Who am I and Who Do I Think Others Say I Am?: A Phenomenological Study of Early Adolescents' Self-Perceptions and Stereotype Consciousness

Linda Turner

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/seceddoc_etd

Part of the Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons, Curriculum and Social Inquiry Commons, Educational Methods Commons, Gender Equity in Education Commons, Language and Literacy Education Commons, Liberal Studies Commons, and the Secondary Education Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/seceddoc_etd/14

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Secondary and Middle Grades Education at DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Education in Secondary Education Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu.
WHO AM I AND WHO DO I THINK OTHERS SAY I AM?:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF EARLY ADOLESCENTS'
SELF PERCEPTIONS AND STEREOTYPE CONSCIOUSNESS
by
Linda Jean Turner

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of
Doctor of Education
in
Secondary Education, English
in the
Bagwell College of Education
Kennesaw State University

Kennesaw, GA
2019
Acknowledgements

To say that “It Takes a Village” is an understatement. My village is full of people who have supported me and cheered me on from the moment I undertook the challenge to become Dr. Turner. I remember sitting down with my closest friends, Stacy, Karis, and Kellie, and telling them that I would have to stop attending our bi-weekly gatherings because I was going back to school to get my doctorate. Like good friends do, they understood and have stood by me the whole way. Stacy, in particular, has been the one I called when I felt overwhelmed, and every time, she talked me off the ledge and reminded me that I was capable, and more importantly, that I could call her during my next meltdown, and she would be there. Stacy, you have been my biggest cheerleader, and I could not have done this without your support. I love you and am so grateful for my “twin.”

I am grateful to my love and future husband, Kimbert. You had the temerity to come into my life in the middle of this process, and I am so glad you decided to pursue a relationship with me even when I was stressing out about the latest deadline or complaining about reading yet another research article. You introduced me to Google Scholar and Perrla to help make my task easier, and more importantly, you reminded me daily that I could do this. Your love and constant encouragement means all the world to me. I cannot wait to be Dr. Frye. It is your turn now, Babe, and I will be with you, editing and proofreading whenever you need me.

My incredible friends from work, who have become family, helped me through this in the most practical ways. Tootie chased down students to get back their consent forms, kicking me out of my classroom to do so. You are an invaluable asset to me both personally and professionally. Kerbie and Bambi spent countless hours with me at Starbucks and Mazzy’s during our “work” sessions. Those times when we got off task to have our therapy
sessions were my favorite and kept me sane. Bambi, your sacrifice of reading through every word of this document with me to make sure it was ready for submission, is more than I deserve. That is friendship, and I look forward to doing the same for you one day.

My family has been there to support me through all of my ventures, and this one is no exception. My boys, Laffayette, Bryan, and Brandon, are the reason I teach and the reason I care for those in my classes who struggle. Thank you for loving me and encouraging me to do this. I am grateful for my sister, Barbara’s, reminders that there was a time in my life when I saw little purpose for books, and for my brother, David, telling me that all of this education doesn’t mean a thing if I still can’t hang my own curtains (I still can’t). Thanks for keeping me grounded and humble. My parents, who were always just a phone call away when I needed some reassurance or who understood when I couldn’t come for a visit because of a deadline, are truly the most loving people I know, and I am so thankful for you.

I am so thankful for the committee I had. Dr. Nichole Guillory, you started me on my awakening twelve years ago when you were my adviser for my capstone project. You have challenged me to be more aware of racial issues than I had been and have opened my eyes to perspectives to which I had been blind. You have changed me both as an educator and a person, and I now see the world differently because of you. I asked you to be on my committee because I knew you would push me to do better and to be uncomfortable. What I did not realize is how much you would be there to walk me through every step, even when it was painful. Thank you for holding me accountable through our weekly FaceTime meetings and for not accepting less than my best. Thank you for believing I could do this and showing me how.
Dr. Megan Adams, I knew I wanted you on my committee when I took that first class with you. Your passion for my work was evident in each and every one of your comments. That passion is infectious and has kept me going when I was discouraged. Your candor about your own experiences has been a huge encouragement to me. Thank you for sharing your dissertation draft with me. You have no idea how many times I have opened that document when I was unsure of what to do next on my own. You have forced me to “unpack” more times than I can count, and although I hated reading that word in the comments, it made me dig deeper and write better. Thanks for pushing me and inspiring me.

Finally, my deepest gratitude is for my chair, Dr. Nita Paris. Dr. Paris, every time I am around you, from the first class I took with you four years ago, to our latest conversation, I find myself wanting to be more like you. You are the reason I continued on with my doctorate when I did not think I could afford it. You found a spot for me on your research team, where I learned about coding data. During this dissertation process, you reached out to me every time you thought I might be drifting away, and you encouraged me to stick with it. Your guidance and direction are why I am finally here. Thank you, from the bottom of my heart. I am truly grateful to have studied under you.
Dedication

This is for my boys, Laffayette, Bryan, and Brandon. You are my Why. You are the reason I teach. The reason I care so deeply that every child in my classroom succeeds. I could not be prouder of the men you have become. This work is because of you.
Abstract

Despite a significant amount of research on stereotype threat, there are few studies that examine middle school students' stereotype awareness, which is a key variable in stereotype threat. In the current study, the researcher provides a literature review of the research on stereotype consciousness and stereotype threat, as well as an explanation of the theoretical frameworks of critical race theory and intersectionality theory. She conducted an interpretive phenomenological study that uses a Who Am I graphic organizer, student narratives, and interviews to examine her sixth-grade students' perceptions of themselves and how they perceive others’ perceptions of them to see their awareness of stereotypes and if those stereotypes might reflect Steele's conception of stereotype threat. Results of the study reveal that these sixth-grade students have a positive self-image and close ties with their families, cultures, and peers. They demonstrated a belief that their parents think well of them, but their peers have a more negative view. They used overwhelmingly positive terms to describe how their teachers and others in the world see them. While they did not explicitly mention stereotypes, they implied an awareness that others viewed them through gendered and raced lenses. As a result, their stereotype awareness could be a mitigating factor in Steele’s conception of stereotype threat for these sixth-graders.

Keywords: stereotype threat, stereotype consciousness, critical race theory, intersectionality theory, phenomenology, middle school students, sixth graders, achievement gap, perspective-taking
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.............................................................................................................. ii

Dedication ........................................................................................................................... v

Abstract .............................................................................................................................. vi

Chapter 1 ............................................................................................................................. 1

  Statement of the Problem ................................................................................................. 4

  Research Questions .......................................................................................................... 5

  Purpose and Significance of Study .................................................................................. 5

  Local Context ................................................................................................................... 6

  Conceptual Framework .................................................................................................... 6

  Background and Role of Researcher ................................................................................ 8

  Definition of Relevant Terms .......................................................................................... 10

  Organization of the Study ............................................................................................... 10

Chapter 2 ............................................................................................................................. 12

  Summary and Implications of Literature Review .......................................................... 12

Theoretical Framework ....................................................................................................... 13

  Critical Race Theory ....................................................................................................... 13

  Intersectionality Theory ................................................................................................. 22

Stereotype Consciousness ................................................................................................. 31

  Factors Influencing Stereotype Consciousness .............................................................. 33

  Adolescent Perspective-Taking ....................................................................................... 36

  Consequences of Stereotype Consciousness .................................................................. 37
Stereotype Threat .................................................................................................................. 39

Research Methods to Investigate Stereotype Threat ................................................................ 40

Effects of Stereotype Threat .................................................................................................. 42

Mediating and Moderating Variables of Stereotype Threat .................................................. 43

Stereotype Threat Research Involving Children .................................................................... 46

Chapter 3 ................................................................................................................................. 54

Research Questions ............................................................................................................... 54

Research Design .................................................................................................................... 54

Worldview ............................................................................................................................... 55

Context of the Study .............................................................................................................. 56

Setting .................................................................................................................................... 58

Overall and Sample Populations .......................................................................................... 59

Access to Site .......................................................................................................................... 59

Value of Phenomenology: Methods ..................................................................................... 60

Data collection and procedures .......................................................................................... 67

Data analysis procedures ...................................................................................................... 73

Validity/Trustworthiness of Interpretation ........................................................................... 76

Ethical Considerations .......................................................................................................... 77

Chapter 4 .................................................................................................................................. 80

Participants ............................................................................................................................. 80

Jazzlyn ..................................................................................................................................... 80

Kimberly ................................................................................................................................. 81

Alex ......................................................................................................................................... 81
Chapter 5 ................................................................................................................. 131
Purpose and Method ............................................................................................... 131
Overview of Findings ............................................................................................... 131
Possible Reasons for Absence of Explicitly-Stated Stereotypes ......................... 132
  My Positionality as a Critical Pedagogue ............................................................. 132
  Wrong Questions .................................................................................................. 133
  Perspective-taking ............................................................................................... 133
  Racial Majority .................................................................................................... 134
  The World is Changing ....................................................................................... 137
Limitations ................................................................................................................ 137
Implications ............................................................................................................. 138
Suggestions for Future Research .......................................................................... 142
Final Thoughts ......................................................................................................... 142
References ............................................................................................................. 144
Appendix A ........................................................................................................... 155
Appendix B ........................................................................................................... 156
Appendix C ........................................................................................................... 157
Appendix D ........................................................................................................... 159
Appendix E ........................................................................................................... 161
Appendix F ........................................................................................................... 163
Appendix G ........................................................................................................... 165
Appendix H ........................................................................................................... 166
Appendix I ........................................................................................................... 167
Chapter 1

Who Am I and Who Do I Think Others Say I Am?:

A Phenomenological Study of Early Adolescents' Self Perceptions

The lights were dimmed, and the normally bustling classroom was eerily calm. The desks that were usually in triads were pushed back against the walls in an oddly shaped circle. Students were crammed elbow-to-elbow in the crowded desks, but no one seemed to mind. Some students chatted quietly as they nervously held the written piece they had been working on all week. In the center of the room, there was a flickering candle that was probably against school fire codes, but I did not care. It helped set the serious and ethereal mood I needed that day.

Once students were settled, I went over the expectations for our first Feather Circle:

“The only person who should be talking is the person holding the feather stick; when the stick comes to you, state and spell your name, then show the logo you created, then simply read your writing with no other qualifiers; take notes about each other's writing (you will find out why later); the only appropriate response after someone reads is a polite snap if you feel so moved.”

I asked for a volunteer to begin and Sarah raised her hand. She shared her deeply personal logo and story and then passed the feather stick to the person on her right, who shared his logo and story, and the pattern continued around the circle. When it came to me, students were surprised to see that I, too, had created a logo and was going to share my story with them. My logo was the Yin Yang, and then I shared the story of my connection with Black culture. Since I am White, this was the last thing my students expected to hear from me. My story detailed my journey of moving from the North to the South in seventh grade and the culture shock of seeing blatant racist attitudes in my school. We even had race riots in my high school. I shared with my
students my internal conflict of witnessing such atrocities. What really caught their attention was my confession that I had gotten pregnant in college. Not just any old pregnant. I had gotten pregnant by a Black man. I went on to tell them how I had this beautiful, caramel-colored son and that when he was two, I married a White man. I detailed the struggles of raising a mixed-race child and about how I had to help him explore his identity despite my ignorance of Black culture.

The room was so silent when I finished reading that I was almost afraid to look up. It is hard to take those types of risks with students, to be real with them about life’s struggles, and I was feeling vulnerable. I had never shared that story with ninth graders before, and I wondered if I had gotten too personal and if they were too immature to handle such mature themes. It was only a few seconds, though, before the snaps began, and I looked up to see a few tears in some students’ eyes. Relieved and satisfied, I passed the stick to the person sitting next to me.

Once everyone had shared their logos and writing, I thanked students for sharing their writing with me. I then told them that I felt like I had received a gift from each of them, and they agreed that they felt the same way. I reminded them that when we receive gifts, it is customary to write thank you notes. After I shared several thank you notes I had received over the years, the students were ready to write to three people whose writing had in some way touched them.

I busied myself writing thank you notes and feedback while the students worked on the notes. After about 15 minutes, students began to get up and distribute their notes. When a student received a note from a peer, she beamed with pride or teared up that someone had thought to write her. I got up to pass mine out, too, and before I knew it, the bell rang, and a mass of papers and backpacks caused the once quiet space to fill with complete chaos. Once the students were well on their way to their next class, I sat down at my desk to find several thank
you notes from students. These always touched my heart, and I still keep a huge folder full of ones I have received over the years. One, though, stuck out to me. It was brief, just one line:

“Dear Ms. Turner, it’s good to know you’re one of us. Derrick.”

Wow. So few words had never felt so heavy to me. Derrick was a 14-year-old Black male. It was in that moment that I realized that my “Whiteness” could be a barrier to learning for my students. The fact that most of my students were students of color and most of their teachers did not look like them suddenly became crystal clear. I realized then that many White teachers may not be sensitive to the cultural identities that minoritized students bring to the classroom and the implications of those identities, and that even though I might be more sensitive than most, I still had a lot to learn.

This incident coincided with my coursework for my education specialist degree, and until that point, I had been adamant that I was not going to pursue my doctorate. That one statement from Derrick was a turning point for me, and suddenly I knew that I wanted to become a qualitative researcher. I wanted to find out why I saw my advanced classes filled with predominantly White students while Black students seemed to fill my lower level and special education classes.

It was about this time that I started learning about our nation's achievement gap that shows that minoritized students tend to score lower on achievement tests than their White peers. The term “achievement gap” is problematic to some, and there has been a recent push to rename it as an “opportunity gap” as a means to encourage people to see not just the achievement gap but also the underlying opportunity gap that contributes to lower achievement (Flores, 2007). Despite the trend in recent literature toward renaming “achievement gap” to “opportunity gap,” I will continue to use the term “achievement gap” in this dissertation because the starkness of that
term is what caught my attention. It made me want to investigate possible causes. I wanted to explore reasons why this gap persists, and how I can be an advocate for students of color in finding ways to mitigate that gap. The questions started coming faster than I could keep up with. This study is an attempt to address some of those questions.

**Statement of the Problem**

There is a problem in the educational system in regards to the achievement gap. Despite educators’ best efforts, students of color are continuing to score lower on standardized tests. “In the half century since the Supreme Court ruled that ethnically segregated schools foster educational inequity, ethnic disparities in academic achievement have persisted” (McKown & Weinstein, 2008, p. 236). Shortly after schools integrated, the achievement gap narrowed but “most of the progress in closing the achievement gap in reading and mathematics occurred during the 1970s and 1980s” (Barton & Coley, 2010, p. 7). Since then, the gap has either stagnated or even widened, causing a huge disservice to the nation’s youth and the education system (Barton & Coley, 2010). This problem has negatively impacted students of color because these lower test scores prevent them from attending colleges and universities of their choice as well as achieving the success they seek once in college. One possible contributing factor to this problem might be that students of color experience stereotype threat while taking standardized tests. Steele (2010) defines stereotype threat as the idea that once a student recognizes the negative stereotype about herself, she becomes preoccupied with it, and recent research suggests that “a general process--involving the allocation of mental resources and even a precise pattern of brain activation--by which these threats impair a broad range of human functioning” occurs and causes her to score lower on tests where she perceives that threat to be applicable (p. 15). In order to address these concerns, research on why students of color underperform compared to
other groups is needed. A phenomenological study using student *Who Am I* graphic organizers, writings, and interviews, which investigates how sixth-grade students understand stereotypes and how these understandings might align with Steele’s conception of stereotype threat triggers fills a gap in the research regarding stereotype threat among middle school students.

**Research Questions**

1. How do early adolescents represent their perceptions of themselves through writing and interviews?

2. How do early adolescents represent their perceptions of what others think of them through writing and interviews?

3. How do these representations reflect the presence or absence of stereotypes related to gender, race, ethnicity, class, and the intersections of these identities?

4. How are these representations consistent or inconsistent with factors associated with Steele’s conception of stereotype threat?

**Purpose and Significance of Study**

There is a lack of research in early middle school students’ awareness of stereotypes and the possible effects of stereotype threat on students younger than seventh grade. This is a descriptive study, framed by critical race and intersectionality theories, of how sixth-grade students think of themselves and what they perceive others think of them. It also addresses how those perceptions reflect the presence or absence of stereotypes and how those understandings might align or not align with Steele’s conception of stereotype threat. The results of this study will add to the existing research on early adolescents’ perceptions of themselves; their beliefs about how others (peers, parents, teachers, society at large) see them. Findings will further our
understanding of how early adolescents’ perceptions of themselves exhibit, or do not exhibit, evidence of constructs related to Steele’s conception of stereotype threat.

Local Context

Fletcher Academy is a diverse, Title I school in the heart of SmallTown, Georgia. It is unique in that it is the gateway to middle school for all of the district’s students. Students from nine elementary schools throughout the city feed into Fletcher, and for the first time, the students receive the title of Fletcher Wildcats—a title that will stay with them through high school.

Fletcher has a diverse student population. The data for the 2017 school year shows the following breakdown:

Enrollment was 678 students: 39% Black, 37% Hispanic, 20% White, 3% Multi-racial, and 2% Asian/Pacific Islander. The gender breakdown was 48.29% Female and 51.71% Male. Students on Free/Reduced-Priced Lunch: 65% (The Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, n.d.). The school recently received the Greatest Gains (Platinum level) award for student achievement on the Milestones exams, a state examination given at the end of each year to all students enrolled K-8 in Georgia public schools in math and language arts.

Conceptual Framework

For the topical research, I have two research strands: stereotype consciousness and stereotype threat. When I began thinking of studying stereotype threat within my sixth-grade class, it led me to wonder how much my students knew about stereotypes. If they are largely unaware of these stereotypes, would they even be affected by stereotype threat? There is a lack of research in younger students’ awareness of stereotypes and the possible effects of stereotype threat on students in grades lower than seventh grade. I also found that research on adolescent perspective-taking is relevant to my study because I asked participants to consider how others
saw them. Once I examine how stereotype consciousness and perspective-taking develops in children, I then define the phenomenon of stereotype threat, which leads to a review of how stereotype threat has been studied both in adult populations and with children, so that I have a clear understanding and expertise of the phenomenon.

I have chosen the theoretical frameworks of critical race theory and intersectionality theory because they are both largely concerned with empowerment of marginalized groups and are transformative in nature (Creswell, 2014). Both theories interrogate how stereotypes have been used to oppress marginalized groups, and I use them to inform my analysis of how students’ race, gender, class, place, and the intersections of those influence students’ perceptions of themselves and how others perceive them. I also use them to frame my discussion of the implications of my findings because those implications are geared towards ways teachers can value student identity and provide a platform for students to tell their counterstories.

![Figure 1. Conceptual Framework](image-url)
Background and Role of Researcher

As a teacher, I am frustrated by the gap in achievement I see in my own school. I see honors level classes filled with primarily White students and on or below level classes filled with the majority of our school’s population: students of color. As progressive as I like to think I am, I am not immune to being affected by stereotypes, certain beliefs about the students I teach. As a critical pedagogue, I have always sought to find ways to honor the cultural identities of my students, but with that I have sometimes allowed stereotypes to form some of my beliefs about my students based on those identities. We all live with certain perceptions of ourselves and of our students. I am deliberate about confronting my own stereotypes and learning about the stereotypes my students may have been exposed to, all in an effort to ultimately help lessen the achievement gap in my classroom, my school, and beyond because I believe it will go a long way to end racial inequities in society. I also have a close personal connection to the topic beyond my classroom, as I referred to in my opening vignette.

While my motivation for doing this research stems from my own classroom, beyond that, I have one biological son who is biracial (Black and White) and two foster sons who are Black. I recognize that my being a White mother of Black sons makes me somewhat unique and that I am not a typical White female teacher. I was once told by an angry White male parent after assigning a reading to his son about Jordan Davis, a young Black male who was shot and killed by a White man while listening to his music "too loudly" in his car, that I have a “reputation of being overly concerned with racial issues” in my classroom. That is a label I proudly wear, and I will continue to be concerned with these issues both in and out of my classroom. I did not become a teacher until my boys were nearly grown and out of school; however, each of them struggled in school, and I tried everything from public to private to even
homeschooling in desperate attempts to help them succeed academically. I now see their faces reflected in my current students’, and my desire to find ways to help all of my students achieve, but especially my students of color, has never been stronger. I am seeking to understand more about my students’ understandings of stereotypes in an effort to eventually help mitigate the possible effects of stereotype threat.

I am going into this study with some preconceived notions about what my students believe about themselves. I am bringing my own knowledge of cultural stereotypes into this research with the assumption that my students have similar notions. I was a high school English teacher for 12 years until two years ago when I moved to teaching sixth grade. While I feel certain that my high school students were aware of society’s perceptions of them, I did not know if my sixth graders have similar understandings. I thought I might find that they were largely unaware of some of the ways society might perceive them. This realization helped me shift my original focus of finding ways to mitigate stereotype threat to an exploration of my students’ understanding of stereotypes or the way society might view them.

I was in the dual role of teacher and researcher. I taught this group of students the entire year and was careful to steer clear of the word “stereotype,” knowing that I did not want to influence my students or get them exploring the idea of stereotypes yet. While I was careful not to openly discuss stereotypes with my students, I did hear my students discussing some stereotypes amongst themselves, particularly when we studied the young adult novel, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, which is about two young boys during the Holocaust, one Jewish and one the son of a Nazi commander, who each held strong stereotypes about the other. Because I am a critical pedagogue, the possibility that I discussed identities and stereotypes with my students
exists. I discuss the possible effects of my positionality in the findings and discussion chapter (Chapter 4) of this study.

**Definition of Relevant Terms**

The following are relevant terms and their meanings in this study:

**Race**—“race is a socially constructed category, created to differentiate racial groups, and to show the superiority or dominance of one race over another” (Solorzano, 1997, p. 8).

**Racism**—Racism is predicated on these three facets: “(1) one group believes itself to be superior; (2) the group which believes itself to be superior has the power to carry out the racist behavior; and (3) racism effects multiple racial/ethnic groups” (Solorzano, 1997, p. 8).

**Stereotype**—“Social psychologists have defined stereotypes as cognitive structures composed of consensual knowledge, beliefs, and expectations about social groups that may result in both positive and negative associations for a single specific group” (Pauker, Ambady, & Apfelbaum, 2010, p. 1799).

**Stereotype-consciousness**—the knowledge that others believe and support assumptions of a particular group (McKown & Strambler, 2009).

**Stereotype threat**—the idea that once a student recognizes a negative stereotype about herself, she becomes preoccupied with it, causing her to score lower on tests where she perceives that threat to be applicable (Steele, 2010).

**Organization of the Study**

For the introduction, I have focused on the statement of the problem, stated the research questions and subsequent topics, discussed the purpose and significance of the study, and described the local context in which the study will occur. I have also given the conceptual
framework of the study, my background and role in relation to the study, and have defined the study’s relevant terms.

The literature review will begin with the two theories, critical race and intersectionality, that will inform the study and how those theories intersect with the topical research. I will go into detail about stereotype consciousness, the phenomenon of stereotype threat, how it has traditionally been researched, and the studies related to stereotype threat in children.

The methodology section will explain why I have chosen a phenomenological study and how that approach is the best fit for this research. I will explain the methods I intend to use to explore the research questions. I will provide the research design, will discuss the setting, overall and sample populations, access to the site, and the value of the phenomenology to this study. I will discuss in detail the data collection procedures and the subsequent analysis and interpretation of that data. I will also examine the trustworthiness of the interpretations and ethical considerations of the study.

In the fourth chapter, I will detail the findings and discussion of each of the research questions. Finally, in chapter five, I will discuss the implications, limitations, and possible ideas for future research.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

This section gives a discussion of the theoretical framework I am using for this study, as well as a review of the literature for the phenomenon of stereotype threat. For the theoretical framework, I have chosen critical race theory (CRT) and intersectionality theory. I explore both theories’ basic tenets and how those tenets will frame my study. From the theoretical framework, I move to defining stereotype consciousness and provide a review of the literature relating to the development of stereotype consciousness in children. I then discuss the foundations of stereotype threat, how stereotype threat has been studied, and the studies relating to stereotype threat in children.

Summary and Implications of Literature Review

Critical race theory (CRT) and intersectionality framed my study of examining the possibility of stereotype threat in my students. I used students’ counter-stories to provide them with a voice and to examine possible triggers for stereotype threat and challenge deficit thinking with the hope of transforming my own teaching practices. Through my study of intersectionality theory, I broadened my focus to include my participants’ multi-faceted and complex individual and collective identities, and I crafted my research questions so they would examine these identities. As I culled through the data, I was ever mindful of the interconnectedness of their home, school, and social lives and how those intersected with their various identities.

My study of stereotype consciousness informed research question three. The review of stereotype consciousness became one of the most referenced sections of this chapter as I sought to interpret my data. My results differed from the existing literature in surprising ways, so I found myself reading and rereading prior studies to determine why this difference occurred.
Likewise, the section on stereotype threat informed research question four, and I found I often had to examine the mitigating and mediating factors of stereotype threat to see how they might affect my students.

**Theoretical Framework**

**Critical Race Theory**

Critical race theory (CRT) seeks to address the inequities caused by racial distinctions. CRT has its roots in the area of legal research and came about as a means to examine race and racism in the United States’ legal system (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Since then it has filtered into other areas, including education. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) were the pioneers who brought CRT into the educational research field, and now it is “a powerful theoretical and analytical framework within educational research” (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 27). The appeal of CRT is that it gives us a frame to challenge the dominant ideology and empower racially oppressed groups (Solorzano & Yosso, 2003). It is transformational in nature, and it seeks to explain the experiences of people of color (Solorzano & Yosso, 2003).

**Utilizes counter-storytelling.** Counter-storytelling is one of the tenets of critical race theory. Critical race theory provides a way for students’ voices to be heard, for them to tell their stories (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Masko, 2008, Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). My study uses counter-storytelling as a way to allow students’ stories to be told and as a way for me to examine possible connections to stereotype threat triggers. I asked students to write narratives to accompany a Who Am I graphic organizer. I also asked for their stories in my interviews. It is through the telling of individual stories that hearts and minds change. “For the critical race theorist, social reality is constructed by the formulation and the exchange of stories about individual situations” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 57). In “Through a Looking Glass
Darkly: The Persistence of Race in Education Research & Scholarship,” Ladson-Billings (2012) begins with a story about her grandparents. The story she tells is about census data on her grandparents and how her grandmother was identified as Mulatto (half Black, half White) even though both of her parents were Black, but her grandfather, whose parents were Black and Native American, was identified as Negro. This misidentification had to do with question four of the census which asked if a person was literate. Her grandmother’s was marked yes while her grandfather’s was marked no (despite his ability to read). Ladson-Billings began her lecture on race in education research with this story to illustrate that literacy and race “have been intricately linked for centuries” and that there is a need to identify those connections in order to understand how race operates in educational research (p. 116). By beginning her lecture with a story, she helped demonstrate a social reality. By asking for my students’ stories, I was able to examine their social realities.

Ladson-Billings (2012) ended that same lecture with another story “The Chronicle of the Best Black Students” (p. 117). Unlike the story of her grandparents and the census, this story was fictional. It was about a Black couple who were granted a wish by a genie. They wished for the Best Black Children. She then goes on to share the educational challenges that each of the couple’s three children experienced, despite being outstanding scholars, athletes, and citizens. They faced setbacks that their White peers of equal, or even lesser ability, did not face. Again, Ladson-Billings used the story to illustrate a social reality and to emphasize her argument. That is the power of story and why it is such a critical component of CRT and of my study. Their stories illuminated their social realities, and I was able to examine their possible triggers for stereotype threat.
Researchers use storytelling and counter-storytelling as a crucial part of CRT. DeCuir & Dixson (2004) used counter narratives to tell the stories of two Black students at a White, wealthy private school. During the school year 2002-2003, 44 of 599 students at this private school were African American. The study follows two African-American students, Malcolm and Barbara. These two exceptional students often felt that their voices had been silenced “because they were afforded very few opportunities to be heard” (p. 26). They often felt ignored or “Othered” (p. 26). Using CRT to tell their stories is a powerful tool “for the critical exposure of race and racism” (p. 26). Delgado (1989) defines counter-stories as stories told by oppressed groups, not the dominant narrative. Counter-stories “challenge the received wisdom” and “can shatter complacency and challenge the status quo” (Delgado, 1989, p. 2414). In DeCuir & Dixson’s (2004) study, using counter narratives revealed how the students’ experiences were far different than their White peers’. Throughout the article, the authors share Malcolm and Barbara’s stories in their own voices. Here Malcolm described his experience with racism on his first day of school:

The first day I came as a freshman, before anybody said hello or how are you or what's your name, they asked me do I play football and what was my 40 time. What did I run the 40-meter dash in? And that seemed like the big thing that they were concerned about because just about all African-American males at my school serve some type of purpose on some athletic team. That's a horrible stereotype [regarding] African Americans. That's a small glimpse of what we are capable of and what we can do. We're smart. We can hold our own in the classroom and everything else. But they expect us just to be Black athletes. That's what I think they see coming in. (p. 29)
By allowing Malcolm to tell his story, it can “allow one to better understand and appreciate the unique experiences and responses of students of color” (Delgado, 2002, p. 116). These stories show the pervasiveness of racism and how insidious it can be in all educational arenas, not just the one in the study. It illuminates the subtleties of race and racism, and by doing so it can expose “covert racist practices and the policies that support them” (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 29).

In an effort to illuminate these subtleties, Sensoy (2011) did a photo essay study that explored racism, classism, and sexism. One of the goals was to see if the students would represent these things in their own lives that would interrupt or push back against mainstream curricular narratives. Fifteen students completed the project. They found that most of the students did not push back, overall, against the mainstream narratives but rather simply revealed those narratives. However, one student, a dark-skinned male, took a beautiful photograph of the moon with him in the forefront. In his narrative, he pointed out various beauty in the picture and then asked if the viewer noticed those things or did they merely see the color of his skin. In this case, the student was aware of the mainstream narrative and was pushing back against it. Sometimes it is difficult to push past the mainstream noise to hear the story within. A challenge to researchers is to “learn how to listen and hear the messages in counterstories” (Delgado, 2002, p. 16).

Masko (2005) sought to give voice to a 12-year-old Black girl, Keandra, who was plagued by thoughts of race and racism constantly. She claims she “thinks about it all the time” (p. 341). In this ethnographic study, Masko shared snippets of her interviews with Keandra and in doing so told Keandra’s story using Keandra’s own voice. “Sometimes people (crying) tease me and stuff and...they don't like Black people [inaudible] ...They always tease my friends ’cause
they're Black [inaudible] …” (p. 342). The direct transcription creates compassion in the reader while giving voice to someone who feels silenced and ridiculed because of her race. It can provide a way for her to “cope with her feelings about racism and the conflicting emotions it produces for her” (p. 348). Her story “provides insights into the racial lives of children” (p. 347).

Likewise, my study sought to provide students a chance to tell their stories in a unique way. It was a way for them to explore their identities and how those identities are situated within the larger society. It was also a way for me to understand their thoughts and feelings towards race and their identities. Critical race theory focuses on experiential knowledge (Solorzano, 1997; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002a), so the vehicle of narratives and interviews provided insights into students’ experiences with stereotypes. Giving voice to the oppressed helps both the oppressed and the oppressor and is the first step in social justice (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Those who are oppressed often internalize stereotypic images presented in the mainstream. Storytelling can help heal the mental anguish suffered by historically marginalized groups “and allows one to stop inflicting mental violence on oneself” (p. 57). Also, those in the mainstream are often blind to the pain they inflict on the oppressed. They often remain blissfully ignorant, a condition I see when I talk with some of my White friends, family, and colleagues, quite honestly. King (1991) named this type of racism dysconscious racism, which is “a form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges” (p.135). White people often justify their power (if they will even call it that) with stories; therefore, it stands to reason that “Stories by people of color can catalyze the necessary cognitive conflict to jar dysconscious racism” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 58). Just like the previous examples, it was my intent to provide insights into my students’ thoughts about stereotypes and how those stereotypes might
be affecting them, while at the same time giving them an opportunity to define themselves, to tell their stories and share how they believe they are perceived.

**Challenges deficit theorizing.** CRT seeks to challenge deficit theorizing (Solorzano, 1997). Many educators will stereotype students of color and view them through a deficit lens. This is even more problematic when this deficit thinking is systemic and carries over not just to a single student but to an entire group of people. Solorzano (1997) explains that the cultural deficit model “contends that minority cultural values, as transmitted through the family, are dysfunctional, and therefore the reason for low educational and later occupational attainment” (p. 13). Many educators hold deficit stereotypes about students of color, such as students of color seek instant rather than delayed gratification, that they live in the present and do not think much of the future or future consequences or goals, and that they place little value on education (Solorzano, 1997). This thinking can stem from their own educational experiences, from their teacher training, or from their own biases. It is imperative, however, that educators reject deficit-based thinking about culturally diverse students (Howard, 2003). Educators have used these stereotypes to throw their hands up in the air with the thinking that there is little they can do to overcome “generational thinking” (Solorzano, 1997, p. 13). Solorzano (1997) goes on to explain the following:

The cultural deficit model also examines deficiencies in minority family internal social structure, such as large, disorganized, female-headed families; Spanish or non-standard English spoken in the home; and patriarchal or matriarchal family structures. These models argue that since minority parents fail to assimilate and embrace the educational values of the dominant group and continue to transmit or socialize their children with
values that inhibit educational mobility, then they are to blame if the low educational attainment continues into succeeding generations. (p. 13)

Unfortunately, this type of thinking has become the norm in education. Often, teachers are trained that they need to acculturate students of color into the dominant culture, that students of color need to learn how to function in mainstream society, so they minimize the value or even belittle the values and cultures of minoritized students (Solorzano, 1997). In recent years, some teacher educators have begun to teach preservice teachers to use critical reflection to develop more culturally relevant pedagogy, and thus to view diverse students on a more asset-based framework (Howard, 2003). Likewise, the multicultural movement challenges deficit perspectives and encourages teachers to build curriculum that values the “children’s connections to their cultural and linguistic roots and their community-based identities,” (Sleeter, 2004, p. 124), but until this becomes the norm, deficit thinking will continue to harm students.

Deficit thinking can have long-term deleterious effects on students. In an ethnographic study by Masko (2008), the author gives experiential evidence that two eighth grade students, a Black male and a Latina, who were talking about how frustrated they were at the negative portrayals of them in society, such as students of color not doing well on tests. In response to publicized low test scores of Latinx students, the Latina said, “I guess kids respond to what they expect them to do, so they just do that” (Masko, 2008, p. 188). She realized “that society holds low expectations for youth of color” (p. 188), and as a result, students stop trying. This coincides with Ladson-Billings & Tate’s (1995) assertion that “members of minority groups internalize the stereotypic images that certain elements of society have constructed in order to maintain their power” (p. 57). As in Masko’s (2005) study, Keandra had internalized society’s
negative perceptions of Black people, Black girls in particular, and those perceptions can have injurious consequences. bell hooks (1995) discusses these injuries:

Collective failure to address adequately the psychic wounds inflicted by racist aggression is the breeding ground for a psychology of victimhood wherein learned helplessness, uncontrollable rage, and/or feelings of overwhelming powerlessness and despair abound in the psyches of black folks yet are not attended to in ways that empower and promote wholistic states of well-being. (as cited in Masko, 2005, p. 345)

She further asserts that unless all Americans become more aware and address the harmful effects of racism on mental health, there will be no way to recover from it. CRT in education seeks to bring this awareness to the forefront and confront these deficit views.

My study sought to understand what sixth-grade students understand about society’s deficit views. Asking students to consider how their teachers, parents, friends, and strangers see them, gave me insight into how cultural deficit thinking may have infiltrated their thoughts, and in turn, how that might align with Steele’s (2010) conception of stereotype threat. In bringing to light these deficit views, I can help other educators shed their perceptions as we strive to help our students overcome some of the injuries we may have unwittingly caused.

It is transformative. Two decades ago, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) asserted that the reason our education system privileges White students over students of color is because we live in a racialized society that continues to silence discussions of race and racism. These discussions, perhaps now more than ever, strike fear in the hearts of White legislators and educators. I could tell story after story of White English teacher colleagues who refuse to discuss race and racism with their students because of their fear of parental backlash. When educators refuse to have difficult discussions about race with our students, we perpetuate the
inequities. Howard (2003) suggests, “The increasing degree of racial homogeneity among teachers and heterogeneity among students carries important implications for all educators” (p. 196). He goes on to say that critical reflection is essential for teachers to build culturally relevant pedagogy in which diverse learners can thrive. Some White teachers are also blind to White privilege, “This privilege is often invisible, it is legitimized and viewed as the norm or the point of departure” (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 111). When people are blind to a flaw, it is impossible to change it. CRT demands that we have these transformative conversations, that in any way possible, we engage in the conversation about race. It demands action for us to move to a more just society, particularly in the area of education (Delgado, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2012; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002b). Solorzano & Yosso (2002b) point out that institutions like schools have the power to either “oppress and marginalize” or “emancipate and empower” (p. 26). As a critical pedagogue, it is always my intent to do the latter.

The impetus for the current study was that I wanted to understand how my sixth-grade students might be influenced by stereotype threat in hopes that I can mitigate that threat as much as possible in my classroom. While the latter part might be outside of the boundaries of this study, it is the end goal and my purpose in seeking to ascertain my students’ knowledge and understanding of society’s perceptions of them; therefore, using CRT as a framework for my study makes sense because the study has the potential to be transformational for my students. Focusing on changing the individual is powerful and lasting. “Once people are changed on the individual level, they are likely to remain so” (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 135).

**Focuses on intercentricity.** CRT focuses on the intercentricity of racism with other forms of subordination. CRT scholars are aware that race is only one small lens through which to view experiences. Ladson-Billings (2012) critiqued the idea of trying to put people into
categories: “As if we don’t live our lives across multiple categories of being” (p. 118). Solorzano and Yosso (2002b) assert that CRT “critiques separate discourse on race, gender, and class” (p. 156). Race and racism are at the center of CRT, but that does not mean that it ignores other forms of subordination. It acknowledges that there are layers of subordination and oppression based on “race, gender, class, immigration status, surname, phenotype, accent, and sexuality” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002b, p. 25). Delgado (2002) acknowledges that “these systems of knowledge [...] emerge from the experiences a person of color might have at the intersection of racism, sexism, classism, and other oppressions” (p. 107). Identities are multidimensional and complex, so it is necessary to pair the framework of CRT to one of intersectionality. I will explain in detail the significance of the intercentricity of racism with other forms of subordination to my study in my discussion of intersectionality theory in the next section.

**Intersectionality Theory**

Intersectionality theory deals with how we all view our world through multiple lenses (Harrison, 2017). It is applicable to my study because my students have multi-faceted lives, and it was crucial that I kept this awareness at the forefront of my examination of the data. Like CRT, intersectionality has its roots in the legal system. It started as an offshoot of feminist theory in which Crenshaw (1989) recognized that Black women’s voices were not being heard in discussions of women’s issues. Likewise, CRT deals primarily with Black males’ experiences, so once again, Black women’s voices were silent. Intersectionality theory recognizes that being Black and a woman is unique, so it values those previously silenced voices. The legal profession began to diversify in the 1980s and the mid-1990s, so social transformations and even the law itself began to change (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013). Much of this change came about
because of the change in law school faculty to include more professors of color, many of whom had social justice leanings and backgrounds. As these faculties changed, they began to shift their focus onto race, class, and gender (Cho et al., 2013).

This transformation in the legal field led scholars like Kimberle’ Crenshaw (1989) to interrogate these intersections. Crenshaw (1989) is credited with coining the term intersectionality in her work, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex,” in which she critiqued legal cases where Black women did not fit neatly into the laws and discussions of race or gender. In one case, five Black women claimed discrimination by General Motors because they were Black women. Because there was only case law that examined discrimination of Blacks or of women, they fell through the legal cracks. General Motors had indeed hired and even promoted many Black men to work in their factories. They had also hired and promoted many White women to work in their offices. Therefore, it was difficult to show that these women had been discriminated against based on race or gender, and not the combination of the two. Crenshaw (1989) used the analogy of an intersection where one road represents sex discrimination and the other represents racial discrimination; Black women find themselves at the intersection, which makes it difficult to determine if the discrimination she experiences is because of her sex or her race, or a combination of the two. She based this theory largely off of the work of the Combahee River Collective, a group of Black feminists who worked together on issues affecting Black women. In their famous statement issued in 1977, they wrote the following:

The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and
practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. (The Combahee River Collective, 2014, p. 270)

Intersectionality was not a new concept when Crenshaw (1989) coined the term. Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1983) discussed the “triple oppression” of race, class, and gender. Grant and Sleeter (1986) called for an integrated approach to education research, considering race, class, and gender, cautioning that “a failure to consider the integration of race, social class and gender leads at times to an oversimplification or inaccurate understanding of what occurs in schools, and therefore to inappropriate or simplistic prescriptions for educational equity” (p. 197). Indeed the legal profession itself, as noted previously, was considering race, gender, and class as intersecting issues during this time.

Intersectionality theory is critical to my study, and the intersectionality of identities was apparent in students’ *Who Am I* graphic organizers, narratives, and interviews. Using an intersectional framework “provide[d] a more expansive lens for addressing the complexities of educational equity” (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 188). As a researcher, I had to keep in mind not only my students’ race and gender but also other identities, such as age and socioeconomic status, and more importantly, the intersections of those identities and the social power structures in which they occur, all while considering the factors that Steele (2010) conceptualized as influencing stereotype threat.

**Intersectionality’s core tenets.** Intersectionality’s six core tenets are social inequality, power, relationality, social context, complexity, and social justice (Collins & Bilge, 2016).

- Social inequality. Intersectionality recognizes that social inequality is rarely caused by only one thing (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Stereotype threat is a result of the intersections
of racism, sexism, homophobia, etc., and is triggered by a combination of these mediators (Smith, 2004).

- Power. Interlocking, mutual constructing, or intersecting systems of power create inequity. There is no pure racism or sexism because "they gain meaning in relation to one another" (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 27). These interlocking systems of power create the conditions for stereotype threat. When students have internalized negative stereotypes about themselves based on society’s perceptions, they are subject to lower achievement in standardized tests, and it can also impede the learning process, causing them to have fewer educational opportunities (Bowen, Wegmann, & Webber, 2013; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Steele, 2010).

- Relationality. An intersectionality framework rejects the binary. Things are not either/or, rather they are seen in the “both/and frame” (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 27). It looks for interconnectedness between things like race, gender, class, sexuality, and age. “Rather than downplaying or dismissing differences, an intersectional methodology requires negotiating differences that exist within discrete scholarly and political traditions of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, nationality, ethnicity, colonialism, religion, and immigration” (p. 168). In my study, I asked students to consider how various people, such as parents, teachers, peers, and strangers, might see them in different contexts. I also looked for how students represented the intersections of their own identities.

- Social Context. Intersectionality demands contextualizing arguments, being aware of historical, intellectual, and political contexts (Collins & Bilge, 2016). These shape what we think and do. It encompasses the theme of different perspectives, and in my study, I asked students to consider how others see them in various contexts, such as home, school,
and in the community. As I conducted my data analysis, I looked for themes that emerged in the pre-writing activity and the writings. I then asked students to contextualize their experiences when I interviewed them, thus adding social context to the themes that emerged.

- Complexity. The intersectionality framework is complex. It is not neat, and there is no formula or “tidy methodology” for intersectional research (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 29). That was one of the most challenging parts of framing my study with intersectionality. It started in legal studies but has morphed and branched out to other disciplines, and as such there is no set formula for how to do this. It did, however, challenge me to continually examine if I analyzed the student data through the lens of the tenets listed here.

- Social Justice--Working for social justice is not a requirement for intersectionality. “Yet people who are engaged in using intersectionality as an analytical tool and people who see social justice as central rather than as peripheral to their lives are often one and the same” (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 30). The impetus behind my doing this study was social justice. I ultimately want my students to push back against the mainstream narratives and overcome the detrimental effects of stereotype threat. I want to create identity-safe classrooms that encourage students to explore the power structures behind these false narratives, so they can overcome them. Though that is outside the scope of my current study, this project lays the foundation for further critical research.

As intersectionality has evolved, one of the concerns has been its relevance when investigating and analyzing issues of marginalized groups other than Black women, as well as other societal powers (Cho et al., 2013). However, the depth and breadth of intersectional
studies alleviates that critique and emphasizes the idea that intersectionality has always been seen as more of “a nodal point than as a closed system” (p. 788). McCall (2005) states, “The premise of this approach is that nothing fits neatly except as a result of imposing a stable and homogenizing order on a more unstable and heterogeneous social reality (p. 1777). Keeping in mind that intersectionality is open and has no set “grand methodology” (Cho et al., 2013, p. 788) is key to understanding it as an ever-evolving theory and framework and one that is necessary in multiple disciplines and contexts: “Intersectionality travels from its groundings in Black feminism to critical legal and race studies; to other disciplines and interdisciplines in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences; and across countries and continents as well” (Cho et al., 2013, p. 792). Danish researchers Christensen and Jensen (2012) state that intersectionality is a “travelling concept” (p. 109) and is now widely used in the UK by post-colonial gender researchers and post-structuralist gender researchers.

Scholars adapt intersectionality theory to conform with their own methodologies and practices. This adaptation comes with risks, of course. Its open-endedness comes with parameters. Cho et al.,(2013) caution researchers to consider what intersectionality does rather than what it is. Intersectionality demands that researchers consider “categories not as distinct but as always permeated by other categories, fluid and changing, always in the process of creating and being created by dynamics of power” (p. 795). Collins and Bilge (2016) echoed this conception of intersectionality by defining intersectionality as “a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences” (p. 25). They acknowledged that people are shaped by many different factors and that those factors are diverse and complex. People are not just defined by their race or their gender or their age or socioeconomic status. Delgado Bernal (2002) claims that “one’s identity is not based on the
social construction of race but rather is multidimensional and intersects with various experiences” (p. 118). Intersectionality is a tool for educational researchers to challenge dominant ideology while considering all aspects that make up students’ identities as well as school power structures. For researchers, “Intersectionality as an analytic tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves” (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 25).

**Intersectionality and education.** Intersectionality and critical education are inextricably connected and have been long before the term “intersectionality” existed. Education has the “potential to oppress or liberate” (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 159). Scholars express the necessity of using intersectionality in the ever-broadening field of educational research (Bhopal & Preston, 2011; Gillborn, 2015; Museus & Griffin, 2011; Nunez, 2014). Intersectionality and critical education have evolved along the same time period, with many of the same scholars and activists, and in much the same way for the purpose of liberating the oppressed (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Collins and Bilge (2016) point out that Freire’s work is really a work of intersectionality. When he talks of the oppressed, he is talking about disenfranchised people: “homeless/landless people, women, poor people, Black people, sexual minorities, indigenous people, undocumented immigrants, prisoners, religious minorities, disabled people, and the young” (Collins & Bilge, 2016, pp. 160-161). These are the very people intersectionality in education seeks to serve.

Educational studies using intersectionality as a framework recognize the limitations of looking at the students and education through a single lens. Intersectionality should be “a gathering place for open-ended investigations of the overlapping and conflicting dynamics of race, gender, class, sexuality, nationality, and other inequalities” (Cho et al., 2013, p. 788). Scholars recognize that the youth they are studying live at these intersections and have begun to
study how the varying identities, such as queer (Olive, 2015; Vacarro, 2015) and gender identity (Prior, 2015) intersect and inform each other. Researchers are concerned with how these intersections of identities construct youth identity (Prior, 2015). While feminist and critical race theorists concern themselves with gender and race, “few qualitative studies highlight the empowered voices of individuals navigating the intersections of multiple identities” (Vacarro, 2015, p. 46).

In a study of four sixth-grade Black girls, Harrison (2017) discovered that students were very aware of race and of stereotypes and negative discourses associated with race and gender. The girls were keenly aware of the stereotype that Black girls are seen as loud and are prone to get in fights more than White girls. Fordham (1993) suggests that Black girls are often seen as “loud” when they do not conform to White teachers’ standards of good behavior without actually behaving badly. The girls also said that Black girls love drama but then acknowledged that White girls have drama, too. They were aware that teachers targeted them for dress code violations and that they were also often criticized for how they dressed. One of the girls, Talia expressed her frustration about an incident on picture day:

Talia discussed how her mother purchased her a new outfit for picture day and a White teacher made her change her clothes because it violated their dress code policy. She then stated that there were White girls who violated the dress code who were never called out for dress code violation. (Harrison, 2017, p. 1030)

Harrison (2017) talks of the girls being able to “other” themselves because of the intersection of identities. For instance, they knew that Black girls were often seen as loud and “ghetto,” but even though they could be loud sometimes they were not ghetto because they did not start drama. They acknowledged that they felt targeted by administrators and teachers.
because they were Black girls. These girls recognized that schools are “venues where intersecting power relations of race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, ability, and age routinely privilege some students over others” (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 165). Social inequality in schools does not lie in a single factor but at the intersection of school structures and students’ cultural identities. Researchers in education are charged with considering how social inequities “shape educational experiences and outcomes of disenfranchised populations” (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 39). My study seeks to understand if early adolescents perceive the inequities and stereotypes that exist about them, both personally and within the larger school structure.

**Intersectionality and identity.** Collins and Bilge (2016) offer three implications for intersectionality: “identities as strategically essential, identities as de facto coalitions, and transformative identities” (p. 133). Identities are not fixed but rather mold, change, and behave differently given different contexts. By rejecting an essentialist view of identity, it opens the door for “subordinated groups to use identity politics for political goals” (p. 133). It also provides an invitation for these individuals to gain a collective identity, which in turn empowers these identities to be transformative (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Intersectionality, like CRT, is not simply a tool for understanding the intersections of race, gender, class, nation, age, and sexual identities, but it is also meant to be transformative. Scholars emphasize “how theory ideally should inform best practices and community organizing. These concerns reflect the normative and political dimensions of intersectionality and thus embody a motivation to go beyond mere comprehension of intersectional dynamics to transform them” (Cho et al., 2013, p. 786).

As a researcher, I had to be careful not to value group identity while ignoring the differences within the group. For example, hip hop values Black men while ignoring, or perhaps devaluing, Black women. African Americans are incredibly diverse and encompass various
identities within the umbrella of being African American. Intersectionality seeks to acknowledge and honor all of these identities and how they intersect and interact with each other in a variety of social contexts. Because this is a valid criticism, the challenge for scholars engaged in intersectional analysis is “to self-regulate and try to identify and oppose the essentialist tendencies of their projects” (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 125). In other words, as researchers, we should be careful to recognize when we begin to categorize that we are not falling into essentialism, or the thinking that these categories are fixed. Intersectionality is fluid because identities are fluid. Because I only have seven participants in my study, it was relatively easy to look closely at the fluidity of individual and group identities.

**Stereotype Consciousness**

People of color are not the only ones to internalize stereotypes, but when they do, this internalization can be especially demoralizing (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). My study was concerned with discovering if my students, at ages 11 and 12 have internalized those stereotypes. Are they stereotype conscious? Stereotype consciousness is “defined as knowledge that others endorse beliefs about the characteristics of ethnic groups” (McKown & Strambler, 2009, p. 1643). In other words, are they negatively affected by the stereotypes surrounding their race, gender, or other identities?

In an effort to examine stereotype consciousness in children ages 6 to 10, McKown and Weinstein (2003) conducted a study of 202 ethnically diverse students. The study revealed that children’s stereotype consciousness grows significantly between the ages of six and ten and that children from stigmatized groups (students of color) develop stereotype consciousness earlier than students from non-stigmatized groups.
McKown and Weinstein (2003) clearly distinguish between two facets of stereotypes: personal stereotypes (those that children hold themselves about others) and stereotype consciousness (the awareness that others endorse those stereotypes). There are two components of stereotype consciousness: The child’s ability to infer another individual’s stereotype and the child’s awareness of broadly held stereotypes (McKown & Weinstein, 2003; Bogan & Slaughter, 2012). For instance, a child might observe a White person’s reaction to a Black person and attribute it to the White person believing a certain stereotype about the Black person (individual stereotype); however, the child might not be aware that that stereotype is broadly held and may even be applied to themselves (awareness of broadly held stereotypes). This distinction is important because my study sought to understand if students are aware of stereotypes that others may have of them, or broadly held stereotypes.

According to Bogan & Slaughter’s (2012) review of studies that examine stereotype development in children, the only study to examine stereotype consciousness is McKown & Weinstein (2003). Indeed, McKown & Weinstein (2003) acknowledge that “little is known about the age of onset and age-related changes in children’s awareness of others’ stereotypes” (p. 499). They conducted two studies. Study 1 was a cross-sectional developmental study to determine children’s stereotype consciousness. Study 2 used the same children and tested the effects of stereotype threat on cognitive tasks. I will discuss the results of the first study here and the second study in the literature review of stereotype threat.

They used a vignette-based interview to determine if students were able to infer if someone’s actions were based on a stereotype and whether or not the children were aware of broadly held stereotypes. They presented the students, again ages 6-10, with scenarios in an imaginary land that had green and blue people. They told the students a scenario in which the
protagonist had to choose either a green or blue person to complete a certain task. They then told the children that the green and blue people were known to have different strengths and weaknesses. For instance, the blue people were thought of as being smarter. Their goal was to see if students attributed choosing a green or blue person to the associated stereotype, thus being able to infer another’s stereotype. They found that by age 10, 93% could infer another’s individual stereotypic beliefs.

To test if the students were aware of broadly held stereotypes, they then asked the students how the imaginary world is like the real world. They found that by age 10, 80% of Black and 63% of White students were aware of broadly held stereotypes (McKown & Weinstein, 2003). This is the first study to demonstrate that children from stigmatized groups tend to be more aware of broadly held stereotypes than children from non-stigmatized groups. The authors posit that this is probably because of the reality of students from stigmatized groups having to face these stereotypes in their everyday lives.

Wegmann (2017) also set out to determine whether children ages 7 to 11 are able to perceive stereotype threat. In this qualitative study, 15 children from diverse ethnic backgrounds were exposed to three of six vignettes that illustrated forms of stereotype threat. All of the children were able to recognize at least one form of stereotype threat. Their responses suggest that children are able to perceive and articulate stereotype threat in a manner similar to adults.

**Factors Influencing Stereotype Consciousness**

Some of the factors associated with stereotype consciousness may be individual development and experiences, family influence, and community forces (McKown & Strambler, 2009). It makes sense that the more parents and families discuss broadly held stereotypes in the home, the more likely students will become aware of those stereotypes at an earlier age. Parents’
intent to prepare students for the realities of living in a world that favors some ethnicities over others can affect stereotype consciousness. “It is possible that preparing children for bias and promoting interracial mistrust can teach children the negative racial perceptions held by outgroup members” (p. 1645). Racial socialization may heighten stereotype consciousness, which may, in turn, affect students’ academic and social behavior.

Students’ experiences in the community may also affect stereotype consciousness. A large percentage of students report experiencing discrimination based on their race outside of school (McKown & Strambler, 2009). Exposure to this type of treatment can have negative effects on students’ academic and emotional well-being. It seems likely that this type of exposure will heighten students’ stereotype consciousness.

While it is clear that by age 10, most students had the ability to infer stereotypes and were aware of broadly held stereotypes, “research on children’s social cognitive development suggest that children should develop stereotype-consciousness in middle childhood” (McKown & Strambler, 2009, p. 1644). In a study that included 11-year-olds, McKown and Strambler (2009) set out to examine parental and community factors on stereotype consciousness as well as the potential behavioral and academic consequences of stereotype consciousness. The first part of the study mirrored the vignettes in the McKown and Weinstein (2003) study in order to determine stereotype consciousness. Interviewers then read statements such as “I have been teased because of my race” in order to determine if students had been exposed to negative treatment based on their race (McKown & Strambler, 2009, p. 1648). To test for parental racial socialization, parents completed a Racial Socialization Questionnaire and a parenting styles questionnaire.
The findings show that almost all children, by age 11, have developed both the ability to infer others’ stereotypes and an awareness of broadly held stereotypes (McKown & Strambler, 2009). This differs from earlier findings possibly because “it may be that by 11 years old, children have mastered all aspects of stereotype-consciousness, which leads to a convergence in developmental trajectories” (p. 1654). In this study, unlike the earlier study, there was no difference between racial groups’ awareness; in other words, Black children and White children both demonstrated stereotype consciousness equally. These findings are consistent with the cognitive perspective that “suggests that as children mature into early adolescence (i.e., ages 10–14), they begin to process societal messages about preferences for certain phenotypic features, race-based hierarchies in wealth and academic tracks, and the plethora of racial stereotypes they will encounter” (Mandara, Gaylord-Harden, Richards, & Ragsdale, 2009, p. 1662).

Parental influence, as suspected, was strong. Children whose parents had reported talking to their children about race, racial socialization, were more likely to have developed stereotype consciousness. “Similarly, more frequent parent-reported cultural socialization practices were associated with greater likelihood that children had achieved knowledge of broadly held stereotypes” (McKown & Strambler, 2009, p. 1654). Surprisingly, though, racial socialization slightly lessened the children's ability to infer stereotypes. Researchers acknowledge that more studies need to be done to confirm this puzzling finding.

Another puzzling finding is that there was no correlation found between self-reported discrimination and stereotype consciousness (McKown & Strambler, 2009). Researchers suggest that perhaps this is due to the types of questions or the manner of self-reporting. They suggest that future work with more refined tools could yield further understanding.
Adolescent Perspective-Taking

Adolescence is the period of time that marks the end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood and is a time of immense physical, cognitive, and relational change (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006; Choudhury, Blakemore, & Charman, 2006; Van der Graaff et al., 2013). Perspective-taking, “the ability to take on another person’s viewpoint,” is also developing during this time (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006, p. 302). In order for adolescents to consider what others think of them or to understand how others may view them, they must be able to step outside of their own egocentric minds and visualize others’ perspectives. “Formal operational thought” emerges by age 11, and “Piaget proposed that this new form of thinking allows children at early adolescence to conceptualize other people’s thoughts and take their perspectives” (Inhelder and Piaget, 1958 as cited in Choudhury et al., 2006, p. 167). This stage is the very beginning of students being able to take on others’ perspectives. The ability to adopt someone else’s viewpoint is essential to being able to understand if someone else holds a stereotype that might be applied to self. Perspective-taking requires stepping out of self in order to understand another’s beliefs.

Few studies have investigated the development of perspective-taking in adolescence. The first do so studied brain development in adolescents using functional MRI (Choudhury et al., 2006). What researchers found is that the imaging indicated “relatively inefficient processing” in pre-adolescence, which led to the assumption that perspective-taking could be impaired for this group (Choudhury et al., 2006, p. 170). The study also indicated that as adolescents mature into adulthood, so does their ability to take on others’ perspectives. Other studies indicate that perspective-taking increases between ages 15 and 25 and that girls had higher levels than boys (Van der Graaf et al., 2013).
This research applies to the current study because I am asking participants to step outside of themselves and consider how others see them: their parents, peers, teachers, and strangers. My participants are at the very beginning of formal operational thought and cognitive development of perspective-taking since they are all twelve-years-old. I will discuss the implications of perspective-taking in my discussion of my findings in chapters four and five.

**Consequences of Stereotype Consciousness**

Shelvin, Rivadeneyra, and Zimmerman (2014) were also curious about stereotype consciousness in 10-12 year olds. They piggy backed on prior studies that showed the students develop stereotype consciousness by this age, but they took it a step further and sought to understand specifically which stereotypes adolescents were aware of. In order to find out, they gave students the following writing prompt: "Stereotypes are ideas about a group that may or may not be true for all the people or things in that group. One example of a stereotype is ‘pit bulls are mean.’ Many people believe this statement, but it is not really true of all pit bulls. Please list the stereotypes that you have heard about Black or African American people” (Shelvin, Rivadeneyra, & Zimmerman, 2014, p. 12). What they found is that 12-year-olds generated more stereotypes than 11-year-olds. Overall, they identified seven stereotypes:

- Blacks are less intelligent than Whites
- Blacks are worthless
- Blacks are poor
- Blacks are unattractive
- Blacks are criminals
- Blacks are violent
- Blacks are good athletes
What I find most interesting, and troubling, is that the students identified only one positive stereotype about Blacks. I also found it relevant to my study that “44% spontaneously listed the stereotype that Blacks are less intelligent than Whites, which was the most common stereotype listed. Moreover, this stereotype is the most relevant with respect to stereotype threat activation for academic performance” (p. 15). The study also found that the students who listed the stereotype about intelligence actually scored lower on an academic task when the threat was activated.

This is significant to my study because I examined this awareness in 11 to 12 year old students. Like Shelvin et al. (2014), my study sought to understand which stereotypes that students have about themselves are consistent with those found in stereotype threat studies. Another reason to determine the ages at which children develop stereotype consciousness is because it can have deleterious effects on them, other than stereotype threat. One consequence of stereotype consciousness on children is related to teacher expectancy effects. Teacher expectations affect how teachers treat students (McKown & Weinstein, 2003). Students are able to perceive teachers’ expectations as early as first grade (McKown & Weinstein, 2003). If students perceive that teachers have low expectations for either academics or behavior, students will often conform to those low expectations. If students perceive unequal expectations in a classroom, with a teacher favoring some students over others, the correlation between expectation and achievement is stronger. If students are stereotype conscious and attribute the unequal expectations to a teacher’s stereotypic beliefs, say about ethnicity, students from those ethnic groups may begin to have negative views of school, which could affect their educational goals and achievement of those goals (McKown & Weinstein, 2003). If a student sees a teacher give a negative consequence to a student of color for talking out in class but sees a
White student doing the same thing without consequence, the stereotype-conscious observer may well attribute the negative consequence with ethnicity.

The other, possibly more significant effect of stereotype consciousness is stereotype threat, which I will discuss in great detail in the following section of the literature review.

**Stereotype Threat**

Though Steele & Aronson (1995) were the first to call it “stereotype threat,” the idea of that these negative stereotypes affect us all and inform how we move through the world, particularly ones associated with race and ethnicity, has been around for decades. W.E.B. DuBois coined the phrase “double-consciousness” in which African Americans must always be aware of their race in a culture in which they are minorities.

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (DuBois, 1903, p. 3 as cited in Landsman, 2010, p. 14)

In an academic setting, this constant awareness of one’s race and the stereotypes associated with it can have negative effects on student achievement on standardized tests. “After a lifetime of exposure to society's negative images of their ability, these students are likely to internalize an ‘inferiority anxiety’—a state that can be aroused by a variety of race-related cues in the environment” (Steele & Aronson, 1995, p. 798). This phenomenon has been studied as far back as the 60s when Katz et.al (1965) found that Black students scored higher on IQ tests when they were told that it was a “test of eye-hand coordination—a nonevaluative and thus threat-negating
test representation—than when it was said to be a test of intelligence” (as cited in Steele & Aronson, 1995, p. 798). More recent studies confirm that stereotype threat not only negatively affects standardized testing but also “impedes the learning process” (Bowen et al., 2013, p. 427).

Figure 2 is an schematic representation of stereotype threat (adapted from Croizet, Désert, Dutrévis, & Leyens, 2001, figure 1)

STEREOTYPE THREAT MODEL (Steele, 1997)

![STEREOTYPE THREAT MODEL](image)

**Figure 2.** Schematic representation of stereotype threat

**Research Methods to Investigate Stereotype Threat**

In his book, *Whistling Vivaldi*, Steele (2010) cites study after study of the stereotype threat phenomenon. One of his earliest studies involved women in advanced college math classes. The problem was that women were often dropping out of advanced math courses at the University of Michigan, or if they did stay in the courses, they were achieving scores significantly lower than men’s scores. The researchers set out to find out the cause, and the following research questions drove their studies:

What factors worsened this effect? What exactly does stigmatization do to people that impairs their intellectual functioning? Are some kinds of people more susceptible to this effect than others? Does it happen for all stigmatized groups or just some? Does it happen for other kinds of performance, in addition to intellectual performance? Does it
happen for low-stakes performances or just high-stakes performances? And, most important, what can be done to eliminate it? (Steele, 2010, p. 32)

They set up their initial study by inviting male and female students of equal math intelligence (based on SAT and advanced math class scores) into their laboratory and gave them an intellectual test individually. Half of the students took a math test and the other half took an English literature test. The results were that women underperformed “in relation to the men on the math test, where they were subject to stigmatization, but not on the English literature test, where neither group was subject to stigmatization” (Steele, 2010, p. 33). These results confirmed what the researchers suspected—that it was the negative stereotype that women are not as good as men at math that affected their performance.

To further test this theory, they attempted to remove the stereotype threat for women by telling them, “You may have heard that women don’t do as well as men on difficult standardized math tests, but that’s not true for this particular standardized math test; on this particular math test, women always do as well as men” (Steele, 2010, p. 38). The results confirmed the researchers’ suspicions. The control group that did not receive the instruction did worse than the equally skilled men, but the group that did receive the instruction performed at the same level as the equally skilled men (p. 39).

The researchers then wanted to know if these results could be generalized to other stigmatized groups, leading them to conduct further quantitative studies. At Stanford University, Steele and Aronson conducted a similar study but this time it involved Black students rather than women. They invited Black and White sophomores into their lab and had them take a difficult verbal reasoning test. They found what they expected: Black students scored significantly lower than White students. Like with the women, they replicated the study, but attempted to remove the
stereotype threat by telling the Black students that it was “a ‘task’ for studying problem solving in general and emphasized that it did not measure a person’s intellectual ability” (Steele, 2010, p. 51). The results confirmed their hypothesis. Those who had received that instruction “performed at the same higher level as White test takers with equal skills and knowledge, and significantly higher than the Black test takers for whom the test had been presented as a test of verbal ability” (p. 51).

Though each of these studies is quantitative, it was qualitative data that drove Steele’s interests: his own experiences as a child who was only allowed to go to the city pool on Wednesdays; his reading about journalist Anatole Broyard, a Black man who chose to live the second part of his life as a White man; his conversations and observations of university students, etc. These experiences coupled with the quantitative studies he and his colleagues conducted spurred Steele and other researchers to find interventions that might mitigate stereotype threat.

**Effects of Stereotype Threat**

Stereotype threat can affect any student; even White males, when they are made aware that their scores will be compared with Asian males, will score lower than without that knowledge (Steele, 2010). “Stereotype threat is known--first and foremost--as a factor that inhibits stereotyped individuals to perform up to their full ability” (Appel & Kronberger, 2012, p. 609). Though White students face some negative effects of stereotype threat, the overwhelming victims of it are Latino and Black students “while European Americans and Asian Americans are the beneficiaries of neutral or positive stereotypes about intellectual ability” (McKown & Weinstein, 2008, p. 236-7). Research on stereotype threat has shown the negative effects of these stereotypes on student achievement and learning and “has established the power of negative stereotypes about ability to impede the academic performance of students from stereotyped
groups” (Bowen et al, 2013, p. 427). The effects of stereotype threat are present “even for students who do not personally endorse the stereotype and who vary in their degree of group identification” (Hanselman, Borman, Bruch, & Gamoran, 2014, p. 107). This means that though a Black male student might know that he is intelligent and claims he does not buy into stereotypes that he is not, he will still be affected by stereotype threat and is apt to score lower on achievement tests than his White counterparts. The irony is that stereotype threat only affects people who are highly motivated to succeed. The stronger the desire to succeed, the stronger the desire to disprove the stereotype, which in turn leads to more distraction and lower achievement (Steele, 2010). It appears that these students are experiencing “vigilant worry that their future will be compromised by society's perception and treatment of their group” (Steele, 1999, p. 48).

**Mediating and Moderating Variables of Stereotype Threat**

In two meta-analyses of stereotype threat studies, researchers looked in vain for an answer to the question of what mediating and moderating variables of stereotype threat could be confirmed (Picho, Rodriguez, & Finne, 2013; Smith, 2004). What both meta-analyses found is that there is not one single variable that explains how stereotype threat works, but both suggest that it must be a combination of several of these variables that accounts for stereotype threat.

Smith (2004) reviewed studies that empirically tested the following stereotype threat mechanisms: "anxiety, evaluation apprehension, performance confidence, effort, self-handicapping, perceptions of a test’s fairness, stereotype endorsement, and a mix of individual differences" (Smith, 2004, 178). These mediators are consistent with the studies I have reviewed, as well. What follows is a brief definition of each of the mediators.

**Anxiety.** The idea that anxious thoughts can disrupt thinking while taking a test under stereotype threat conditions stems from test taking anxiety literature.


**Evaluation apprehension.** This has to do with the idea that the test taker is concerned about how he or she might be evaluated based on the results of the test.

**Performance confidence.** Performance confidence is the theory that stereotype threat affects self-confidence and disrupts the thoughts of the participant.

**Effort.** The two aspects of effort that are thought to mediate the effects of stereotype threat are over-effort, in which the participant tries too hard to prove the stereotype wrong but fails due to the pressure of trying too hard, and under-effort, in which the participant gives in to the stereotype and does not try as hard.

**Self-handicapping.** Self-handicapping occurs when a participant seeks to explain the underperformance by blaming some external means, such as "I never do well on tests" or "I'm feeling a little sick today and can't concentrate."

**Perceptions of a test's fairness.** Poor test results are often attributed to the test's bias or fairness, and this is no exception when it comes to determining mediating factors for stereotype threat.

**Stereotype endorsement.** Another possible mediating factor is that the individual under stereotype threat actually endorses the stereotype, thereby creating a self-fulfilling prophecy.

After her meta-analysis, Smith (2004) states, "No one construct emerged as a strong reliable candidate for a complete mediator, however some evidence for anxiety and performance confidence as partial mediators did emerge in some studies" (p. 195). She cautions against dismissing these mechanisms as mediators and suggests that researchers consider "a multidimensional umbrella" instead (Smith, 2004, p. 202). She encourages researchers to broaden their scope when looking for mediating variables in stereotype threat research. The answer to what causes stereotype threat lies in a combination of these factors.
Likewise, Picho et al (2013), looking for psychological and contextual factors that influence stereotype threat, found that no single moderating variable has been found. Picho et al. (2013) investigated the following moderating effects of contextual factors on females under stereotype threat in math: priming, sex composition, and region. What follows is a brief definition of these variables.

**Priming.** In stereotype threat studies, researchers will often implicitly or explicitly "prime" the participants of the stereotype. An example of implicit priming is that a researcher might have a participant read a story of a female character engaged in typically feminine tasks (Ambady, Shih, Kim, & Pittinsky, 2001). An example of explicit priming is mentioning that the test is a test of diagnostic ability (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

**Sex composition.** This contextual variable posits that females in a mostly male environment will be more greatly affected by stereotype threat in mathematics.

**Region.** Studies have found that people in certain regions endorse stereotypes differently and that might have an effect on stereotype threat.

Picho (2013) and colleagues found that these individual variables had no significant effect on stereotype threat. The authors call for researchers to "investigate the interaction between multiple identities, as well as several levels of context" (Picho et al., 2013, p. 327). Like, Smith (2004), the authors encourage further research into how these mediators and moderators might work together to influence stereotype threat.

Complex issues rarely have simplistic answers, and stereotype threat is no exception. I see close ties to intersectionality theory in the need to examine the multiple identities of the participants as well as the multiple contexts in which stereotype threat occurs. While a study on the moderating and mediating variables of stereotype threat with my students is outside the scope
of the current study, I examined how these variables were or were not present in students' *Who Am I* graphic organizers, narratives, and interviews, in order to see if the themes that emerged in the data reflected any of these variables.

**Stereotype Threat Research Involving Children**

Though there have been relatively few studies conducted about the effects of stereotype threat among children and adolescents in comparison with those studies that focused on adult populations, there are still those researchers, both in the United States of America and abroad, who have attempted to test the phenomenon of stereotype threat on younger populations. An overview of the literature reveals some of the internal and external variables associated with stereotype threat. In order for stereotype threat to be activated, students must be aware that the test is diagnostic of ability, that others believe certain stereotypes about that ability, and that their performance on the test will be judged based on this stereotype (McKown & Weinstein, 2003). The studies I reviewed activated stereotype threat using these principles. What follows is a table of the studies that include the ages, the type of stereotype threat studied, the variables thought to influence stereotype threat, and the results.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ambady, Shih, Kim, &amp; Pittinsky (2001)</td>
<td>Lower elementary-middle school</td>
<td>Asian Americans in math</td>
<td>Implicit priming-gender</td>
<td>When the gender stereotype threat was activated, the girls performed lower than boys. When the ethnic identity was activated, both groups performed higher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good, Aronson, &amp; Inzlicht (2003)</td>
<td>7th grade</td>
<td>Girls in Math/Minoritized &amp; Low-income students in reading standardized tests</td>
<td>Evaluation apprehension Performance confidence</td>
<td>Female students who received the mentoring scored higher in math than those who did not. Minoritized and low-income students who received the training scored higher on reading standardized tests than those who did not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McKown &amp; Weinstein (2003)</td>
<td>6-10 year olds</td>
<td>Cognitive tasks</td>
<td>Evaluation apprehension Performance confidence</td>
<td>For students who were stereotype conscious, those who were told it was diagnostic of ability scored lower than those who were told it was non-diagnostic of ability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuville &amp; Croizet (2007)</td>
<td>7-8 year old girls</td>
<td>gender-math</td>
<td>Implicit priming-gender Performance confidence</td>
<td>When gender identity was activated, girls performed worse than boys for difficult math problems but not easy ones.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huguet &amp; Régner (2007)</td>
<td>Middle school</td>
<td>math</td>
<td>Sex composition</td>
<td>Found that in a mixed gender setting, ST was activated and girls performed lower than boys. In same sex setting, no ST threat effect was found.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muzzatti &amp; Agnoli (2007)</td>
<td>Early elementary-Middle school</td>
<td>math</td>
<td>Explicit priming-gender</td>
<td>No ST found in girls until age 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kellow &amp; Jones (2008)</td>
<td>High school freshmen</td>
<td>Standardized test</td>
<td>Implicit priming-ethnicity</td>
<td>African American students scored significantly lower than White students when the ST was activated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Domain</td>
<td>Measure</td>
<td>Findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arbuthnot (2009)</td>
<td>Black eighth grade students</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Anxiety, Evaluation apprehension, Performance confidence</td>
<td>High achieving students scored lower on math tests when they believed it was a test of achievement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Désert, Préaux, &amp; Jund (2009)</td>
<td>6-9 year olds</td>
<td>SES</td>
<td>Evaluation apprehension, Stereotype endorsement</td>
<td>Those in the evaluative group found that ST effect was activated on children of low SES. Students also indicated that they believe that students of higher SES are better at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomasetto, Alparone, &amp; Cadinu (2011)</td>
<td>K-2 White girls</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Implicit priming-ethnicity, Stereotype endorsement</td>
<td>ST present in girls K-2 for girls whose mothers endorsed gender stereotypes about mathematics. For those who had mothers who rejected the stereotypes, they were unaffected by ST.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mello, Mallett, Andretta, &amp; Worrell (2012)</td>
<td>6-12 grades</td>
<td>Standardized test</td>
<td>Implicit priming-ethnicity, Evaluation apprehension, Performance confidence</td>
<td>Results indicated that marginalized students experienced lower achievement scores when identity threat conditions were activated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ganley et al. (2013)</td>
<td>Three studies school-aged girls</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Explicit priming-gender, Performance confidence</td>
<td>No evidence of negative effects of ST found.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hartley &amp; Sutton (2013)</td>
<td>3 studies</td>
<td>1: Academic inferiority beliefs, 1: Academic inferiority beliefs</td>
<td>Explicit priming-gender, Stereotype endorsement</td>
<td>1: girls from age 4 years and boys from age 7 years believed, and thought adults believed, that boys are academically inferior to girls. 2&amp;3: Standardized test</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One of the main variables in studying stereotype threat in children is their awareness of stereotypes, which is the focus of my own study. Research also found this awareness of stereotypes among children when Wasserberg (2014) conducted a quantititative study to test stereotype threat on upper elementary school students at a low income urban school in the southeastern United States. This study found that as Black students become more aware of racial stereotypes, they are more vulnerable to the effects of stereotype threat. The authors also found that students who were more domain identified, meaning “the degree to which one personally values achievement in a given domain,” were more susceptible to stereotype threat (Wasserberg, 2014).
Again, these findings are consistent with findings among adults. An internal variable associated with stereotype threat is that the more students want to disprove the stereotype or the more high-achieving students are in a particular area, the more stereotype threat affects their performance (McKown & Strambler, 2009; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Steele, 2010).

In a quantitative study conducted with 301 students grades 6-12, researchers sought to extend the research on stereotype threat on adolescents (Mello, Mallett, Andretta, & Worrell, 2012). The study acknowledges that the bulk of the research on stereotype threat has been conducted on college students. Their hypothesis was that stereotype threat would be the same for adolescents as it is with adults. Results indicated that marginalized students experienced lower achievement scores when identity threat conditions were activated, which is similar to the studies involving college students.

Good, Aronson, and Inzlicht (2003) conducted a field study with 7th grade students in an effort to mitigate the effects of stereotype threat. College students worked with the experimental group to show them that intelligence was either malleable or to tell them that academic challenges in 7th grade were attributable to the fact that 7th grade is a difficult year of transition for all students. These variables greatly impacted results. Female students in the experimental group scored higher on standardized math tests than females in the control group, while all students in the experimental group scored higher in reading than students in the control group. These results are consistent with Steele’s (2010) findings that when triggers of stereotype threat are removed, test scores rise.

Female students, ages 7 and 8, demonstrated stereotype consciousness in a 2007 study related to mathematics performance (Neuville & Croizet, 2007). Researchers found that when they activated gender identity, girls scored significantly lower on difficult mathematics problems.
than the boys, a finding that is also consistent with the stereotype threat literature with adults. In a similar study of middle school students, Huguet and Régner (2007) also found that environment can be a variable. In a mixed gender setting, when stereotype threat was activated for girls, the girls scored lower than boys. In a same sex setting, researchers found no stereotype threat effect. One study by Tomasetto, Alparone, and Cadinu (2011) postulated that mothers’ attitudes or “racial socialization” can be an external variable (McKown & Weinstein, 2003). Mothers’ attitudes can influence stereotype threat among girls in lower elementary school in mathematics (Tomasetto, Alparone, & Cadinu, 2011). In the study of 124 girls in Kindergarten through 2nd grade, researchers found the effects of stereotype threat for girls whose mothers endorsed gender stereotypes about mathematics, but for those who had mothers who rejected the stereotypes, they were unaffected by stereotype threat. Likewise, researchers found that girls as young as first grade have automatic stereotype associations, believing that boys are better at math and girls are better at reading (Galdi, Cadinu, & Tomasetto, 2014). When these associations were activated, girls’ mathematics performance dropped.

Ethnicity and gender collided when Ambady, Shih, Kim, and Pittinsky (2001) conducted a study to examine the effects of positive and negative stereotypes on Asian-American students in mathematics in three categories: lower elementary, upper elementary, and middle grades. Researchers activated gender or ethnic identity by having students color pictures for the lower elementary students and by having the older students (grades 3-8) fill out questionnaires with questions related to either their gender or ethnicity. In the lower elementary and middle grades, results were consistent with studies of adults: When the gender stereotype threat was activated, the girls performed lower than boys. When the ethnic identity was activated, both groups performed higher.
In contrast to these findings, Muzatti and Agnoli (2007) found no evidence of stereotype threat among girls in mathematics in an Italian school until the age of 13. There was no evidence of stereotype threat among the students in lower or upper elementary school. Not all studies have found evidence of stereotype threat among girls in mathematics at all. In a series of three studies with a total of 931 children and adolescents, Ganley et al. (2013) found no evidence of stereotype threat among girls and mathematics when researchers employed either explicit or implicit variables. The authors offer a couple of possible reasons, one of which is publication bias of stereotype threat in children, implying that studies that find no stereotype threat in children are less likely to be published than studies that find the presence of stereotype threat. Another possible reason is that it only occurs in specific circumstances or that it always occurs and is therefore not triggered by activation methods.

Arbuthnot (2009) conducted a study on Black eighth-grade students in mathematics. Findings suggest that stereotype threat may have a negative impact on test scores of Black adolescent students’ test taking strategies and achievement on standardized mathematics tests. Likewise, in a study of high school freshmen, Kellow and Jones (2008) found evidence of stereotype threat among Black students on a standardized test. Researchers activated an internal variable of stereotype threat by telling students that the test would be a predictor of achievement on future high stakes tests. The Black students who were in the experimental group scored significantly lower than White students in the same group. These findings are consistent with stereotype threat found in adults.

Désert, Préaux, and Jund (2009) found that students as young as first grade (6 to 7 years old) experienced stereotype threat when researchers gave evaluative instructions, an external variable, that triggered awareness of low socioeconomic status (SES). Not only did students who
had the evaluative instructions score lower they also indicated that they believe that students of higher SES are better at school.

In three studies designed to examine the role of stereotype threat in boys’ academic underachievement, researchers found that girls believe early on (age 4) that girls are smarter than boys and that adults believe the same thing; whereas boys demonstrate that belief a little older (age 7) (Hartley & Sutton, 2013). Researchers then manipulated stereotype threat variables by telling students that boys typically perform more poorly on a standardized test than girls. This manipulation negatively affected the boys’ performance on both reading and math, but did not affect the girls’ performance. Conversely, in the third study, researchers told students that boys and girls typically scored the same on the test, and the results showed that the students who were told that performed equally well. In a similar study of 80 3rd grade students, Pansu et. al. (2016), found that boys underperformed girls in a reading test when they thought it was a test of diagnostic ability rather than a game. In the game scenario, boys outperformed the girls. Once again, these findings are consistent with the stereotype threat variable and findings in adults.

In summary, these studies show that children and adolescents have varying degrees of stereotype consciousness, making my study all the more relevant.
Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter will describe the research design and methods I used to collect and analyze my data. It begins with my research questions, then moves to the overall research design. I describe the setting, the participants, and how I gained access to the site. I then elaborate on why I chose to do a phenomenological study, the particular type of phenomenology (interpretive), and some aspects of interpretive phenomenology. After I describe phenomenology, I write out step-by-step instructions for my data collection. I then describe how I analyzed the data according to interpretive phenomenological methods.

Research Questions

1. How do early adolescents represent their perceptions of themselves through writing and interviews?
2. How do early adolescents represent their perceptions of what others think of them through writing and interviews?
3. How do these representations reflect the presence or absence of stereotypes related to gender, race, ethnicity and/or the intersections of those identities?
4. How are these representations consistent or inconsistent with factors associated with Steele’s conception of stereotype threat?

Research Design

Though most studies of stereotype threat are quantitative, I have chosen to do a qualitative study because I am less interested in student achievement data than I am in exploring how my students see themselves, how they think others see them, and how they interact with the world. While I am intrigued by the effects of stereotype threat, my goal for this study is to gain
an understanding of what my sixth-grade students know about stereotypes. My students may have various lived experiences where stereotyping is involved. However, they will not be affected by stereotype threat unless they are stereotype conscious (McKown & Weinstein, 2003). My research design is a qualitative phenomenological study in which I examined sixth grade students’ knowledge of and lived experiences with stereotypes and how those stereotypes may align or may not align with Steele’s conception of stereotype threat.

Qualitative inquiry does not attempt to provide large-scale data analysis or generalizations based upon trends (Creswell, 2014). Instead, qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to delve into the lives/lived experiences of participants (Lincoln, 2009). This descriptive technique highlights the voices of participants as opposed to a focus on the statistics or trends in the data (Lincoln, 2009). The focus is on trustworthiness as opposed to validity or reliability; these studies are not designed to answer questions that need replication (Creswell, 2014; Lincoln, 2009). One of the ways a qualitative researcher can add trustworthiness to her study is through triangulation, “multiple methods of data collection and analysis” (Creswell, 2014, p. 211), so I am using three data sources: a Who Am I graphic organizer (Appendix A), a written response (Appendix B), and an open-ended interview (Appendix C).

**Worldview**

As an English teacher, I am always interested in providing opportunities for my students to express themselves in writing. van Manen (1997) defines protocol writing as that in which participants write about their lived experiences and “generat[e] original texts on which the researcher can work” (van Manen, 1997, p. 63). He then acknowledges that getting people to write their stories can be fraught with difficulty. The first reason is that many people, especially students, find writing difficult, even when it is about themselves. Any writing teacher will tell
you that getting students to write, even about themselves, is challenging. In my own classroom, students bemoan writing most days. As a result of these challenges, many researchers have been disappointed in the lack of information they sometimes get from student participants (van Manen, 1997). I wanted to get the best possible writing from my students, so it would be rich with detail, and I could uncover some of their lived experiences with stereotypes. I have found that if I have a prewriting assignment that gets students’ thoughts going, I get much better results, especially when writing about themselves. One of my favorite writings I have my students do is an I Remember piece. I begin this activity by having students draw a picture of their neighborhood and mark where various memories spring up. To get them started, I model drawing my own neighborhood on the whiteboard, marking where I fell off the lifeguard stand when I was trying to show off for my brother and his friends and where I used to go to the penny candy store and buy ten pieces of candy with the dime I found in the change return in the phone booth. Students enjoy hearing these stories, after I explain the concept of a phone booth to them, of course. Then students love getting a chance to stroll down their own memory lane as they draw their neighborhoods. From these drawings, I ask them to select the memory that sticks out most clearly. They then embark on writing with a fervor I seldom see when I do not do this type of prewriting exercise. The Who Am I graphic organizer I used for this study is designed to spur students into writing thoughtfully about their experiences. It was only after students completed the Who Am I graphic organizer that I asked students to write a narrative of their lived experience with one of the perceptions they wrote on the graphic organizer.

Context of the Study

While I had all 19 of my advisement students complete the Who Am I graphic organizer and writing, I only conducted semi-structured interviews with the students who returned the
consent and assent forms. I had nine of these forms returned; however, one student did not come to school on the day of the interviews, and another student refused to be recorded, so I did not add his data to my study, leaving only seven participants. Many phenomenological researchers use interviews with open ended questions (Creswell, 2014), so I did the same. My interview questions (Appendix C) stemmed from my analysis of the Who Am I graphic organizers and written responses (Appendices A & B). The interviews I conducted served to further my understanding of the students’ Who Am I graphic organizer and writing, while providing another data point by which I analyzed the experiences of my students in reference to their view of how they see themselves and how they perceive how others may see them. Additionally, interviews are a type of member checking, so I was able to verify my analysis of the prewriting and writing with the authors (Creswell, 2014; Stake, 2010); I was able to ask probing questions in order to clarify my thinking and ensure that students considered my interpretations valid.

As a teacher, I have found that keeping a journal allows time for me to reflect on my practices, so I can improve them. Even making notes on my lesson plans after teaching a lesson is a form of journaling and causes me to reflect on the notes and revise my plans before teaching the lesson again in the future. Likewise, van Manen (1997) encourages researchers to keep a journal, stating that journals “can be very helpful for keeping a record of insights gained [and] for discerning patterns” (van Manen, 1997, p. 73). Throughout my data analysis, I have kept a reflective bridling journal. It has been a useful tool for helping me hold my assumptions and biases at bay (Vagle, Hughes, & Durbin, 2009), which I will explain further in my discussion of bridling.
Setting

I am a language arts teacher, and I also have an advisement class comprised of 19 students who are scattered throughout my five language arts classes. Advisement classes meet for 45 minutes at the end of the day every Wednesday, except for the last Wednesday of the month, which is reserved for clubs. Advisement at Fletcher Academy has several functions. Advisement teachers act as a point of contact for parents and students, a liaison of sorts between the school and home. Teachers have the same students the entire year in their advisement classes. Teachers meet twice a year during conference weeks, once in the fall and once in the spring, with the advisement students and their parents to discuss students’ academic progress and set goals for the remainder of the year. Another role of the advisement classes is as a place for socio-emotional learning. The school’s guidance counselor provides weekly lessons to be conducted by the teacher. Examples of lessons include goal setting, choosing kindness, anti-bullying, anti-drug, tone of voice, various cultural awareness activities, lessons about heritage, gratitude, positive behavior expectations, overcoming barriers, and study skills.

I have chosen to have my advisement students participate in this project because I have formed special relationships with them over the year. Advisement is a time when I can let go of the curriculum and interact with students on a more informal basis. As a result, I have gotten to know my advisement students on a deeper level. They have shared some of their personal histories with me, as well as explored their various cultural heritages. I have come to know them and their families on a more personal level than with my other students.

Another reason I have chosen my advisement students as my participants is accessibility. During school wide testing days, I have extended times with these students. The way our school conducts testing is only half of the building can participate in the state tests at a
time because of lack of computers and internet bandwidth. While half of the school is testing, the other half of the school is in advisement. During these testing days, I have my 19 advisees for upwards of 2 1/2 hours. Normally, we fill the time with math or ELA packets, playing games, or watching movies. This large block of time on May 8th was ideal for me to do the lesson I used to collect the *Who Am I* graphic organizers and narratives for my study.

**Overall and Sample Populations**

I used my own advisement class of sixth graders, who were also my language arts students. The class’s demographic is as follows: 4 Black, 10 Hispanic, 2 Mixed, and 3 White; 14 females, 5 males. I had all 19 of my advisement students create the *Who Am I* graphic organizers and narratives, even though only nine returned the consent and assent forms (Appendix D, E, & F); however, one student chose not to participate in the activity. I chose to have the entire class participate because it was an activity I would have had my students do in the normal course of the year. I assured the students that I would not be using their graphic organizers and narratives in the study if I had not already received their consent and assent forms. Nine students returned their forms, but I ended up only using seven in the study. One student did not give me verbal assent to my recording the interview, and another student did not come to school on the day of the interviews, which was the last day of school.

**Access to Site**

Since I am a teacher at the school, I have access to both the school and my classroom. I received approval for the study from the school’s principal, the school’s district office (Appendices G & H), and Kennesaw State University’s IRB (Appendix G).
**Value of Phenomenology: Methods**

I first encountered the term “phenomenology” about a year ago in my qualitative studies course. It immediately piqued my interest because, in my understanding, it sought to explain or describe a particular phenomenon. What I did not know at the time is that I was learning Husserlian phenomenology, which is descriptive rather than interpretive. “Husserl’s phenomenological view requires that descriptions of experience be gleaned before it has been reflected on” (Dowling, 2005). Since I became interested in the phenomenon of stereotype threat around that same time, it seemed like a natural fit for my study. As my focus has shifted to trying to gain an understanding of what my students understand about stereotypes, I had to come to a new understanding of phenomenology: Heidegger’s hermeneutical or interpretive phenomenology.

**Interpretive phenomenology.** According to van Manen (2017), interpretive phenomenology seeks to understand what it means to live an experience, rather than simply describe it. It is the “significance of the idea of the ‘lived experience’” (van Manen, 2017, p. 810) that interpretive phenomenology seeks to uncover. In a monograph he uses in his doctoral methodology courses, van Manen (1984) outlines the tenets of phenomenology as follows:

- “Phenomenological research is the study of lived experiences” (van Manen, 1984, p. 1).

It is about real experiences, not conceptualizations or hypotheticals. These are everyday experiences. Phenomenological research is a commitment to a single abiding concern. It requires deep thinking about a single thing—a quest for understanding. It is always personal—about a real person in a particular social context (van Manen, 1984). van Manen (1997) says that it can be “about any experience or activity, whether it be mothering, fathering, teaching, testing, reading, running, leading, lending, drawing,
driving, or the experience of time, space, things, the body, others,” as long as we are reflectively asking “what is it that constitutes the nature of this lived experience?” (van Manen, 1997, p. 32). I sought to understand how seven of my students experience and understand stereotypes and how those experiences and understandings may or may not be aligned with Steele’s (2010) conception of stereotype threat.

- “Phenomenological research is the study of essences” (van Manen, 1984, p. 1). “Phenomenology is less interested in whether something actually happened, how often it tends to happen, or how the occurrence of an experience is related to the prevalence of other conditions or events” (van Manen, 1984, p. 1). It seeks less to describe how something happens but rather what the nature of the experience is like, reflectively asking, “What is it that makes this lived experience what it is?” (p.4). Essence is “a description of a phenomenon” (p. 6). When a phenomenologist asks for the essence of a phenomenon--a lived experience--then the phenomenological inquiry is not unlike an artistic endeavor, a creative attempt to somehow capture a certain phenomenon of life in a linguistic description that is both holistic and analytical, evocative and precise, unique and universal, powerful and eloquent. (p. 6)

It does not ask how a certain variable might change an experience but rather what an experience is like. For me, I asked what it is like for my students to be living their school lives with these perceptions of how others view them. What is that experience like for them?

- “Phenomenological research is the attentive practice of thoughtfulness” (van Manen, 1984, p. 1). Thoughtfulness, according to van Manen (1984) is “a minding, a heeding, a caring attunement--a heedful, mindful wondering about the project of life, of living, of
what it means to live a life” (p. 1). This is what we, as teachers, do every day. We have to act responsively to our students’ needs. I do this daily—I am constantly thinking of my students and what they need and how I can best meet those needs. As a researcher, my full attention was on what it means for my students to be experiencing the threat of stereotypes, or of not experiencing that threat, depending upon their understanding of stereotypes, their own stereotype consciousness.

• “Phenomenological research is a search for what it means to be human” (van Manen, 1984, p. 2). As we search what lived experiences mean, we explore what it means to be more fully human. For example, what is it like for a woman to experience the world as a woman, with all of the constraints and affordances of being a woman? It is a search for the “fullness of living” and “to become more fully who we are” (van Manen, 1984, p. 4). My study seeks to explain how my students realize their own humanity under the potential threat of stereotypes, how they experience their world as sixth graders. What does it mean to be aware, or unaware, of stereotypes others may have about them?

• “Phenomenological research is a poetizing activity” (van Manen, 1984, p. 2). One of the frustrating things about phenomenological research is that there is no one single answer. We pose questions but never come up with answers, per se. van Manen (1984) likens it to poetry: “When you listen to a presentation of a phenomenological nature, you will listen in vain for the punchline, the latest information, or the big news” (p. 2). In poetry, you would never ask for a summary or conclusion. “The poem itself is the result. The poem is the thing” (p. 2). Rather than a positivist answer to a question, interpretive phenomenology is the bringing to speech of something—the telling of it. “Phenomenology is the application of logos (language and thoughtfulness) to the
phenomenon (lived experience, to what shows itself)” (p. 4). My task was to show, through rich, thick description, my students’ lived experiences with stereotype consciousness, and then to be satisfied that it is the telling of those experiences that is the “answer” to my research question.

The task of phenomenological writing is “to construct a possible interpretation of the nature of a certain human experience” (van Manen, 1984, p. 7). It is, by nature, reflective, and it is through this deep reflection that the researcher can begin to tell the “living meaning of this lived experience” (van Manen, 2017, p. 813). As such, phenomenological research has to do with storytelling and narratives rather than objectivist data, making it a natural fit with critical race theory that seeks to tell the stories of oppressed people (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). I reflected on the stories that my students tell in their Who Am I graphic organizers, narratives, and interviews, in order to understand their lived experiences with their perceptions of stereotypes.

As van Manen (2017) asserts, reflection is a crucial element of seeking to understand what is truly phenomenal about a phenomenon, things that are impressively unique or deeply meaningful. Through the process of reflecting on the lived experience, researchers will begin to see themes, and the more they reflect and allow these new patterns and ideas to emerge, they will be able to follow these “lines of flight” to gain new insights into the phenomenon (Vagle & Hofsess, 2016). Vagle and Hofsess (2016) assert that phenomenology is not merely about interpretation, but rather it is “entangling entanglements” (p. 342). Much like intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989), it is about seeing intersections and crossroads in the data and allowing the data to take us to new understandings about the phenomenon, basically following lines of flight and not allowing ourselves to be limited by constraints, theoretical or methodological. In
my study, I have taken time to “sit in” the data and reflect on the possible interpretations within the *Who Am I* graphic organizers, the narratives, and the interview transcripts, which I discuss further in the next section. Additionally, keeping a bridling journal of my reflections and process as I explored the data was a critical component of my research.

**Bracketing/bridling in interpretive phenomenology.** Phenomenological research demands that researchers continually question if they are doing the process correctly (Vagle et al., 2009). In other words, we have to be reflective in our role as researchers while we are researching the phenomenon. We have to be our own best critic and to be aware of what we, as researchers, bring to the research and lay bare how what we bring may impact research methods, analysis, and findings. In traditional phenomenology, researchers attempt to bracket, or set aside, their own understanding of a phenomenon, to “hold their preunderstandings at bay” (Vagle et al., 2009, p. 350)

The point of bracketing is openness, being open to whatever the research is telling us about the phenomenon. However, Dahlberg & Dahlberg (2003) acknowledged that bracketing is impractical and that the term “bridling” might be more useful. As a horse rider, Dahlberg made the comparison between putting a bridle on a horse in which to be able to control the horse’s movements and what a researcher should do as she reflects on the data. She describes it as a way to bridle our preunderstandings in order “to slow the natural process of conscious understanding” (p. 48). In doing so, we can more easily examine not only our interpretations but also the journey we took to arrive at those interpretations. Bridling is a “loosening up” of what we know/understand rather than disregarding it as in bracketing. We cannot actually “unknow” something, but we can open up our minds around that thing we think we know in order to allow new knowledge or a reshaping of what we know. It is a “reflective stance” (Dahlberg, 2006). It
requires that we, the researchers, acknowledge that our interpretations are biased by our own experiences and knowledge and that acknowledgement is part of the process of the interpreting. In acknowledging these biases, it does open us up to other interpretations, as bracketing seeks to do, but bridling embraces the process of sorting through the biases. Bridling is an unending process that requires us to constantly examine what something means (Vagle et al., 2009).

Bridling acknowledges that the limitations often become the basis of the work (Vagle et al., 2009). As a researcher, I had to bridle my positional, textual, and constitutive processes (Vagle et al., 2009).

- Positionality--I am both a teacher of these students and a researcher. I constantly examined what that means as I interpreted the data. As I mentioned earlier, I know this particular group of students better than I know my other students, and I have taught them all year. I have interacted with their families on several occasions because they have come to school for various events, such as a Meet and Greet before school started, open house a few weeks after school began, fall conferences in October, and spring conferences in March. I have assumptions based on these interactions about what the data may reveal, and I did my best to bridle those assumptions. I wrote about it in my bridling journal to make sure I acknowledged them and how they may have influenced my interpretations of the data.

I have also had to interrogate my social positionalities as I interpreted the data. As I mentioned in my introduction, I bring to my research a strong connection with the Black community. I am the mother of three Black sons and am about to marry a Black man. Because of this connection, I have insights into the Black community that a typical White researcher may not have. I have witnessed, second hand, the challenges that my
sons faced while in school. They were constantly being singled out for minor offenses that their White friends were also committing. There was not a single time that my son dated a White girl that was not fraught with issues from her parents. I have my social justice bent because of my experiences, and I have had to bridle those positionalities and assumptions as I have gone through the data, particularly when examining what my Black participants wrote. One of my Black female students said that people thought she was rude at the beginning of the year. I know this student to be quiet and sweet. I wrote about it in my bridling journal as I was coding in order to question my assumption of their seeing her as rude being related to racial stereotypes. It was this type of interrogating my positionality that seemed never ending--I was always questioning, using my bridling journal, as I culled the data (Vagle et al., 2009).

- Textual—Bridling must be done by constantly reflecting as I write each step, as I am doing now. van Manen (1984) cautions phenomenological researchers to be reflective throughout the process of writing, so that they do not merely produce a list of themes but rather a rich description of the lived experience of a phenomenon. As I was coding my data, I found myself wanting to “find the themes.” It was not until I began writing the lived experiences of the participants and how they related to my research questions that the themes emerged. It is my job as the researcher to tell the results of the data and to, as accurately as possible, reflect my students’ lived experiences with stereotypes, and to reflect upon my writing as it has progressed.

- Constitutive—Bridling requires that I recognize that I am always in an intersubjective relationship with the phenomena. I examined the lived work with my students as well as their lived experiences with the phenomenon (Vagle & Hofsess, 2016; Vagle et al., 2009;
van Manen, 2017). I acknowledged my own lived experience with stereotype consciousness and have reflected upon times when I believed people saw me and judged me based on stereotypes. My bridling journal is the place I did such reflection. For example, I noticed that my one White participant, Frances, paused before answering the question about her race. I recognized that pause because I, too, have had to make that pause before answering a question about my race, especially when I was her age. I grew up with the privilege of not having to think much about my race because just about everyone around me looked like me. I acknowledged this connection with Frances’ pause in my bridling journal as a way to hold that assumption at bay as I examined her other responses.

**Data collection and procedures**

I collected data in three phases: Phase 1- Prewriting; Phase 2- Writing; and Phase 3- Interviews.

**Pre-writing phase.** I completed the following data collection in one day, during the aforementioned 2 ½ hours of non-testing time during which I had my advisement students while the other half of the school was testing. Students sat at desks that were grouped with four to five desks per group. I made it clear to the students that while everyone was participating in the activity, I would only be using the ones who had agreed to be part of the study by returning the consent and assent forms. All 19 of my advisement students were present, though one student chose to sit by himself and said he did not want to participate. I gave him the poster board anyway in hopes that he might change his mind, but he did not. One table grouping only had two students, both boys, while the other tables were filled with students. The data collection went as follows:
Step 1: I handed out 11”x17” poster boards, one per student. I then gave them black markers. I instructed students to draw a rough outline of a person using the markers I had given them. I projected an image of the outline on the Smart Board at the front of the room (See Figure 3).

Figure 3. Outline

- Step 2: In the head of the outline drawing, I instructed students to write down the things they “Are.” For example, student, daughter, friend, thinker, athlete, etc. In the arms of the outline drawing, students wrote the things they “Do.” For example, play football, chores, homework, give hugs, etc. In the chest of the outline drawing, students drew a heart and then wrote the names of the people/things they “Love.” In the legs of the outline drawing, I instructed them to list places they have gone or would like to go. For example, the beach, Florida, the mall, my grandma’s in Alabama, etc.
Step 3: I asked the students to bring their black markers to the front of the room and put them in the marker box. I then instructed them to each get a blue marker from the box and return to their tables. I then said, “Using the blue marker, write down words and phrases that represent how you think your parents view you anywhere on the outside of the drawing.”

Step 4: When it seemed that students had written all they wanted, I then asked them to return their blue markers to the marker box and pick up a red marker before returning to their seats. Once they were seated with their red markers, I said, “Using the red marker, write down words and phrases that represent how you think your peers view you anywhere on the outside of the drawing.”
• Step 5: After it appeared they were done writing how their peers saw them, I asked students to return their blue markers and pick up green markers before returning to their seats. Once students were seated, I said, “Think about your first day of 7th grade in just a couple of months. Using the green marker, write down how you think the 7th grade teachers will view you on the first day of school anywhere on the outside of the drawing.”

• Step 6: Finally, when they finished with writing how they think their teachers will see them next year, I instructed students to return the green markers and pick up purple markers before returning to their seats. I said, “Imagine that you are at the mall or just walking down the street. Using the purple marker, write down how you think people out in the world might view you just by looking at you anywhere on the outside of the drawing.”

**Writing portion of data collection.** After students completed the graphic organizers, I passed out blank sheets of lined notebook paper. I then said, “I’d like you to choose one of things that you wrote on the outside of your outline in either green or purple (either how teachers next year will see you or how people in the world might see you) to write a paragraph about. Can you tell me a story about why you wrote that down? What evidence or examples do you have that make you believe people see you that way?” (Appendix B).

I collected the graphic organizers and the narratives and reminded the students that I would only be using the ones for my study who had given permission by returning the consent and assent forms. Once students left the classroom, I sorted the drawings and writings, selecting only those for further analysis from whom I had signed parental consent and student assent. I had nine students who had returned both parental consent and student assent.
Two and a half weeks after I collected the graphic organizers and narratives, I conducted interviews with eight of the nine participants. One of the participants was absent on the day I did the interviews, which was the last day of school. Another participant did not give verbal assent to my recording the interview, so I ended up with seven interviews. I focused my interview questions on what I saw in my review of the graphic organizers and narratives, as well as some questions structured around my research questions. When writing about some of the possible pitfalls of interviewing, van Manen (1997) cautions researchers to consistently stay focused on the research questions so that “one does not get easily carried away with interviews that go everywhere and nowhere” (p. 67). According to van Manen (1997), the interview “may be used as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon” (p. 66). My goal in interviewing these students was to clarify my interpretations of their Who Am I graphic organizers and the narratives themselves, as well as providing more insight into their lived experiences with stereotypes and how those experiences may coincide with factors that influence Steele’s (2010) conception of stereotype threat.

I used a common interview format for each of the participants (Appendix C). I began by restating the purpose of the interview, asking them if I could record them, and letting them know that they were free to stop the interview at any time. I then asked them demographic questions. From there, I focused the questions specifically to each individual based on what they had written on their graphic organizer and in their writing. I chose to ask only questions about what they had written in green (what their seventh-grade teachers would think of them) and purple (what strangers on the street would think of them), since I was seeking to discover what
stereotypes they may be aware of when thinking of how people who do not know them think of them.

The interviews took place on the last day of school once I had submitted grades and all academic work was over for the school year. I chose to use an interview with open-ended questions, so that I could be sure to stay focused on the phenomenon of stereotype threat; however, I remained open to allowing my students to elaborate on various related topics as they desired. The questions I prepared helped me direct the conversation so that I got the most valuable data possible (Creswell, 2014; van Manen, 1997; Stake, 2010).

I received signed consent and assent forms from nine students to use their data in this study and to conduct and record the interviews (Appendices E, F, & G). The last day of school at Fletcher is Field Day, meaning all students are involved in various sporting activities throughout the day, culminating with popcorn and a movie in the advisement rooms. I received permission from the principal to schedule interview sessions with the participants on Field Day. I scheduled these sessions for 30 minutes each and coordinated with a fellow teacher who was with the students to send the students in at the appropriate times. After my first interview lasted less than 10 minutes, I changed plans and texted my colleague who had agreed to help me to send in the next student. Consequently, I was done with the interviews before lunch and was able to participate in the rest of Field Day alongside my students.

My classroom is far away from all of the scheduled activities, so it provided a quiet space in which to conduct and record the interviews, with only the occasional interruption of announcements. I chose not to conduct any focus groups because the data I received from the Who Am I graphic organizer, the writing, and the individual interviews provided me with enough
information to get an understanding of my students’ lived experiences with stereotypes. My analysis of the interview transcripts is described in the next section.

**Data analysis procedures**

Conducting thematic analysis of data is a daunting task and should strike fear into the hearts of those who embark on it, according to van Manen (2017). He says this because, as I mentioned earlier, the phenomenologist is seeking to understand and relay the lived experiences of individuals with a particular phenomenon. In my case, I sought to understand and relay the lived experiences of seven of my advisement students in relation to their understanding of stereotypes. Though the task is challenging, van Manen (1997) gives some guidance on how to go about the process.

**Thematic coding.** As an English major and literature teacher, I love the idea of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis in literature has to do with uncovering the themes, symbolism, and sometimes hidden meanings in a body of work. Thematic analysis in human sciences is similar in that it is an uncovering of understandings and a “free act of ‘seeing’ meaning” (van Manen, 1997, p. 78). van Manen (1997) says the purpose of theme in human sciences is that it “gives control and order to our research and writing” (p. 78). He suggests that there are three possible approaches to uncovering themes in the data:

1. The holistic or sententious approach which looks at the text as a whole to see what it is saying overall and then formulating a phrase that tries to capture that meaning.

2. The selective or highlighting approach in which the researcher reads the text several times and looks for and highlights sentences or phrases that stand out as particularly important regarding the phenomenon being researched. From these highlights, the researcher then formulates phrases that try to capture the meaning.
(3) The detailed or line-by-line approach where the researcher looks closely at every sentence, looking for what each sentence has to say about the phenomenon (van Manen, 1997).

For my study, the second approach, the selective or highlighting approach, seemed most fitting because it is more detailed than the first approach but not as tedious as the third. I am familiar with looking for themes in this way when doing close readings of literature texts, so it fit best with my abilities and feels the most comfortable for me. I decided to read through the *Who Am I* graphic organizers and narratives together, highlighting the words and phrases related to stereotypes having to do with my research question topics: students’ perceptions of themselves and of how society views them and how those perceptions might be related to stereotypes based on race, ethnicity, gender, and the intersections of the various identities.

I took pictures of the graphic organizers and typed the hand-written narratives and put both into a Word document, with the narratives at the bottom of the graphic organizer. Each participant’s work was on a single page. I then printed them using a colored printer. I chose five colored highlighters and highlighted the graphic organizers and narratives as follows:

- **Pink**: words/phrases that have a positive connotation
- **Green**: words/phrases that have a negative connotation
- **Blue**: words/phrases related to education
- **Yellow**: words/phrases related to race
- **Orange**: words/phrases related to gender

I chose to highlight in this manner because it allowed me to overlap colors. For instance, a word or phrase could have a positive connotation and be related to education. Also, with the overlapping highlighting, it allowed me to see the intersections of race, gender, and education.
Once I completed highlighting the graphic organizers and narratives, I followed the same pattern for the transcribed interviews.

After I finished highlighting, I created several tables in Google Docs. The first table was for all of the responses that I had coded as gender-related. I listed the words/phrases under the following columns:

Table 2. First coding chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inside</th>
<th>How do you think your parents view you?</th>
<th>How do you think your peers view you?</th>
<th>How do you think people out in the world view you?</th>
<th>How do you think your 7th grade teachers will view you on the first day of school?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

I made sure to keep the positive and negative connotation highlighting as I added the words to the columns. I then created tables for gender-related, race-related, and uncategorized words and phrases. This helped me begin to bridle my knowledge of the students individually and be able to look at the data collectively. I also journaled extensively throughout the entire process. I found that I was not satisfied with the categories and that I was having trouble seeing themes emerging, so I decided to put all of the highlighted words/phrases into a single table, still keeping the positive and negative connotations highlighted. I began to see some themes emerging, so I wrote those at the bottom of the chart document.

I decided to take a break from looking at the data for a few days, and then came back to it with a different approach in an effort to reduce the number of categories, so I could see patterns and themes more clearly. Again, I printed off the graphic organizers, narratives, and transcribed interviews. This time, I only highlighted for positive and negative connotations. I then created another chart, but this time, I categorized things differently.
Table 3. Positive/negative coding chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Neutral/unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

I kept the originally colored font:

- Black: What students think about themselves
- Blue: What students think parents think about them
- Red: What students think peers think about them
- Green: What students think their 7th grade teachers will think about them the first day of school
- Purple: What students think people in the world think about them.

It was during this process that I was able to add to the themes I had seen emerge during my initial coding.

**Bridling journal.** I also journaled throughout the process. By journaling, I reflected on how well I was bridling my own assumptions as I coded and saw the themes emerge (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2003; Dahlberg, 2006; van Manen, 2017). At the end of each time I went through the data, I opened my bridling journal on my computer and spent some time writing down my observations and writing where I saw my own biases and assumptions in my interpretations.

**Validity/Trustworthiness of Interpretation**

According to Creswell (2014), validity in qualitative research carries a different connotation than validity in quantitative research. "Qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures" (Creswell, 2014, p. 200). Validity is synonymous with "trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility" (p. 201). For the purposes of this discussion, I will use the term trustworthiness.
I am using the table below to show how I established trustworthiness in my study. I created this table in my advanced qualitative research class in preparation to use it in my dissertation.

Table 4. Trustworthiness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Criterion</th>
<th>Provisions made by researcher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>-Triangulation: interviews, student <em>Who Am I</em> graphic organizer and writing, member checking with 7-10 different informants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Debriefing sessions and review by dissertation committee members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Reflective commentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferability</td>
<td>-Background data on school, including historical and demographic data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Detailed description of phenomenon of Stereotype Threat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependability</td>
<td>-In-depth methodological description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Detailed data gathering throughout study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Reflective analysis of data gathering effectiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirmability</td>
<td>-Detailed description of my own bias and predispositions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Reflective commentary examining my own assumptions vs. what the data reveal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Triangulation as described above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Admission of study’s shortcomings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ethical Considerations**

Decalogue:

1. Data Interpretation: I did my best to acknowledge my biases as I interpreted the data. I used a bridling journal to uncover how my assumptions and biases may have influenced my interpretations.
2. Privacy and Anonymity: Files of coded documents (all names redacted) were stored electronically on a password protected desktop office computer to which only the researcher has access. The key to participant ID and participant names were kept on a USB in a locked drawer and on a password protected desktop computer in the faculty supervisor’s Kennesaw State University office to which only the faculty and the student researcher had access.

3. Confidentiality: Confidentiality was maintained by assignment of participant ID which was coded to all written data, drawings, and interview data. All names and any personally identifiable data in any of the written, drawing, or interview data were redacted. A key to the participant ID and participant name was kept separate from other data along with signed consent and assent forms. At the end of five years (2023) the files will be purged from the computer and from the USB. Audiotapes of interviews will be destroyed after 5 years.

4. Do No Harm: Participants may have experienced feelings of self-consciousness and/or self-awareness during the drawing, writing and/or interview process. Participants were instructed that they could have taken a break from the activity and returned later OR ceased participation all together at any time without any detrimental or harmful effects.

5. Informed Consent: I had originally planned to have the district literacy coach explain the study and hand out the consent and assent forms, but he was called away at the last minute, so I asked the principal’s secretary to do it instead. I wrote her a script and gave her the consent and assent forms (Appendix J). She then called students to her office throughout the day to explain the study and give the forms. She described
the purpose of the research as well as what participation in the research entailed. She described what data was to be collected and the data collection procedures. She passed out the consent and assent paperwork to the students and explained that both forms (parental consent and student assent) must be returned signed for them to participate in the study. Students took the paperwork home for parents to read. If the parent consented, he/she signed the consent form and the student signed the assent form and returned both to the school secretary in the main office. Students had two weeks to return the forms.

Since this assignment is one I have used previously and is commonly used to assist students in generating ideas for writing, all students in the class participated in the activity. However, the data selected for use in the study was only from those students who assented to participate and whose parents consented for the student to participate. Students were informed that they may cease participation at any time for any reason without harm or consequences.

6. Inappropriate Behavior: I kept professional boundaries with students.

7. Rapport and Friendship: I built appropriate student/teacher relationships with students throughout the school year as their advisement teacher and ELA teacher.

8. Honesty: I was upfront with my students and their parents about the intent of my study and the procedures I undertook (Appendices E, F, & G).

9. Intrusiveness: Though I asked for students to be interviewed during Field Day, I kept the interviews brief.

10. Data ownership and Rewards: I asked participants ahead of time what they wanted for a snack and drink and then provided them with those after the interviews.
Chapter 4

Findings and Discussion

Participants

I originally thought that all 19 of my advisement students would participate; however, only nine returned the consent and assent forms. Of those nine, two did not participate in the interview, so I chose not to use their graphic organizers or narratives. The seven participants who remained provided me with a wealth of data that informs the remainder of this chapter.

The six girls and one boy who took part in the study are students who I got to know well over the course of their sixth-grade year. They were in my advisement and were sprinkled throughout my five language arts classes. I allowed participants to choose their own pseudonyms, which they greatly enjoyed. What follows is a brief description of each participant.

Jazzlyn

The first day I met Jazzlyn, I knew she was something special. She can truly light up the room with her smile and outgoing personality. When I asked her to identify her race, she said, “Black kid.” At the time of the study, she was twelve years old and was living with her godmother. I know Jazzlyn to be a bright student who works hard and constantly seeks approval from her teachers and peers. Jazzlyn was often in the middle of “girl drama,” though she expressed a desire to avoid it. She is generous and loving. She can also be quick to pout and get angry if she receives criticism or an answer she does not like. In my interactions with her and her godmother, I noticed that Jazzlyn seemed to have great respect for her godmother, and her godmother often gave sage advice to her about how to behave in various situations. Her godmother received our team’s Volunteer of the Year award because she came on both of our field trips and put together a collage of the students after one of the trips.
Kimberly

At the beginning of the year, twelve-year-old Kimberly appeared to be a shy, quiet student, but as the year progressed, I saw more and more of her personality show itself in class. When I asked Kimberly her race, she told me that she is Guatemalan. Kimberly had a challenging sixth-grade year, both socially and academically. There were often days when she would come into class and asked to be moved to a different part of the class, so she would not have to interact with various children with whom she had conflicts. There were other days when I would have to move her seat because she was instigating trouble with a student. She was always respectful to me and her other teachers, despite the conflicts with her peers. Academically, Kimberly struggled so much with completing work and completing it correctly that her teachers recommended she be tested for special education. At the end of the year, we considered retaining her, but instead recommended that she receive special services in seventh grade. Kimberly’s father was deeply involved in his daughter’s schooling, and we communicated often about how to best help Kimberly. I do not know if her mother lives with her because I never had any interactions with her.

Alex

Alex is the one male participant in the study. Alex is loud and always has a smile on his face and never failed to put one on mine. When I asked him his race, he said, “Hispanic,” and then told me that his family is from Guatemala. Though he is somewhat socially awkward, one of the things I love about him is that he is unapologetic about who he is. He is truly one of the kindest people I have ever met, though his peers may not have always noticed. Alex is the oldest of three siblings and relishes in the role of big brother. His mother and the younger two siblings all came to both conferences we had. Though I had to speak with his mother through a
translator, I could see the pride she has in her oldest son. She also expressed concern for him because he struggled academically. As his language arts teacher, I can attest to the fact that he struggled when it came to writing. The thing that made Alex a successful student, though, is his work ethic. He tried harder than most students, and as such, he was able to make gains over the year.

Ally

Ally was so quiet throughout the school year that I found I had a hard time getting to know her. She is one of those students who flies under the radar because she is a good student who does not get in trouble. She kept to herself for the most part, and generally avoided trouble. As a matter of fact, she was a student who I could put in the midst of students who were off task, and I knew she would stay focused and affect those around her to do the same. She is mature beyond her years. She identified herself as mixed: African American, French, and White. She did her best to avoid gossip and “drama.” Academically, she worked hard and typically scored at the top of the class. She lived with her mother and brand-new baby sister. She shared that her mother was out of work, and she felt a responsibility to help her mother as much as she could. She scored well on the assessment that would determine her placement in seventh grade, so I was able to recommend her for an enhanced language arts class.

Margarita

Margarita came bounding into my advisement class the first day of school and immediately introduced herself to me. I could tell right then that she and I would get along well. In her first writing assignment for me, she wrote about her passion for reading and love of books, so I was not surprised that she was in my enhanced language arts class. She joined the reading bowl team and was soon recommending books to me, which of course, I read. She is a
gregarious, second-generation Mexican-American, twelve-year-old girl, who has a zest for life and maturity that I have rarely seen in a middle school student. Margarita is the youngest of four siblings, all of whom are outstanding students. I had the privilege of meeting Margarita’s mother on several occasions, and though we spoke through a translator, I could tell that her main priority was her family and Margarita’s well-being. Margarita won award after award at our quarterly awards celebrations, so much so that I began to joke with her, asking if being so amazing ever got old. Margarita was also popular among her peers, and I often saw her in the halls or cafeteria surrounded by friends.

**Cassandra**

Sweet, meek, poised, mature. These are the first words that come to mind when I think of Cassandra. She is a quiet, second-generation Mexican-American preteen girl who is quick to smile and slow to speak. I first met Cassandra with her father at our annual meet and greet before school started. They stuck out to me because her father shared that her mother could not attend because their two-year-old son was in the hospital and was very sick. The concern for his son was evident, even as he attempted to mask it, so the situation pulled on my heartstrings. Thankfully, by the time of our first conference, the whole family was able to attend, and I got to meet Cassandra’s youngest brother. Cassandra and I would often talk of her role as big sister to a sickly baby brother and an active five-year-old sister. She seemed to enjoy the role in her humble, quiet way and would light up when she talked about them. Despite the challenges at home, Cassandra thrived in my enhanced language arts class. A diligent student, she grew as both a reader and writer, and most often scored near the top of the class. She and Margarita seemed to be close friends, and they challenged each other to be good students.
Frances

Frances is a perky young lady, who is kind, driven, and respectful. Frances is one of those students whom I could place anywhere in the class, and she would thrive, despite the fact that she was one of two White students in the class. Her mere presence would cause rowdier students to focus more intently in class. She seemed genuinely liked by her peers, though many of her classmates seemed to pay little attention to her. She also enjoyed helping those who might be struggling and volunteered her peer-tutoring services when students were in need. At the beginning of the year, Frances, herself, was a struggling student. After the first few grades, her mother reached out to me and asked how Frances could improve. I walked her through some reading strategies, and the next day, I spoke with Frances about what we could do to help increase her reading comprehension. She took these suggestions to heart, and by the end of the year, she scored high enough on the state test to be recommended for enhanced language arts in seventh grade. She and her younger brother split time between their mom and dad’s houses. I had the pleasure of meeting with her mother and father and step-mother at various conferences and open houses. All of them seemed to be focused on the best interest of their daughter. Frances often wrote and spoke of the impact of her parents’ divorce, but overall seemed well-adjusted.
Research Questions and Answers

Research Question 1:

How do early adolescents represent their perceptions of themselves through writing and interviews?

Positive

The seven participants view themselves in a generally positive light based on what they wrote inside of the *Who Am I* graphic organizer. The first thing I asked them was to write down the things they are (in the head of the outline). While they wrote many neutral words (student, actress, dancer, etc.), they also wrote many positive adjectives (proud, bright, brave, fearless, patient, loving, caring). I had them write the things they do, the people they love, and the places they have been or want to go within the outline of the graphic organizer. Students responded with either neutral or positive words or phrases with only four exceptions (a bad person, lose friends, make people sad, over-protective).

*Figure 5. Jazzlyn’s graphic organizer*
Collective identity

The participants often wrote things that indicated that they see themselves as part of a group rather than just individuals. These groups fell into the categories of family, ethnic identity and culture, and friends.

**Family.** All six of the females identified themselves in terms of how they fit in their families as sisters and daughters. The one male, Alex, identified himself as a son and big brother. In the heart of the graphic organizer representing the people/things they love, every student wrote either the “family” or “Mom,” “Dad,” “brother,” “sibling.” In the interviews, participants spoke often of their roles in the family. Ally described her role as a daughter, “My mom, she just had a baby. She’s struggling to get a new job, and I’m trying to help her out with that.” She then went on to describe how she is working on becoming a model and even a rapper with her uncle’s help. Alex, who is the oldest of three children, explained how he helps in his family, “I help people in my family. Like I help them cook [and] take care of my baby [brother].”

![Figure 6. Alex’s graphic organizer.](image)
Margarita, the youngest of three daughters, described her close-knit family this way:

Well, I come from a big family. We're all about being together. We like to take steps as a family, one on one with each other. We really have a close bond with each other. You know, we're all different, but that's what makes us us, and we all love being around each other, and yeah, that's a good thing.

Likewise, Cassandra, the oldest of three, talked about her family having fun together:

My family is nice. We always play around with each other. We go see the movies. We go to the store. When we lived in Florida, we used to go to Disney a lot, like every year with our cousins. Well, we're always there for each other.

When I asked Frances about her family, the first thing she told me was that her parents are divorced, but still emphasized the closeness of her family:

They got divorced when I was about ... I think it was the summer after 1st grade. I have a stepmom on my dad's side, and I have two other step-siblings. But then on my mom's side, it's just me, my mom, and my brother. And then grandparents and aunts and uncles and stuff.

Jazzlyn, an only child who is currently living with her godmother, described her family like this: “Well, my family did their own thing. They were very untraditional. They just did things kind of like their own way, and they just loved one another, and were supporting my family.”

**Discussion.** The participants’ emphasis on family comes as no surprise since families are the central aspect of all societies (Georgas et al., 1997). Across cultures, the family “influences the social development and social behavior of the individual” (Georgas et al., 1997, p. 303). Whether the cultures are individualistic or collectivist, as described in the next section, the
importance of family remains constant (Georgas et al., 1997). This is true of my participants. They all situated themselves within the family context and spoke highly of their families, both nuclear and extended, even Jazzlyn who no longer lives with her nuclear family.

**Ethnic Identity and Culture.** While I did not see an acknowledgement of ethnic identity (Pinney, 1989) represented in the graphic organizers or narratives, I did see it in the interviews. Phinney (1989) describes the development of ethnic identity as a “shift from learning one’s ethnic label to understanding the significance of one’s group membership” (p. 35). In this case I was merely asking their ethnic label during the interviews. I asked about the students’ ethnicity directly by saying, “What is your ethnicity?” Most students did not understand the question worded that way, so I changed it to race, and that elicited more responses. For a couple of students, I had to say, “If someone asked you what you are, what would you say?” and then gave an example, “Like Hispanic or …?”

One of the things I thought was interesting was when I asked Frances, my one White participant, about her race. When I asked her if she identified with a certain race, she gave a long pause before saying, “Yeah,” with a shoulder shrug. I then asked her which race, and she replied, “I’d say Caucasian, I guess.” I found this interesting because I know that in my experience growing up as a White girl, I very rarely had to think about my race at all. I wrote about it in this excerpt from my bridling journal:

I also went back and listened to the interviews, and in doing so, I noticed that Frances, my one White participant, took a long pause when I asked her to identify her race. It’s almost as if she hadn’t had to think of that before, which I totally understand and is consistent with my experience and with what the research says about racial awareness in privileged groups.
In “Whiteness” studies research, researchers suggest that in cultures where White is the dominant culture, those who are in the dominant race rarely think of their ethnicity (Phinney, 1989; Dottolo & Stewart, 2013). The assumption is that “because whiteness is seen a ‘natural’ or a default identity, it goes unnoticed, hidden, and taken for granted as ‘normal’” (Dottolo & Stewart, 2013, p. 103). One of the “privileges” of being White is not having to think about your own ethnicity or race, unlike the “double-consciousness” that DuBois (1903) experienced.

While my other students had to think about the term “ethnicity,” once I changed it to race, only Frances hesitated, confirming that she has rarely had to consider her own race.

Unlike Frances, Kimberly quickly identified herself as Guatemalan and spoke of her how her parents work hard to send money to their family still in Guatemala, revealing the intersections of race, class, and place: “They work hard to give money to my grandparents in Guatemala because over there it’s poor and they don’t have enough money. Every time they go to this place and give money to them, to my grandparents.” She also said that she has never been to Guatemala but wants to go so she can visit her grandfather’s grave. Alex, who is also Guatemalan, spent most of his childhood in Guatemala. Alex has fond memories of his time there where he used to “play with [his] uncles,” who have since moved to the States. The strong sense of family reveals the collectivist culture in which he is maturing.

Both Cassandra and Margarita identified themselves as Mexican-American. They shared about how that culture has shaped them and has given them the drive they have to succeed. Their discussions reveal the intersections of race, class, and place and how those intersections have shaped their own identities.
Cassandra said,

Well, I would say my family's from Mexico. Mexico isn't really, I guess, that rich. They work a lot over there. My parents, they've taught me a lot about Mexican culture, like what they do over there, like *quinceaneras* and all that. They said that not everyone there has a house to live in. Some people have to look for food and money. Yeah. My parents told me to value what I have.

Margarita also spoke of how her family’s roots shaped her drive to be a good student. She shared about how her father knew he wanted a better life for him and his family, so he came to the United States to go to university. He has also been able to bring other family members over. She shared the impact of that hard work and the words of wisdom from her mother that have compelled her to be a strong student,

"Your father and I, we worked hard, and we want you to succeed." So growing up, I would always do my best. I would always try to do it, and every step that I do, I do it thinking of how much my parents struggled and how much they worked hard to make me who I am.

Margarita also spoke of immense pride in her Mexican-American culture and sense of community:

Being a Mexican-American means that you stick by your people. You love them and cherish them for no matter who they are, and you know, you can't let people judge your appearance by that because that's not what it's about.

**Discussion.** Once I reworded the question to ask their race rather than ethnicity, their responses revealed a strong identity with their home cultures, particularly for the students who identified themselves with Latinx cultures. I began to see their sense of ethnic identity emerge,
particularly for those with immigrant parents, which is consistent with the literature on ethnic identity development in adolescents (Phinney, Romero, Nava, and Huang, 2000). According to this literature, adolescents who grow up with immigrant parents are more likely to have a more well-defined sense of ethnic identity. They have grown up with parents who are strongly tied to the language and culture of their home country, yet they themselves have been educated in American schools, interacting with American teachers and peers (Phinney et al., 2000).

According to Triandis (1995), culture “is usually linked to a language, a particular time period, and a place” (p. 4). For purposes of this study, I will be referencing aspects of culture, such as “shared beliefs, attitudes, norms, roles, and behaviors” (p. 4).

Likewise, Cassandra and Margarita’s connection to Mexican-Americans and their Mexican-American heritage reveals a collectivist mentality often associated with people from Central and South American countries (Triandis, 1995). In these collectivist cultures, “People think of themselves as parts of their collectives and in most situations subordinate their personal goals to those of their collective” (Triandis, 1995, p. xiii). When Margarita spoke of the importance of “sticking by your people” and of honoring her parents’ hard work by working hard herself, she affirms the values of the collectivist culture passed down to her by her family.

Friends. Peer acceptance in middle school is a key part of students’ identity. The participants all wrote something related to friendship on their graphic organizers. Four students identified themselves as “friend” in the head of the graphic organizer. All of the participants wrote “friends” or “best friend” in the heart of the outline to indicate the things/people they love. Two participants wrote “make friends” in the arms of the drawing when asked to write the things they do. One student even wrote “lose friends” on one of her arms.
In the interviews, students often talked of the importance of their friendships. Jazzlyn explained why she wrote that she was “loving” on her graphic organizer: “Even if someone doesn't like my friend and they don't want me to be their friend, I'm still going to be their friend period, but I'm still going to love that person.” Frances explained that she usually has a smile on her face, which helps her be good at making friends.

Kimberly wrote about friendship in her narrative:

I would always make my friends laugh and make funny jokes. I thing I like about being crazy is making my friends laugh when there down. I really don’t like seeing my friends down they mean so much to me. My friends are really important to me, so I really make my friends laugh so crazy is who I am.

Margarita spoke of the importance of having good friends and how those friendships help her sense of identity. She said, “All of my friends, we're all very sociable, but we like […] we
all are always with each other, and we don't let the opinions of other people define who we are.”

She also talked about losing her best friend:

I recently, I had my best friend of three years, and we stopped being friends. She would call me about it, and I would be like, "You know, I'm sorry." She was like, "Well, I don't care about you." So I was like, you know? Sometimes those things would get to me, but I always know that there's always going to be other people who are going to care for me more than she did, and at times, it did really get to me, but I learned to grow from it.

Discussion. Having reciprocated friendships is an important part of students’ successful transition to middle school (Wentzel, Barry, & Caldwell, 2004), so it is no surprise that students situated their own identities within the context of their friends. Having friends in middle school is associated with better grades and test scores, as well as more involvement in school-related activities (Wentzel, Barry, & Caldwell, 2004). Students in reciprocal friendships also tend to display more prosocial behavior than those without reciprocated friendships. Friendships in middle school are also a significant aspect of identity formation. It is at this time that they are beginning to choose their own groups with whom to associate, and these groups contribute to their increasingly complex intersectional identities (Knifsend & Juvonen, 2014).

On their graphic organizers, students wrote that they see themselves as friends or even good friends. In their narratives and interviews, they told of how they enjoy making their friends laugh, and that even when times were difficult with friends, they still valued those friendships. They are beginning to see themselves in various friend groups, as I will discuss in subsequent sections.
Research Question 2:

How do early adolescents represent their perceptions of what others think of them through writing and interviews?

After students explored their own perceptions of themselves on the inside of the *Who Am I* graphic organizers, I then asked them to explore others’ perceptions of them on the outside of the outline. Students considered what they thought their parents, peers, strangers, and teachers think of them. This section explores the themes that emerged from each of those considerations.

Parents

I wanted to transition from having students describe themselves to having them think about how others saw them to see if stereotypes would appear organically. I asked them first to think about how their parents saw them. After students put away their black markers and were seated again with only the blue markers, I said, “Using the blue marker, write down words and phrases that represent how you think your parents view you on the outside of the graphic organizer.” Student responses were two times more likely to be positive than negative.

Generally, participants wrote that they think their parents think well of them. Five of the seven participants wrote that their parents would say they are “smart.” One even used the word “intelligent.” Three said “nice.” At least two students said their parents would say they are “respectful,” “determined,” “funny,” “good,” and “quiet.” A couple of the females wrote that their parents see them as “beautiful” or “pretty.” Other positive words were “talented,” “caring,” “playful,” “independent,” “loving,” and “curious.”
There were, however, some negative comments. I also thought it was interesting that three of the seven participants wrote that their parents would say they are “childish.” I am inferring that they may have heard their parents say that in the past. Other negative words were “sassy,” “mean,” “lazy,” “annoying,” “sneaky,” “clumsy,” “hyper,” and “bad.” One girl wrote that her parents would say she is “fat.” Another tried to soften her parents’ critique by writing, “not the nicest person to my brother.”

**Discussion.** I asked students to think about how they thought their parents saw them before asking them how their peers, teachers, and strangers would see them because I wanted them to shift from an inward to an outward focus, and I thought it might be easiest to do that by thinking about family members. The fact that participants’ responses were twice as likely to be positive than negative shows that these seven sixth-graders have home environments where they
perceive they are loved and even well-liked. “A child’s perception of his parents’ behavior may be more related to his adjustment than is the actual behavior of his parents” (Schaefer, 1965, p. 413).

As for the negative comments, one that struck me in particular was Kimberly’s comment that she perceived that her parents saw her as “a disappointment.” I happened to have had a conference with her father during our spring conference week. I got to see first-hand how much he demanded from his daughter. Kimberly is a struggling student and was almost retained last year. Her father was stern with her during our conference to the point that Kimberly was in tears. I know Kimberly to be a student who tries hard sporadically but rarely meets with success. Perhaps she has internalized her father’s apparent disappointment.

![Kimberly’s graphic organizer](image)

*Figure 9. Kimberly’s graphic organizer.*
Peers

After students wrote about how they thought their parents saw them, I instructed them to put away the blue markers and pick up red markers. I then said, “Using the red marker, write down words and phrases that represent how you think your peers view you anywhere on the outside of the outline.” It is in this category that I saw the most negative responses, although the positive remarks outnumbered the negative.

I noticed during this segment that the students were asking each other things like, “What would you say about me?” so many of the remarks were similar to others sitting at the same table, and it could be that many of the positive words stemmed from those conversations. All six of the girls wrote that their peers would say they are funny. Half of the girls said, “smart” and “quiet.” A couple of them wrote, “pretty,” “helpful,” and “kind.” Other positive remarks were “giving,” “good,” “good dancer,” “nice,” “calm,” and “friendly.”

*Figure 10. Frances’ graphic organizer.*
Scattered amongst the praise were words that showed that middle school children can be highly critical of each other, or at least it seems that these participants perceive that their peers often view them in a negative light. Three of the girls wrote that their peers would see them as “extra.” When I first heard the term, “extra,” used to describe a person, I asked my students what it meant, and one student said, “It means she’s doing too much.” I probed further and found out that it refers to a drama queen, or to someone who draws attention to themselves excessively.

A couple of students wrote that their peers would say that they are “weird,” which I have learned can be negative or positive, but when it appeared with words like “fake,” “mean,” “retard,” “childish,” “eye roller,” “talkative,” “dumb,” “loud,” and “crazy,” I took it to be a negative. There were a couple of words I did not know how to classify as positive or negative. Jazzlyn wrote that her peers would say she is “tall” or has “long legs.” This is where I had to draw on my knowledge of Jazzlyn and not on my own experiences as a tall girl. When I was growing up, I was always the tallest girl in my class, and I hated it. I was teased for it, and it was definitely not a positive thing from my perspective. I journaled about it after seeing what she wrote:

I can remember lining up in grade school for just about everything: class pictures, scoliosis screening, chorus concerts. I was always the one in middle on the back row—the top of the pyramid. I was even taller than the boys. The only one that came close was my long-term crush, Phillip. Thinking back, I’m pretty sure I only liked him because he was the one boy whom I didn’t feel like a giant around. Anyway, things seem different with the tall girls that I observe in my classroom. There seems to be a sense of pride in their height. The tall girls seem to own it, and it is celebrated. I’ve noticed that with
Jazzlyn. I realize that I am making an assumption about her, but that assumption is based on how I see her carry herself and on comments I have heard other girls make about wishing they could be tall like her. There also seems to be more tall girls than there were when I was her age, which I know would have made me feel more secure about my height.

Jazzlyn is tall, and she also wrote that people would see her as pretty, so it is my perspective that she meant “tall” and “long legs” to be positive traits.

There was one participant whose response to what his peers would think of him was brief. Alex only wrote one word in red: “nothing.” A couple of things could have contributed to this response. The first is that Alex was sitting at table with another boy who is very quiet and wrote minimally on his graphic organizer. They talked very little to each other, in contrast to the girls at the other tables who were working collaboratively, so he could have just not had any ideas. As a matter of fact, the other boy wrote, “I don’t know.” Another thing I know about Alex is that he appears to be an outcast among his peers. He can be loud at times and is often difficult to understand when he talks. I have had to talk with other students about how they treat him. Perhaps he chose to write “nothing” instead of bringing up other words that might have been more painful. I chose not to ask him about it in the interview because I did not want to put him in the awkward position of having to explain it.

**Discussion.** When analyzing the data, I was not surprised to find more negative comments when they were writing how their peers saw them than in the other categories. Middle school can be tough, and I see every day in my own classroom, how critical the students are of each other. As with each of these categories, I wish I had had more time to delve into why the students wrote what they did because I am sure there are stories there that need telling;
however, I was more focused on asking students about what they wrote in green and purple (what their seventh-grade teachers and what people in the world would say about them) to see if they would identify stereotypes, so I did not probe further into what they wrote about how their peers saw them. A discussion of how these perceptions are related to stereotypes occurs in my discussion of Research Question 3.

**Teachers**

In trying to see if students are aware of stereotypes in the academic setting, I asked them to think about their first day of seventh grade and what their teachers might think of them that very first day. I had students return their red markers and pick up green ones to take back to their tables. Once students were seated, I said, “Think about your first day of 7th grade in just a couple of months. Using the green marker, write down how you think the 7th grade teachers will view you on the first day of school anywhere on the outside of the outline.” In stark contrast to how they thought their peers would view them, almost all of them thought their teachers would view them positively.

At first the students seemed to struggle with imagining how their teachers might see them next year. Several asked me, as I circulated throughout the room, what I thought of them on the first day of school last year. I brushed them off by saying that I did not remember. They then got to talking in groups, so I could see similarities in their responses. Six of the seven participants had identified themselves as students on the interior of the graphic organizer (in the head). In the green writing on the outside of the outline, there was only one negative word: “talkative.” All of the other words and narratives were overwhelmingly positive. Students were confident that they thought their teachers, on the first day of seventh grade, would think they are awesome: “Caring,” “Pretty,” “Giving,” “Calm,” “Loving,” “Graceful,” “A beauty,” “Helpful,”
“Smart,” “Intelligent,” “Hard-worker,” “Kind,” “Nice,” “Good,” and “Quiet.” Several students wrote the words that are plastered on posters throughout the school for our behavior expectations: “Responsible,” “Ready,” and “Respectful.” Students internalized that message and associated it with how they should behave.

![Figure 11. Ally’s graphic organizer.](image)

Cassandra wrote about how her teachers might see her on that first day of seventh grade in her narrative. She wrote that, because she is shy on the first day of school, her teachers might see her as calm:

> In 7th grade I think that my teachers would see me as a calm person. I agree because sometimes in the first days of school I don’t talk much to people I don’t know. Other times, if there are people that I know, I feel more confident and less nervous. Over time
teachers might see me as a more talkative person. Other teachers might see me as a smart person.

In our interview, I asked her why she thought they would see her as “smart,” and she said that it was probably “because I made it all the way up there, like to 7th grade.” She, as well as several other students, made the assumption that because they are prepared with all of their supplies on the first day that their teachers will see them as good students.

Like Cassandra, Kimberly thought that her teachers would see her as “smart” on the first day of school. She was not able to tell me why when I asked her, only that they do, and that she does not feel smart: “Teachers see me as smart, but in real life I'm not. I try to do stuff that's hard, but I do it, but sometimes I'm confused on it.” I know from teaching her that Kimberly struggles to do well in school and that things do not come easily for her. She is one of the students that her team of teachers considered holding back to repeat 6th grade, but instead decided to put her in some more intensive intervention classes next year, so her perception that her teachers see her as smart is interesting.

Frances, too, thought her teachers would view her as smarter than she actually feels. She wrote the words “intelligent” and “smart” in green on her graphic organizer, so I asked her about it in our interview:

Frances: I just feel like, most people when they look at me, they think I know a little more than I actually do. And I feel like everyone thinks that I'm really smart when I'm not. I mean, I'd say I'm smart, but I wouldn't say I'm super, super smart. And so I just feel like that's ...

Ms. T.: Why do you think that they see you as smarter than you think you are?

Frances: I'm not really sure. I would just ... people say that. I say, no, I'm just the same as you.
Alex, on the other hand, seemed conflicted about how his teachers will view him on the first day of 7th grade. Alex had only written words like “good” and “excited” in green on his graphic organizer, but nothing about his academic ability, so I asked him in our interview:

Ms. T.: Okay. Do you think that they'll [the teachers] see you as smart or ... not smart or average or what do you think?

Alex: Average.

Ms. T.: Why?

Alex: Because-

Ms. T.: Just by looking at you.

Alex: Yeah average because they'll think that I'm not them and I'm not that smart. Yeah, average.

Ms. T.: Wait, but why just by looking at you will they think that? What do you think?

Alex: Maybe because they will ... they'll see me as energetic and ...

I tried probing him further, but he seemed unable to expound upon why they might see him as an average student.

Unlike Cassandra, Frances, and Alex, Margarita prides herself in being smart and being a good student. In her narrative, she wrote about an experience she had in 5th grade when her teacher pointed out how neat and organized she was:

When I was in 5th grade my teacher had told me “you’re the most neat and organized person in this room. I bet you’re the smartest too.” She had said that to everyone. As she said that she gave everyone the same problem. I was the only one who solved it correctly. She then had said, “Class, looks are very important.” She then said, “She was the only organized and responsible person. What does that say about her?” My best
friend later said, “It shows that she has motive to learn.” I was then known as the smartest girl in that class.

She wrote that her teachers would see her as “amazing” next year. I asked her about it in our interview, and she talked about how her parents’ strong work ethic shaped her drive to be a good student:

I do it thinking of how much my parents struggled and how much they worked hard to make me who I am. So I've always had As, and I've always been such a good student, and you know, that's something to be proud of, you know? Because that's not something that you find in everyone. So I like to kind of brag about that, because, yeah, that's a good thing. So teachers, I feel like I would be an amazing student.

Likewise, Jazzlyn thought her teachers would see her as “intelligent,” but when I asked her in the interview why she wrote that, her response indicated that it was because she would make A’s in the class. I reiterated that it was about how they would see her on the first day of school, and she said, “Because I will probably be quiet and not say anything and work really, really hard, and then as I'm silent and working really hard, I might ace it.” I also asked her about why she wrote that her teachers will see her as “giving,” “funny,” and “caring.” Her response shows more about how she sees herself as having these traits:

Jazzlyn: Because I feel like I give a lot of things to other people, but then ... Like if I have candy or something, or a piece of paper, I'm that person that if I see somebody that doesn't have a piece of paper, like, "Here you go. Here's your piece of paper." Or like if everybody else in the class had Blue Devil bucks and didn't, you know, couldn't buy anything, I would give her or him some of my Blue Devil bucks just so that they could go and buy whatever they wanted to buy.

Jazzlyn: Because like ... I feel like ... This is just me personally. I feel like I'm just a funny person. I just feel like I'm a funny person, so.

Ms. T: Okay. You also said that you thought that they'll see you as a good kid. Why?

Jazzlyn: Because they will see me not get into as much drama and gossip as other people.

Ms. T: On that first day?

Jazzlyn: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ms. T: Okay. And that you're caring.

Jazzlyn: Because I care about other people's feelings.

Ms. T: Okay. How about loving?

Jazzlyn: Because like ... Even if someone doesn't like my friend and they don't want me to be their friend, I'm still going to be their friend period, but I'm still going to love that person.

Ms. T: And you think the teachers will see that?

Jazzlyn: Yeah.

Similarly, when I asked Frances about why she wrote that she thought her teachers would see her as a “good kid” on the first day of school, she replied that it was because of how she would act toward other students on that first day and how she would say nice things to everyone and make friends. Much of what the students wrote had less to do with their outside appearance than it did their actions.

Discussion. I was surprised to see that students thought their teachers would think highly of them, almost without exception. These participants overwhelmingly think their teachers believe in them and expect the best out of them. There has been a push in recent years in teacher education to train teachers to view students through asset-based lenses, and to communicate to
our students that they are capable and that we believe they have bright futures (Howard, 2003). It may just be these particular students, however, because they are not students who typically are discipline problems, even though a few of them do struggle academically. I have a feeling that there are students in my advisement and at Fletcher who did not participate in the study who may have written some negative comments about how their teachers perceive them.

It was also interesting to hear both Jazzlyn and Frances use gendered terms to describe how their teachers would see them and then to draw the false conclusion that those descriptions would lead their teachers to view them as “smart.” For example, Jazzlyn said that her teachers would see her as smart because she is “loving” and “funny” and cares about people. These are all gendered terms, as I will discuss further in my discussion of research question 3.

Others in the World

After ten minutes or so of students writing about what their teachers might say about them, I asked participants to return their green markers to the bin and pick up purple markers before returning to their seats. Once they were seated, I said, “Imagine that you are at the mall or just walking down the street. Using the purple marker, write down how you think people out in the world might view you just by looking at you.” Students got to work right away while still chatting with each other about what they were writing down. Unlike the parents’ and peers’ perceptions, these responses were far more positive in general, but not as positive as the teachers’ perceptions.

About half of the participants wrote that people would think they are “quiet” if they just saw them walking down the street or at the mall. Several students wrote “funny” and “kind” and “calm.” Some wrote words having to do with their physical attributes, such as “bonita (pretty),”
“big smile,” “young,” and “pretty.” Many of the words had to do with their character, such as “nice,” “loving,” “good,” “respectful,” and “friendly.”

In the interviews, I asked students why people might see them in such a positive light, and I found that they always contextualized their responses. When I asked Ally why people in the world would see her as “kind,” she gave me a concrete example:

I like to help the homeless, I like to be kind, to give them money. When they're on the street, and I tell my grandma to step aside, so I could give the homeless some money when I have some on me.

Ally wrote that people in the world would see her as smart. When I asked her about why, she answered in a way that makes me think perhaps she did not understand the question I asked because she spoke more of how her family has spoken of her in the past rather than how a stranger on the street might see her:

Ms. T.: How do you think people would know that you're smart just by looking at you?

Ally: Well, sometimes like, with my family members just looks at me, they were like, "She looks smart." Like when I read my book to my little sister, she's like, my momma, she's like, "She looks smart." Sometimes I'll put on some fake glasses.

Ms. T.: Oh.

Ally: That makes me feel smart.

Ms. T.: So when you wear glasses you think people see you as smart?

Ally: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Likewise, I asked Jazzlyn about some of things she wrote in purple (how others in the world might see her). Here is an excerpt from interview transcript:

Ms. T.: All right. On your graphic organizer, you said that you think that people in the outside world, speaking of people in the outside world and how they see you, that
they would see you as loving if they just saw you on the street. If they looked at you, or in the mall or whatever. Why do you think they would think that?

Jazzlyn: Because if I go somewhere with family or even friends, we always talk to one another, and we always just laugh and giggle and smile and things.

Ms. T: Okay. You also said perky and funny. Why do you think they would, just by looking at you, they would know those things about you?

Jazzlyn: Because I always have a smile on my face. I'm always happy.

When I asked Alex why people in the world would say that he is “excited,” he said that it is because he is always smiling. He gave the same response when I asked him why people would see him as kind. Similarly, when I asked Frances about why people in the world would see her as kind, she said, “I feel like when I’m with my family, I’m always kind to them.” Frances spoke about how people will see her as a dancer. She also wrote about it in her narrative:

If I was in public people would probably think I am a dancer. I think this because every time we meet someone new most people think I am a dancer. Another reason why I think people as[s]ume that is because I am always dancing everywhere I go. One last reason why people assume that of me is because I am always graceful like a dancer. This is what people assume of me.

In her interview, she expounded on this notion and even though I did not ask her about it directly:

Ms. T.: Is there anything on that graphic organizer that you want to explain further?

Frances: I'd say, well, I said dancer.

Ms. T.: Yeah.
Frances: I put that there because I do other stuff. I do volleyball and tennis, but I feel like ballet is more ... that's just a really meaningful thing to me.

Ms. T.: Why do you think that's so meaningful to you?

Frances: I don't know, it's just something that when I was little, I did it just as a thing that younger kids do. And then like second grade, I was like, this is actually really fun, and I enjoyed it, and it felt like a second home to me. And I feel like volleyball and tennis, that's fun, but I feel like dance is just more of my thing.

Ms. T.: I gotcha. And so I saw that you wrote that people will see you as a dancer?

Frances: Yeah.

Ms. T.: Just when they see you? In your narrative, you wrote a little bit about that as well.

Frances: Yeah, I say that because most of the time, I guess it's just when I'm walking around, my posture, I guess, because that's what a lot of people say. They're like, oh, are you a dancer or gymnast? Because your posture's really good. And then also, I have dance almost every day, and so I'll be in my dance clothes and have my hair in a bun, so people probably think that-

Ms. T.: That's a pretty easy connection.

Frances: But I feel like the posture one, that's something that a lot of people say. Even just if we're at the grocery store, the cashier will be like, are you a dancer? And I'm like, oh yeah.

Ms. T.: Oh that's cool. That kind of makes you feel good, huh?

Frances: Yeah.

I could not help but notice that Frances wrote that she started dance in second grade, which is right after her parents divorced. It is interesting that she said that “felt like a second home.” Much of her identity seems connected to dance, and she seems proud when people who do not know her recognize her as a dancer.
Not all of the comments about how they thought others in the world would see them were positive, however. Several students wrote “childish,” “crazy,” and “weird.” One wrote “stupid,” and others wrote “mean,” “chubby,” “dumb,” and “talkative.” When I asked students about some of these comments, again they contextualized them, and most placed themselves with their peers.

Cassandra wrote that someone in the real world might think she is crazy, and she immediately gave an example of being with her cousin, “We went to the store one day with me and my cousin. I just heard this random person say, ‘Those people are crazy.’” Similarly, Kimberly said that it just depends on who she is with:

Ms. T.: You wrote that people in the world, like if they just saw you walking down the street or in the mall or whatever, that they might see you as 'childish.' Why did you write that?

Kimberly: I wrote 'childish' because I always play around.

Ms. T.: So you think if they saw you they'd be like, "Oh, that girl. She's so silly."

Kimberly: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ms. T.: "Childish." Okay. You also wrote that they might see you as stupid.

Kimberly: Yeah, because sometimes I act so stupid around people. I always goof off somewhere.

Ms. T.: Okay. What about mean?

Kimberly: People see me as mean, but I would say that because I'm kind of mean to people.

Ms. T.: So you think that if they saw you just in the mall, they would look at and they'd go, "That girl's mean?"

Kimberly: It depends. It's like, what's my behavior?

Ms. T.: I got you. Kind of who you're with and that sort of thing. What if you were all alone and you were just walking down the street?
Kimberly: If I was all alone walking down the street, I would have been like a normal person, not like goofing off. If people see me walking down the street with nobody, they wouldn't think that, "Oh God. Look at her. She's acting so funny."

Alex wrote that people in the world would see him as “dumb.” When I questioned him about it, he said, “I do stuff like I shouldn’t.” When I probed further, he said that he does not always do what his mother tells him to do, so I am not sure he fully understood my prompt.

Ally seemed to understand the prompt a little better. When I asked Ally why people in the world might see her as “rude,” she explained:

It's because that I don't know a lot of people, and then when they try to pull me over I just try to move them out my way, and I don't ... Like I'm not that person that likes to be around a lot of people. It just gets me uncomfortable.

Like Ally, Margarita had a strong sense of self in the following exchange:

Ms. T.: I like that. So you wrote that people in the real world would see you as childish or crazy, like if you were just in the mall or walking down the street or whatever. Why, when they look at you, would they see that?

Margarita: Well, I don't like to hide who I am. It doesn't matter where I am, I like to show my funny side. Doesn't matter who I'm with, I like to be who I am. You know, if people ... Like, you don't think of a person coming up to you and telling you to stop being yourself. So I like to embrace being myself, and that's something that I like about myself.

Similarly, what I saw when the participants wrote about how their teachers would see them on that first day of 7th grade, students mostly wrote about how people in the world would judge them based on their actions rather than their appearance.

Discussion. What I found most interesting about how they thought strangers out in the world would see them is still largely based on how they see themselves, as well as on their
actions rather than mere physical appearance. In other words, if they were with friends and were being silly by their own description, then others would see them as being silly or crazy; however, if they were alone, not one participant thought others would see them in a negative light. I discuss the implications of this and how it relates to their understandings of stereotypes in my discussion of Research Question 3.

**Research Question 3:**

**How do these representations reflect the presence or absence of stereotypes related to gender, race, ethnicity, class, and the intersections of these identities?**

When I began coding the data, I tried to force it into the categories of gender and race, and what I found instead was the gray area of intersectionality. What follows is a discussion of the representations of students’ perceptions of how others view them and how those show the presence or absence of stereotypes related to gender, race, ethnicity, class, and the intersections of these identities. It will follow a similar format as research question 2 above.

**Parents**

As I mentioned previously, when students wrote about how they thought their parents viewed them, it was generally in a positive light. In the interviews, I primarily asked students questions about what they wrote for how their teachers and others in the world would view them because I was trying to ascertain their awareness of what people who did not know them might think of them in order to see if they might be affected by stereotype threat. In hindsight, I wish I had asked them more questions about what they wrote about how their parents see them because now I see that those answers could provide insight into how they might be affected by stereotypes engrained in them by their parents.
One thing I did find is that their responses were also likely to be gendered, meaning they used terms that are often applied mainly to females. Because six of the seven participants are females, this finding makes sense. Terms such as “sassy,” “caring,” “loving,” “beautiful,” “pretty,” “nice,” and “good” are often used to describe females, and the participants perceived that their parents would see them in these gendered terms.

Parents are the first people to expose their children to traditional gender roles and terms, and those roles generally stay with children throughout their lives, even when they are exposed to counter roles (Witt, 1997). Children as young as two years old have “internalize[d] parental messages regarding gender” (Witt, 1997, p. 254). The participants in my study have internalized these messages and believe that their parents see them through these gendered terms, as well.

These representations of gender lend themselves to gender stereotypes. If a girl perceives that her parents see her in more feminine terms, the stereotypes associated with females, such as their being in more submissive roles than men or being bad at math, will be present. I will discuss the potential effects of this in the academic arena when I discuss the potential effects of how they perceive their teachers’ view of them.

**Discussion.** I am not surprised that I did not see more stereotypes represented when looking at how parents see them. After all, we would all expect our parents to see who we really are rather than some surface stereotype. My point in asking them how their parents see them was mostly to transition them from thinking about how they see themselves to a more outward focus, and I thought it might be easiest for them to do that by starting with the people closest to them—their parents.
Peers

Like the words the participants wrote about how their parents see them, there were a mixture of positive and negative words for how they perceive how their peers see them. There were also a significant number of gendered terms. Again, I did not follow up with interview questions for how their peers saw them, so the only data I have to assess gender stereotypes in how they perceive their peers see them are the words they listed on the graphic organizer.

According to a study by Martin (1995) that measured stereotypes of children, many of the words the participants used are words used to describe “sex-typed feminine” (p. 732) and many were categorized as traits that are “highly desirable, especially for girls” (p. 733). Some of these words are as follows: “quiet,” “pretty,” “helpful,” “kind,” “giving,” “good,” “good dancer,” “nice,” “calm,” and “friendly.” It is clear that the participants of my study have heard these words used to describe themselves, so gendered constructions are part of their identities and how they perceive others think of them.

Other highly gendered stereotypes are “drama queen” and “extra.” In my observation of my students, these two terms are typically used to describe young females of color, so the participants in my study are finding themselves at the intersections of age, gender, and race when they perceive that these terms are how their peers see them. These terms represent negative stereotypes applied to young females of color and several of my participants have internalized these portrayals.

Discussion. In asking my students to write about how their peers saw them, my goal was to get them thinking a little further away from themselves, trying to help them take on others’ perspectives. I began with how they saw themselves and then had them shift to how their parents saw them. Asking them how their peers saw them was one further step away from their internal
focus. It makes sense to me that I did not see explicit stereotypes at this level because they have grown up with many of their peers, so perhaps they were not distancing themselves enough to consider how others might see them in terms of stereotypes. Perhaps, as research suggests, their brains are not yet developed enough to fully take on another’s perspective (Choudhury et al., 2006). Also, because I was more focused on the following two categories, I did not follow up with many interview questions about how their peers saw them. I will elaborate on these possibilities further in chapter five.

**Teachers**

As much as most teachers would hope to treat both boys and girls the same and not demonstrate gender bias towards our students, some studies show that teachers still show a belief that “some behaviors (the provision of examples in the classroom, practices at events, use of educational resources in the classroom) favored boys while other behaviors (reading sessions) favored girls” (Stromquist, 2007, p. 9). Other studies, though, indicate that teachers’ attitudes towards gender suggest “that they view girls as working harder, having better motivation, being more cooperative in the classroom and being better organized about homework” (Myhill & Jones, 2006, p. 100). My participants’ perceptions of how teachers see them seem to be more aligned with the latter. All but Alex thought that the teachers would see them in a positive light.

Likewise, Jazzlyn could not articulate why teachers would see her as smart on the first day of school until I pressed her to think more deeply about it. Her response was that it was because she would demonstrate the feminine characteristics of being quiet, giving, funny, and caring. Then she spoke of how they would see her as kind to others, so they would automatically believe she was smart. This notion is tied to the findings of a 2006 study of students’ perceptions of gender equity in classrooms that found that students “themselves perceive that teachers treat
boys and girls differently. [...] their perception is that girls receive more positive and less negative attention from teachers” (Myhill & Jones, 2006, p. 111).

Margarita found herself at the intersection of race and gender when she spoke of her pride in her academics. Though many teachers perceive girls as being more academic than boys, a metanalysis of research of teachers’ expectations for various racial groups shows that teachers tend to have lower expectations of students of Mexican descent (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). Margarita’s explanation of why teachers would think highly of her is because of how hard she works:

I do it thinking of how much my parents struggled and how much they worked hard to make me who I am. So I’ve always had As, and I’ve always been such a good student, and you know, that’s something to be proud of, you know? Because that’s not something that you find in everyone. So I like to kind of brag about that, because, yeah, that’s a good thing. So teachers, I feel like I would be an amazing student.

Margarita is telling a counterstory to the narrative that teachers have lower expectations of Latinx students by asserting herself as hardworking and high achieving. She believes that her teachers will see her as “amazing,” a perception based on her past academic experiences when teachers have praised her successes.

Frances, my one White participant, wrote about how others see her as smarter than she actually is:

Frances: I just feel like, most people when they look at me, they think I know a little more than I actually do. And I feel like everyone thinks that I'm really smart when I'm not. I mean, I'd say I'm smart, but I wouldn't say I'm super, super smart. And so I just feel like that's ...

Ms. T.: Why do you think that they see you as smarter than you think you are?
Frances: I'm not really sure. I would just ... people say that. I say, no, I'm just the same as you.

I wrote my thoughts about this comment in my bridling journal:

[Frances’] discussion was interesting in that she talked about how others assume she’s smarter than she actually is. I’m not sure who these “others” are, but I got the feeling that it’s other students and teachers. In our school, she was definitely in the minority in her classes, since most of our White students are in the advanced classes. Maybe that’s what she meant. I have to bridle my assumptions here, because of my positionality and knowledge of the makeup of our school. I wonder if she were in a predominantly White school and in on level classes if she would have heard similar comments.

Four meta-analyses of teachers’ racial bias substantiate the idea that “teachers hold more positive expectations for European American children than for African American and Latino/a children” (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007, p. 267). Frances’ perceptions that people see her has smarter than she is could be because of both her race and her gender. I know Frances to be a strong, hardworking student, who was at the top of my on-level class all year. She scored high enough on her exams to be placed in an enhanced language arts class next year; though, she did score lower than she was projected to based on earlier exams. Like she said about herself, she is smart, just not that smart.

Kimberly also said that her teachers often think she is smarter than she feels; however, I do not think her perception is necessarily related to either gender or racial stereotypes. I believe instead that Kimberly has heard her teachers trying to encourage her to do her best and possibly saying something about her being smart to spur her on to work harder. Kimberly was at risk of failing at the end of the year and struggled throughout the year just to keep up. I suspect that
Kimberly is well aware of how hard she works and still sees few successes. Because her teachers, myself included, want her to feel that she is capable of more, she perceived that her teachers believe that she is smarter than she feels. It is, however, possible that her teachers tried even harder to convince her that she was smart because of both her race and gender, perhaps believing that she thought she fell short because of those identities.

I also found Alex’s comment about teachers thinking he would be an average student just by looking at him to be telling. When I asked him about it, he said that it was because “they’ll think I’m not them, and I’m not smart.” Alex is Guatemalan, and my guess is that in his academic career here in the States, he has not had many teachers who look like him. This seems to be a direct connection to teacher expectancy effects when students achieve to the level they perceive their teachers have of them (McKown & Weinstein, 2003). Tenenbaum and Ruck (2007) found that teachers expect less of Latinx students, and Alex has apparently felt that. Alex finds himself at the intersection of race and gender, since studies show that children perceive that teachers also expect less of boys (Myhill & Jones, 2006).

Discussion. It was the teacher section that surprised me most of all. Initially, I expected far more negative comments than I received for how they think their teachers, who have never before met them, would see them. I also thought that they would have explicitly mentioned some stereotypes that I had seen in some other studies. I think had I asked them about stereotypes directly I would have seen some more explicitly mentioned, but I was looking to see if these stereotypes were on their minds when at the mere mention of how their teachers would see them. The connections I was able to make and connect with the literature, though, are valuable and get to the heart of my study, and that is what stereotypes the students may have
internalized about themselves. I will discuss more how this might affect them academically in my discussion of Research Question 4.

Others in the World

When Jazzlyn wrote that people in the world would see her as “Bonita (pretty),” “long curly hair,” and “short eyebrows,” is that because she is a girl or because she is a Black girl? Probably both. Kimberly wrote that people in the world would view her as “crazy.” That could be applied to both her ethnicity (Guatemalan) and gender. I wrote about this in the following excerpt from my bridling journal:

I’m still struggling with the narratives and interviews because I know who said what. However, having the key ideas from each all in one place is helping a bit. It’s here that I’m really getting a sense of intersectionality because I could easily attribute something as gender or race, when in reality it is probably both.

Kimberly’s sense that people would see her as childish out in the world was contextualized. It is not as if someone would look at her if she were by herself and think that she is childish, she said, but it is when she is with her friends, and they are being silly that people would think they are childish. Kimberly is both Guatemalan and female. She is also a preteen. All three of those identities intersect in her perception of how strangers view her. Many adults see preteens as behaving in crazy ways; however, they might view boys behaving silly in a more negative light than they would girls because of stereotypes associated with boys. Kimberly’s answer seems to show that she knows that, though she is seen as childish, it seems harmless:

Ms. T.: You wrote that people in the world, like if they just saw you walking down the street or in the mall or whatever, that they might see you as 'childish.' Why did you write that?

Kimberly: I wrote 'childish' because I always play around.
Ms. T.: So you think if they saw you they'd be like, "Oh, that girl. She's so silly."

Kimberly: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Cassandra said that she overheard someone say that she and her cousin were acting crazy. Again, that is a stereotype generally applied to females, and in this case, young girls. Margarita also spoke of her perception that people in the world think she is crazy:

Ms. T.: I like that. So you wrote that people in the real world would see you as childish or crazy, like if you were just in the mall or walking down the street or whatever. Why, when they look at you, would they see that?

Margarita: Well, I don't like to hide who I am. It doesn't matter where I am, I like to show my funny side. Doesn't matter who I'm with, I like to be who I am. You know, if people ... Like, you don't think of a person coming up to you and telling you to stop being yourself. So I like to embrace being myself, and that's something that I like about myself.

Margarita is pushing back against others’ negative views of her when she acts “crazy.” Many of the participants have internalized some of the gender and age stereotypes. They seem to be developing stereotype consciousness without explicitly saying it (McKown & Weinstein, 2003).

When Ally talked about how she thinks people in the world see her as smart, and I asked her to expound on why, she explained that her fake glasses make her look smart:

Ms. T.: How do you think people would know that you're smart just by looking at you?

Ally: Well, sometimes like, with my family members just looks at me, they were like, "She looks smart." Like when I read my book to my little sister, she's like, my momma, she's like, "She looks smart." Sometimes I'll put on some fake glasses.

Ms. T.: Oh.

Ally: That makes me feel smart.

Ms. T.: So when you wear glasses you think people see you as smart?
Ally: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Gendered stereotypes of the smart girl in glasses are all over movies and television (Conaway, 2007). Usually these girls are seen as smart and socially awkward, and the goal is to get the girls to become more “normal,” which usually involves exchanging the glasses for contact lenses. Ally, though, desires to look “smart” and believes that the glasses help her achieve that stereotype.

Frances’ identity is strongly connected to her being a dancer, and it is clear that she relishes in the idea that people see her in this feminine ideal. She wrote about it in her narrative and then spoke about it in the interview. Below is what she wrote in her narrative:

If I was in public people would probably think I am a dancer. I think this because every time we meet someone new most people think I am a dancer. Another reason why I think people as[s]ume that is because I am always dancing everywhere I go. One last reason why people assume that of me is because I am always graceful like a dancer. This is what people assume of me.

Her strong association with being a dancer could lead her to believe some gendered stereotypes about herself. Despite the preponderance of professional male dancers, dance is sex-stereotyped as feminine (Gettys & Cann, 1981). Her identity is tied to being seen as a dancer by those in the world. She wants people to see her for her good posture and gracefulness, both strongly feminine characteristics.

Margarita’s identity is closely connected to being Mexican-American. She talked with me during our interview about what it is like to be a light-skinned Mexican-American. I asked each of the students to tell me about a time when they were misjudged based on their appearance.
Margarita’s response shows stereotype consciousness—that she is aware of stereotypes that might be attributable to her (McKown & Weinstein, 2003):

Ms. T.: Okay. Tell me about a time when you were misjudged based on your appearance.

Margarita: Most Mexican people, or a lot, have a darker complexion than I do, and I'm always judged like that. I don't think that I have to look a certain way, but that's the way that society is. They like to think I have to have really dark hair and darker skin complexion, but I don't think that defines a Mexican-American person. Being a Mexican-American means that you stick by your people. You love them and cherish them for no matter who they are, and you know, you can't let people judge your appearance by that because that's not what it's about.

Ms. T.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Margarita: I'm known to have a lighter complexion, and they're like, "Oh, you're not Mexican." No, no, but that's not true. I am because, and it's just not about the way I look; it's the way that I act.

Ms. T.: Oh. So who is it that mostly makes those judgements? Is it other Mexicans, or Mexican-Americans, or is it non-Mexican Americans that'll say that about you?

Margarita: Most of the time it's a bit of both, you know? Some Mexicans do it jokingly, others do it seriously. They're like, "You don't belong with us." You know, I don't let that get to me, because that's not what it's about. Sometimes non-Mexican people come up to me; they're like, "Oh, go sit with us. Don't sit with them." I'm like, "You know, I kind of know them better." They're like, "Yeah, but they're Mexican. They're going to treat you bad." Like, no. That's not good. You know? I always like to stick up for people, because we're all one in unity. We all stick by each other, and you know, it kind of sucks when people say those things, but I just get by it and stick by, to the people who know who I am.

Margarita’s identity as she defines it has more to do with actions than outward appearances; though, clearly she is pushing back against the outward appearances and the stereotypes associated with skin color. She claims that being Mexican is about sticking together, which is consistent with the collectivist culture I discussed in Question 1, rather than about skin
Colorism, when lighter skin tones are favored above darker skin tones, is a persistent issue among people of color (Hunter, 2007). Despite the fact that people with lighter skin tones fair better economically and socially, light-skinned people of color may feel less connected to their ethnicity: “Light skin may be viewed as a disadvantage with regard to ethnic legitimacy or authenticity” (Hunter, 2007, p. 244). In Margarita’s case, being called out for having lighter skin felt like an insult and one that kept her from being seen as truly Mexican-American.

When I asked Jazzlyn if she identified with a particular race, she said, “I would say that I’m a Black kid, basically.” When I asked her why she identified in that way, she replied,

Because even though I’m light-skinned, the outside world is going to still look at me as a Black child. They don’t see me as a White kid or a Mexican kid. They're going to see my skin tone, even though I'm light, they're going to see me as a Black kid.

When I asked her if both her parents were Black, she shook her head no, but did not seem to want to say any more about it, so I did not ask again. In my desire to minimize discomfort in my students during the interviews, I decided to leave it alone, despite my curiosity. Because she indicated that she is multi-racial, it is appropriate to explore race as a social construction, particularly for people of more than one race, like Jazzlyn. There are multiple factors associated with racial identity: social class, racial composition of social networks, family structure, and appearance and phenotype (Brunsma, 2005). Jazzlyn assumes that people will see her as a “Black Kid” based largely on appearance, according to her response. As a result, she may be influenced by some of the negative stereotypes associated with “Black Kids.” I wrote about my biracial son’s experience with racial identity and stereotypes in my bridling journal as I was analyzing Jazzlyn’s response:
Bryan started wrestling with his racial identity when he was in middle school. As far back as he could remember, he had been raised by two White parents, with all White family members. He knew his biological father was Black, and he would make comments from time to time about being the only Black kid in our extended family. He would also get extremely frustrated when people who did not know us would assume we weren’t together. I specifically remember being at Costco and standing right behind him as he waited in line to taste a sample of some new product, when the employee told him he needed to get his parents in order to give approval for the tasting. He burst into tears and told the clerk that I was his mom. It wasn’t until he entered public school for the first time in middle school that his identity was truly challenged, though. His Black peers wanted to know why he dressed, talked, and acted like a “White Kid.” That was the beginning of his search for identity, and I was tasked with helping him find it.

I’m not sure if at Jazzlyn’s age, he would have been able to articulate that people would call him a Black kid because he had yet to see himself that way. In examining my positionality as a mother of a mixed-race child, I see a contrast between Bryan and Jazzlyn. Clearly, Jazzlyn has already realized that others view her by that social construction.

Ally, who is also mixed race, thought that others in the world might see her as “rude.” When I asked her why, she shared the following:

It's because that I don't know a lot of people, and then when they try to pull me over I just try to move them out my way, and I don't ... Like I'm not that person that likes to be around a lot of people. It just gets me uncomfortable.

I wrote about it in my bridling journal because I was unsure if she was pushing back against the “loud” Black girl stereotype:
One black girl said that people thought she was rude at the beginning of the year, and that’s probably because of the stereotypes associated with black girls as being rude, but the way she described it, it was because she just kept to herself, so maybe she’s pushing back against the stereotype of the “loud” Black girl.

**Discussion.** When thinking about why I did not see more stereotypes explicitly mentioned, I have come to the conclusion that I should have been more direct in my questioning. I specifically did not want to ask about stereotypes because I wanted to see if the stereotypes were on their minds and would arise organically when they were considering how strangers might view them. I wanted to see if they thought others saw them through the lens of race, gender, age, or the intersections of those identities. While most of the participants did not explicitly talk about stereotypes, their answers indicate that they are aware that others see them through gendered and racial lenses.

I expected to see more stereotypes explicitly mentioned; for instance, when I asked about how others in the world would see them, I thought I might get some of them to say troublemakers or stupid, some of the harsher words associated with negative stereotypes of young people of color. What I discovered is that they seemed more to project how they viewed themselves rather than being able to step outside of themselves and think of how others would view them. This observation is consistent with research findings that suggest that adolescents are in the very early stages of being able to understand others’ perspectives (Choudhury, Blakemore, & Charman, 2006). Researchers found that “the brain regions that undergo the most significant development during adolescence overlap with those that have been linked to the ability to take other people’s perspectives and infer mental states” (p. 168). They go on to demonstrate that the brain undergoes significant changes in adolescence, which affects their
ability to step outside of themselves and see others’ perspectives clearly. Early adolescents’ brain development “reflects an immature cognitive mechanism for perspective taking” (p. 170). It makes sense, then, that the double-consciousness that Dubois (1903) defines did not appear to exist among these 11 and 12-year-olds, at least not in this study. While it is clear that being able to understand others’ perspectives matures throughout adolescence and into adulthood, I cannot help but hope that maybe, just maybe, we are doing better as a society and as teachers, and there is hope that the stereotypes are waning, and that, too, might play a role in these findings.

Research Question 4:

How are these representations consistent or inconsistent with factors associated with Steele's conception of stereotype threat?

The main variable my study focuses on in activating stereotype threat is stereotype consciousness. I set out to see if the participants in my study, 11 and 12-year-old students, had internalized the stereotypes that might contribute to stereotype threat. After spending hours analyzing the data, looking for connections, I have been able to find that the participants’ graphic organizers, narratives, and interviews reveal an internalization of gender and racial stereotypes that are consistent with Steele’s conception of stereotype threat.

Gender Stereotypes

Throughout my analysis of all aspects of the data, from how students represent themselves to how they represent how they perceive others see them, gendered responses were prevalent, indicating a possible internalization of stereotyped gender roles.

In a few of the studies I reviewed, participants ages four to ten believed that girls are smarter than boys, so the results of those studies showed boys performing lower than girls on standardized tests when stereotype was activated (Hartley & Sutton, 2013; Pansu et al., 2016).
In my findings, most of the female students said that they thought their seventh-grade teachers would think they are “amazing,” or “smart.” Alex wrote that his teachers would see him as “kind,” “excited,” and “good.” He wrote nothing about being smart, unlike the girls. It is possible that Alex has internalized the stereotype that girls are better at academics than boys, so he might be affected by stereotype threat when he believes that the test scores will be compared with girls’ test scores.

The other side of the gender coin, however, favors boys, particularly in math. In a study that considered if mothers who endorsed gender stereotypes affected girls’ performance in math, researchers found that stereotype threat was present for those girls in math (Tomasetto et al., 2011). Many of the girls in my study wrote gendered terms for how their parents saw them, such as “beautiful,” “good,” “caring,” “helpful,” and “loving.” If the participants have internalized those feminine traits from their parents, it is possible that they would be affected by stereotype threat if those conditions were activated.

Studies have shown that when gender identity was activated for young female students, stereotype threat occurred, and girls’ math scores suffered (Ambady et al., 2001; Galdi et al., 2014; Good et al., 2003; Huguet & Regner, 2007; Neuville & Croizet, 2007). For those female participants who strongly identified with feminine characteristics, such as Frances as the ballet dancer, it is quite possible that they have internalized gender stereotypes and could be affected by stereotype threat in a situation where they believe boys to be better, such as in math.

**Racial Stereotypes**

When marginalized students are aware of the stereotypes that could be applied to them, whether or not they subscribe to these stereotypes, the possibility of stereotype threat is there.
In my interview with Alex, he mentioned that he thought his teachers might see him as average because “they’ll think I’m not them, and I’m not smart.” He identified himself as Hispanic, and as I mentioned in the previous section, it is possible that this is what he meant. If so, this could trigger stereotype threat if he is aware of the stereotype that Hispanics are not smart.

For students such as Margarita, whose identity closely tied to Mexican-Americans, she resists the stereotype that Mexican-Americans are not seen by teachers to be as smart as White students (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). It is clear that she has an implicit understanding of that stereotype because she works so hard to disprove it. Part of her identity is that she is a strong student; she prides herself in that and is not afraid to tell those around her what a good student she is, as I have heard her do on many occasions. She works hard to disprove the stereotype; however, research shows that stereotype threat is worse for students who are motivated to disprove the stereotype (Hanselman et al., 2014; Steele, 1999; Steele, 2010; Wasserberg, 2014); thus, Margarita could very well become a victim of stereotype threat.

Likewise, for the mixed-race participants, Jazzlyn and Ally, who are aware that the world sees them as Black, they could also be aware that some people see Black students as lower-achieving than White students (Shelvin et al., 2014; Tenebaum & Ruck, 2007). Whether or not they subscribe to this stereotype, it could be a contributing factor to stereotype threat for them either now or in the future. Both of these students are high achieving, like Margarita, but even when high achieving students are confronted with stereotype threat, they are likely to score lower than White students on achievement tests (Arbuthnot, 2009; Kellow & Jones, 2008; Mellow et al., 2012; Shelvin et al., 2014; Wasserberg, 2014).
Intersections

Identities are fluid and multi-faceted, so I need to be careful not to pigeon-hole the stereotype threat triggers into merely gender and racial stereotypes. For each of my participants, all of their identities are always at play. For instance, Frances is both White and a girl; Margarita and Cassandra are both Mexican-American and girls; Ally and Jazzlyn are mixed race and girls; Kimberly is both Guatemalan and a girl; and Alex is both Guatemalan and a boy. On top of those identities, they are all adolescents at various stages of growth. Some are of low socioeconomic status, some in the middle, and some high. The many terms that they used to describe themselves shows their incredible complexity.

These complexities play into their chances of experiencing stereotype threat. As I mentioned earlier, did Jazzlyn describe herself as “pretty” with “long, curly hair” because she is a girl or because she is Black, or is it because she has been taught to be a proud Black girl? Stereotype threat is also multi-faceted and can be a result of the intersections of racism, sexism, ageism, etc., and can be triggered by one or more of these variables (Smith, 2004). When students internalize stereotypic images of themselves, they are subject to the negative effects of stereotype threat, such as lower achievement on standardized tests and impeded learning opportunities (Bowen et al., 2013; Steele & Aronson, 1995; & Steele, 2010).

Discussion

Despite all of the connections I was able to see for students internalizing possible stereotypes, I still expected to see more explicit stereotypes. For instance, I expected them to think that their teachers next year might have low expectations of them if they were students of color and for the students to be able to articulate that. I also expected them to think that others in the world might see them as troublemakers or up to no good, but the most I got was “childish” or
“crazy.” My own experiences with and knowledge of stereotypes influenced my expectations. In hindsight, I see that much of what my sons experienced in their educational journeys was tied to lowered expectations from their teachers, their coaches, and their large school structure. Also, as a former high school teacher, I heard some my students of color discuss their awareness of these stereotypes, so I thought that perhaps my participants would have explicitly mentioned them. I discuss some of the possible reasons why they did not in Chapter 5.
Chapter 5
Limitations, Implications, and Future Research

This final chapter of my dissertation will review the original purpose of the study, provide a brief overview of my findings and possible reasons for those findings, address the limitations of my study, discuss implications for classrooms, and suggest ideas for future research.

Purpose and Method

The initial purpose of this study stemmed from my interest in finding possible causes of the achievement gap. In my initial research, I came across Steele’s (1995) conception of stereotype threat, and my curiosity was piqued. I knew my study would in some way be related to stereotype threat in my students. At the time, I was teaching high school, but as I progressed through my doctoral program, I changed jobs and became a sixth-grade language arts teacher. I soon became curious to know if my sixth-graders were even aware of stereotypes that others might have of them. After all, if they were not aware of them, they could not be affected by stereotype threat. As I began researching middle school students’ awareness of stereotypes, I discovered that there is a dearth of research in this area. In order to add to the existing research and find out if my sixth graders were stereotype conscious (McKown & Weinstein, 2003), I conducted a phenomenological study in which I used Who Am I graphic organizers, narratives, and interviews to examine their perceptions and compare those perceptions to the factors that influence stereotype threat.

Overview of Findings

What I found, in general, is that these sixth-grade students have a positive self-image and strong family, cultural, and peer ties. They demonstrated a belief that their parents think well of
them and perceive that their parents would describe them in gendered terms, such as “pretty,” “kind,” and “caring.” They had more negative comments when asked how their peers would see them, which is common among middle schoolers, and those terms were also typically gendered.

The insight I was most seeking was how they perceived how their teachers and others in the world saw them, and I was surprised to find that they used overwhelmingly positive language in those descriptions. Because I gathered more data in these categories, I was able to clearly see gendered and race-related language, as well as the intersections of those.

While none of the participants mentioned any specific stereotype explicitly, their stereotype consciousness showed in their implicit descriptions, indicating that such awareness could be a mitigating factor in Steele’s conception of stereotype threat. The idea that these 12-year-olds are aware of broadly-held stereotypes is consistent with McKown and Weinstein’s (2003) study in which they determined that stereotype consciousness is developed in middle school.

Possible Reasons for Absence of Explicitly-Stated Stereotypes

My Positionality as a Critical Pedagogue

As I mentioned previously, I taught these participants for the entirety of their sixth-grade year. I also got to know them and their families fairly well throughout the year. As a critical pedagogue, I am intentional about honoring my students’ various identities. I provide identity-safe classrooms in which students have a platform to share who they are with one another and with me. I know there is at least one other teacher on our team, the social studies teacher, who strives to do the same. Perhaps the reason the students did not think their teachers would see them in a negative light is because we are doing a good job of helping them feel valued and that we want them to be there. Perhaps we have focused on students’ strengths rather than their
deficits, provided them with a supportive environment while simultaneously holding them to high standards, and showed them that we value their individual identities in such a way that negative stereotypes are not the first things that come to mind.

Wrong Questions

It is also entirely possible that I did not ask students the right questions. I was careful all year to steer clear of discussing stereotypes, knowing that I wanted to see if students would automatically associate themselves with certain stereotypes. In the study, I wanted to get an authentic look into how students thought others saw them in order to see if race came to mind organically.

I have shared portions of the Who Am I graphic organizer in professional development settings. Instead of asking my colleagues to think of how people in the world saw them, I asked them to think of things that others might say about them that are not true. Perhaps had I worded it that way for my study, it would have prompted participants to think more deeply about how others might see them.

Perspective-taking

Participants had a difficult time thinking anyone would see them as other than they see themselves. They believed they are good students or good friends, so others must believe that, too. Also, they had heard their parents and peers say negative things about them, but they probably (hopefully) have not heard their teachers or others in the real world say many negative things about them, so it was difficult for them to imagine what they might say. They had a difficult time with taking on others’ points of view, which aligns with the research adolescent cognitive development and perspective-taking (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006; Choudhury et al., 2006; Van der Graaff et al., 2013). Researchers found that perspective-taking starts to
develop in pre-adolescence but is not fully developed until adulthood, so these participants are at
the beginning stages of being able to step into someone else’s shoes and see their viewpoint
(Choudhury et al., 2006). This knowledge helps me understand a possible reason why the
participants did not explicitly mention stereotypes others may have about themselves.

**Racial Majority**

I was at a brunch recently and was seated next to a new acquaintance, Claudia, an
accomplished, 48-year-old chemist, who works for the FDA in Washington, D.C. She and I hit it
off immediately, largely because of her outgoing personality. Being the only White person in the
room, I felt welcomed immediately by this warm and vibrant Black woman next to me. It was
not long before I shared, over plates of crab cakes, quiche, and cinnamon rolls, that I am in the
process of writing my dissertation, which led her to ask me about my research.

I began briefly by talking about the achievement gap as the impetus of my study and then
about Steele’s conception of stereotype threat. Soon, the other women at the table leaned in to
hear what Claudia and I were discussing. When I mentioned the phenomenon of stereotype
threat in women in math and students of color in standardized tests, all of a sudden, Claudia’s
eyes got big. I stopped what I was saying in order to give her the floor. I am going to attempt to
share her story here because I see a connection between her experiences and the experiences of
my students of color who participated in this study.

Claudia grew up in Southeast Washington, D.C. and was always in schools with
predominantly Black students. The few White students who trickled in and out of her schools
had been “cool,” and Claudia and her friends had readily accepted them. Most of the White
students were diplomats’ children who had flunked out of the private schools, so these kids were
partiers, which made them fun to hang around for the brief time they spent in D.C.’s public schools.

After graduating with honors in high school, Claudia went to an Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in Atlanta. She had always seen herself as one of the smart students and believed she was gifted because she had always excelled in school. Things were no different at college. She soared to the top of her class and knew that graduate school was in her future.

Claudia’s father told her that since she had chosen an HBCU for undergraduate work, she needed to attend a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) for her graduate work, so she could “prepare for the real world.” She set her sights on Virginia Tech. The next fall, she walked proudly onto campus, believing that she belonged there—believing that she was smart, capable, and more than ready to handle the rigors of graduate school.

The shock of her new surroundings set in quickly. Claudia soon discovered that not only was she in the minority in her program, but there was only one other Black student in the chemistry Master’s program, and he dropped out before the end of the first semester. Still, Claudia remained undaunted in her studies; until, that is, she was faced with the reality that people might not be able to see past the color of her skin. One afternoon while preparing for an exam, she sat in the library with her head phones on and book open, and a White male in her program walked up to her and said, “Whatcha listening to? Rap?” Claudia was taken aback and at first could not understand why he would assume that about her. Her immediate thought was, “Why would I be listening to rap while I’m studying? Clearly, I’m listening to Beethoven.” Then the harsh reality hit that he had assumed she was listening to rap merely because of the color of her skin. For Claudia, it was the first time she became truly aware that others would be
making assumptions about her based on the color of her skin. Having grown up in the relative comfort of being in the majority, she was completely unprepared to be judged based on the color of her skin. Soon, Claudia began to question if she could make it in this environment. This once confident, bright, enthusiastic student began to see her grades slip, and she felt as if she had no one to turn to for help. There was no one to look up to as a mentor, at least no one who looked like her.

Despite this shaken confidence, Claudia soldiered through and earned her Master’s degree. She then set off to the University of Florida to begin her Ph.D. program. Again, she began to worry about not being smart enough. Her confidence was so shaken that she failed her comprehensive exams twice before finally passing. Ultimately, she did, indeed, obtain her Ph.D., but the old, confident Claudia was gone, and in her place stood a woman who was unsure of her place in her field, despite all she had accomplished. She carries these feelings of inadequacy with her even to this day, and it has held her back from pursuing leadership positions in her career. It was just a few years ago that she saw another Black woman in a leadership role in her industry. This woman mentored and encouraged her to take a promotion and become a team leader.

As Claudia shared her story, I could not help but relate it to my study. My participants, like Claudia, might not have had to think much about their race because they have always been in school environments with students who look like them, other students of color, predominantly. Most of my participants are good students, so they cannot imagine a world in which people might see them differently. Claudia had never felt judged based on her race until she went to Virginia Tech. Likewise, my students have not been in school settings where they are the minority and have felt the sting of being judged based on the color of their skin. That is one
possible reason that I did not see my participants being as race-aware and stereotype conscious as I thought I would.

**The World is Changing**

In his book, *Diversity Explosion: How New Racial Demographics are Remaking America*, Frey (2018) exposes our nation’s changing demographics, and despite pushback from older White generations, the younger generation appears to be welcoming the change. He asserts that there is an acceptance of these diverse communities, “particularly among the highly diverse youth population” (p. 3). Perhaps my participants did not reveal that they perceived others would make assumptions of them based on their outward appearance because they would not judge others that way. Maybe we are doing something right with these students. I am hopeful that maybe that is the case; though, much more research needs to be done to be able to say that things are changing for this generation.

**Limitations**

Every study has limitations, and as I was reviewing the data, several limitations became apparent. The first one I saw was with the participants themselves. Because I needed both consent and assent forms completed and returned, it limited the participation to the students whose parents agreed, but more importantly, it took a certain amount of responsibility for students to remember to bring the forms home, get them signed, and return them to the office. There were many students who kept promising to bring back the forms but missed the deadline. Several students were disappointed that their graphic organizers would not be used in the study because they had forgotten to turn their forms in. What this left me with is participants who are generally responsible students, which in turn means that they are students who are more likely to have positive experiences with their teachers, which could have influenced their responses.
Another possible limitation is that I did not use the word “stereotype” with them at all. The reason I stayed away from that word was because I wanted to see if they made automatic associations with stereotypes when they thought of how others saw them. However, I believe I would have been able to see stereotype consciousness, or at least awareness, had I asked them directly about stereotypes.

I also wish I had probed further in the interviews, especially about how their parents and peers see them. I was focused on getting at how they thought their teachers and strangers would see them, so I did not ask much about parents and peers, or even themselves. Had I probed deeper, I may have uncovered some more implicit stereotypes. Having a focus group in addition to the interviews, or maybe in place of the interviews, may have allowed students to open up more and may have revealed more stereotype awareness.

My own biases and subjectivities in interpreting the data are another limitation. Though I used my journal to bridle these, it is possible, and even likely, that my assumptions about what I would find in the data found their way into my interpretations.

I also did not member check with my participants by showing them this draft or asking them if my interpretations were correct. Because they are all at a different school from where I teach now, it would have been difficult, though not impossible, to confer with them.

Implications

My goal from the beginning of this process was to find ways to help narrow the achievement gap by addressing the role of stereotype threat in that gap. The main thing that I am taking away from this study is that my students are multi-faceted adolescents who need, more than anything, teachers who recognize and value their complex, intersecting identities. As a
result of this study, I have thought long and hard about how teachers can do that and by doing so, help mitigate the possible effects of stereotype threat.

To find out how teachers can effectively create classrooms that value all student identities, researchers conducted a qualitative study that examined third and fifth grade teachers in a large school district who “compared to their colleagues, were especially good with ability-stereotyped students” (Steele, 2010, p. 178). They discovered what they have termed “identity safe classrooms” (Cohn-Vargas & Steele, 2016, p. 23). According to Steele and Cohn-Vargas (2013), “Identity safe classrooms are those that validate students’ experiences, backgrounds, and identities to promote academic and social success for all students (p. 5)” (as cited in Cohn-Vargas & Steele, 2016, p. 23). The researchers state that identity safe classrooms are child-centered and promote positive relationships (Steele, 2010, p. 180). They further emphasize that “identity safe teaching focuses on the social nature of learning, putting the students’ interests, skills, and experiences at the center of classroom life and curriculum” (Cohn-Vargas & Steele, 2016, p. 23).

It seems like such a simple fix yet getting teachers to acknowledge that stereotype threat exists and can be mitigated can be difficult. Many teachers, particularly White teachers, might be hesitant to talk about stereotypes with students; however, as White teachers, in particular, we have an obligation and duty to be aware of the notion of stereotype threat and to have “touchy dialogues about race with our students” (Landsman, 2010, p. 20). Many of us are unaware of our own White privilege and walk through the world in ignorant bliss. We even make the seemingly altruistic claim that we are colorblind; however, “Not seeing color suggests one does not acknowledge students, their individual cultures, dialects, environments, backgrounds, heritage, and different learning styles (Farinde, LeBlanc, & Otten, 2015, p. 34). I have heard my
own White colleagues recoil at the notion that a person’s race affects matters in the classroom and claim that they carry no bias at all. While these claims have the appearance of good, “acknowledging or denying a student’s cultural background may impact how well that student performs in the classroom” (Farinde et al., 2015, p. 34). If teachers want to mitigate the effects of stereotype threat, they must eliminate colorblindness: “According to research on stereotype threat, instead of eliminating the influence of race in the classroom, colorblind practices allow the conditions of threat to continue (Steele et al., 2000)” (as cited in Cohn-Vargas & Steele, 2016, p. 24). By failing to acknowledge each student’s individual identity, “teachers unintentionally convey that what these students know and can do, how they feel, does not matter” (Cohn-Vargas & Steele, 2016, p. 24). Landsman (2010) asserts that “there is no more important work” (p. 19) than for White teachers to become enlightened and educated about matters of race in their classrooms, so they can begin to honor students’ complex identities.

My purpose in analyzing how students understand stereotypes was ultimately to help students not only identify some of these stereotypes but to push back against them and change the narrative from a negative one to a positive one. Another way teachers can help students mitigate the effects of stereotype threat is to help students create a new hopeful personal narrative, one in which they see themselves removed from the stereotype. One of the ways to do this falls under self-affirmation theory. Bowen et al (2003) assert, “Encouraging a brief focus on self-affirmation before a stressful exam, for example, can have a significant positive effect on performance (p. 427). They found that “African American seventh graders who wrote a brief self-affirming essay early in the year in their Social Studies classrooms obtained better Social Studies grades over the grading term as well as better grade-point averages in general” (Bowen et al, 2003, p. 428). Not only did their grades improve in seventh grade but those results were
still seen in their eighth-grade year. A similar study had half of the students in a seventh-grade classroom write down their top two to three most important values and later had the opportunity to affirm those values, while students in the control group wrote down their least important values and did not get the chance to affirm values. The results were astounding. Not only did the students in the first group see an increase in grades but the students’ non-affirmation group’s grades “kept going down, making the racial achievement gap in these classrooms even wider over the school term” (Steele, 2010, p. 175).

Another way to help students build new personal narratives is by helping them understand Carol Dweck’s growth mindset theory, “which frames the ability required to meet a challenge as learnable and incrementally expandable” (Steele, 2010, p. 168). Teachers need to “reinforce for students the idea that intelligence is expandable and, like a muscle grows stronger when worked” (Aronson et al., 2009, p. i). Teachers can do this in a variety of ways, but most importantly, teachers can and should hold high standards for all students and let them know that you “believe that they can meet those standards (this signals that you do not view them stereotypically). This shouldn’t be faked” (Steele, 1999, p. 52). Teachers also need to be sure to communicate to students “that their difficulties in school are often part of a normal learning curve or adjustment process, rather than something unique to them or their racial group” (Aronson et al., 2009, p. ii).

As a teacher leader and critical pedagogue, I am responsible for mentoring teachers with whom I work. I also have an open door with many of my White colleagues since I am White. I am hopeful that my new credentials open other doors, so I can share this research and its implications to a broader audience. Teachers need to create communities within our classrooms where all identities are valued, and I feel confident I can help them do so.
Suggestions for Future Research

I felt limited by this study almost from the beginning because it seemed that it was more of a mission rather than providing a solution to a problem. Part of me wanted something more concrete—data that led to quantitative, definitive answers. Through this process, however, I have come to appreciate van Manen’s (1994) assertion that phenomenological research is a “poetizing” (p. 2) activity and does not yield concrete answers to these important questions, rather it offers varied explanations and interpretations of complex issues. I also see how this study contributes to the research on stereotype consciousness in adolescents, and that can be a valuable tool for researchers who wish to further study its effects. It would be interesting to follow up with these participants in high school or even college to see how they have fared. I have even suggested to a colleague that she conduct a quantitative study with these same students in ninth grade that would measure the effects of stereotype threat. It would also be interesting to do a similar study with sixth-grade students that explicitly mentions stereotypes to see what their awareness is in a way that takes into account their limited ability to take on others’ perspectives. Another research idea could be examining early adolescent students’ perspective-taking ability at the beginning of sixth grade and again at the end. Researchers could also use the Who Am I graphic organizers to generate thinking and research on identities that examines more closely what students wrote about who they are on the inside of the drawing. They could use the format for many types of probing into how students see themselves, as well as how they perceive others see them.

Final Thoughts

At the end of this process, I reflect back on Derrick, the young man whose thank you note in which he expressed that he saw me as “one of us” spurred on this whole process. Derrick is
set to graduate this year, and I plan to be in the audience, cheering him on. I have been changed over these last four years, as I am sure he has, and my desire to value my students’ complex and intersecting identities continues to grow. This study does not answer all of my questions about how to mitigate the causes of the achievement gap, but it is a start, and it is my hope that it can be used to help enlighten others.
References


http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10648-012-9200-4


http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.99.3.545


http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/0013189X12440743


https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X14522320


http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01511.x


variables and new performance goal directions. *Educational Psychology Review, 16*(3),
177-206. http://dx.doi.org/1040-726X/04/0900-0177/0

Solorzano, D. (1997). Images and words that wound: Critical race theory, racial stereotyping,

Solorzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2002). A critical race counterstory of race, racism, and

Solorzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an
analytical framework for education research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 8*(1), 23-44.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/107780040200800103

Guilford Press.


Steele, C. M. (2010). *Whistling Vivaldi: And other clues to how stereotypes affect us*. New York,
NY: W.W. Norton & Company.


comparison. *Background Paper Prepared for the Education for All Global Monitoring
Report 2008*.


Appendix A

Who Am I Graphic Organizer

1- In the head, have students write down the things they are.
2- In the arms, have students write the things they do.
3- In the chest, have students draw a heart and then write the names of the people/things they love.
4- For the legs, have them list places they have gone or would like to go.
Appendix B

Written Response Prompt

“I’d like you to choose one of things that you wrote on the outside of your outline in either green or purple (either how teachers next year will see you or how people in the world might see you) to write a paragraph about. Can you tell me a story about why you wrote that down? What evidence or examples do you have that make you believe people see you that way?”
Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Interview #_______

Date:______________

Script:

Good afternoon, and thank you for taking time to meet with me. I hope you are enjoying your summer break. It is good to see you again. As you know, I am a graduate student at Kennesaw State University, and I am conducting a research project for my dissertation. This interview will take about 30 minutes or so, although we might go longer if you are enjoying it. The questions will be geared towards your life experiences both inside and outside of school and some of them will be based on the Who Am I graphic organizer and writing about how others see you that you created in advisement a few weeks ago. I would like your permission to audio record this interview so I can go back and listen to it later. Are you comfortable with that? Thank you. If at any time during the interview, you want me to turn off the recording or stop the interview, just let me know, and I will stop it. All of your responses are confidential, which means I will not share them with anyone with your name attached to them. Everything you share with me will be used for educational purposes only.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If at any time you would like to take a break, just let me know. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then if it is okay with you, we will begin.

Demographic Questions:

• Tell me about the place where you grew up.

• Tell me about your family.
• What is your ethnic background?
• Do you identify with a certain race? If so which one, and why?

Questions related to student *Who Am I* graphic organizer and writing

1. Can you explain to me why you wrote __________ on your *Who Am I* graphic organizer?

2. Why do you think other people might see you as that?

3. How do you think people see you as a student?

4. How do you see yourself as a student?

5. Tell me about a time when someone misjudged you based on your appearance.

Ending

Thank you so much for meeting me here today and for being so willing to talk to me about yourself and your writing. If I have further questions, is it okay I contact you again? I wish you all the best in 7th grade, and if you need anything, please feel free to contact me. I know you are going to do great things!
Appendix D

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM


Researcher's Contact Information: Linda Turner, 404-610-1044, lindaturner1@gmail.com

Your child is being invited to take part in a research study conducted by Linda Turner, a doctoral student at Kennesaw State University. Before you decide to allow your child to participate in this study, you should read this form and ask questions if you do not understand.

Description of Project
The purpose of the study is to understand how early adolescents view themselves and how they think of how others see them.

Explanation of Procedures
Students will create a Who Am I graphic organizer by drawing an outline of a Students will create a Who Am I graphic organizer where they draw an outline of a figure. I will ask students to write the things they are in the head (athlete, student, daughter, etc.). In the arms, students will write what they do (play football, chores, homework, dance, etc.). In the chest, students will draw a heart and write those people and things they love. In the legs, they will list the places they have gone or would like to go. On the outside of the figure, students will write words or names of how they think others (parents, peers, teachers and society as a whole) see them. Once the Who Am I graphic organizer is completed, students will write about why they wrote what they did for how teachers and society see them. After the Who Am I graphic organizer and the written work, I will invite students to participate in interviews to discuss more fully what they wrote and what the writing means. I plan to record the interviews, so I can go back and review them as needed.

Time Required
Participants will complete the Who Am I graphic organizer and writing during non-testing time on MAP testing days when advisement students are in classes while students in the other part of the building are testing. This session will last approximately 90 minutes. The interviews will occur during the last week of school after students’ final grades have been calculated and posted. Interviews will last no longer than 30 minutes each.

Risks or Discomforts
There may be only minimal discomfort as participants may experience feelings of self-consciousness and/or self-awareness during the drawing, writing and/or interview process. Participants may stop the activity, take a break and return OR cease participation completely at any time without any detrimental or harmful effects.

Benefits
Participants may experience a sense of community and well-being as they think about themselves and their positive attributes. Participants may experience a sense of pride as they write about and/or talk about themselves and how they perceive themselves.
Compensation (if applicable)
There is no compensation for participation in the study. However, since the activity is at the end of the school day, snacks and drinks will be provided to all students in the class whether one has agreed to participate or not.

Confidentiality
The results of this participation will be confidential. Confidentiality will be maintained by assignment of participant ID which will be coded to all written data, drawings, and interview data. All names and any personally identifiable data in any of the written, drawing or interview data will be redacted. A key to the participant ID and participant name will be kept separate from other data along with signed consent and assent forms.

Inclusion Criteria for Participation
Participants in this study are ages 11-13 and are students in the Marietta School District. They are students in the researcher’s advisory class.

Consent to Participate
I give my consent for my child,__________________________________________________________, to participate in the research project described above. I understand that this participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty. I also understand that my child may withdraw his/her assent at any time without penalty.

Put an X on this line if it is okay for us to record your child __________

________________________________________________________
Signature of Parent or Authorized Representative, Date

________________________________________________________
Signature of Investigator, Date

PLEASE SIGN BOTH COPIES OF THIS FORM, KEEP ONE AND RETURN THE OTHER TO THE INVESTIGATOR

Research at Kennesaw State University that involves human participants is carried out under the oversight of an Institutional Review Board. Address questions or problems regarding these activities to the Institutional Review Board, Kennesaw State University, 585 Cobb Avenue, KH3403, Kennesaw, GA 30144-5591, (470) 578-2268.
Appendix E

Research Study Assent Form (11-14 Year Age Range)

Study Title: Who Am I and Who Do Others Say I Am: A Phenomenological Study of Early Adolescents’ Self-Perceptions. (KSU IRB Study #18-488)

Researcher: Linda Turner; cell: 404-610-1044; ljt 7176@students.kennesaw.edu

My name is Linda Turner. I am from Kennesaw State University.

- I am inviting you to be in a research study about what students think of themselves and what they think others think about them.
- Your parent knows we are going to ask you to be in this research study, but you get to make the final choice. It is up to you. If you decide to be in the study, I will ask you to create a Who Am I drawing about yourself and to write about one of the things from your drawing. Then some you will be invited to be interviewed about what you have written.
- If you are interviewed, I will be recording our conversation, so I can go back and listen to it again to make sure I have it all correct when I write about it.
- I hope to share the work I am doing with other teachers, so we can all get a better understanding of how sixth graders think about how other people view them.
- I will do my best to make the drawing, writing, and interviews fun, but you might find that you may get a little self-conscious and sensitive while you write about yourself. If you do, you can take a break, and then come back to it in a little bit OR you can stop altogether. We will do these activities during our MAP testing down time. For the interview, you may have to miss part (only 30 minutes) of Field Day. We will meet in my classroom, and I will have snacks and drinks during these activities.
- If anything in the study worries you or makes you uncomfortable, let me know and you can stop. There are no right or wrong answers to any of my questions. You don’t have to answer any question you don’t want to answer or do anything you don’t want to do.
- Everything you say and do will be private. I won’t tell your parents or anyone else what you say or do while you are taking part in the study unless you tell me something that would be dangerous to yourself or to someone else. When I tell other people about what we learned in the study, I won’t tell them your name or the name of anyone else who took part in the research study.
- You don’t have to be in this study. It is up to you. You can say no now or you can change your mind later. No one will be upset if you change your mind.
- You can ask me questions at any time and you can talk to your parent any time you want. I will give you a copy of this form that you can keep.

Here is the name and phone number of someone you can talk to if you have questions about the study:

Name: Dr. Nita Paris  Phone number: 470-578-9094

Do you have any questions now that I can answer for you?
IF YOU WANT TO BE IN THE STUDY, SIGN OR PRINT YOUR NAME ON THE LINE BELOW:

Put an X on this line if it is okay for us to record you __________

___________________________________________________________________________
Child name and signature Date

Check which of the following applies (completed by person administering the assent.)

_____ Child is capable of reading and understanding the assent form and has signed above as documentation of assent to take part in this study.

_____ Child is not capable of reading the assent form, but the information was verbally explained to him/her. The child signed above as documentation of assent to take part in this study.

___________________________________________________________________________
Name of parent who gave consent for child to participate

___________________________________________________________________________
Signature of person obtaining assent Date
Appendix F

FORMULARIO DE CONSENTIMIENTO PARENTAL

Título del estudio de investigación: ¿Quién soy yo? Y ¿Quién dicen los demás que soy: un estudio fenomenológico de las autopercepciones de los primeros adolescentes? (KSU IRB Study #18-488)

Información de contacto del investigador: Linda Turner, 404-610-1044, lindaturner1@gmail.com
Se invita a su hijo a participar en un estudio de investigación dirigido por Linda Turner, estudiante de doctorado de Kennesaw State University. Antes de que decida permitir que su hijo participe en este estudio, debe leer este formulario y hacer preguntas si no comprende.

Descripción del Proyecto
El propósito del estudio es comprender cómo los adolescentes se ven a sí mismo y su percepción de cómo los ven los demás.

Explicación de los procedimientos
Los estudiantes crearán un organizador gráfico Who Am I dibujando un esquema de un Estudiante. Los estudiantes crearán un organizador gráfico Who Am I donde dibujarán un contorno de una figura. Pediré a los estudiantes que escriban las cosas que están en la cabeza (atleta, estudiante, hija, etc.). En los brazos, los estudiantes escribirán lo que hacen (jugar fútbol, tareas domésticas, tarea, baile, etc.). En el cofre, los estudiantes dibujarán un corazón y escribirán las personas y cosas que aman. En las piernas, enumerarán los lugares donde han ido o les gustaría ir. En el exterior de la figura, los estudiantes escribirán palabras o nombres de cómo piensan que otros (padres, compañeros, maestros y la sociedad en general) los ven. Una vez que se complete el organizador gráfico Who Am I, los estudiantes escribirán la razón por la cual creen que sus maestros o la sociedad los ven de la manera que identificaron. Después del organizador gráfico Who Am I y el trabajo escrito, invitaré a los estudiantes a participar en las entrevistas para analizar con más detalle lo que escribieron y lo que significa la escritura. Planeo grabar las entrevistas, para poder revisarlas según sea necesario.

Tiempo requerido
Los participantes completarán el organizador gráfico Who Am I y escribirán cuando no les toquen tomar el examen de MAP. Esta sesión durará aproximadamente 90 minutos. Las entrevistas se llevarán a cabo durante la última semana de clases después de que las calificaciones finales se hayan calculado y publicado. Las entrevistas no durarán más de 30 minutos cada una.

Riesgos o incomodidades
Puede haber una incomodidad mínima ya que los participantes pueden experimentar sentimientos de autoconciencia y / o autoconciencia durante el proceso de dibujo, redacción y / o entrevista. Los participantes pueden detener la actividad, tomar un descanso y regresar o suspender la participación por completo en cualquier momento sin ningún efecto perjudicial o dañino.
Beneficios
Los participantes pueden experimentar un sentido de comunidad y bienestar a medida que piensan en sí mismos y en sus atributos positivos. Los participantes pueden experimentar un sentido de orgullo mientras escriben y / o hablan de ellos mismos y de cómo se perciben a sí mismos.

Compensación (si corresponde)
No hay compensación por la participación en el estudio. Sin embargo, dado que la actividad se realiza al final del día escolar, se proporcionarán bocadillos y bebidas a todos los estudiantes de la clase, ya sea que hayan aceptado participar o no.

Confidencialidad
Los resultados de esta participación serán confidenciales. La confidencialidad se mantendrá mediante la asignación de la identificación del participante que se codificará a todos los datos escritos, dibujos y datos de la entrevista. Todos los nombres y cualquier dato de identificación personal en cualquiera de los datos escritos, de dibujo o de entrevista serán eliminados. La clave para la identificación del participante y el nombre del participante se mantendrá separada de otros datos junto con el consentimiento firmado y los formularios de consentimiento.

Criterios de inclusión para la participación
Los participantes en este estudio tienen entre 11 y 13 años de edad y son estudiantes en Marietta City Schools. Son estudiantes en la clase de aviso del investigador.

Consentimiento para participar
Doy mi consentimiento para que mi hijo, __________________________________________________________, participe en el proyecto de investigación descrito anteriormente. Entiendo que esta participación es voluntaria y que puedo retirar mi consentimiento en cualquier momento sin penalización. También entiendo que mi hijo puede retirar su consentimiento en cualquier momento sin penalización. Ponga una X en esta línea si está bien que grabemos a su hijo __________

________________________________________________
Firma del padre o representante autorizado, fecha

________________________________________________
Firma del investigador, fecha

__

FAVOR DE FIRMAR AMBAS COPIAS DE ESTE FORMULARIO, GUARDAR UNA Y DEVOLVER LA OTRA AL INVESTIGADOR
La investigación en Kennesaw State University que involucra participantes humanos se lleva a cabo bajo la supervisión de una Junta de Revisión Institucional. Dirija preguntas o problemas con respecto a estas actividades a la Junta de Revisión Institucional, Kennesaw State University, 585 Cobb Avenue, KH3403, Kennesaw, GA 30144-5591, (470) 578-2268.
Appendix G

MARIETTA CITY SCHOOLS
Access to Confidential Data
Application Agreement

Research Applicant ______ Linda Turner ______

Research Title ______ Early Adolescents' Perceptions of Themselves and of How Others View Them

Address ______ 81 Grampian Court ______

City/State/Zip ______ Marietta, GA 30008 ______

Telephone: Work ______ 770-429-3115 ______ ext 5931 ______ Home ______ 404-610-1044 ______

Fax ______ 770-429-3118 ______

E-mail ______ lturner@marietta-city.k12.ga.us ______

I understand that any unauthorized disclosure of confidential information is illegal as provided in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1973 (FERPA) and in the implementing federal regulations found in 34 CFR Part 99. I understand that participation in a research study by students, parents, and school staff is strictly voluntary.

In addition, I understand that any data, datasets or outputs that I, or any authorized representative, may generate from data collection efforts throughout the duration of the research study are confidential and the data are to be protected. I will not distribute to any unauthorized person any data or reports that I have access to or may generate using confidential data. I also understand that students, schools, or the district may not be identified in the research report. Data with names or other identifiers such as student numbers will be disposed of when their use is complete.

I understand that acceptance of this request for approval of a research project in no way obligates the Marietta City School System to participate in the research. I also understand that approval does not constitute commitment of resources or endorsement of the study or its findings by the school system or by the Marietta Board of Education.

If the research project is approved, I agree to abide by standards of professional conduct while working in the schools. I understand that failure to do so could result in termination of the research study.

I agree to send a copy of the study results to the superintendent and/or his designee after completion of the study for any future use to the Marietta City School System. I understand that the study is not complete until this report has been provided to the Marietta City School System.

Linda Turner ______ 4/12/18 ______
Research Applicant Signature ______

Linda Turner ______ 4/12/18 ______
Signature of Administrator or Staff Sponsor of Research Project ______

Linda Turner ______ 4/13/18 ______
Signature of Sponsoring Agency ______
Appendix H

APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE MARIETTA CITY SCHOOL SYSTEM

DISPOSITION

Researcher: Linda Turner

Title of Proposed Research Study: Early Adolescents’ Perceptions Of Themselves and of How Others View Them

Date Considered by the Administration and/or Marietta City Board of Education: 4/19/2018

Administratively or Board approved:
☑ Yes - please review additional information below

☐ Yes - pending documentation listed below

☐ No - please review additional information below

Research proposal may be resubmitted for further consideration with the following criteria: N/A

Additional Documentation:
• N/A

Additional Information:
• It is not permissible to reference the name of the school or school district in any documents related to this study.
• Please submit an electronic copy of your study to the district upon completion.
• School/teacher participation is completely voluntary.

District Contact: Dr. Belinda Walters-Brazile, Deputy Superintendent

Approved 4/18/18

Thur Moore
Review the IRB website for information about what type of IRB review applies to your study (http://research.kennesaw.edu/irb/about/review-classifications.php)

**Review type:**
- X Check here for a Request for Exemption
- __ Check here for an Expedited Review [IRB Reviewers may recommend a Full Board Review]

**Status of Primary Investigator:**
- ___ Faculty
- ___ Staff
- X Student

**Students as the Primary Investigator (PI) and their Faculty Advisors**
Students (graduate and undergraduate) must have a faculty advisor complete the last page of this form and submit all documents from the faculty advisor’s KSU email address. Students must also use their KSU email address in all IRB correspondence.

By submitting this form, you agree that you have read KSU’s Federal-wide Assurance of Compliance and agree to provide for the protection of the rights and welfare of your research participants as outlined in the Assurance. You also agree to submit any significant changes in the procedures of your project to the IRB for prior approval and agree to report to the IRB any unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risks to subjects or others.

**Title of Research**

| Early Adolescents’ Perceptions of Themselves and of How Others View Them |

**Start Date is date of IRB approval**

| Proposed start date: __4/26/2018__________ |

*The official start date for research is the date the IRB approval letter is issued. Research activities may not begin prior to final IRB approval. Studies should be submitted well in advance of the proposed start date to allow for processing, review, and approval. If you have not received a letter from the IRB in 10 business days of submission, please call or email requesting status update.*

**Is your research being funded in any way?**

| Yes* | X No |

*Where is the funding coming from? [Name of Federal Agency/Foundation/Department]*
**Primary Investigator**

Name:  
Linda Turner, Doctoral Candidate

Department:  
Secondary and Middle Grades Education

Telephone: 404-610-1044  
Email: ljt7176@students.kennesaw.edu

FOR RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY STUDENTS AS THE PRIMARY INVESTIGATOR, GO TO THE LAST PAGE OF THE APPLICATION FORM TO ENTER REQUIRED FACULTY ADVISOR INFORMATION.

Co-Investigator(s) who are faculty, staff, or students at KSU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____Faculty</td>
<td>___Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____Faculty</td>
<td>___Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____Faculty</td>
<td>___Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Names (include status and email):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Co-Investigator(s) who are NOT employees or students at KSU: Please submit your human participants training certificate with application materials.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Institution:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Institution:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Additional Names (include email and home institution): |

**ALL researchers listed on this application MUST have completed CITI training BEFORE an IRB Approval will be provided.**
Visit [http://research.kennesaw.edu/irb/citi-training.php](http://research.kennesaw.edu/irb/citi-training.php) for additional information about CITI training, how to choose the right course, and how to create a profile. ALL KSU faculty/staff/students MUST use their KSU provided email address on all correspondence.

**NOTE:** It is each researcher’s responsibility to ensure that the CITI Certificate does not expire during the course of the approved study. Failure to maintain a current certificate will invalidate your approval. Please use your KSU email address on your CITI profile and make sure your profile name matches the one provided above.

**Does your research involve minors?**  
__X__ Yes  ___No
See item number 5 below for parental consent and minor assent information. See [http://research.kennesaw.edu/irb/consent-templates.php](http://research.kennesaw.edu/irb/consent-templates.php) for forms and information.

**Will this research involve COLLABORATION with ANOTHER INSTITUTION?**  
__X__ Yes  ___No, go to question 1

If yes, provide the name of the Institution _____Marietta City School District_____

Has the other Institution conducted an IRB review of the study?
___No  __X__ Yes – Send that review with this approval form to the KSU IRB. (The review is underway. Linda, please go ahead and submit all you need to do and get the MCSD approval underway. We have to get that approval first!)

1. **Prior Research**

Have you submitted research on this topic to the KSU IRB previously?  
___Yes*  __X__ No  
*If yes, list the date, title, name of investigator, and study number:

N/A


2. **Description of Research**
   a. Purpose of and anticipated findings for this study:
This is a descriptive, qualitative study of how sixth-grade students perceive themselves and how they perceive others (peers, teachers, parents, society at large) see them. The purpose of the study is to describe how students’ perceptions may reflect constructs consistent with Steele’s conception of stereotype threat.

Research Questions:
1. How do early adolescents represent their perceptions of themselves through writing and interviews?
2. How do early adolescents represent their perceptions of what others think of them through writing and interviews?
3. How do these representations reflect the presence or absence of stereotypes related to gender, race, ethnicity, or the intersections of those identities?
4. How are these representations consistent or inconsistent with factors associated with Steele’s conception of stereotype threat?

b. Nature of data to be collected (interview (includes focus groups), online or hardcopy survey, observations, experimental procedures, etc.):

I will collect the following types of data from the students:

1. *Who Am I* graphic organizer which is the outline shape of a body which provides a template upon which students will write words that describe themselves (see page 19 of this application)
2. Written narratives in which students will explain the words they wrote on the *Who Am I* graphic organizer and why they chose those words.
3. Semi-structured Interviews with selected student volunteers as a follow up to explore in more detail the descriptors and the narrative the students provided.

I will also keep a reflective journal of my own thoughts and perspectives during the research and as I analyze the writing and interviews.

c. Data collection procedures: (include information on how consent will be obtained, how links will be provided, where interviews will be conducted, audio or video taping, etc.). Note: student email addresses are FERPA protected. Student email addresses, grades, or work cannot be collected without student consent and IRB approval.

The district literacy coach will explain the research study to my advisement students and will pass out parent consent forms and student assent forms to students. The students will return the forms to the school secretary in the front office, and she will give them to me. As I have done in years past, this activity will be completed with all of my advisory students but I will only use the data of those students who return both parental consent and student assent forms. The assignment is a non-graded assignment and I have used this and similar
assignments regularly to help students generate ideas for writing. No incentives will be provided to the students for participation.

I will begin my data collection in my current classroom with (how many students). The students will create the *Who Am I* graphic organizer by creating an outline of a person and fill in the interior based on the following prompts. "Inside the “head” of your drawing, write words that describe…. (Linda….add the actual prompts here) They will then write descriptions on the outside of the person based on my prompts. Linda….put in actual words you will use. These descriptions will be how students think others—their parents, peers, future teachers, and society—see them. Students will then choose one of the descriptions on the outside of the body about which to write their narrative. I will provide the following instructions for the narrative writing…"Put in the exact prompts you will use"….I will collect the *Who Am I* graphic organizer and written narratives from all students. I will select the data from the students who have returned the parental consent and student assent forms. After I analyze the *Who Am I* drawing and the narrative writings, I will select 7-10 students to ask for follow-up interviews. The open-ended interview questions will be grounded in the themes from my research questions and those that emerge from the data analysis. Questions will include the following: “

I will conduct the selected interviews during the last week of the school year. Students’ grades will have already been finalized the week prior so as not to compel students to participate. I will schedule times for the students to come to my classroom for our interview.

d. Survey instruments to be used (pre-/post-tests, interview and focus group questionnaires, online surveys, standardized assessments etc.). Attach all survey instruments with your application document):

Consent forms, sample of graphic organizer, and interview questions are attached.

The graphic organizer and narrative writing are both part of normal classroom activity which I have used in years past.

e. Method of selection/recruitment of participants:
Refer to the [KSU Mass Email policy](#) on the use emails to faculty/staff. For student recruitment via email, please also follow these mandatory instructions. ALL recruitment materials (flyers, emails, posters, etc.) MUST include your IRB Approval Study # and a statement that your study has been reviewed and approved by KSU’s IRB.
Participants will be middle school student volunteers from my existing class and who have returned both the parental consent and student assent forms. I am a language arts teacher, and I also have an advisory class comprised of 19 students with whom I meet every week. This advisory model is common in middle schools across Georgia and the U.S. and recommended by the Association of Middle Level Education. As is true for many middle schools across the country, most teachers at my school have advisory classes and all students are enrolled in advisory classes. I have chosen to invite my advisement students participate because advisement is a time when I can let go of the curriculum and interact with students on a more informal basis. Furthermore, I have chosen my advisement students as my participants is out of accessibility. During the end period of time I hope to collect my data, I have extended times with these students due to changes in the schedule to accommodate statewide testing. During these testing days, I will have my 19 advisees for upwards of 2 1/2 hours. This large block of time, in the beginning of May will be ideal for me to do the lesson I am proposing to collect data.

f. Participant age range: 11-13 Number: _19___

Sex: __Males ___Females or _X_Both

g. Incentives, follow-ups, compensation to be used: (e.g., Gift cards, course credit, etc.). Please visit HERE on our website for guidelines on participant incentive payments.

As I have done in years past, this activity will be completed with all of my advisory students. The assignment is a non-graded assignment. I have used this and similar assignments regularly to help students generate ideas for writing. No incentives will be provided to the students for participation. However, since the activities will occur at the end of the school day, I will provide snacks and soft drinks to all students (regardless if they have returned consent and assent forms) during the activity and to interviewees during the follow-up interview.

3. Risks
Describe in detail any psychological, social, legal, economic, or physical risk that might occur to participants. *Note that all research may entail some level of risk, though perhaps minimal.* According to the federal regulations at §46.102(i), *minimal risk* means that the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests.

_X_ There is minimal risk (if selected, must be reflected within consent documents)

__ There is more than minimal risk (requires full explanation below and in consent documents)

Anticipated risks include (if selected, specific potential risks must be incorporated into the consent documents):
Participants may experience feelings of self-consciousness and/or self-awareness during the drawing, writing and/or interview process. Participants may take a break from the activity and return later OR cease participation all together at any time without any detrimental or harmful effects.

If more than minimal risk is anticipated, describe your method for handling risk.

N/A

4. Benefits

Federal Guidelines and University policy require that risks from participation be outweighed by potential benefits to participants and/or humankind in general.

a. Identify potential benefits to participants resulting from this research (It is possible that there are no direct benefits or possible specific benefits, either must be reflected in the consent documents):

Participants may experience a sense of community and well-being as they think about themselves and their positive attributes. Participants may experience a sense of pride as they write about and/or talk about themselves and how they perceive themselves.

b. Identify benefits to humankind in general resulting from this research. While there may be no potential benefits to participants there must be some benefit to humankind in order to receive IRB approval. Please include these benefits in the consent documents:

The results of this study will add to the existing research on early adolescents’ perceptions of themselves; their beliefs about how others (peers, parents, teachers, society at large) see them. Findings will further our understanding of if and when early adolescents’ perceptions of themselves exhibit evidence of constructs related to Steele’s conception of stereotype threat.

5. Informed Consent

All studies of human participants must include informed consent (see IRB approved templates). Consent may require a signature or may simply require that participants be informed. Minor participants must receive an assent form in conjunction with parental consent (see IRB approved templates). If deception is necessary, please justify and describe, and submit debriefing procedures.

What is the consent process to be followed in this study? Submit your consent form(s) with the application as a separate document(s).
The district’s literacy coach, whom the students do not know, will meet with my advisory students to explain and describe the study to my students. She will pass out the consent and assent paperwork to the students. Students will take the paperwork home for parents to read. If the parent consents, he/she will sign the consent form and the student will sign the assent form and return both to the school secretary in the main office. Students will have two weeks to return the forms.

Since this assignment is one I have used previously and is commonly used to assist students in generating ideas for writing, all students in the class will participate in the activity. However, the data selected for use in the study will be only from those students who have assented to participate and whose parents have consented for the student to participate. Students will be informed that they may cease participation at any time for any reason without harm or consequences.

6. Online Surveys

Will you use an online survey to obtain data from human participants in this study? Check all that apply.

_X_ No. If no, skip to Question 7 below.

___ Yes, I will use an online survey to obtain data in this study. If yes:

a. How will online data be collected and handled? Select one and add the chosen statement to your consent document.

___ Data collected online will be handled in an anonymous manner and Internet Protocol addresses WILL NOT be collected by the survey program.

___ Data collected online will be handled in a confidential manner (identifiers will be used), but Internet Protocol addresses WILL NOT be collected by the survey program.

___ Data collected online will be handled in a confidential manner and Internet Protocol addresses WILL be collected by the survey program.

b. Include an “I agree to participate” and an “I do not agree to participate” answer at the bottom of your consent document. Program the “I do not agree to participate” statement to exclude the participant from answering the remainder of the survey questions (this is accomplished through "question logic" in Survey Monkey or “skip logic” in Qualtrics).

Ensure that the online consent document is the first page the participant sees after clicking on the link to your online survey.

Although you may construct your own consent document, see the IRB approved Online Survey Cover Letter template (http://research.kennesaw.edu/irb/consent-templates.php), which contains
all of the required elements of informed consent that must be addressed within any online consent document.

7. Vulnerable Participants

Will minors or other vulnerable participants (e.g., prisoners, pregnant women, those with intellectual disabilities) be included in this research?

_X_ Yes. Outline procedures to be used in obtaining the agreement (parental consent, assent or guardian consent) for vulnerable participants. Describe plans for obtaining consent of the parent, guardian, or authorized representative of these participants. For research conducted within the researcher’s own classroom, describe plans for having someone other than the researcher obtain consent/assent so as to reduce the perception of coercion.

The district’s literacy coach, whom the students do not know, will meet with my advisory students to explain and describe the study to my students. She will describe the purpose of the research as well as what participation in the research entails. She will describe what data will be collected and data collection procedures. She will pass out the consent and assent paperwork to the students and explain that both forms (parental consent and student assent) must be returned signed for them to participate in the study. Students will take the paperwork home for parents to read. If the parent consents, he/she will sign the consent form and the student will sign the assent form and return both to the school secretary in the main office. Students will have two weeks to return the forms.

Since this assignment is one I have used previously and is commonly used to assist students in generating ideas for writing, all students in the class will participate in the activity. However, the data selected for use in the study will be only from those students who have assented to participate and whose parents have consented for the student to participate. Students will be informed that they may cease participation at any time for any reason without harm or consequences.

____ No. All studies excluding minors as participants should include language within the consent document stating that only participants aged 18 and over may participate in the study.

8. Future Risks

How are participants protected from the potentially harmful future use of the data collected in this research?

a. Describe measures planned to ensure anonymity or confidentiality. Studies can only be considered completely anonymous if no identifying information is collected; therefore, a cover letter must be used in place of a signed consent form.
Confidentiality will be maintained by assignment of participant ID which will be coded to all written data, drawings, and interview data. All names and any personally identifiable data in any of the written, drawing or interview data will be redacted. A key to the participant ID and participant name will be kept separate from other data along with signed consent and assent forms.

b. Describe methods for storing data while study is underway. Personal laptops are not considered secure.

Files of coded documents (all names redacted) will be stored electronically on password protected desktop office computer to which only the researcher has access. The key to participant ID and participant name will be kept on a USB in a locked drawer and on a password protected desktop computer in the faculty supervisor’s Kennesaw State University office to which only the faculty and the student researcher have access to.

c. List dates and plans for storing and/or destroying data and media once study is completed. Please note that all final records relating to conducted research, including signed consent documents, must be retained for at least three years following completion of the research and must be accessible for inspection by authorized representatives as needed.

After the study is complete (2018), files of coded documents (all names redacted) will be stored electronically on password protected desktop office computer to which only the researcher has access for five years. The key to participant ID and participant name will be kept on a USB in a locked drawer and on a password protected desktop computer in the faculty supervisor’s Kennesaw State University office for five years to which only the faculty and the student researcher have access to. At the end of five years (2023) the files will be purged from the computer and from the USB.

d. If digital audio, video, or other electronic data are to be used, when will they be destroyed?

Audiotapes of interviews will be destroyed after 5 years.

9. Illegal Activities

Will collected data relate to any illegal activities? __Yes* _X_No
This includes asking about illegal activities from participants or surveys containing any reference to illegal activities (e.g., questions requesting information about witnessing illegal behaviors that
others have engaged in, minors drinking or using drugs, or any illegal drug use or violence of any nature that would result in legal action).

*If yes, please explain.

N/A

Is my Study Ready for Review?

Every research protocol, consent document, and survey instrument approved by the IRB is designated as an official institutional document; therefore, study documents must be as complete as possible. Research proposals containing spelling or grammatical errors, missing required elements of informed consent (within consent or assent documents), not addressing all questions within this form, or missing required documents will be classified as incomplete.

All studies classified as incomplete may be administratively rejected and returned to the researcher and/or faculty advisor without further processing.

If you are a non-KSU researcher wishing to recruit participants from the KSU campus, please follow these instructions: http://research.kennesaw.edu/irb/about/external-international-research.php

Student researchers make sure that your faculty advisor completes the following page and sends all study related material from their KSU email address to irb@kennesaw.edu. Failure to follow this procedure will result in a significant delay in the approval process.

**RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE STUDENTS AS PRIMARY INVESTIGATORS**

All undergraduate and graduate students who will be acting as the Primary Investigator must be under the direct supervision of a faculty advisor. The faculty advisor must review the IRB application materials and agrees to supervise the student’s proposed human subject research project by completion and submission of this routing sheet.

All application materials must be submitted by the faculty advisor from their KSU email address to irb@kennesaw.edu. Students may not submit their materials to the IRB for the first review; however, subsequent revisions can be sent directly to irb@kennesaw.edu with a cc to your advisor and MUST come from your KSU provided email account.
FOR RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY STUDENTS OR NON-FACULTY STAFF. This study, if approved, will be under the direct supervision of the following faculty advisor who is a member of the KSU faculty:

Faculty Advisor

Name:
Nita A. Paris, Ph.D.

Department:
Secondary & Middle Grades Education

Email: nparis@kennesaw.edu
Phone: 470-578-2882

By checking the items below and submitting all materials from your KSU email, the faculty advisor for this project attests the following:

_X__ I have personally reviewed each of my student’s IRB application documents (approval request, exemption request, informed consent documents, child assent documents, survey instruments, etc.) for completeness, and all documents pertaining to the conduct of this study are enclosed (consents, assents, questionnaires, surveys, assessments, etc.)

_X__ I have completed the Social/Behavioral Research course (Biomedical version only for medical/biological human studies) CITI training course in the ethics of human subject research within the past three years as have all researchers named within this application.

_X__ I approve this research and agree to supervise the student(s) as the study is conducted.

Date: __4/16/18_______
Appendix J

Script for Principal’s Secretary for Handing Out Consent/Assent Forms

Ms. Turner would like to invite you to be part of her research study. She is studying how early adolescents think of themselves and how they think others think of them.

If you would like to participate, please read through the Research Study Assent Form, so you can be aware of all the study will ask of you. If you have any questions after reading the form, you can ask Ms. Turner or call the number at the bottom of the form. Take the form home and talk it over with your parents.

After you read the form, if you still want to participate, and your parents say it’s okay, please sign the form, and return it to me (Ms. B.), along with the signed Parental Consent Form. I have Spanish versions of the Parental Consent form, so take those if you need them.

Please take TWO copies of each form, but only return ONE copy of each. You keep your copy, and your parents keep theirs.

If you don’t want to participate, that is absolutely fine. No one will be upset if you don’t want to participate or if you change your mind once you sign the forms.