The frequency with which White participants employed the expressions “no difference” or “no problem” in their responses to questions revealed that their collective memory of school integration was marked by little evidence of physical or verbal conflict; therefore, little tension was mentioned in the transition between segregated schools and desegregated schools.

All White participants described family upbringings that instilled in them respect for all persons regardless of race or other factors. Some of the White participants spoke of their parents working within occupations that were integrated before the legally mandated integration of schools. Participants also spoke of having friends of the opposite race except for sleepovers, which were socially unacceptable at the time. Some participants described that some of their Black counterparts visited their homes and vice versa.

The greater conversation from the White focus group centered around the issue of busing. Busing had a negative connotation for all White participants. Most spoke of having to leave schools within their neighborhood and some within sight of their houses. This issue concerned not only the participants, but also their parents. Participants spoke of their parents not understanding why their children were unable to attend schools within the neighborhood.

Participants also cited busing as loosening connections, not only in their neighborhood schools, but to the community as well. This issue was interesting to the researcher because the loss of community was often addressed among Black participants

during this era, but the degree to which this was a concern for the White participants was unexpected.

One White participant reflected on Black students' integration of what were formerly all-White schools. This participant attributed any discomfort those students experienced to the fact no one wanted to leave their home school. This participant glossed over any other possible factors that could have accounted for the Black students' apprehension. The issue surrounding loss of community was a prominent one for both Black participants and White participants. Several participants also felt that changes to school assignments were an almost yearly occurrence, and that adjusting to all the changes certainly added to problems. When reflecting on the busing of students, White participants identified that neither Black students and families nor White ones were satisfied.

"Getting along" was repeated throughout the White focus group. This represented the values inculcated by families of the White participants. Participants also spoke of their affiliations with churches that embraced social issues and that would not approve of behavior contrary to respect for all people.

In describing the differences between their own experiences and those of Black students during this time, one White participant stated bluntly, "Integration did not cause Whites trouble." Another participant when speaking of the disciplining of students – in particular, Black students – by White teachers, "They were afraid to discipline." This perspective stands in contrast to the recollections of Black participants, who saw the end of discipline occurring with the integration into formerly all-White schools of Black

students and Black teachers, with White families clearly indicating that they did not want Black teachers to discipline their children.

One White participant spoke of the perception of Black teachers early in the desegregation process. Although the process for Black teachers to integrate formerly all-White schools took much longer than the process for White students, perceptions about the potential quality of Black teachers was negative and comments were not unusual in either the home or the school. With time this participant added, Black teachers demonstrated their ability to connect with White students as well as with Black ones.

Participants shared that White teachers held a negative view of the preparation of the Black students entering the newly desegregated schools. One participant suggested, since she only had White teachers before desegregation, White teachers may have viewed the incoming Black students as simply "different."

Towards the end of the meeting, one participant of the White focus group looked somewhat distressed and stated to the researcher, "I hate that we're not giving you more information." With that, the other participants nodded in agreement, as though they perceived the researcher was expecting answers contrary to those the participants were themselves providing.

The White focus group presented their recollections and perceptions about the desegregation experience through the lens from which they viewed it at the time, as well as the socio-cultural context in which they lived both then and in the present day. Their candid answers represented the experience as they saw and lived it. When reflecting today on the desegregation experience, the issue of race had not been a driving force to these participants at the time being discussed; neither was it an overarching concern for

them today. These participants portrayed the desegregation experience, with seeming sincerity, as having been largely inconsequential to them when it occurred.

Where the White and Black Focus Group Converged

Clearly, within the body of this investigation, the Black focus group and the White focus group experienced and perceived the phenomenon of desegregation in opposite ways. The memories and lasting impacts on the Black participants were more personal and intimately connected to the time and place. The White participants viewed the process without the personal connectivity to the time and place of an event that would have a lasting impact on their life going forward. Each seemed to view these events in line with how they stood racially during the experience itself.

Although their perceptions and experiences were different, each group seemed to agree on some tangible benefits resulting from desegregation. Participants spoke about feeling initial distrust of students from the other racial group at the beginning of the school desegregation process. Participants explained that, as time went on, they began to see students of the other race in a different light. Participants spoke of seeing others as having the same problems, same issues, and same hopes and desires that they had as well.

The main positive effect of desegregation for some participants was it allowed them to see and understand others in a way that would not have been possible if desegregation had not occurred. Some participants even described having formed lifelong relationships and friendships with those of the other race.

Participants also described how the experience of school desegregation prepared them to operate in spaces in which those of other races, nationalities, and religions were

involved. This proximity to others who were different from themselves allowed them to respect those differences, just as they desired their own differences to be respected.

Most participants within this study were eager to share their story for various reasons. Participants in both focus groups expressed a strong desire to know how the other group's participants perceived and experienced school desegregation. Each group expressed they thought that the other group would be different in their analysis. Indeed, the two focus groups did present very different analyses with regard to their individual and collective experiences, and perceptions of both segregated and newly desegregated schools.

Analysis, Finding(s), and Explanations of Research

A clear finding emerged from the research study in which both Black participants and White participants viewed the school desegregation experience from very different lenses, both back then and now. In this study, the Black participants were either four or five generations away from chattel slavery, but had remained a part of a strictly segregated system that relegated them to less than second-class citizenship. Their lenses were shaped daily by this history and these experiences. Additionally, this research reinforced the notion that the burden of segregation has always been on the backs of Black students. Black students bore the brunt of the psychological, sociological, and even physiological effects of desegregation (Hannah-Jones, 2017).

The White participants, whether they had descended from owners of slaves or not, were nevertheless the beneficiaries of a society that provided advantages to them in which their race would never serve to hamper their life chances and opportunities for success. White participants enjoyed the advantages of not being disqualified or

discounted from birth because of the race into which they were born. Their lenses were shaped by the advantages that race afforded to them, even if they never chose to avail themselves of those advantages. These lenses colored their perceptions of their daily experiences.

White participants in this study clearly had a frame of reference associated with the Little Rock Central crisis. Their perceived goal was to show through their experiences and perceptions that their schools did not experience this level of obstruction and resistance. The perception of most of the White participants was that the experience at their school did not look like what had happened at Little Rock Central, and everything else associated with the experience was described as "ok."

Although the lens by which both focus groups viewed the desegregation of their schools were different, both groups acknowledged that the effort to desegregate public schools allowed participants to view each other in a more positive and understanding light than would have been possible without such interactions.

Analyses of the transcripts from these focus groups showed that the Black participants endured the hardship of this process more than their White counterparts, and it continued well beyond their grade school years. While the differences were pronounced, most participants from both groups agreed that desegregation allowed each participant to develop and grow.

As indicated above, one finding that was unexpected for this researcher was the level of resentment expressed by most of the participants both Black and White regarding the loss of school and community leadership that resulted from forced busing and desegregation initiatives. While this was not surprising coming from the Black

participants, it was nevertheless surprising to the researcher that the White participants also experienced the loss of community schools. Indeed, this represented the biggest grievance expressed by the White focus group.

This study confirmed prior research in finding that desegregation did indeed have great impact on students who experienced it:

> School desegregation fundamentally changed the people who lived through it, yet had a more limited impact on the larger society. Public schools faced enormous challenges during the late 1970s as educators tried to facilitate racial integration amid a society that remained segregated in terms of housing, social institutions, and often employment. Nonetheless, desegregation made the vast majority of the students who attended these schools less racially prejudiced and more comfortable around people of different backgrounds. After high school, however, their lives have been far more segregated as they re-entered a more racially divided society. ("How Desegregation Changed Us", 2004, para. 6)

In this study, the White students were eager to share that not all schools that were desegregated experienced the kinds of violence and chaos that materialized at Little Rock Central High School. While that is certainly true, the Black participants did not recall the experience as being quite as uneventful as their White counterparts did. While the tension of the experience may have been invisible to the White participants, it was nevertheless real and palpable to the Black participants

Significance

This study addressed the perceptions and experiences of both Black and White individuals who were schoolchildren at the time when schools were mandated by law to

desegregate. Much of the prior research focused primarily on Black students with various exceptions. This research provided a snapshot of both sides of this phenomenon within the same study and addressed how they were impacted from their own words.

Prior research showed that students who attended desegregated schools recounted that they valued their diverse learning experience ("How Desegregation Changed Us", 2004). Although many participants expressed they hoped their children could have similar experiences, they recognized that this was unlikely to happen. A White graduate of West Charlotte High School noted, "It's amazing to me that…my parents went through segregation, I went through integration, and potentially my daughter might go back to segregation" ("How Desegregation Changed Us", 2004).

The voices of the participants—all of whom were students when Arkansas' schools were desegregated—were critical to this research. How the two focus groups internalized this experience reflected their positionality at that time, and it continues to color the recollections of their experiences today. The findings from this investigation reaffirmed that two narratives exist regarding this phenomenon. The researcher's task going forward is to understand this duality itself and to better understand why such disparate points-of-view persist in this nation, especially in matters relating to race.

As the researcher, and as a Black man whose siblings started their school careers in segregated settings and who personally experienced the process of desegregation, I had reason to anticipate how Black focus group members would recall the phenomenon and its subsequent impact on their lives. I was nevertheless surprised by the sentiments expressed by the participants in the White focus group. Specifically, the recurring theme that the desegregation of schools had made "no difference" to these participants was one

that had never occurred to me. With that said, I had no reason to question the participants' honesty; this was merely indicative of the lens through which these individuals viewed their experience with school desegregation.

The chief significance of this phenomenological investigation was to demonstrate how race relations—a perennial challenge for Americans—can be confronted in a methodical, respectful, and appropriate manner.

Limitations

This research presented a glimpse into the experiences and perceptions of a limited number of individuals who had as students experienced both segregated schools and the process of desegregation. This research does not claim to be exhaustive. As the researcher, I acknowledge that additional work must be completed to contribute to the body of knowledge about the experiences of people—both Black and White—who experienced the desegregation of America's education system as schoolchildren.

While I was able to recruit two Black males to participate in this investigation, no White males agreed to participate, despite numerous attempts to recruit such individuals. The perceptions and experiences of White males who had been students during the time when Arkansas' schools were desegregated would have provided more insight into this phenomenon.

Within both focus groups, participants expressed that they benefited from the exposure to individuals of other races that integrated schools provided to them during their school years. It is conceivable that a similar study may include participants who did not share this view. It is very important to hear from individuals who did not share this viewpoint, as it was to hear from those who valued desegregation.

As the researcher, I must admit that only when a White female participant felt the need to offer the following apology, "I feel like we are not giving you what you want," it occurred to me that it might have been prudent for a White individual to moderate the White focus group. Since then, I pondered how the White participants' responses might have been different, if their group had been facilitated by a White man or woman rather than by me, a Black man.

This research had many limitations and represents only a snapshot of this phenomenon. Additional research looking at both the Black participants and the White participants would certainly expand the needed research. The timing for such research is of the essence: The participants for this study were at minimum sixty-three-years-old. Additional research cannot wait or be delayed.

Recommendations for Future Research

Given the absence of White male participants in this investigation, it is recommended this study be repeated with a special emphasis on recruiting White male individuals. This would allow researchers to identify their perspectives on having transitioned from segregated schools to integrated ones during the legally mandated desegregation of schools in Arkansas. It would be interesting to learn whether their recollections coincided with or deviated from those of their female and/or Black counterparts.

Another recommendation would be to conduct a similar study investigating the perceptions and experiences not of White and Black students, but of White and Black teachers and administrators who made the transition from segregated to desegregated

schools. Time is also of the essence for such investigations, as such individuals are likely at minimum to be eighty years old or older.

In the present study, all participants self-identified as being in the middle class of society, based on their occupations, incomes, and levels of education. The final recommendation for future research would be to investigate former students whose socioeconomic circumstances were less than those of these participants. It would be interesting to learn the perceptions and experiences, of both the time of school desegregation and since, of individuals who did not advance to the middle class.

Conclusion

While reflecting the perceptions and experiences of only a small number of individuals who had begun their school careers in segregated schools and lived through the desegregation process, this research study provided important sociological data about this crucial moment in the history of Arkansas and of the United States. If we are to create a more equitable society, it is imperative that we understand historic events and phenomena, not only through the perspectives of the majority, but also—just as importantly—from the perspectives of those who lacked such privilege.

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Appendix A

Research Question:

How do participants, Black and White, who attended both segregated and desegregated schools recall their school experiences?

Biographical Information:

- What city are you from?
- What segregated school did you attend?
- What desegregated school did you attend?
- What grade did you transition from a segregated to desegregated school?
- What educational level did you obtain?
- What is/was the educational level attained by your parent(s)?

Interview Questions:

- Will you explain what you remember about your transition between the segregated and desegregated schools?
- Are you able to share with us any family conversations, meetings, dialogue that occurred within your family regarding your transition from segregated to desegregated schools?
- How would you describe your teachers in both the segregated and desegregated schools?
- What was your perception of how teachers viewed you in both segregated and desegregated school settings?
- Please explain your differing and like experiences in both school environments. (Examples)
- Would you share with us the academic environment, for you, in both schools?
- Please describe the physical environment of both schools?
- Take a moment and reflect on what you perceive to be the positive outcomes, negative outcomes and/or both in terms of this lived experience for you.
- Would you explain the effect this experience has had on your life since leaving grade school?
- How did your parent(s) view segregation and desegregation?
- Is there anything relative to this experience, time, and place that I have not asked specifically that you wish to share because you feel it to be important to understanding this phenomenon/experience?

THIS CONCLUDES OUR INTERVIEW--- THANKS FOR YOU PARTICIPATION