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The University of San Francisco

AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES' PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE
TO HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION

A Dissertation Presented
to
The Faculty of the School of Education
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
Samantha Marilyn Rainer
San Francisco
December 2009

THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Dissertation Abstract

African American Males' Perceptions of Factors that
Contribute to High School Completion

Current research has focused primarily on the negative aspects of African American males and high school attainment, examining the misleading high school drop out rates among African American males rather than the steady increase in high school completion. My study explored the factors that help contribute to high school completion among African American males. My participants were seven African American males who were recent high school graduates planning to attend college. I used a qualitative approach specifically participatory research, to engage my participants in dialogues discussing their high school experiences as African American males. Through the dialogues the researcher was able to extract pertinent themes that reflected the participants' experiences. This study demonstrated that the following factors helped to contribute to high school completion among African American males: (a) a close relationship with parents or mentors helped to support and motivate African American males in their academic achievement, (b) positive teacher perception and high expectation, and (c) after school extra-curricular activities can have a positive impact on academic achievement. My study helped to shift the lens from the challenges African American males face within the educational system to focus the positive aspects of academic achievement among African American males. The findings of this study revealed that African American males have greater academic success with a strong support system/network in place. The findings showed that being involved in after-school extra-curricular activities helped to motivate young African American males and

promote academic achievement. For those reasons, my research will make a significant impact on the ongoing scholarly research on African American males and academic achievement.

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

<u>Samantha Rainer</u> Candidate	<u>12/07/09</u> Date
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CHAPTER I

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Introduction

African American students face unique challenges in U.S. schools by virtue of their racial identity and the way that identity can be a source of devaluation (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). Yet contemporary U.S. society continues to ignore the social issues African American students experience in U.S. schools today. Thompson (2004) suggests that the social issues that African American students experience include weak social networks (relationships) between school personnel and students, cultural disconnection, the lure of negative community or neighborhood influences, low level parental support, low teacher expectations, and negative media perceptions. These social issues often present challenges for African American males that are difficult to overcome.

Overcoming challenging social issues such as negative perceptions is not new for African American males. According to Austin (1996), in many social domains of American society, African American males are often characterized as *endangered*, *uneducable*, *dysfunctional*, and *dangerous* (Gibbs, 1988; Majors & Billson, 1992; Parham & McDavis, 1987). Such terms perpetuate negative images and stereotypes that continue to pose challenging and sometimes impossible social issues for African American males. Bailey & Moore (2004), Moore (2000), and Moore & Herndon (2003) suggest that such depictions of African American males can negatively impact the perceived ability and behavior of African American males and impede their pursuit of the American Dream or academic achievement.

These negative perceptions of African American males are given constant focus and attention in the literature. The literature rarely focuses on those African American males who take on and overcome these challenging social issues. Thus it is important to give attention to those men who have been able to jump through persistent hurdles, face challenging social issues, and achieve success in the U.S. The academic community needs to deeply understand how African American males are perceived and viewed within the U.S. school system.

As stated above, research literature on African American male high school attainment has focused on the negative aspect of the issue. Patton (1981) suggests that when attention has focused on this subject, the results usually reveal an educational system that limits the positive growth of Black males. The focus has primarily been on the misleading high school drop out rates among African American males, rather than the steady increase in high school completion. According to Mishel and Roy (2006), data from the Current Population Survey conducted by the Census Bureau shows that between 1994 and 2004 African American males' high school completion grew 4.1, 85.0% to 89.1% increase in high school completion, a 4.1% difference. This increase illustrates a growing trend reflecting the importance of education.

Mishel and Roy's (2006) study focused on the graduation gaps between African American and Latino students. Their data reveals an overall modest increase among African and Latino students in high school completion and a steady decline in drop-outs over the past 10 years. This increase in high school completion also illustrates the narrowing academic gap between African and Latino students and white students. For African Americans, Mishel and Roy (2006) report estimates graduation from high school

with a *regular diploma* range between 69% and 75%, with the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) showing a 74% graduation rate. These percentages express a higher rate of high school completion among African American youth than what is consistently reported. According to Belgrave and Allison (2006), for all African Americans, the overall rate of actual high school completion is 50.2%, with 56.2% of females and 42.8% of males. These percentages show an estimated 25% lower graduation rate than reported in Mishel and Roy's study.

Despite Mishel and Roy's (2006) study on the steady increase in high school attainment among African American youth, current literature focuses on the negative plight of the African American male in U.S. society. The focus tends towards issues such as high incarceration rates, negative media perception, and stereotype threat. This last concept, according to Steele & Aronson (1995), is the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype. These social issues have a significant effect on the academic achievement of African American youth.

A challenging issue that continues to negatively impact African American males is the high rate of incarceration. According to the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin (2007) on Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear 2006, many more black men (836,800) were in custody at the state and federal prison and local jail level in comparison to white (718,100) or Latino men (426,900). African American men comprised 41% of the 2 million in custody, and African American men between the ages 20 to 29 made up 15.5% of all men processed into the U. S. prison system. The Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin (2007) also reports that African American men overall were

incarcerated 6.5 times the rate of white men, with the highest rate of incarceration occurring between the ages of 25-29. Learning that there is such a high percentage of the African American males in jail can be startling, even shocking, to comprehend.

However, it is important to understand that the other 59% of African American men are not in prison. According to the Henry J Kaiser Family Foundation (2006), *Race, Ethnicity, and Health Care* fact sheet in 2005, 77.4% of African American men graduated from high school and 7.5% from college. What factors then are contributing to the academic attainment of the 77.4% of African American males who are completing high school? Media perception also impacts the academic achievements of African American males, and often perpetuates the negative stereotypes and images of African American men. Although many successful African American men are taking care of their business, the media rarely portrays these men. Many are educated, financially stable and hard working men who are trying to build strong positive family units as well as find ways to be involved in their community. Boles (2007) contends that most of our young African American men do not see these role models in the media, but are instead bombarded with images that reinforce and promulgate stereotypes that negatively impact their development and expectations.

Boles (2007) suggests that this media distortion allows two distinct outcomes to take place: (1) an insatiable desire for immediate financial gratification, and (2) the overshadowing and devaluation of attainable, positive role models. These outcomes are not occurring by chance; according to the 2005 PCAG Multicultural Kids Study, cable television plays a significant role in the lives of African American youth. This means

that a greater number of African American youth are consuming images that do very little to reinforce positive values and morals into the community.

Boles (2007) recognizes that these outcomes perpetuate social and cultural inequities that persist within the African American community as well as in the psychological development of the African American male. The media images continue to reinforce the impossible unattainable goals and misplaced values that send negative messages to African American youth, specifically males. More media focus needs to be on those African American men who are creating a positive and encouraging environment. Boles suggest that this new focus is necessary for young African American men to be able to seek guidance and counseling from those role models who are demonstrating positive examples of a successful African American man. Through these positive role models young African American men can begin to learn how to combat the negative images in the media, and ultimately change society's perceptions of the young African American male.

Psychologists Claude Steele and Joshua Aronson (1995) have developed the concept of "stereotype threat" Steele and colleagues have defined stereotype threat as "the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype" (p. 111). This fear refers to the pressure an individual from a stereotyped group may feel in a performance situation and the risk of confirming that negative stereotype. For African Americans, academic performance can cause a pressured situation in which that individual may feel that their academic abilities may be judged based on their race. Steele and Aronson (1995) refer to this impaired performance as "overprediction phenomenon" (p. 98), describing African

Americans who are academically capable (as reflected in their aptitude scores comparable to their European American peers) and yet demonstrate lower academic performance. This lower academic performance is possibly due to the negative stereotypes about academic ability that are associated with African American males.

In summary, social issues, such as rates of high school retention, incarceration, negative media perception, or stereotype threat, form the foundation for many research studies. These challenging social issues have raised much concern for the plight of the African American community, especially males. For many African American males these social issues shape their reality. Overcoming such issues can present a daunting, seemingly insurmountable, barrier for many African American males.

Yet many young African American males are able to overcome these challenging issues and attain success. These individuals have fought against society's negative perceptions and stereotypes of who and what an African American males should be. These men have been able to navigate their way through some of the social barriers and redefine what success means for an African American male in the U.S. Hopefully, this research study provides more insight into those African American males whose stories of success and accomplishment can inspire others to do the same.

Statement of the Problem

Although African American males face challenging social issues such as high school retention, incarceration, negative media perceptions, and stereotype threat that often impede their academic achievement, many of these young men still have found ways to successfully navigate through such issues. However, most research studies have

neglected to identify African American males who are confronting these social issues head on and building social networks while navigating towards academic achievement.

Garibaldi (2007) conducted a study that demonstrates a steady increase in high school completion among African American students, especially males. Yet most studies focus on the overwhelmingly challenging social issues such as high school retention or incarceration rates among African American students. Shifting the lens from the consistent reporting of those social challenges faced by many young African American males, research studies can begin to highlight those men who are able to attain success. This shift helps to counteract the negative portrayal of African American males in society as well as highlight the positive images.

Prompted by the lack of research on African American males who navigate their pathway to successful and academic achievement, the researcher took the opportunity to identify factors contributing to the successful completion of high school among African American males. This research provides new information to help educators, community members, and society understand the necessary factors that must be in place for African American males to achieve academic success.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine factors such as (1) support networks within school systems, (2) parental involvement, (3) teacher expectations, and (4) positive or negative community influences that contribute to successful high school completion of African American males entering into university. For the purpose of this study, “success” is defined as accomplishments and achievements that help to achieve a

specific goal. Successful African American males in this study are those graduating from high school and pursuing higher education.

The study specifically focuses on (1) the social and psychological factors that contribute to the motivation among these African American males to successfully complete high school and pursue a degree in higher education, and (2) the types of support systems needed from the family, school, and community to help these African American males successfully complete high school.

Research Questions

1. According to successful African American males, how does society perceive the academic achievement of African American men? What role does the media play in that perception?
2. What specific variables do successful African American males attribute as leading to their academic achievement?
3. To what extent do successful African American males perceive teacher expectations as contributing to their motivation to complete high school?

Theoretical Framework

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of those factors contributing to the successful completion of high school among African American males and the support systems necessary for this achievement, the research examined James Coleman (1966) and Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) concepts of social and cultural capital. This study also investigated anthropologist John Ogbu's (1986) cultural-ecological perspective which was used as the theoretical framework for this study.

Social and Cultural Capital

Sociologists James Coleman (1966), Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Claude Passeron (1990) have developed the theoretical concepts of social and cultural capital, and each have expanded on the concept of capital and its various forms. Coleman, Bourdieu and Passeron argue that adequate access to social and cultural capital is instrumental to positive educational outcomes. For the purpose of this research, the concepts of social and cultural capital were used in order to examine factors that contribute to the successful educational outcomes for African American males.

Social Capital

Coleman (1966) and Bourdieu (1986) recognized that access to social capital increases an individual's chance for greater academic opportunity. Social capital highlights ways in which social organization—in the form of small networks of relationships and broad societal patterns of interactions—enhances the productive capacity of individuals and groups (Coleman, 1988). These relationships are important to the academic achievement of the student, who often needs guidance, assistance, and support to help him/her accomplish his/her academic goals. Coleman's idea stresses the role of social capital as a way of communicating norms, trust, authority, and social controls that an individual must understand and adopt in order to succeed. Dance (2002) suggests these characteristics of social capital exist in the interpersonal and institutional relationships (that is, social networks or group life) between and among individuals. Coleman (1988) recognized that these relationships function to facilitate individual accomplishments or actions that would be otherwise unattainable without such connections.

An example of a social network is the teacher-student relationship. This network provides the student with an opportunity to develop and cultivate a relationship that will benefit them academically (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). As this relationship develops, the student is introduced to various social networks, such as school counselors (K-12 or college), teachers, administrators, or college recruiters that will lend support and guidance through their educational career. As the student progresses through their educational career, these networks become more varied and complex, expanding and developing into new relationships, thus providing the individual with greater opportunity towards academic success. For many African American students access to social capital is limited thus posing a greater challenge to academic success.

Bourdieu's (1986) views on social capital are based on his theoretical ideas of class. While Coleman (1988) suggests social capital can improve an individual's chances and opportunities in society, Bourdieu (1986) examines how social capital can be used to produce and reproduce inequality. Bourdieu's (1977; 1992) main distinction is his belief that social capital operates as a tool of cultural reproduction in explaining unequal educational achievement. O'Brien and O'Fathaigh (2005) suggest that Bourdieu's theory proffers socio-cultural explanations for why under-represented groups remain excluded from the educational process. By expanding on and analyzing the cultural barriers of one's own lived experiences, only then will the institution of education can begin to understand the hopeless process of education among these groups of students.

Cultural Capital

Bourdieu (1986) uses the theory of cultural capital as a way to focus on how social structures and institutions play a part in producing inequality. Bourdieu and

Passeron (1990) offer powerful theoretical insights into the critical importance of cultural and social capital in education and how this capital is distributed in ways that contribute to the reproduction of socio-economic inequalities. They examine how one can identify many or all the impediments to removing inequality. The opportunity for progression towards a just and equitable society for all starts with analyzing forces and influences that act on students to either increase or decrease the chance of success, and finding ways to remove these impediments.

Armstrong and McMahon (2006) suggest that evaluating cultural capital is one way to understand exclusion of students from the learning process. Cultural capital can be defined as a set of valued resources that an individual needs in order to navigate through societal pathways. This set of value resources may include the way a person speaks, style preferences, or how they act and think in social settings. According to Dance (2002), scholars argue that schools are *mainstream* social settings that fortify and reproduce the linguistic and cultural practices imposed as legitimate by the dominant group in society. Because schools are *mainstream* social settings that reinforce dominant social and cultural ideology, the values and ideals of students from under-represented groups are discouraged and devalued. Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural capital will be used as a way to explore the educational system as a social structure and institution. This theory will also be employed as a way to give possible explanations for the barriers and challenges African American students, especially males, must face as they traverse their way through the educational system.

Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Claude Passeron (1990) contend that cultural capital is of critical importance to the individual; through this coveted access a person is able to

maneuver through the dominant culture of society. Cultural connections are important for the individual because they allow that person to navigate their way through the dominant culture of society. Bourdieu (1986) suggests that parents provide children with cultural capital, the attitudes and knowledge that make the educational experience a comfortable and familiar place in which they can succeed. It is through this stage of parental provision that children begin to develop and formulate their opinions and feelings about education.

Margaret Gibson and John Ogbu (1991) recognize that cultural capital, when not cultivated and developed properly, can contribute to the reproduction of socio-economic inequalities to those who have been marginalized and disadvantaged in education, such as African American males. It is important that an individual develop the values, attitudes, and learning styles that will allow him/her to attain success educationally and economically. For marginalized and disadvantaged populations such as African American males, cultural capital is a vastly different acquisition that is often times both difficult to negotiate and navigate within the dominant society.

Cultural-Ecological Perspective

Ogbu and Fordham (1986) have proposed that some African Americans may reject education because it is identified with an economic and status attainment system linked to their oppression by European Americans. African Americans who seek identity and achievement within such a status system actually identify and position oneself within a system that has historically forbidden them access. Ogbu suggests the presence of two different types of minorities in the U.S.: voluntary (immigrant)—groups whose ancestors came to the U.S. in search of greater economic opportunities; or involuntary

(nonimmigrant)—groups whose ancestors brought to this country either by force (African Americans) or by conquest. Ogbu (1994) argues that minority students operate out of a dual frame of reference that corresponds to their cultural frame of reference.

Voluntary immigrants, unlike involuntary immigrants, for example, possess a positive dual frame of reference: they are able to make comparisons between their new experiences living in the United States and their past experiences in their home country. For them the comparison is a positive one because they see more opportunities for success in the United States than back home. As a result they are willing to accommodate and accept less than equal treatment in order to improve their chances for economic success (Ogbu, 1978).

The dual frame of reference that involuntary minorities operate out of illustrates the various cultural differences and experiences in comparison to the dominant society. Involuntary minorities' experiences are both different and negative in comparison to those of voluntary immigrants. For involuntary minorities, the point of comparison is the dominant group (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). Involuntary minorities view their socio-economic status in society as inferior in comparison to white America. For example, the schools that involuntary minority students attend compared typically do not provide the same level of educational experience as those of middle class white Americans.

Ogbu (1990), through his research in minority education from a comparative or cross-cultural perspective, examined how the social history of African Americans and their historic and contemporary relationships with schools have informed their philosophy of schooling and theory of achievement. Ogbu demonstrated how the

educational process must take into account the social and cultural differences as well as the lived experiences that students of involuntary minority status bring. This research will use Ogbu's cross-cultural perspective to analyze African American students, specifically males and their academic achievement.

School Systems as Support between Student and School Personnel

According to Stanton-Salazar (2001), school systems are essential to the establishment of social networks among adolescents and children of low status backgrounds. School systems can provide adolescents with human knowledge that allows them to navigate the social, political, and economic areas of society. These systems assist young adolescents, such as African American males, in developing social relationships outside of their family and community. These systems are constructed as social highways for adolescents to navigate as they establish vital relationships between school personnel and peers. These relationships are very important, yet often more difficult to establish for African American students. The lack of trust and support these adolescents may feel towards school personnel such as administrators, teachers, and counselors, often contributes to their lack of academic achievement.

Stanton-Salazar (2001) suggested that when adolescents are able to develop relationships among and with school personnel it is "...contingent on the establishment of relations of trust and positive sentiment." (p. 166). Stanton-Salazar explored how access to multiple forms of social and institutional support from school personnel establishes positive relationships among adolescents which can improve academic achievement. He also observed that relationships formed between adolescents and school personnel, such as teachers and counselors, can be quite complex and demonstrate various forms of

support. Stanton-Salazar expressed that to establish and develop caring and supportive relationships, school personnel must offer tacit and explicit forms of emotional support and intimate counsel as well as institutional support.

Caring and Support

Caring is a characteristic demonstrated by teachers that students feel great influence and impact on their academic success. It has a direct impact on student academic achievement: caring and support shown by teachers towards students results in greater academic success. Noddings (1992) defines caring as not occurring in isolation, but within a supportive relationship that demonstrates a level of trust and connection between the two individuals. According to Muller, Katz, & Dance, (1999), many students experience a lack of caring in today's institutions, particularly at school. An effective teacher-student relationship is one in which both individuals share an sharing understanding and respect for one another that goes beyond school walls.

An effective teacher-student relationship is one in which both individuals express mutual respect, trust and understanding of one another, so that positive change can occur within the student (Weissglass, 1998). As this relationship develops, the teacher begins to understand and respect the student and his/her background. This understanding and respect shown by the teacher demonstrates to the student beginning levels of care and support. Weissglass suggests that relationships make it safe for people to go beneath the surface, enabling them to confront beliefs, attitudes, and patterns of behavior that include their becoming confident learners and growing into powerful adults. By building a positive and solid relationship filled with care, trust, support, comfort, and understanding, the student gains more opportunities and choices.

Teacher-Student Expectations

Teachers' expectations are a critical factor in influencing students' academic achievement. For youth from low-income backgrounds and/or marginalized communities, a teachers' negative perception can quickly and permanently disengage the student from a positive educational experience. "Teachers often base their expectations on the student's prior performance, using indicators such as test scores, track placement, and on other characteristics such as behavior, physical appearance, socioeconomic status, the student's expectations, and race and ethnicity" (Muller, Katz, & Dance, 1999, p. 297). Overall, teachers' expectations influence the student's social navigation through school.

"Just as teachers' expectations are associated with their behavior and classroom processes, the students' educational expectations predict academic performance, educational attainment, and (to a lesser extent) occupational attainment" (Muller, Katz, & Dance, 1999, p. 298). If teachers have higher expectations of their students, then the students in turn will begin to expect more from their own academic ability. The student will also have more motivation and desire to engage and navigate their own learning process, all due to the higher expectation set by the teacher.

Parent Expectations, Family Values, and Community Involvement

The active engagement of parent, children, extended family, and their community is vitally important to the educational experiences and outcomes of African American children. Expectations of parents, teachers, and students play a pivotal role in students' educational outcomes. Expectations about grades, number of years of schooling children should complete, and future career prospects are related to school performance (Hill,

1971). Parent expectations are important to positive academic outcomes, a positive community or neighborhood can play a critical role in those experiences as well.

The community or neighborhood plays a monumental role in the educational experiences and outcomes of African American youth. Belgrave and Allison (2006) found that the community or neighborhood provides structural factors that help to shape the necessary foundations to succeed within the dominant social structure of society. A community that is unified in its promotion of fostering successful youth provides more opportunities to achieve positive academic outcomes. A positive community can be essential the difference between an African American youth graduating or dropping out from high school.

Educational Significance

Janice E. Hale (2001) has noted that the most critical issue facing the African American community and society as a whole is improving the future of African American males. It is time for the African American community to reinvest in the future of its male youth. As a community, importance should be placed on the guidance of children through their educational journey towards success by investing in their future.

This study hopefully provides additional insight into how the public school system in connection with the African American community could help African American students build relationships with community members, such as educators and administrators. These relationships can be the foundation to gain social and cultural access into mainstream society. Past research has often focused excessively on problems (e.g. rates of high school retention, incarceration, and low employment) among African American males. In contrast, this study presents the stories of individuals who found

success in the public school system and pursued a degree in higher education. By sharing these individual stories, this study can demonstrate the positive support system allowing the youth to achieve academic success.

For the purpose of this study, qualitative research was conducted in order to expose the stories and experiences of those individuals were able to navigate their way through the intricate social and cultural networks to attain academic success. Qualitative research allowed the researcher to conduct dialogues with participants that hopefully created levels of trust and comfort so that their shared experiences could provide insights, support, and encouragement to others. Finally, qualitative research helped to continue and expand the necessary discourse on educational attainment among African American males in American society.

Definitions of Terms

Social Capital-the social resources and networks that enable an individual to promote their own or others' educational achievement, economic, or social attainment, Coleman (1966) and Pierre Bourdieu (1986).

Cultural Capital-forms of knowledge acquired through parental and familial connections. Cultural Capital is the attitudes, skills, and knowledge which are beneficial for success in an educational setting, Bourdieu (1986).

Cultural-Ecological Perspective-the idea that African Americans have been systematically prevented from taking advantage of the American educational system. Some African Americans may reject American education because it is identified with an economic and status attainment system linked to their oppression by European Americans Ogbu (1978).

Voluntary Immigrants-groups whose ancestors came to the U.S. in search of greater social, economic, and educational opportunities, Ogbu (1978).

Involuntary Immigrants- groups whose ancestors suffered slavery or colonization and who historically were denied true acceptance into American society, Ogbu (1978).

Stereotype Threat-A type of confirmation bias, can be either positive or negative. For the purpose of this study it's the idea that one's race or gender may play a role in academic performance and make significant impact on academic achievement, Perry, Steele, & Hilliard (2003).

Over prediction Phenomenon-Underrepresented minority students such as African Americans tend not to perform well academically despite what standardized scores predict. Academic performance can cause a pressured situation where the individual may feel that their academic abilities are being judged based on their race Ogbu, (1986).

“Double-Consciousness”-the concept of viewing oneself through the eyes of others and how they perceive an individual, Du Bois (1969).

“Acting White”-behavior that is perceived as being compliant with the dominant culture which include traits such as mastery of the Standard English language, excelling academically, or in the eyes of their peers “to achieve is to be white”, Ogbu and Fordham (1986).

Racelessness-African Americans who distance themselves from Black culture in response to the lack of support they receive from the African American community Fordham (1988).

Constructivist Listening-encourages the speaker to reflect on their lived experiences; to express and work through feelings that is conflicting with clearer thinking. Constructivist

listening allows the researcher to hear what is not being said, reflect and keep an open mind to the participant Weissglass (1990).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

President and chief executive officer of the National Urban League, Marc H. Morial (2007), addresses the need to empower black males to reach their full potential. He acknowledges several black men who were nationally recognized for their achievements in this country. For example, Rep. Charles Rangel became the first African American to head the House Ways and Means Committee, one of the most powerful and prestigious committees in Congress. Morial continues to highlight two African American men who represent the most accomplished football coaches in the National Football League since who took their teams to the most coveted game in professional sports, the Super Bowl. He also acknowledges President Barack Obama, an African American man, who became the first Black president of the United States. All of these men, like so many others in this country, exemplify African American men who have triumphed over the many social challenges and barriers in their path to success.

These successful African American men illustrate that it is possible to break through the racial barrier to achieve the American Dream (Morial, 2007). These examples of great men also show how far African American men have yet to go. For many African American men, their futures are less than bright, and achievement among African American youth is at a devastating all time low. This embodies an issue that is not just for the African American community to deal with, but for everyone in society.

Much of the research reports on African American males in the United States have been less than positive. From rates of high school retention, incarceration, or low

employment rates among African American males, it is not as easy to uncover empirical research studies that examine successful young African American males attaining academic achievement. Acknowledging these young men who are the students on the margins hurdling over the challenges and barriers that exist because of who and what they are is important and necessary. The responsibility of highlighting these successful individuals lies within the education community. The responsibility of the educational community is to not only research and report on the struggles and experiences of the African American male in this country, but also on the experiences and accomplishments of those successful African American males who are achieving success as well.

This study examined successful high school completion among African American male high school seniors and the factors that contributed to that completion. The review of the literature focuses on the concepts of social and cultural capital, and a cultural-ecological perspective is used as the theoretical framework for this study.

Access into Higher Education

Social Capital

American and French sociologists James Coleman (1988) and Pierre Bourdieu (1986) have been the two leading scholars who have examined social capital and the role it plays in academic achievement. According to Coleman and Bourdieu, social capital includes the resources that enable individuals to gain access into various societal areas such as political or economic arenas. Access to social capital allows individuals to build and cultivate relationships that will in turn create an intricate networking system that will allow them to navigate through the education, economic, political, and social systems with ease.

Coleman's Theory of Social Capital

Coleman's (1988) theory of social capital is important for understanding how social structures such as school support systems are imperative for the academic achievement of African American males. Coleman defines social capital as follows:

Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two characteristics in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure. Social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that would not be attainable in its absence. Social capital, in turn, is created when the relations among persons change in ways that facilitate action. (pp. 302-304)

For Coleman, social capital is an indefinable concept embedded in the structure of relationships between and among individuals. Within this embedded structure are various modes in which these relationships are conducted. Coleman identified three modes in which social capital is facilitated through relationships: (a) obligations and expectations that are understood and shared among individuals with a solid foundation of trust between them, (b) access to information that they otherwise would not have access to, and (c) a set of norms and sanctions that dictate and encourage individual persons' behavior and attitudes.

Coleman (1988) suggests that two elements critical to social capital are the trustworthiness of the social environment, which means obligations will be repaid, and the actual extent in which the obligations is held. Mutual trust between individuals is imperative to the building of relationships. The concept of mutual trust between individuals simply illustrates the importance of trustworthiness as a form of social capital. An example of mutual trust among individuals is the relationship that is formed between teachers and students. Both the teacher and student place an extensive amount

of trust in each other to build a deep level of respect that is invested in the relationship. The student is placing their trust in the teacher to provide the academic support and resources that will help them achieve academic success. In return for the support and resources provided to the student, the teacher expects the student to use those resources for academic achievement.

Coleman's (1988) theory of social capital can be applied to the academic achievement of African American males. African American males who attain academic achievement were able to establish social networks that have allowed them to build and foster social relationships to achieve success. Social networks such as the teacher-student relationship can help African American males establish relations that will grant them access to the academic support and resources to which they previously have been denied.

A study conducted by Croninger and Lee (2001) examined whether social capital reduces the likelihood of dropping out of high school and whether teachers provide students with valuable forms of social capital that will help them succeed. Analyzing data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS, 1988), they examined whether or not social capital reduces the likelihood of dropping out of high school among 11,000 adolescents between the 10th and 12th grades who attended more than 1,000 public and private school between 1990 and 1992. Croninger and Lee measured social capital in two ways: (1) students' beliefs about how much their 10th grade teachers support their efforts to succeed in school and (2) teachers' reports about whether individual 10th grade students receive guidance from them about school or personal matters. They found that teachers are an important source of social capital for their students. For students who enter high school with no history of academic difficulty, teacher-student relations

significantly reduces the likelihood of dropping out of school. Academically at-risk students benefit more from access to social capital than students with no history of difficulty in school. Establishing positive relationships and having interaction with teachers outside of the classroom create informal opportunities for academically at-risk students to gain assistance and guidance that will ultimately contribute to their academic success.

Although Croninger and Lee's (2001) study did not specifically focus on different ethnic groups, they did find that students who come from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and have had academic difficulties in the past found guidance and assistance from teachers especially helpful. When students are able to trust their teachers and interact with them informally, they are more likely to complete school and graduate. Academically at-risk students who enter school with low-expectations, motivation, and a history of school related problems benefit the most from positive teacher support and guidance. Croninger and Lee also contend that from a theoretical vantage point of social capital, an absence of positive social relationships and contacts with teachers denies students resources that help them develop positively.

Bourdieu's Theory of Social and Cultural Capital

Bourdieu's theory of social capital is slightly different from that of Coleman's. Bourdieu (1986) developed a separate but related definition which explores social capital as an advantage to an individual because of membership into particular groups. Bourdieu defines social capital as dependence on the membership in a social group whose members or representatives establish group boundaries through the exchange of things and symbols. Bourdieu suggests access to social capital means people have connections to

individuals who, because they possess greater amounts of economic and cultural capital, might help advance or further those individuals' connections. This intricate and complex theory places individuals in positions that reflect their social, economic, and cultural status in society. This status is demonstrated through the lifestyle and attitudes which are reinforced through a sense of belonging among individuals who share these common traits. According to Bourdieu, the amount of social capital to which an individual may gain access through social networks and relationships depends on the size of these networks as well as on the amount of economic, cultural, and social capital possessed by individuals in the network.

Using Bourdieu's (1986) definition of social capital helps to demonstrate in part why many African American males enrolled in U.S. public schools achieve academic success and pursue college attainment. The social networks that many African American males were able to acquire granted access to the academic support and resources necessary for high school completion and possibly pursuit of higher education. Bourdieu suggests that access to social capital means people have connections to individuals who, because they possess greater amounts of economic and cultural capital, might help them with advice, further connections, loans, and so on. African American males who are able to build such social networks with individuals who can provide them with academic support and resources can possibly increase their chances in pursuing college attainment.

Establishing social networks that help promote and support African American students in completing high school and possibly pursue higher education increases their opportunities of success. Social networks can come in the form of school-to-work high school programs that are initially designed to help African American students who come

from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds acquire employment as they exit high school. However, school-to-work programs can have a deeper objective for the students that enter into the program seeking to create and develop social networks that will enable them to find employment after high school.

Annette Hemmings (2007) found that programs such as the school-to-work program that she observed at an inner-city high school proved to be more than a job placement program. The youth advocates who were employed to assist students with job internships viewed themselves as helping the students acquire social and cultural capital and promoting higher educational attainment. Hemmings discovered during her research that the youth-advocates objected to the perception that their sole intent was to place Black students from low-income backgrounds in dead-end, low paying jobs. Instead of participating in what they felt was the perpetuation of socio-economic inequalities, youth advocates sought to promote the college attainments of students by encouraging them to pursue higher education.

By inverting the program's ideology and redefining their roles as the "surrogate" middle-class parents who facilitate upward mobility through strategic cultural productions and links to social resources and networks, the youth advocates were able to help students acquire the cultural and social capital they needed to go to college (Hemmings, 2007). Hemmings drew from Bourdieu's (1986) concept of social capital, demonstrating that the connections the African American students were establishing with the youth advocates provided resources and support that went beyond job placement. The youth advocates felt it was their responsibility to share their support and encourage the students to pursue college attainment.

Cultural Capital

Both Coleman (1988) and Bourdieu (1986) agreed that individuals need all forms of capital as a resource to enhance social productivity. However, just like social capital, cultural capital is important to an individual's social productivity. Cultural capital refers to the system of attributes, such as language skills, cultural knowledge, and mannerisms, that is derived in part from one's parents and that defines an individual's class status (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

Grenfell and James (1998) suggested that cultural capital can also be derived from the cultural connections people make with educational curriculum, literature, or universities. These connections can be obtained from dominant language patterns, style of clothing, music, and knowledge of world affairs. These cultural connections are part of a larger system of attributes that are partly comprised of the parents' influence and impact on the child's life. Through cultural capital, individuals are able to use their existing cultural background knowledge to build and foster social relationships that would strengthen rather than weaken their connections to the family, community or neighborhood, or school environments.

Bourdieu (1986) concept of cultural capital provides a way to examine the impact culture plays on academic achievement. According to Bourdieu (1977a), cultural capital is socially inherited cultural competence that facilitates achievement in school. It is the value placed on academic achievement and dominant cultural knowledge, and the cultural dispositions that are most conducive for success in various educational environments. Perry, Steele, and Hilliard (2003) contend that cultural capital is competence passed on through primary socialization, "modes of use and relationship in language; relationship to

and affinity for the dominant culture; styles of interaction and varying dispositions toward schooling itself” (p. 67). Bourdieu (1986) suggested that styles of interaction and varying dispositions are part of an individual’s *habitus* or a way of behaving and thinking. An individual’s *habitus* is formed through the influence of parents, which is cultivated by socialization of family traditions and cultural practices. Essentially, the *habitus* is an individual’s character, attitude, and personal style, it is who they are.

According to Bourdieu (1986) this system of attributes can be divided into three subtypes: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized states of cultural capital. All three subtypes describe various states of cultural capital and the level of access one must have to fully acquire it. For the purpose of this research the embodied state of cultural capital will be examined in greater depth. The embodied state of cultural capital is both inherited through parental influence as well as familial socialization such as traditional and cultural practices. It is also the acquired properties one possesses of themselves. The embodied state of cultural capital is linked to an individual’s *habitus* or habits, such as a person’s character and way of thinking. Bourdieu (1977) continued to suggest that linguistic capital, defined as the mastery of and relation to language, represents ways of speaking, and can be understood as a form of embodied cultural capital. The embodied state of cultural capital encompasses the whole person, who and what they are.

Since African American students enter the educational system with a significant amount of all embodied states of cultural capital, schools should acknowledge and embrace the cultural attitudes and behaviors that these students bring into the classroom however this rarely occurs. When African American students enter into school with their cultural practices that encompass their style of dress, music and art, or language patterns,

they are not recognized or encouraged. Instead they are viewed as not being in sync with the dominant group in society. For many African American students the cultural capital that they embody is devalued and fails to parallel the educational *fields* or social relationships they encounter throughout their educational career.

Perry, Steele, and Hilliard III (2003) noted that it is important to recognize that for Bourdieu the mechanism for distributing educational opportunity resides in the academic culture, not in the characteristics of the social classes. Essentially, schools convey knowledge and understanding in the form of a cultural system (mainstream cultural capital) that has a significant advantage over those who possess limited or no cultural and linguistic capital. Perry, Steele, and Hilliard III suggested that the educational system, given the close interrelationship with the dominant culture and the close affinity between the dominant and the academic cultures, has already picked the winners. The educational system is designed to give a significant advantage to those who possess cultural capital in sync with the dominant culture.

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement plays an important role in the academic achievement of children and is regarded as a way to help students in their schooling. Parental involvement at school may include volunteering at school functions or in the classroom, attending Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) meetings, or parent-teacher conferences. Parents who are involved in their child's academic career help to establish an educational foundation in which success can be attained. For African American parents being involved in their child's academic career is important and given high priority within the family. According to Reynolds (1992), early studies found that African American

parents' involvement at home and school were positively related to their children's academic achievement. These parents understood that their involvement in the school culture reinforced the importance of education to their children as well as established a positive attitude about education.

Recent experimental and longitudinal studies have explored parental involvement among African Americans and its effect on student academic achievement. Izzo, Weissberg, Kaspro, and Fendrich (1999) conducted a study following 1,250 urban children (63% African American) from kindergarten to third grade, investigating academic performance among the students in relation to parental involvement. Over the period of three years teachers were asked to rate the children on problems and academic competencies according to the teachers' perceptions of the quality of parental involvement. Izzo et al. found that the teachers' perceptions of parental involvement quality were very stable of the course of three years, even though different teachers were performing the rating each year. This study also documented that teachers rated African American boys less favorably if parents were perceived to not be actively involved in their child's education. Mandara (2006) suggested that a collective body of research illustrates that parental involvement has a significant effect on African American male achievement, which seems to be particularly true when teachers perceive the boys' parents as being actively involved.

Significant research findings support that when African American parents are actively involved in their sons' academic efforts by monitoring homework and other academic pursuits, limiting nonproductive and destructive activities (e.g. television, radio, and video games), and creating a constant and positive dialogue with school

personnel, they increase the odds of their sons succeeding in school (Mandara , 2006). Parents who are present and observant of their child's education help to build and establish life long learners. Providing a positive environment for children to succeed is pertinent to their overall success. Establishing a positive parent-teacher relationship can also have significant effects on student academic achievement as well.

Parent-Teacher Relationship

According to Barbarin, McCandies, and Hill (2005), healthy collaborative home-school relationships are built on mutual support, open and honest communication, and trust. The parent-teacher relationship is just as important as the student-teacher relationship, possibly more so. Parents are entrusting the teacher with their children's education in hopes that they will be sufficiently educated and prepared for society.

Trust is considered to be an important factor in a parent-teacher relationship. Adams and Christenson (1998) conducted a study where they surveyed 123 parents of regular and special education students and 152 teachers in three ethnically balanced urban middle schools. They found that parents' trust of the teacher was significantly higher than teachers' trust of parents. Ultimately, both parent and teachers felt that trust was an important factor in establishing a healthy collaborative relationship that would help to improve academic achievement. The parents of this study who were characterized as "high trust" reported significant behavioral indicators of parental involvement compared to parents who were characterized as having moderate and low levels of trust reported by the teachers. Both parents and teachers agree that communication and parental dedication to education is important to increasing mutual trust between family and

schools, and being satisfied with the parent-teacher relationship was a predictor of trust for both parents and teachers.

Teacher Expectations as a Theoretical Model

Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) redefined and popularized the concept of teacher expectations. In their research the authors developed a theory of teacher expectations comprised of four factors:

1. Climate: Teachers should create warm socioeconomic relationships with students. Teachers more often create these types of climates with their brighter students.
2. Feedback: Teachers should provide feedback to students about their performance. Teachers tend to praise high-expectation students and criticize low-expectation students.
3. Input: Teachers should teach quantitatively more material and qualitatively more challenging material. Student perceived as low-expectation receive fewer opportunities to learn and are taught less difficult material.
4. Output: Teachers should give students more opportunities to respond and ask questions. Teachers give preferential treatment by giving high-expectation students more clues, longer response times, and with more repeats, redirects, and rephrases.

(pp. 98)

This model illustrates how teachers behave differently towards students and have different expectations about their academic ability. According to Cooper (1985), the model shows the teacher's control over the student and the environment. High-expectation students are successful regardless of the teachers' control.

Finally, Brophy and Good (1974) suggested that ultimately expectations make a difference in student achievement and other outcomes, indicating that teacher expectations can function as self-fulfilling prophecies when teachers perceive certain children to be smarter than others. If the teacher has high-expectations of the student, then the student becomes motivated and will strive to do his/her best. However, if the

teacher expectation of the student is low, then the student becomes unmotivated and struggles to achieve.

According to Suarez-Orozco (2001), a child's sense of self is profoundly shaped by the reflections mirrored back to him/her by significant others; this process is known as social mirroring. These reflections that help to shape a child's sense of self are not exclusive to family (mother and father), but also to individuals outside of the family, such as teachers, peers, employers, people on the street, and even the media. When the images of oneself is held in a positive light, the individual feels a sense of self-worth; whereas if the images reflected back are negative, then that individual may find it difficult to see the value within him/herself. W.E.B. Du Bois (1969) called this to be our "double-consciousness"—a "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...contempt and pity" (p. 99).

For students of color, such as African American students, these reflections can be demonstrated through the teacher's expectations. Teachers have significant influence over students and their self-perception, thus having a significant effect on their educational achievement. For example, Lewis and Kim (2008) conducted a study analyzing effective teaching in urban areas located in Northern and Southern California. They examined a 3-day-a-week, 2 hour after school enrichment program which included a language arts, math, and science curriculum. Lewis and Kim explored the positive attitude toward learning among elementary-age African American children living in low-income neighborhoods. They wanted to address whether oppositional attitudes toward learning prevailed among these African American children. One particular dynamic that surfaced in this study was the school culture of low expectations, exemplified by teachers

allowing mediocre student work to pass as exceptional. The messages that children received throughout the school day in their interactions with teachers and other staff was that they were not really expected to demonstrate or engage in behavior aligned to learning. It is the implicit and explicit messages of low expectations, both behaviorally and academically, that facilitates disengagement from learning among these students.

They concluded that children from low-income urban areas have a desire to learn. The researchers' findings also suggest that the African American children are aware of their strengths and deficiencies in the teachers and could explicitly identify them. Ultimately, the students want teachers who will treat them well and help them learn.

Teacher-Student Relationship as a Support System

A factor that contributes to the academic achievement of African American males is the establishment of a positive teacher-student relationship. The teacher-student relationship is an example of students gaining access to social capital and constructing social networks that will further their academic endeavors. Out of this familiarity and comfort comes a sense of trust between the teacher and student that forms a strong and vulnerable bond between both individuals. This sense of familiarity and trust is displayed by both the student and the teacher, when the student has become comfortable and senses that the teacher cares and is ultimately concerned for their overall success then academic achievement can be attained. According to Stanton-Salazar (2001) this sense of trust allows the student to view the teacher as both agent-advocate and gatekeeper to academic resources that would benefit and help transform a student's life chances in a very positive and lasting ways. Through this relationship the student is able to gain access to the

academic support and resources that the teacher provides, thus helping them to navigate the social highways of academia.

Stanton-Salazar (2001) proposed that emotional support, moral support, and intimate counsel, when provided, were not the consequence of explicit adolescent help seeking, but rather the by-product of an ongoing caring relationship between student and a school agent. For example, the teacher demonstrates how a school agent takes on parental aspects in the relationship. Stanton-Salazar recognized that the students trust and rely on the school agent for academic and informational support, intimate counsel and emotional support for a variety of miscellaneous favors. These relationships were vitally important because they provided adolescents with an alternative support network when family resources were limited or unavailable. “In other words, adolescents often turned to trusted school agents when needed support from parents, family, and peers was deemed inaccessible” (p. 167). Through these caring relationships, students were able to construct vital support networks that helped them stay motivated in school and work through family or peer issues, such as the death of a family member or the demise of a relationship.

Within the teacher-student relationship are certain dynamics that govern such interactions between teacher and student. One particular dynamic governing such a relationship is the level of expectation and perception held by the teacher towards the student, an important aspect to the relationship and the academic success of that student. Teacher expectations confuse important factors that influence students’ academic behavior, including test scores, grades, self-esteem, locus of control, and engagement in school (Muller, et al., 1999). This aspect of the teacher-student relationship corresponds

to Coleman's (1988) modes of social capital. When trust and familiarity exist between teacher and student, it is the obligation of the teacher to share and help the student with information and resources necessary for the student's academic success. In return for shared information and resources, the teacher expects the student to take advantage of those resources so that s/he can attain academic achievement.

Another dynamic that exists within the teacher-student relationship is the perception that the teacher and student have of one another. Among teachers, perception is often borne out of the evaluation and observation of the student by the teacher. According to Irvine (1990), teachers are quick to evaluate and observe students' behavior upon entering the classroom and gauge their academic ability. Accordingly, out of this observation and evaluation, teachers then begin to shape their instruction depending on their evaluation of the students. Rosenthal and Jacobson's (1968) research showed that teachers teach students differently depending on their evaluation of the student. These expectations and perceptions of students are based on various characteristics, such as a student's prior performance, test scores, track placement, behavior, physical appearance, socioeconomic status, or race and ethnicity (Muller et al., 1999). The teacher's perceptions of a student can significantly alter the way in which that student achieves academic success.

Irvine (1990) suggested that teachers socialize and condition students through the hidden and stated curriculum. They consciously and unconsciously incubate students for their inappropriate role in the institution by delivering messages, sanctions, and rewards about appropriate behaviors and expectations. This intense and powerful relationship between teacher and student is often reminiscent of the relationship between parent and

child. The bond formed between teacher and student has great influence over the child and the decisions he/she will make in their academic career as well in his/her lives.

Irvine discussed that teachers not only influence students' achievement and their cognitive development, but they influence self-concept and attitudes as well. A student's self-concept and attitude towards oneself is greatly influenced by the teacher's perception of the student. If the student believes that the teacher does not like him/her, then there is she/he will possibly develop a dislike for him/herself or school. These students often feel discouraged, dejected, and isolated from the general school population. When this occurs, students begin to demonstrate behaviors of disengagement from school, their teachers, and the educational process as a whole.

According to Irvine (1990) a teacher's warmth, affect, and enthusiasm are attributes found to be highly correlated with student achievement. Johnson and Prom-Johnson (1986) found that students were influenced most by those teachers who displayed social and interpersonal skills, affective characteristics, and temperament. The authors similarly discovered that the same students used the following descriptors to portray teachers that had the most influence and impact on their lives: approachable, pleasant, easy to relate to, accepting, tolerant, helpful, concerned, caring, thoughtful, and perceptive of, and sensitive to, the needs of students. These influential teachers were able to adapt to and understand the needs of their students. Essentially, the students are able to achieve academic success through the caring and understanding of the teacher.

The media has become the vehicle of the 21st century that continues to perpetuate the negative stereotypical images of African American youth, especially males. Just like the general population in the U. S., teachers are constantly bombarded with the negative

images that surfaces in the media. They too fall victim to the media's onslaught of images of African American males and form negative perceptions and expectations from these negative images. These perceptions and expectations then cause high levels of distrust and disengagement among African American males.

Caring

Caring is a characteristic demonstrated by teachers that students feel have had a real influence and impact on their academic success. According to the students in Dance's (2002) study, the qualities that gave a teacher "favorite-teacher" status included: making learning fun yet educational, understanding and encouraging students, or believing in students' academic ability, and knowing that their teacher genuinely care about the students and their well-being. Those teachers who demonstrated this attitude of caring influenced their students to achieve and accomplish their short and long-term academic goals. Caring and support by teachers was considered to be an important and necessary factor in student achievement.

Muller, Katz, and Dance (1999) reported that students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds isolate teacher caring as a key factor in their achievement of success. A teacher can encourage the student to take advantage of the resources provided as well as to create a connection between school and home community. The authors suggested that without this connection, inner-city school may become an alienating place, particularly when students do not live in the same neighborhood as the school or share the same cultural background. For African American students a teacher's personal and cultural attributes, as well as their attitudes and behaviors, are important to their academic success (Irvine, 1990).

Teachers who demonstrate the act of caring towards their students provide an environment that keeps the student engaged in learning. Caring and support can be the determining factors that not only keep a student engaged in learning, but also lower the risk of dropping out of school. Croninger and Lee (2001) suggested that students who leave high school prior to graduation often cite a lack of social and academic support. Fine (1988) and MacLeod (1987) reported that students who feel a disconnect with teachers frequently complain that their teachers do not care about them, are not interested in how well they do in school, and are unwilling to help them with problems. If the act of caring or being cared for is not demonstrated by the teacher, the student's level of engagement and interest in school is considerably lower.

A caring teacher has an open mind and tries to understand what the student brings to the table. Caring is another facet of the teacher-student relationship in which both the teacher and student feel that they are mutually "understood, received, respected and recognized" (Muller, et al, 1999, p. 299). Through these feelings, positive social relationships emerge and the powerful incentive for the student to be fully engaged in school and schoolwork is achieved. Even when the student is challenged with difficult schoolwork or negative influences from his/her neighborhood, Croninger and Lee (2001) found that such a relationship may serve as a safety valve for these students, providing emotional support, encouragement, and actual assistance when academic or personal problems threaten to overwhelm them.

Dance (2002) conducted a study that examined caring, social and cultural capital as related to educational success. She observed teachers' and students' interactions with one another as well as teacher effectiveness on the student. Dance explored how a

mainstream teacher and a non-mainstream African American street-savvy youth can establish and maintain an educationally productive relationship, or from the student perspective meet the demands and expectations of the teacher in order to achieve success. Dance analyzed qualitative interviews and field observations to both the teacher and student's perspective of the role of social and cultural capital within their relationship.

Dance (2002) examined how caring on the behalf of the teacher provides a reliable foundation for the street-savvy student to trust that learning *will* take place. This level of caring gives the student a sense that the teacher is invested in the relationship and ultimately his/her educational success. According to Dance, teachers often possess mainstream social (cultural) capital resources that students need. When teachers care enough to motivate the student to learn, understand, process, and apply the curriculum, then the student feels obliged to work hard, knowing that his/her effort will pay off in success. A caring teacher is significant instrumental, or a social capital resource in a relationship, because s/he makes it "possible to achieve certain ends that would not be attainable in [absence of a caring relationship]" (Coleman, 1990). For African American students this type of relationship between teacher and student would result in a positive educational outcome, where the student achieves success despite his/her social and cultural limitations.

Regardless of the amount of mainstream cultural capital that students bring into the classroom, it is necessary for teachers to view the student as having the ability to acquire mainstream cultural codes. A teacher, interviewed by Dance (2002) suggested that it was her responsibility make the dominant "culture of power" accessible to *all* students. Delpit (1995) argues that if a student is not already a participant in the culture

of power, being told explicitly the rules of the culture makes acquiring power easier. A student must acquire the rules and cultural codes of mainstream society to navigate their way through society. A caring teacher provides opportunities to practice these rules and cultural codes, so that students are able to increase their chances towards academic success.

Cultural-Ecological Perspective

In his research John Ogbu (1974, 1994) tried to find an explanation as to why minority students such as African Americans were not performing as well academically in school as the majority students. Ogbu (1994) argued that involuntary minorities, or subordinate groups, resist the ideology of the dominant American culture that hard work and academic achievement will result in success because they operate out of a different frame of reference. Ogbu (1993) suggested that from the point of view of minorities, the dominant American culture has a separate cultural frame of reference or ideal way of behaving that symbolizes their identity. Involuntary minorities such as African Americans can learn to behave within this white American cultural frame of reference, but they do so at the risk of their peers' perception that they are acting like white Americans and losing their African American identity. According to Ogbu (1993) the ideas of cultural frame of reference and cultural identity are analytically two separate but related phenomena. Ogbu notes crossing over cultural and cognitive boundaries can be difficult at times for some minorities. Yet, for other groups, assimilating to the white American cultural frame of reference is seen instead as gaining an opportunity to succeed.

Ogbu (1993) found the cultural frame of reference for voluntary minorities to parallel that of white Americans. Voluntary minorities view the cultural and language differences encountered in school and society as barriers to overcome in order to succeed in education, ultimately resulting in successful employment. The children of voluntary minorities are encouraged to learn the language and behaviors of the dominant culture, believing that understanding these will lead to success. According to Gibson (1983), voluntary minorities practice “accommodation without assimilation” strategy. This strategy illustrates “... that although voluntary minorities may not give up their own cultural beliefs and practices, they are willing to and may actually strive to “play the classroom game by the rules” and try to overcome any obstacles that stand in their way (p. 500). Operating out of a non-oppositional cultural/collective identity gives voluntary minorities the ability and comfort to cross cultural and cognitive boundaries in order to be successful within dominant society.

In contrast, Ogbu (1993) believed that involuntary minorities operate out of a dual frame of reference, which has made it difficult for some to achieve success and access within the dominant society. Involuntary minorities possess an oppositional cultural frame of reference and oppositional collective/social identity. This both oppositional cultural frame of reference and oppositional collective/social identity have made it difficult for some to cross cultural and cognitive boundaries and be able to experience academic achievement.

Ogbu and Fordham (1986) contended that an oppositional identity gives African Americans a sense of self-identity. This self-identity works in resistance to the social identity of white Americans because of the way they were treated. An oppositional

cultural framework views certain activities, including doing well in school, as “acting white” (p. 339). Ogbu and Fordham suggested that the idea of “acting white” leads African American students to adopt self-defeating behaviors that inhibit possibilities for academic success. Fordham (1988) adds that many high achieving African American students embrace “racelessness” (p. 340) meaning they distance themselves from Black culture in response to the lack of support from their peers at school.

Ogbu and Fordham (1986) argued that Black students hold themselves back from doing well academically in fear of being ridiculed and ostracized by their peers. However, Noguera (2005; 2008) suggested that Ogbu and Fordham fail to acknowledge the dynamic relationship that occurs between Black students, males in particular, and the culture that is operative within the schools. Noguera did not deny that African American males may exhibit behaviors and attitudes that do not promote academic achievement. However, he noted that they are also more likely to be placed into marginal roles in school where minimal encouragement is given and be discouraged from academic challenges, especially by those adults in roles designed to help them. He pointed out that Ogbu and Fordham did not account for individuals who find ways to overcome the societal, school, peer, and family pressures exerted on them and manage to avoid choosing between their racial and gender identity and academic success. Noguera conceded that these individuals are rare, but that some African American males are able to maintain who they are and reach academic achievement. They are able to preserve their self-identity and have academic success by developing multiple personas that embrace the cultural norms that are valued in school environments. These cultural norms consist of the speech patterns and styles of dress that are accepted by the mass majority.

By embracing and understanding these cultural norms African American males are able to link self-identity to academic achievement.

Perry, Steele, and Hilliard (2003) also found Ogbu and Fordham's (1986) understanding and interpretation of African American social and educational history to be misguided. Ogbu and Fordham maintained that African Americans' fight for equal education left a deep distrust of schools and school people, therefore causing them to not succeed. Perry, Steele, and Hilliard disputed this claim, arguing there is simply no evidence to support it. They instead suggested that the struggle and fight for equal education which many African Americans endured has created the academic tradition to which most African Americans adhere today. Historical events, such as slavery, segregation, and the Civil Rights Movement, have served as the catalyst to enable African Americans to develop a sense of educational achievement in this country, where academic success is the norm not the exception (Edmonds, 1979; Sizemore, 1988).

Ogbu's (1986) research provides some understanding as to why African Americans struggle for academic achievement. However, his work does not clearly explain why some African Americans manage to achieve academic success within the American educational system and to have continuing success. Applying Ogbu's theories, Spradlin, Welsh, and Hinson (2000) explored achievement motivation and identity development variables underlying the failure of many involuntary minority group students to achieve. The research presented a psychosocial explanation as to why African American students underachieve. Spradlin, Welsh, and Hinson drew from Ogbu's (1974) hypothesis which suggested that academic motivation among involuntary minority

students may have been shortened by student awareness of limited opportunity structures and institutional discrimination.

Spradlin et al. (2000) sampled 185 students (88 males and 97 females) enrolled in four public schools. Minority students represented 23% of the sample, 44 participants were African American and 141 were European American. The researchers found that African American males have the highest level of academic futility along with the lowest GPAs ($M=1.9$), but they also have the highest levels of racial identity, consistent with Ogbu's hypothesis. These students believe that they can achieve academically however they also believe that institutional barriers and limited opportunities hinder them from achieving success.

Spradlin et al. (2000) concluded that schools must be willing to involve the community in strengthening the academic achievement levels of African American youth. Schools need to be actively finding ways to identify and incorporate all cultural groups into the schooling practices. The African American community as well must find ways to help its youth understand the difference between successfully navigating the system for achievement purposes. Considering the need for African American male students to improve and feel confident in the American school system, these students must have academic support and attention that will help them succeed academically. Racial identity as well must be understood, respected and handled differently within schools if the goal is to move African American students, especially males, towards academic achievement. The educational community must learn and understand the dual frame of reference that has shaped African American students psychological, social, and academic needs.

In contrast Harper (2006) conducted a study that explored internalized racism and Ogbu and Fordham's (1986) "acting white" hypothesis among high achieving African American male undergraduates at six predominantly white universities. The findings in the individual interviews contradicted Ogbu and Fordham's hypothesis and found that peer support in leadership and achievement were variables that were negotiated among and within the African American peer group on the six university campuses. Harper found no evidence of internalized racism within the domains of African American male leadership and academic achievement. The participants of the study, however, attributed their academic success to the support offered by their same-race peers.

Harper (2006) noted in his findings that the academic achievements of the participants in this study were not viewed as abnormal or characteristically white. It was clear in this study that African American males were given validation, support, and encouragement to do well in school. Establishing same-race peer support also provided opportunities to engage with others inside and outside of the classroom. For the individuals of this study academic achievement did not occur through the burden of "acting white" (Ogbu & Fordham, 1986). Instead academic success occurred because of the feelings of support and encouragement that were given to the African American students along with the understanding that they could be successful in school.

Teacher Expectations: Does Race Still Matter?

Irvine (1990) found that dialogue on the matter of race in education was still difficult especially when concerning teacher's perceptions of multiracial students. This question is still relevant today because of the persistent racial inequities within the African American community. Despite the difficult struggle to bring about equality for

African Americans, the issue of race continues to permeate many aspects of the educational system.

Most teachers would like to believe that they do not factor in race when working with students. According to Irvine (1990) some teachers believe that it is preferable to see students' skin color as neutral rather than to acknowledge their black or white racial identities. However, Bennett (1986) suggested that to ignore a person's race is racist. Ignoring a student's physical characteristic as his/her skin color is to ignore their cultural background as well. Lightfoot (1978) also stated that even if one is to move beyond the tendency to exclude children from the educational process, teachers are likely not to see children as individuals but as member of perceived group. For many teachers, categories such as race, gender, class, and ethnicity are used as a way to understand and learn about their class environment. In addition Lightfoot suggested that instead of teachers taking the time to get to know and understand their students over time, their initial perceptions of the child become increasingly stereotyped and shaped into hardened caricatures.

Steele and Aronson (1995) explained why Black and White students might respond differently to teachers in identical classrooms. Steel and Aronson called this "stereotype threat" resulting in "stereotype anxiety" that affects any stigmatized group. The researchers stated that "when the stereotype concerns ability, individuals fear that the stereotype might become the basis of others pejorative judgments, as well as their own self-perceptions" (p. 401). The anxiety that African American students may feel can greatly affect their academic performance.

Disengagement among black students can result in low performance. Gross (1993) found that teachers felt that Black students were the least studious and prepared

for classes. He reported that “teachers and administrators reported that black parents were less supportive of the school’s mission than white parent” (p. 94). Black parents would support their children in higher level classes even if they received lower grades. “I believe that the most important factor impacting the academic achievement of African American children is not the race or gender of the teacher but the teacher’s expectation” (Kunjufu, 2002, p. 17). Clearly the expectations of a teacher can have a significant effect on the students academically.

Summary

Literature on factors that contribute to the successful completion of high school among African American males were reviewed to better understand the effect of the educational system on African American students. The review of the literature examined social and cultural capital, and the resources and information needed to navigate social and cultural highways to gain access into higher education. The literature also explored the dynamics of the teacher-student, parent-student, and teacher-parent relationships as a support system to the academic success of the student. Ogbu’s (1993) theory and research on cultural frame of references was examined to understand why African American students, especially males, have limited amounts of success in the U.S. educational system. Finally, this section concluded with a discussion on the idea of race and its relevance in education and the barrier it creates for African American students in the academic community.

Existing literature focuses on the negative plight, rather than on the successes of the African American male within the educational system. My study will shed new light

on those African American males who are triumphing over the many social hurdles that exist and who are finding academic success.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology for this study. The goal of this study is to explore the African American male educational experience and to examine how parent involvement, community and social environment, and teacher expectations played a role in their academic preparation into college or university. Therefore, these dialogues between the African American participants and the researcher lay the groundwork for this study.

Research Design

Participatory research methodology was used as the research design for this study. Participatory research helped examine several factors affecting the academic preparation of African American high school males and enrollment into California collegiate campuses. Rather than merely recording observable facts, participatory research has the explicit intention of collectively investigating reality in order to transform it (Hall, Gillette and Tandon, 1982; Fals Borda, 1979). This methodology was selected as a way to investigate these concerns and their impact on the African American community.

Maguire (1987), Park et al. (1993), and Collins (1999) have illustrated how transformative participatory research can be conducted within a community or culture. Participatory research gives the participants an opportunity to speak and understand their struggle so that they can begin to ask questions with the end result of gaining answers. Tandon (1988) describes participatory research as a method that attempts to present people as researchers themselves in pursuit of answers to the questions of their daily

struggle and survival. Conducting participatory research involves both the researcher and the participants as co-researchers in the study, giving each an opportunity to share and experience a commonality with one another.

The purpose of this study was to explore several factors affecting African American males and their academic achievement in order to gain access into a university. By using participatory research as the process for this study, participants were able to share their stories and experiences on the factors that played a substantial role in their academic achievements. Through dialogue the participants gave voice to those experiences and they in turn began the process of reflection, analysis, and hopefully transformation.

“There is the possibility for transformation of the nature of consciousness, both individually and collectively, and that whether this can be solved culturally and socially depends on dialogue” (Bohm, 1996, p. 46). For an individual to be transformed, both the researcher and participants have to be willing to open themselves up to the possibility of past hurts and sadness that could surface during dialogue. Transformation is a conscious action that comes out of reflection from the dialogue.

Voices To Be Heard

Participatory research opens the dialogue with the researcher and co-researcher to explore and discuss the many issues permeating throughout a community or a marginalized group of people. It is the process in which support is given to those voices that cannot be heard. By giving those who do not have a voice a chance to share their stories, participatory research becomes the vehicle that drives those critical issues to the forefront of important dialogue and discussions. Participatory research is about learning

new knowledge about the issues and taking action for the articulation of view points by the dominated or subordinated, whether from gender, race, ethnicity, or other structures of subordination (Park, Brydon-Miller, Hall, & Jackson, 1993). If a group of persons is within a systematic structure that continually subordinates them, then they will continue to view the world in a filtered way. They will continually see themselves as persons who do not have the power or a voice to fight injustices permeating their community.

Hall (1979) suggests that participatory research is a process which combines three activities: research, education, and action. Participatory research is a joint effort from everyone involved to collectively investigate an issue or problem. It aims to set up a plan to achieve an outcome that will hopefully create change within a community or its members. The objectives that are set forth in participatory research are often to produce knowledge and action directly useful to the community and to empower people through the process of constructing and using their own knowledge reason (Collins, 1999).

Constructivist Listening

Listening is a vital participatory research. A researcher must listen to the participant carefully so that what is being said can be heard and understood.

“*Constructivist listening* encourages the talker to reflect on the meaning of events and ideas; express and work through feelings that are interfacing with clearer thinking; construct new meanings; and make decisions” (Weissglass, 1990 p. 356). *Constructivist listening* is important to participatory research because it allows the researcher to hear what is not being said. It is the things that are not being said that the researcher is listening for and keeping an open mind to. “Constructivist listening also aims to enable the talker to express feelings, construct personal understandings, and use his or her full

intelligence to respond creatively to situations rather than rely on habit or rigid strategies” (Weissglass, 1990, p. 356).

Constructivist listening is being an active listener to the speaker. It is actively giving the speaker your attention and listening with an open heart and mind.

Constructivist listening allows the researcher to really hear what the participant has to say. It also provides an opportunity for the researcher to encourage and reassure the participant that it is alright to share their experience and feelings. Constructivist listening allows the researcher and the participant to share in a powerful and engaging experience that validates the voice of the participant.

In participatory research, constructivist listening not only gives validation to the speaker, but also empowers him/her to examine his/her current reality and explore possible issues that may exist within their community. By conducting constructivist listening in participatory research, the researcher is able to give the participant the space s/he may need to deconstruct possible issues not aware of previously.

Dialogue in Participatory Research

Dialogue in participatory research is important and gives great value to the study. Bohm (1996) suggests that “Dialogue is a way of observing, collectively, how hidden values and intentions can control our behavior, and how unnoticed cultural differences can clash without our realizing what is occurring” (par. 5, p. 8). The researcher provides a space for the participant to examine his/her own thoughts, beliefs, prejudices, and feelings about personal situations. Dialogue is a way for the researcher and the participant to reflect on what has been spoken and to deconstruct what has not been spoken.

Dialogue also creates a relationship between the researcher and the participant that can be meaningful and helpful to the study. This relationship is created out of the understanding that both persons (the researcher and the participant) are sharing thoughts and ideas that can be explored together. “Thus if people are to cooperate...they have to be able to create something in common, something that takes shape in their mutual discussions and actions, rather than something that is conveyed from one person who acts as an authority to the others, who act as passive instruments of authority” (Bohm, 1996, p.3).

Through dialogue transformation can occur between the participant and the researcher both individually and culturally. Bohm (1996) suggests there is the possibility for transformation of the nature of consciousness, both individually and collectively, and that whether this can be solved culturally and socially depends on the dialogue. This transformation will only occur when both the researcher and the participant have mutual understanding of what each has to offer the dialogue. This study utilized dialogue in a way that gave the participants and the researcher the opportunity to engage in speaking and listening to one another so that valuable pieces from the dialogue would emerge.

Selection of Participants

The researcher recruited seven African American males to participate in this study. The participants were high school graduates who were entering the 2008-2009 academic years as freshmen in a university or community college system in the San Jose and Los Angeles area. Five of the seven participants of the study were African American seniors who attended high school in a predominately Vietnamese-American community located in San Jose. The community consisted of moderate to upper middle income

families where 74% of parents have attended/graduated from college. According to the School Accountability Report Card (2007) the local high school currently enrolls approximately 2,197 students, 5% are African American and 47% are of Asian background. Two of the seven participants were referrals from family and both attended high school in the Los Angeles area. One participant was pursuing higher education at California State University, San Jose, and the other was planning on attending a local community college in the Los Angeles area. The participants were (a) African American males who were recent high school graduates, (b) recently accepted or attending a four-year university or community college, and (c) between the ages of 18-20 years.

Data Collection

Entry into the Community

The participants of this study were found through professional contacts with high school principal and professional colleagues in the local area, as well as family referrals. The high school principal, professional colleague and families were contacted for referrals of African American males who had recently graduated from high school with potential interest in participating in the study. Next the participants were contacted via a letter in which the researcher extended an invitation to participate in the study. Upon agreement to participate in the study, the researcher conducted follow-up phone calls in order to set up a meeting date and time to engage in a one-on-one dialogue. The researcher requested that the principal share her knowledge of the participants' academic background. This information helped to support the academic profile of each participant.

Several steps were used in the data collection process which included: (a) conducting two one-on-one dialogues in length with each participant in the Fall of 2008,

(b) transcribing each dialogue in order to uncover emerging themes, (c) having participants review the transcribed dialogues for authenticity, and (d) reviewing the second dialogue and emergence of new themes according to participants' feedback. The dialogues took place in a high school conference room, the researcher's place of work, and participants' homes.

The dialogues were conducted and audiotaped in a quiet and comfortable setting at the convenience of the participants. I transcribed one dialogue per week and each participant reviewed the transcriptions for authenticity. After the participants reviewed the transcription of the first dialogue and the emerging themes, the researcher then engaged the participant in a second dialogue which also was audiotaped and transcribed. During the second dialogue the participants discussed the emerging themes from the initial dialogue and contributed new information that they wanted to add. The second dialogue was transcribed and analyzed for new themes. In order to synthesize the data clearly, a chart with themes revealed from the data was created to according to each participant (Please refer to Themes Revealed From the Data in Appendix D).

Questions to Guide the Initial Dialogue

“Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it nourished by false words...Men are not built in silence, but in word, in action-reflection” (Freire, 1970, p. 76). Freire is speaking about the need for a person to be “bathed” in their reality. To explore that reality through dialogue can bring about reflection that leads to action. It is the researcher's hope that the participants will be willing and able to share their experiences and reality within this study.

The questions to guide the dialogue are listed after each research question:

Research Question 1:

According to successful African American males, how does society perceive the academic achievement of African American men? What role does the media play in that perception?

Dialogue Questions

1. How do you think the media perceives African American males?
2. Do you think the perception of the media plays a role in the academic achievement among African American males? If so, how?
3. What effect does the media have on African American males?

Research Question 2:

What specific variables do successful African American males attribute as leading to their academic achievement?

Dialogue Questions

1. Do you feel that your parents should have played a more active role in your academic preparation? If so, how would they go about doing this?
2. How strong is your community/neighborhood influence on your academic achievement?
3. How important is having a role model as a positive figure for you?
4. What factors have enabled you to want to successfully complete high school and want to pursue higher education?

Research Question 3:

To what extent do successful African American males perceive teacher expectations contributing to their motivation to complete high school?

Dialogue Questions

1. Do you think that teachers were highly motivated in preparing you as an African American male for higher education?
2. In the past, how do you feel teachers perceived you within the classroom? What factors do you think contributed to this perception?
3. When you first began high school, did you feel that you were enrolled in courses that were going to prepare you academically for higher institutions of learning? If not, why?

Data Analysis

Once all of the data was collected from the dialogues, I analyzed it for relevant and similar themes. The researcher's reflection on the dialogues was essential to the research process and was conducted thoroughly. More specifically, I analyzed the data by: (a) reviewing the dialogues, and (b) creating a chart of the portraits of participants to get a clearer picture of each participant's background. In the chart each participant is represented with a summarized comment for each research question, and (c) I reviewed over the chart searching for emerging themes from the data.

Delimitations of the Study

Participants in this study were limited to African American males who were planning to attend university or community college pursuing an undergraduate bachelor's degree in the San Jose and Los Angeles area. All of the young men in this study had completed high school. African American females were not part of this study.

In addition, the researcher had no prior background knowledge of any of the participants involved in the study. The researcher, however, was interested and curious

to understand what these young men had to share about their experiences in successfully completing high school. The researcher believed that the experiences shared by the participants in this study would help to shed some light on the challenges these individuals faced while completing high school and attaining academic achievement.

Protection of Participants

The researcher sought permission and approval from the University of San Francisco Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects committee to ensure the study was in compliance with all policies and regulations set forth by the committee (See Appendix C). Each participant received a letter written by the researcher explaining in detail both the problem and purpose of the study. This letter informed participants that participation in the study was completely voluntary and they were free to decline or withdraw from the study at any point. Prior to the study all participants were given the opportunity to choose a pseudonym to protect his identity during the study.

Background of Researcher

As an educator I value the success and achievement of every student that I have had the pleasure to teach. In particular, the education of African American students has been of importance to me. For African American students (especially males), negative images of increasing number of high school drop-outs and prison inmates continue to overshadow their potential within the educational system. As an educator who has worked with these students and seen their potential, I often wonder why that potential is not fully maximized as they prepare for the future.

I am an African American woman who was born and raised in Carson, California to parents who migrated from Alabama to California in the late 1960's-early 1970's. I

am the last born in my family. I grew up in a middle class community that was predominantly African American. In my neighborhood, the majority of the families consisted of two-parent households where the parents worked as professionals. The children went to the neighboring elementary, middle, and high schools. I was immersed within a culture of people who looked, spoke, and seemed familiar to me. All the while I was growing up, I knew that I was part of a community of people who would collectively support and help me through my formative years.

My undergraduate degree was completed at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where I received a B.A. in African American Studies. Towards the end of my undergraduate career, I attended a graduate school fair on campus and received information about Pepperdine University Graduate School of Education and Psychology. I applied to Pepperdine and spent a year working towards my Master's and teaching credential in education. After I completed my Master's, I was hired by Los Angeles Unified School District to teach in a K-12 classroom. I taught for 3 years in Los Angeles and gained a wealth of knowledge from the interaction of the children and people within that environment.

When I tell people that I worked in South Central, Los Angeles, they immediately think that they understand the experience that I had. However, I don't think people have any idea as to how devastating, yet enlightening, an experience such as teaching in Los Angeles can be. During that time I began to see the disconnected relationship between the community and the school. I noticed that a high level of mistrust existed between the community and the school. I also realized the need for much to be done both with and within the community.

During those three years of teaching, my most striking observation was the lack of motivation and disinterest among most of the young African American boys in the school. These young boys were either labeled as behavior problems or placed in Special Education classes. I began to notice that the U.S. educational system was failing to instill within young African American boys a sense that academic preparation will be invaluable to their lifelong success. As the years went by, I began to wonder how these young boys would grow up and go through school. I wondered if their interest in education would peak somewhere along their journey or if they would become another prison statistic or be killed. As these questions arose, I had no answers and even fewer thoughts as to why this pattern was occurring in our educational system.

I always knew that I wanted to pursue a doctorate degree, and my teaching experience in Los Angeles increased my desire to begin research on the African American community, specifically African American males. As I began to apply to different graduate schools, the University of San Francisco stood out as having the program that would help me gain answers to my burning questions. As I work through the program, I am discovering new thoughts and ideas that I know will help me in the future towards my research goals.

Currently, I am employed in the Berryessa Union School District in San Jose California. I am in my ninth year of teaching and have taught grades Kindergarten, first, and fourth. I enjoy working with students and being able to journey with them through their educational development. Throughout my nine years as a teacher, it has been a pleasure and a privilege to have worked with so many students of various cultural backgrounds. Many students have learned from me as their teacher, but those same

students have also taught me about struggle and perseverance regardless of their circumstances.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Seven participants, all African American males, participated in two one-on-one dialogues with the researcher and served as co-researchers for this study. Through the use of participatory research, the researcher dialogued with all seven participants to examine the following research questions: (a) According to successful African American males, how does society perceive the academic achievement of African American men? What role does the media play in that perception? (b) What specific variables do successful African American males attribute as leading to their academic achievement? (c) To what extent do successful African American males perceive teacher expectations contributing to their motivation to complete high school?

The following section of this study provides profiles of the young African American male participants' backgrounds as a context for their reflections. These reflections centered on parent involvement, support from other individuals, and high school completion.

Participants

All of the participants of this study shared similar backgrounds, such as being identified as African Americans and attending public and private schools. Despite the similarities, each participant expressed his unique and interesting experiences in this study. Five of the participants lived in and attended public and private high schools in the city of San Jose, while two other participants lived in and attended public high school in the Los Angeles area. All participants came from moderate income family backgrounds. All participants were accepted to, or planning to, attend either a two year

community college or university. Six of the seven participants lived with parents, whereas one lived alone near his college. Table 1 provides a detailed description and unique portrait of each participant in the study including their age, residence, parental background, and educational aspirations.

Table 1

Portrait of Research Participants

<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Residence</u>	<u>Parental Background</u>	<u>College Aspirations</u>
Daniel	18	Bay Area	Mother/Stepfather	Community College
Devon	18	Bay Area	Single Mother	Community College
Jeremiah	21	Los Angeles	Mother/Father	4 year University
John	18	Bay Area	Mother/Father	4 year University
Joshua	18	Bay Area	Single Mother	Community College
Robert	18	Los Angeles	Single Mother	Community College
Ronnie	18	Bay Area	Mother/Father	Community College

Daniel

Daniel was the first participant who dialogued with me for this study. He was recruited by his high school principal to participate in the study. I met Daniel during the summer when he agreed to participate, so we met at the high school to conduct our dialogue. He appeared to be a very polite and well-spoken young man who seemed to be enjoying life after high school.

Daniel was an 18 year old African American male who had recently graduated from a public high school within the San Jose area. Daniel was about six feet two inches tall and has butterscotch color skin and deep brown eyes. He lived with his mother, stepfather, and older stepbrother in a predominately Vietnamese-American community in

San Jose. Daniel was a laid back 18 year old who liked to do normal teenage activities such as hang out with friends, go to the movies, text friends, and play basketball.

Daniel was a willing participant of the study, although during our dialogue session his initial comments to the questions were one word answers or short statements. However, as time went on during the session, he became more comfortable with the questions and began to elaborate in greater detail about his experiences in high school. After graduating from high school, Daniel's educational plan was to begin his studies at a community college in the Santa Clara area with the hopes of transferring to a four year university on a basketball scholarship. Daniel's career goal was to become a psychologist if playing basketball became not an option.

Devon

Devon was an 18 year old African American male who recently graduated from high school. Devon was also recruited by his former high school principal to participate in the study and share his experiences. Upon meeting Devon for the first time, I noticed that he had smooth dark brown skin and smiling eyes. He lived in a predominately Vietnamese-American community with his mother and younger sister. Devon's father lived in Kentucky whom he rarely visited. Like most young teenage boys Devon liked to have fun hanging out with friends and playing sports, especially basketball. Basketball was the sport that he has enjoyed playing since he was elementary age. When Devon entered high school in the ninth grade, he described himself as shy and timid. However, he admitted that the past four years of high school helped him figure out what type of person he is, which was a friendly and socially active person who liked to joke around and have a great time.

During our dialogue, Devon was a very relaxed young man who seemed excited about beginning a new path in his educational journey. Devon's educational plan was to begin his studies at a community college in the Santa Clara area where he hoped to study psychology and earn a basketball scholarship to a four year university.

Jeremiah

Jeremiah was a 20 year old college junior who moved from Los Angeles to attend University of California, Santa Cruz. Jeremiah was born in Los Angeles; however, when his mother relocated to Missouri, he lived with her until the end of his eighth grade year. Then he moved back to Los Angeles to live with his dad and stepmother to complete high school. His parents never married and he had four siblings who were younger and older than him. Jeremiah recalled his move back to Los Angeles as life changing. Moving back to Los Angeles was a big adjustment for Jeremiah and the selection of a new high school was very important to Jeremiah and his family. They wanted him to attend school in an environment that was safe and where he could excel academically. In the end Jeremiah attended a newly built high school in Lawndale located in the southwest part of Los Angeles; his was the second class to graduate from the school.

In high school Jeremiah played football and was passionate about the game. Being able to play football was essential to Jeremiah's academic success and one of the main reasons why he decided to attend University of California, Santa Cruz for college. Jeremiah was planning to graduate in 2010 with a Bachelor's of Arts in Recreation and Tourism with a minor in Communications.

John

John was a quiet 18 year old who lived with his mother, father, and sister in San Jose. He was recruited to participate in this study through a professional colleague. Upon meeting John for the first time, I noticed that he was a young man of average height with smooth dark skin and brown eyes. He was a soft spoken young man that exuded quiet confidence and assurance. He liked spending time with friends and family doing normal teenage activities. John attended a private all boys college preparatory school located in San Jose, California. It was a small school community where students were able to form close relationships with teachers and peers. The classes were small with 25 students or less and teachers offered support to students.

During our dialogue, John shared a slightly different high school educational experience from the other participants of the study. John thought his overall high school experiences were very positive and fulfilling. He felt the school community, including his teachers, wanted him to do his best and succeed. John expressed that his school provided an environment which allowed students to challenge themselves in the pursuit of new knowledge. For John it was an experience that gave him the motivation to want to pursue higher education after high school. After our dialogue it was evident that this young man had set goals that he wanted to attain in the near future. John was planning to attend a four year university in the fall and hoped to major in Biology.

Joshua

Joshua was an 18 year old African American male who lived with his mother and sister. Upon meeting Joshua, he appeared to be a quiet, shy young man who had tremendous love and respect for his mother. As we began to dialogue together, Joshua

revealed that he and his sister were adopted by his mother when they were very small. Although Joshua and his sister were adopted, he shared that they grew up in a very loving and caring home. His mother was very interested in their educational lives and wanted him and his sister to do well in school. Joshua felt and saw how his mother supported his sister and him through high school and, through this support, motivated him to want to pursue higher education.

Like many of the other participants of the study, Joshua described himself as a normal teenager who liked to spend time with friends and play sports. Joshua attended public high school in the San Jose area where he played on the football team. He felt that part of his educational success came from the support of his mother and sister, and the other came from playing football. Joshua was currently attending a community college in the Santa Clara area and hoped to transfer to a four year university on a sports scholarship.

Robert

Robert was an 18 year old African American male who was six feet four inches tall with smooth chocolate brown skin. Within the first ten minutes of speaking with Robert, it was apparent that he was a soft spoken and shy young man. Robert lived in a moderate income community that was predominately African American in Los Angeles with his mother, aunt and uncle. He had two half brothers by his father whom he rarely saw. When Robert spoke about his father, it seemed that his voice was peppered with some sadness and regret for the lack of relationship he had with his father. Robert described himself as a nice and caring person who loved his mother very much. Like many teenagers, Robert liked hanging out with friends and playing video games.

Robert attended a magnet school in the Los Angeles area. The magnet school academic programs focused more on the subjects of science and health education. Students took traditional math and language arts courses but there was a greater emphasis on the science and health component of the curriculum. Because of the heavy emphasis on science and health, the school offered medical programs designed to motivate students to pursue careers in the medical field in college. Robert was part of the nursing program in the 11th grade, which allowed students to work in the hospital across the street from the school and receive hands-on experience within the medical field. Being part of the nursing program in 11th grade sparked an interest in Robert to one day work as a nurse in the hospital. Robert's educational plans were to attend a local community college and hopefully be accepted into a nursing program.

Ronnie

Ronnie was an 18 year old male who lived with his mother, father, and sibling. He attended high school in the San Jose area. When I sat down to speak with Ronnie, the one thing that stood out to me was his open and fun sense of humor. I noticed right away that Ronnie, like many of the other participants, mentioned playing the game of basketball during high school. Ronnie liked playing basketball in high school; he revealed that he had been playing since he was in elementary school. It was just a natural process for him to continue with the sport throughout middle and high school.

Ronnie mentioned in his dialogue that his parents were very supportive in all of his endeavors in high school, especially sports. Ronnie expressed that it was important for him to do well academically. Sports were important, but it was understood that he needed to do well academically so that he could apply and attend college after high

school. The idea of higher education was something Ronnie had to give great focus to in addition to playing well in basketball. Ronnie had applied to and was planning to attend a community college in San Jose.

Reflections of Participants

Seven participants took part in two one-on-dialogues with the researcher. Both dialogues were transcribed and analyzed for generative themes. The data revealed several broad generative themes that illustrated a relationship between a strong support system and academic achievement among African American males. Through data analysis, the following themes were revealed: (a) parental/role model support had an important effect on academic motivation and high school completion, and (b) high school sports had a positive influence on the academic achievement of the African American male. The section below presents critical reflections from the participants in response to each research question.

Research Question #1:

According to Successful African American Males, How Does Society Perceive the Academic Achievement of African American Men?

What Role Does the Media Play in That Perception?

All participants of the study felt that society has an overall negative perception of young African American males and their academic achievement in particular. The participants thought that society viewed African American males through a stereotypical lens. The view through this lens is magnified even more by the disproportionate media coverage that tends to glorify and showcase less than positive behaviors of popular African American males, such as sports figures and entertainers. The media bombards

society with reports of athletes and entertainers like football players or rappers who engage in harmful behaviors. This fact overshadows the many African American males who are doing positive things within their community and society. Many of the participants conveyed through their dialogue how the media perceives, judges, and stereotype many young African American males socially and academically.

Media Perception of African American Males

During our dialogue Devon shared his thoughts on how the media perceives African American males. Devon felt that the media places African American men in a certain category to fit society's perception:

I don't know, you're either a star athlete or out causing trouble, that's what it seems like to me. You are either one thing or something else. You can't be anything other than an athlete, rapper, or whatever. It's like they don't see you as anything else but that and that perception can have a negative effect on a person especially in school.

When the media places African American men in certain categories such as entertainer or athlete, it limits and also influences the possibilities of what these men can achieve.

Placing them into a box can limit their access into other realms of society, such as education where they could maximize their full potential.

Jeremiah expressed a similar opinion of how media perception plays a role among African American males:

It depends on what area you live in you know; it seems we are seen as criminals no matter what, being a statistic or already in a jail cell. They make it seem like that, I don't its kind of funny, and it depends on how you look at it though. I think they perceive us to always be failures. I think a lot of people watch t.v. so much, that when they see sports athlete or a rapper, especially if they don't have a father figure in their household and they see it everyday they think they are to behave like this, that's how it plays a role.

Jeremiah expressed how the media in many ways has replaced the role of the father figure within the home. The father's role is to guide and demonstrate how to be a man and be a productive citizen within his community and society. Because of the absence of many fathers within the homes of young African American males, the media has become the influential figure that guides the choices they make.

Ronnie also thought the media has had strong or heavy influence on young African American males and the choices they make:

I do think the media has a lot of influence on how people see Black men. I mean you have the rappers and pro athletes that you see all the time on t.v or in videos what are we to do as Black men if that is all really see. If all you see is the same thing all the time then you begin to think that is what I am suppose be or suppose to do. I don't know it messes with your mind a little, its kinda crazy you know.

The media's singular portrayal of African American males begins to define the individual and the role he will play in society. This perception has a tremendous effect on African American males and their academic achievement.

Media Perception and Academic Achievement

When asked what effect the media has had on African American males' academic achievement, Daniel shared:

I don't know I think that a lot of African American males kind of make themselves fit the stereotype that people give us, like oh, he sell or does drugs or all of those crazy things and some people just do it and it kind of makes it easier for the media to say that we do those kinds of things. People just give up and just drop out of high school and stuff like that.

Devon also felt the media played a significant role in the academic achievement among African American males. He thought that the media does have some effect on some young men academically, depending on the individual. Devon explained that a person had a choice to either do well or not:

At times yeah the media can have an effect, but I think its more up to the person, as long as you know what you need to do it shouldn't matter what other people think. But you can get into people heads easy. It's more of a choice. As long as you know what your goals are and you stay on the straight and narrow its more up to you than anything. I think there are some out there that are good, but I think when most people see a group of African Americans walking around they automatically get nervous or think they are up to no good.

Although John attended a private school in San Jose and had a positive high school experience, he was constantly reminded everyday that as an African American male, he was not supposed to succeed. He understood how the media perception of African American males can play a role in academic achievement:

The media sees us as troubled youth not interested in attaining academic achievement. The media paints a negative picture of who we are and what we are suppose to be. On the news black men are suspects breaking the law and that influences a lot of us in school and anywhere else. Some of our teachers buy into some of those images and then they treat their students accordingly.

John, like the other participants of the study, felt that the media plays a significant role in the lives of African American males. He felt the negative perception of the media can influence some to have poor academic performance or lack of motivation for school. However, each participant expressed the overall sentiment that an individual has a choice to either succeed or succumb to the negative influences that they witness daily.

Style of Dress and Society

One societal perception that many young African American males related to was their style of dress. Many African American males have voiced deep concerns about the way society perceives and judges them based on the style of clothes they choose to wear. During their dialogue the participants mentioned the style of dress among young African American males as being an important factor. Daniel talked about society's perception of young African American males:

It depends on what you are wearing and how you are acting. Like if I go out like this with the hat backwards people may think that I am some kind of thug or I don't know maybe somebody who is not doing well for themselves. But if I have on a nice college shirt and pants they might perceive me as someone that's more like business oriented, someone who has a good head on their shoulders. My uncle always tells me that perception is everything. What you present to people positive or negative is what people will think of you.

Daniel understood that perception was important in how others view and judge you.

Daniel felt that regardless of how you present yourself, either in a positive or negative light, many in society view young African American males based on a stereotypical perception.

Robert shared a similar opinion of how society perceives African American males by their style of dress:

Yeah, like we sag our pants even though some of us our raised not to do that. They don't see that we have knowledge, they (media) think that we're not that smart, and when we speak we talk ghetto. The media thinks we don't know anything and if you look a certain way then you are up to no good.

It is this view in which society perceives and judges African American males that continues to perpetuate this negative stereotype.

In addition, Devon also thought that a person's style of dress predicted how others would perceive and judge you. When he mentioned this during the dialogue, he was asked to elaborate:

Like today I decided to wear red and people may be like yeah he is just a gang banger or something like that. But other days I may be in basketball shorts and a cut-off shirt and they may think "oh he's just going to play basketball or something". Its all about how you present yourself to people and what they will think about you.

Teacher Perception of African American Males

Daniel was asked if teacher perception of young African American males played a role in their academic achievement. For example, if they are dressed a certain way, even

though the student may be academically proficient, would the clothes have a significant effect on teacher perception of the student?

Maybe for some people it would, but it didn't play one in me, I don't know. I don't know what goes on in other people's heads and what others are doing. But I know for me it was important to try to do my best despite what the teachers thought of me. I didn't let how I dressed effect my academics.

During high school Joshua thought some of his teachers perceived him in a certain way. He felt they regarded him as an athlete whose only interest was to do the minimum amount of work in order to pass the class to be eligible to play football for his school. He also sensed that his teachers viewed him as a stereotypical young African American male who was not interested in pursuing college or higher education after high school:

I don't know what it was but my teachers saw me another black boy who only wanted to play football and do nothing else. They really didn't care whether I was wanted to go to college or not. I don't think many of them knew I want to go to college, but I guess that's how it is, you just have put it out of your mind and do things for yourself you know.

Joshua's reflection of how teachers perceived him in high school illustrates the effect of how society's perception of certain individuals can influence how others will treat them. He assumed that his teachers did not care about his academic achievements or were interested enough to find out if he even wanted to pursue higher education. These negative perceptions and attitudes among teachers affect many African American males' experiences within the U.S. educational system.

The participants shared their experiences of how the media can have tremendous impact on an individual. For African American males, this impact has significant repercussions and consequences within their lives. Academic achievement is a critical area that needs more attention and focus in order to guide those young men to success.

Research Question #2

What Specific Variables Do Successful African American Males

Attribute as Leading to Their Academic Achievement?

The Effect of Parent/Mentor Support on Academic Achievement

Parental Support

All the participants of the study attributed parental and/mentor support as their foundation for academic success. Devon felt that his mother played a tremendous role in his academic support system:

My mom motivated me a lot during school, she always told me to stay focus on my school work or I won't graduate or do anything with my life. When my dad was around he would also tell me to stay on the right track, but he lives in Kentucky so I don't see him that much.

Robert expressed during our dialogue that the only specific role model or person he looked up to was his mom. He described his mom in this way:

I don't have a role model, I mean I have one and that is my mother. She is a strong black woman, who tells me to do right, embrace my color, be a better person and don't treat people wrong. She is the one who is there for me through anything even if I'm doing bad or good she always tells me that she is proud of me and to do my best.

Joshua attributed his academic success to the support of his mother and sister. He described how his mother and sister both supported him throughout his entire high school career:

My mom and sister were like my main support and encouragement. I mean if they weren't there to encourage me telling me that I could do, I don't know what if I would have made it out. My mom stayed on me making sure that I kept my grades up and my sister who goes to a Historically Black College on the east coast would always tell me that I can do it. I just need to focus on what I am doing and go for it, yeah they were really there for me and still are.

Devon, Robert, and Joshua conveyed in their dialogues the love and respect they both felt towards their mother. For many of these participants, the maternal bond within the parental unit played an important and instrumental role in each of their lives. All of the participants referred to either their mother or a maternal figure, such as a grandmother or aunt, as helping to guide them through their educational journey. In the absence of the father, the participants looked to their mothers for guidance, support, and encouragement to help them achieve academic success.

Having both parents in the home to support and encourage can have significant effect on an individual and their academic successes as well. Ronnie's support came from both his parents, who encouraged him to do his best in school. His parents wanted him to do well in everything he was actively involved in at school, including academics and sports:

Doing well in school was important to my parents, but I was encouraged to do well in everything, which included sports and academics. My mom and dad were very serious about getting good grades and taking care of my responsibilities. I couldn't give excuses if things didn't get done. Not doing well is was never an option with my parents, it's was a must that you do well.

Daniel also looked to his parents for support during high school. His parents played an important role in encouraging him to do well academically.

Most definitely, yeah my parents were my role models. Whenever I didn't do my homework or got a bad grade they always got on me real bad, they took away my phone. I guess I just didn't want to let them down so I tried to succeed and do my best. They always tell me to keep my head up and I watch them and they are pretty successful in raising me. My mom she was a single mom so I have always looked up to her.

Daniel expressed the need to do his best despite any errors he may have made along the way. Although he may have made mistakes in high school, like not completing an assignment or receiving a less than positive grade, he always felt that his parents were

there for him. Daniel and Ronnie both were motivated to do well in school and to make their parents proud of their achievements.

John attributed his success to the support of his family, friends, and teachers:

My family, friends, and past teachers helped me stay on track so that I can do well in school. My family has made it their priority to keep me on the right track so that I can attain the goals that I have set for myself. My friends and I challenge one another to do our best and that motivates me to do well. Finally, my past teachers have always encouraged me to do my best and I knew that I could go to them for help and guidance. So it's a lot of people helping to support me through my education.

John experience indicates he not only received support from his family and friends, but also from his teachers at school. As John spoke about his educational experience, he conveyed a sincere respect and gratitude towards the teachers he encountered in high school. The encouragement and support he received from his past teachers helped guide and motivate John to excel in attaining his educational goals. Although John, like many of the participants, had the support of family and friends, he could also rely on the motivation and encouragement of his teachers to help him succeed.

Parental support was important to all of the participants' academic success, helping them to understand that there was someone who would always be there to push and motivate them no matter the circumstances. Jeremiah was the oldest of my participants and the one whose experience was most inspiring. Jeremiah's parents were his motivation to want to succeed and be a positive influence for others. As he spoke about his parents Jeremiah revealed that they were addicted to drugs and struggled through their parental responsibilities.

Well my parents wanted me to excel academically; they pushed me and were like my inspiration to succeed more than anything. Well they didn't have a college education, they stopped at high school. They couldn't really motivate me to do nothing in school or push me; all they could really do was advise me like telling

me I had to go. Based on my family everybody has a college degree and education and I felt like I had to push through that as well and reach for it. Both of my parents are recovering drug addicts so I didn't want to be nothing like them and that's where I found my motivation to get a college education so that I wouldn't turn out like them.

It was his parents' drug addiction that motivated Jeremiah to want to be a positive influence to others. It was through those struggling times that Jeremiah found support from his paternal grandmother and uncles to help him stay in school and pursue higher education. During his dialogue he talked about wanting and needing to escape Los Angeles and the environment where he lived; otherwise he knew that he too would become another statistic of an African American male who ended up either in a gang, in jail, or even worse, dead. Jeremiah's story, like many of the other participants, was very hopeful and inspiring to hear that young African American males do exist who aspire to be a success and possible role model for others.

Mentor Support

One of Devon's teachers also played a significant role in supporting and motivating him to graduate high school and pursue higher education. This teacher encouraged Devon to apply to a community college in the Santa Clara area, with the hopes of playing basketball and being recruited into a four year university through a sports scholarship.

Mr. Jones he helped me and Daniel a lot, he actually came out and helped us. He helped me fill out applications and apply for financial aid for college. It's just my mom and I, so Mr. Jones understands that it would be really hard for my mom to try to pay for school and take care of my little sister too. Yeah, we would hang out with Mr. Jones in his classroom and he would talk to us about what we were going to do after we graduated and encouraged us to apply for college.

Daniel found support through his basketball coach who not only helped him and his teammates mentally prepare for games, but also encouraged him to do his best academically.

Our basketball coach was always on us. We had weekly progress reports all the time, had to maintain a 2.0 which is kind of low. My G.P.A. was like a 2.5 or something like that, it wasn't great but I met his requirements. Yeah, we couldn't really get in trouble with the law. There was this kid who got into trouble for selling drugs, but our coach gave him another chance. That was really cool for our coach to support that kid even if they did something wrong he still was there for them.

The information that was shared in the dialogues revealed that parental/mentor support was important for the academic achievement of African American males. The participants found success academically through the support and encouragement they received from parents, family, or mentors. The support and love they gained from their families helped guide them through high school and allowed them to believe in themselves and the success they could achieve.

Research Question #3:

To What Extent Do Successful African American Males Perceive Teacher Expectations Contributing to Their Motivation to Complete High School?

Teacher Motivation and Perception of African American Males in the Classroom

Highly Motivated Teachers

John was the sole participant who felt that the teachers at his school were motivated to see students do well and supported them in their academic success:

My school is a small campus with an average of 25 students or less in each classroom. I go to a private school so it is a small community of teachers, counselors, and administration that want to see every student do well. I think all the teachers are motivated to see every student succeed. They offer after school help if a student needs it, because the work is challenging and difficult. But everyone is there to support you whenever you need them to.

Unmotivated Teachers

In contrast, six participants described their teachers as being unmotivated or ignorant of their academic goals. Jeremiah felt that his teachers were unmotivated in preparing him for higher education:

From the educational standpoint I don't think any public school in the L.A. area could prepare individuals higher education. One reason is the lack of teachers and teachers wanting to push their students. When I started at my new high school I was in remedial classes even though I had a 4.0 or 3.8 at my other school I was still placed in remedial classes. I don't think any schools in the L.A. area can prepare you for college.

Robert had a similar experience with his teachers during his time in high school. According to Robert, some of his teachers provided an academic challenge for him and his peers but most of the teachers seemed to not care:

Some were and some were like they didn't care. They did not put a lot of effort into it, like they gave you one assignment to do for the whole week and give you free time for the remainder of the day. There were like a few teachers, maybe 3 or 4 out of my entire high school career that were really challenging.

Ronnie also shared the same sentiments as the other participants on teacher motivation. Due to the low number of African American students who attended his high school, Ronnie felt the teachers seemed unaware of that population of students:

There wasn't that many Black students that went to my high school and in my senior class there was even less. Most of the Black students were kids who were athletes at our school and people knew them from the sport they did, but other than that the teachers really didn't know them. I don't think the teachers felt that the Black kids were interested in going to college after high school. They just didn't seem to really care what we did or if we were good at it.

Student Reflection on the Effect of Teacher Motivation

Devon thought that the motivation from his teachers could have been stronger.

He explained that both his teachers and counselors could have supported him more in his academic endeavors.

The teachers that I had in high school didn't seem to take much interest in me and what I was doing academically. During my time there I didn't really meet with them much, but they didn't try to meet with me either. So basically if I didn't go and seek their help I had to go to them and ask about things. Yeah, it's like if you don't go after the help they don't give it to you really.

Although Devon felt that his teachers did not fully support him, he recognized the role he played in those relationships.

Yeah, but back then I really wasn't think about it, I mean if I thought about it I would have done it differently. I probably would have gone to see them more and worked harder in class. I look back on it now and think I should have talked with my teachers more so that they knew who I was and could have supported me more. But I've graduated now so it's like oh well what's done is done, I'm o.k. though.

Recognizing that he too has a role to play in his academic achievement, Devon expressed some regret for not making more of an effort to work with his teachers and counselors to help him better prepare academically for higher education.

Jeremiah also remembered one teacher and an assistant principal from high school that understood his family situation and supported him:

I did have one motivated teacher in school that pushed me considering my home situation and my assistant principal who stayed up late hours helping me out. I felt that they were there for me in the sense that I needed to get an education. Like really being there so that I could have someone to talk to about my family or school issues. But from an academic standpoint like writing and math no, thinking critically yes. They helped me to think about things in a bigger perspective which helped me plan out what I wanted to do after high school like go to college.

Jeremiah credited one of his high school counselors and assistant principal for taking an interest in his personal situation offering their support and advice towards his educational endeavors.

Daniel felt that it wasn't until the last two years of high school that his teachers and counselors showed more support for him and his academic endeavors:

I think that within the last two years the teachers seem more motivated to try to help us to succeed to get to the next level. In my junior year you would hear teachers talking to students about college and preparation. Kids were beginning to study for tests like the SATs and things like that. I really wasn't thinking about going to college because my grades were o.k. but in my senior year Mr. Jones started really talking to us and telling us about the importance of going to college. He helped us apply to college and I will be starting in the fall.

Teachers like Mr. Jones provided an environment where students could visit, discuss, and ask questions about colleges and universities, the application process, or how to finance their education. Mr. Jones was the piece in the educational support system that is missing for students like African American males. Daniel was able to access the experience and knowledge that Mr. Jones imparted for interested students.

Only one of the participants shared their experiences of highly motivated teachers who helped them succeed, most recalled teachers who showed minimal interest in their academic success. These participants conveyed through their dialogue that the lack of interest from some of their teachers was noticeable and discouraging to them as students. Experiencing this lack of motivation or interest from their teachers had some effect in their motivation to pursue higher education.

Teacher Perception in the Classroom

Positive Teacher Perception

Teacher perception in the classroom plays a major role in the educational success of students. How a teacher perceives students can be the determining factor of whether the teacher will be highly motivated to educate an individual. Five of the participants shared their experiences with teacher perception and how teachers viewed them within the classroom. Devon thought the teachers' perception of him overall was positive:

I'm pretty social, but for the most part I'm pretty good. They had to stay on me a little bit, but after a while I got it. I knew that I needed to focus on my work and not talk so much and joke around. I think my teachers saw me as a kid who liked to have fun and who had a positive attitude. That's one thing about me is that I am positive and show respect to my teachers even though I like to have lots of fun.

Jeremiah also shared his experience with how his teachers perceived him in the classroom:

It's a timeline, first they probably saw me as the shy one, didn't talk too much, pretty much kept to myself. Over time I became loud, class clown, but I did all my work, I was very smart. I graduated with a 3.8, but I was always cracking jokes in class. I think they didn't have to worry about me too much. They knew I was a hard working student so they didn't have to worry about me because they knew I was going to get my work done no matter what.

Daniel thought that his teachers perceived him in a positive way. He felt he was a student that respected his teachers and tried to do all the tasks that were asked of him.

I don't know I think the teachers liked me. I wasn't any trouble in the classroom, I tried to do all of my work and complete everything. I mean there were times that I may have missed an assignment or something like that, but I tried not to be a problem in the classroom. Sometimes it's hard when your friends are in the class with you, but I know how my parents are so I try to do my best.

Knowing that his parents had certain expectations of his academic achievements and classroom behavior gave Daniel the foundation to do his absolute best. He was also

aware of students who were not doing well academically and in the pursuit of higher education, knowing they were not trying to do their best.

John also expressed that he felt his teachers perceived him in a positive way. He continued to relate his experience:

My teachers saw me as a hard working student who does the work that is assigned to them. A person who goes above and beyond without being asked to do so. I was seen by my teachers as a diligent and discipline worker who persevered through any challenges that came my way. I was also seen as a student who found ways to improve academically.

These four participants felt that most of the teachers they encountered during their high school career perceived them in a positive way. These participants conveyed that they thought the teachers viewed them as friendly, slightly off focus, but overall hard workers in the classroom. For other participants, however, their experience with teacher perception was not as pleasant.

Negative Teacher Perception

In contrast, Robert and Ronnie had less than positive experiences with some of the teachers they encountered during high school. Robert felt his teachers had a negative perception of him.

I think they thought that I wasn't going to do my work, talk a lot, or play around. Some teachers had an over the top, over confident sense of humor and made jokes they shouldn't make about the students. For us students that made us feel like well what is the point if we are going to be treated that way, like we don't really matter.

When asked how the teachers developed this sense of humor, Robert responded:

I don't know, I think that the teachers are like that probably because of the kids they had in the past and their behavior. They are using past kids bad behavior as their way to show us new students that we can't get to them I guess. It's like they will get to us before we get to them.

When Ronnie shared his thoughts on teacher perception in the classroom and how teachers perceived him, he explained:

The teachers and I had some problems. I think that because I like to have fun and joke around it came get me in a lot of trouble. My teachers would always be on me to either be quiet or do my work. I mean do my work it's just that I like to talk and have with my friends. I think the teachers thought I was a little difficult in class, but I tried to be cool and not get into trouble.

Negative teacher perception usually has a significant effect on an individual.

However, Robert and Ronnie did not allow the perception of teachers to affect their resiliency towards academic goals and achievements. Instead the teachers' negative perception had the opposite effect and possibly motivated them to want to succeed even more.

Summary

This chapter presented several factors that contributed to the academic success of these six African American males. The data revealed that (a) a close relationship with parents or mentors support and motivation, (b) positive teacher perception and high expectations, and (c) the positive impact of after school extra-curricular activities are all factors that play a significant role in the academic achievement among African American males between the ages of 18-20 years old. Through the process of participatory research, the participants were able to dialogue and share their experiences of how they achieved academic success and began pursuing higher levels of learning.

The data also demonstrated that support and encouragement either from parents or mentors helped motivate the participants of this study to finish high school and pursue higher education. It became increasingly apparent during the dialogues that not only did support and encouragement play a significant role in each of the participants' academic

success, but love did as well. Each participant expressed an overwhelming amount of love and respect towards the individuals who helped them throughout their academic journey.

Understanding the factors that contribute to African American males' academic success can provide further insight into finding more ways to foster positive motivation among African American males in high school. Chapter V contains a summary of the study, a discussion of the findings, recommendations for educational practice and future research, draws conclusions as for the study and presents the reflections of the researcher.

CHAPTER V

OVERVIEW, DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Overview

This study was designed to investigate the factors that contributed to the successful completion of high school among African American males. The purpose of conducting participatory research was to engage African American males in critical, and hopefully transformative, dialogue about their educational experiences. Through two one-on-one dialogues, each participant spoke and reflected on their academic successes and how they were able to attain them.

This study demonstrates that access to adequate levels of social and cultural capital can have significant impact on educational success. The results of these findings illustrate the importance and need for support systems to help guide and motivate African American males to complete high school and pursue higher education. In this chapter, I discuss ways in which African American males can attain academic achievement through various support systems and programs to achieve educational success. This chapter offers recommendations for future research and practice, reflection of the researcher and a final conclusion to the study.

Discussion

Connection to Social and Cultural Capital

According to American and French sociologists James Coleman (1988) and Pierre Bourdieu (1986), social capital plays a major role in an individual's academic achievement. Coleman and Bourdieu agreed that all forms of capital were an important resource that allow an individual to develop and build social collateral within various

realms of society such as education, politics, and the economy. It is this capital that gives individuals the opportunity to foster and develop relationships that help to cultivate complex inter-woven support systems. Social and cultural capital also allows them to navigate with ease through the intricate and often times convoluted educational and social systems encountered on a daily basis. Like social capital, cultural capital is also equally important to an individual's social development. Cultural capital allows an individual to build and cultivate social relationships outside the family structure, such as within school and home communities. Essentially, social and cultural capital are resources that make up the foundation of an individual's mobility through society.

The findings of this study support Coleman's (1988) and Bourdieu's (1986) theories of social capital, in that African American males established social network relationships within the educational system. Coleman suggests that mutual trust is an important factor to the development of these social relationships, and without it, individuals cannot fully use this resource. The participants conveyed through their dialogue and sharing of experiences that the relationships they were able to form based on mutual trust and respect with educational figures such as teachers, coaches, and school administrators were critical to their academic success. For African American students, especially males, trusting in the educational system can be a daunting and often times intimidating situation.

Croninger and Lee's (2001) research also aligns with this study, which examined whether social capital reduced the chances of dropping out of high school and whether teachers provided students with valuable forms of social capital that would help them to succeed. Croninger and Lee showed that teachers provided students with an important

source of social capital. The research suggested that teachers who established positive relationships or informal interaction outside of the classroom with students helped decrease the chance of drop-out, and increase their opportunities to attain academic achievement.

Although Croninger and Lee (2001) did not focus on specific groups from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, the theoretical framework of their study can be applied to most groups. They found that all students regardless of racial and ethnic background should be able to find guidance and support from the teachers they interact with throughout their educational journey. These relationships built on mutual trust and respect helped to foster positive attitudes about education and motivated students to want to stay in school, graduate, and possibly pursue higher education. The educational system is designed to provide equitable opportunities for all students to receive the best education possible; however, that is not always the practice among educators. School figures such as teachers and administrators are essentially there to facilitate the learning for individuals so that they can succeed. The absence of positive social relationships or access to social capital as a resource is denying an individual the opportunity to succeed.

Similar to Croninger and Lee (2001), several participants in my study mentioned that particular school personnel helped to motivate them throughout high school. This person was a supporting and encouraging teacher, administrator, or coach with whom they were able to foster a relationship outside of the classroom. These relationships were based on mutual trust, caring, and love for the student where they were able to gain guidance. The teachers, administrators, and coaches in these relationships recognized the value of the resources that they could impart to their students. These educators

understood that their own social capital could help the student increase their opportunities for educational attainment.

The Impact of Cultural Capital in Educational Achievement

Cultural capital is a resource that plays a role in the academic achievement of students. Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital examines the impact an individual's culture plays in their academic achievement. According to Bourdieu, cultural capital is inherited through the socialization of an individual's dominant cultural background. It is the cultural practices and attitude toward language patterns, music and art, education, style of dress, politics, or global issues that embodies an individual's cultural capital.

When African American students enter into school, they bring with them a wealth of cultural knowledge and dispositions that can have significant impact on their academic achievement. As the participants described their experiences in school, it became exceedingly clear that cultural capital played a role in their academic achievement. Style of dress was a recurring theme that many of the participants mentioned in their dialogue. The participants described how they felt society and their teachers perceived them based on the way they dressed.

According to the participants, society does not always perceive or portray young African American males in a positive way. They believed this perception influenced how others judged and treated them. Teacher perception and motivation illustrates this concept best. It was conveyed during several dialogues with participants that perceptions of a student can influence teacher motivation in many ways. Many of the participants

sensed that some of their teachers were not entirely motivated to help them succeed or simply ignored their presence in the classroom.

Style of dress is one form of cultural capital that many students of various ethnic backgrounds bring to education when they enter into the classroom. It is part of their cultural social make-up that distinguishes them from other groups. However, cultural capital, if not in sync with the dominant culture, can be viewed as negative and detrimental to the individual. For example, several of the participants expressed in their dialogues how society negatively perceives African American males based on the clothes they wear. Robert mentions in his dialogue the impression of African American males who sag their pants and the negative perception this style of dress garners from society. This cultural capital that African American males possess is often devalued and considered a negative factor within the fabric of education. Education can often times devalue the capital that students possess which can lead them to not acquiring academic success.

Love and Care

The findings of this study align with Muller, Katz, and Dance (1999), whose research demonstrates that teacher caring was a key factor in the academic achievement of students of diverse backgrounds. They found teachers who showed care and understanding can influence a student to take advantage of the resources provided. This level of care can also create a deeper connection between the school and home community. Teachers like Mr. Johnson, who provided a caring and open environment within his classroom promoted engagement and knowledge seeking within his students.

Caring and supporting an individual can be a determining factor that keeps the student focused and engaged in learning and reduces the risk of dropping out of school.

Several of the participants conveyed that particular teachers at their school showed them love and care, characteristics usually demonstrated only by their family. Although the participants spoke about the disconnect they felt with most of their teachers, most were able to identify and speak about a particular teacher that helped and guided them through high school. Ultimately, a teacher should have an open mind and heart to understand the students that enter the classroom. It is the teacher-student relationship in which both parties mutually try to “understand, receive, respect, and recognize” (Muller, et al, 1999, p. 299) one another so the student can be successful. It’s a learning process in which both the teacher and student build a trusting relationship that will reap significant rewards at the end of the journey.

Positive Impact of Extra-Curricular Activities

Another recurring theme in this study was the important idea of extra-curricular activities in which many of the participants were involved in after school. Five of the seven participants participated in a sport-related extra-curricular activity. The participants either played basketball or football during their time in high school. Several of the participants mentioned they were planning to play sports when they entered college. Two of the participants spoke about being a part of a school club such as the African American Student Union. School clubs give students the opportunity to meet others who share the same interests as them. Moran (1991) found that participation in extra-curricular activities had a positive effect on the social emotional adjustment of high school freshman. An extra-curricular activity gave the high school freshmen a chance to

join with a group of people of like interests to help develop social skills needed for high school.

Research conducted by Pascarella and Smart (1991) found that for African American men, athletic participation had a positive effect on their college social involvement, bachelor's degree completion, and self esteem. Data from this study illustrated that African American males who participated in a sport-related extra-curricular activities maintained a "C" average in their academic studies. These individuals were motivated to excel academically so that they remained eligible to play sports. Similarly several of the participants conveyed in their dialogue that the support they received from their coaches encouraged them to do well academically.

Recommendations for Future Research

The responses from the participants of this study indicate that further research should be conducted in three areas: educational capital, teacher perception and academic expectations, and the effect of positive choices on academic achievement.

Educational Capital

According to Jaeger (2009) the concept of cultural capital is often used to explain how in addition to an individual's socioeconomic and family background characteristics, cultural knowledge, traits and behaviors also affect educational outcomes. Jaeger's (2009) research proposes that for cultural capital to promote educational success three conditions must be in place: (1) parents must possess cultural capital, (2) they must transfer their cultural capital to the child, and (3) children must absorb cultural capital and convert it into educational success. Downey (1995), Eitle and Eitle (2002), Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell (1999), and Teachman (1987) suggests that parents who possess

cultural capital are measured by the quantity of educational resources in the home. Educational resources including reference materials like dictionaries or thesauruses, various types of literature, or a quiet place to study, transfer parents' knowledge of cultural capital to their children. Through these resources parents are helping to promote and facilitate within their child an interest in learning and gaining new knowledge. This transference is conducted through various communication outlets that parents and children share.

More research needs to be conducted on access to educational capital and the impact it has on African American males and educational success. For example, participants in my study appeared to have a clear understanding of the importance of completing high school and pursuing higher education. Many expressed how important completing high school and attending college was to their parents. Daniel shared that his mother attended college and received her degree; both his mother and father expressed their desire for him to pursue higher education as well. The participants understood that completing high school was an expectation that was to be achieved.

Jaeger (2009) examined how children and parents communicate about academic expectations. He observed how often children discuss politics and social issues, books, films or television with their parents. This open communication between children and parents is an example of parents investing time, energy, and knowledge into their children with the hope that they will absorb the various pieces of information and apply them to their educational opportunities.

Several of my participants indicated during their dialogues that their parents placed a high level of importance parents on education. Some also shared that their

parents expected them to attend college in pursuit of higher education. This knowledge and experience that the parents shared and invested in them helped to motivate and encourage the participants to want to pursue higher educational opportunities after high school. Further valuable areas of study include investigation through dialogues with the parents.

Teacher Perception and Academic Expectations

Reviewing the data revealed that teachers' voices were absent in my study. This absence made it difficult to understand those participants who claimed that these teachers were unmotivated to challenge them academically, ignored them, or viewed them negatively based on prejudiced perceptions. Yet, other participants felt their teachers were motivated and made time after school to help students with homework or projects. They felt the teachers perceived them positively and were willing to help them attain academic success.

Reviewing the dialogues made me think about those teachers whose voices were absent from the data and wondered what they would say about the young African American males who they once had as students. Would they confirm the participants' personal accounts of their experiences? In a future study, I would like explore the perceptions and expectations teachers hold for their African American male students.

Making Choices

The effect of making positive choices was another concept that continued to surface throughout the data. Many participants in the study mentioned the importance of making positive choices several times during their dialogue. Devon shared that it was up to the individual to make the right choice in life. He felt that if a person has a clear

understanding of what their goals are, then it would be up to the individual to pursue success. Although Devon and many of the other participants understood the idea of making positive choices and the benefits they receive from doing so the question must be asked: What about all of the young African American males who are not making positive choices and how do their choices affect them socially and academically?

In *The Trouble with Black Boys*, Noguera (2008) reports that anthropologists and sociologists have documented ways in which certain cultural influences can lower the aspirations of Black males and contribute to the adoption of self-destructive behaviors. He suggests that Black males view sports or music as more promising routes to upward mobility than academic pursuits. The participants shared concern for the media's influence on African American males and their academic achievement, and the obstacles and challenges that might stand in his way in order to complete high school and possibly pursue higher education.

Although an individual's "choice" is of importance, it is imperative to recognize that individuals make choices based on their daily surroundings. Noguera (2008) suggests the range of choices available to the individual is profoundly constrained and shaped by external forces over which he may not have control. Noguera recommends the only way to change behavioral outcomes is to comprehend the cognitive processes that influence how individuals adapt, cope, and respond to their situations. For many African American males, the decision to stay in school and graduate is often a difficult one to make, despite many efforts and attempts to encourage and guide them to academic success. Jeremiah recognized that an individual must understand he has choices. This understanding comes from a strong family support system that teaches an individual

about the impact of both positive and negative choices on their lives. Without a strong family support system, outside influences such as the media, neighborhood “streets,” or certain peers can significantly shape an individual’s life choices. Further research on individual “choice” would be beneficial to educators in understanding external influences on African American males and their motivation to stay in school and graduate. Thus, a comparative study could be conducted to explore the choices made by African American males who did not graduate high school.

Recommendations for Practice

The results of this study revealed several consistent factors that helped contribute to the successful high school completion among African American males. Factors such as parent or teacher-student mentor support systems, teacher perceptions and high expectations all play a significant role in the educational success of African American males. Even though the participants of this study were successful in their academic endeavors, many African American males are not. It is my recommendation for practice that improvement in the following areas can help increase academic success rates among African American males.

Parental Support Systems

A strong parental support system was found in this study to be a significant factor that contributed to the academic achievement among African American males. All of the participants credited their parents for supporting, encouraging, and loving them through their educational journey. Some of the participants expressed that without the presence of their parents, they probably would not have graduated from high school, let alone

pursue college. The parental unit as a support system can make a tremendous difference in the individual's ability to make positive life choices.

Several participants in my study mentioned external parental support, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and family friends, as an important factor that helped them complete high school and pursue higher education. Given this finding, it is my recommendation that more programs be implemented to foster and maintain strong parental support systems among African American students.

Teacher-Student Mentorship Support Systems

African American academic achievement can be greatly improved through mentoring programs where teachers mentor students outside the classroom in an informal environment. The findings of this study revealed that building a strong trusting teacher-student relationship increases the chances that the student will continue their education to the end and graduate from high school. These findings also demonstrated that when teachers build informal relationships outside the classroom to help and guide students, they can make a positive difference in the future choices of their students.

For example, John shared that the teachers at his school made themselves available after school for every student who needed help with any academic work. He also mentioned that his school sponsored several student clubs such as the African American Student Union, where students like John were able to meet with other African American students with similar interests and seek guidance and mentorship from the advising teacher.

Devon spoke about a similar experience with a particular teacher at his high school who provided guidance and mentorship for African American students outside the

academic walls. Devon explained that Mr. Johnson helped him create a plan that would allow him to apply and attend a two-year community college and play basketball in the hopes of being recruited by a four-year university. Mr. Johnson used the strong teacher-student relationship that he and Devon have established to help guide and support him through the college application process. Mr. Johnson also made it his priority to counsel with parents to guide them through the college application process. Therefore, professional development should include a focus on teacher-student mentoring and its impact on the academic achievement of African American males.

Teacher Perception, Expectations, and Motivation

To help improve African American males' chances in succeeding within the classroom, teacher attitudes and expectations would need to improve as well. Teachers should not just be motivated to teach, but also and want to invest time and energy into the educational achievement of the student. My participant, Joshua thought his teachers perceived him as just an athlete who was only interested in sports. He felt their perception was based on the stereotypical attitude of African American males whose only aspiration in life is to be a professional athlete. In a similar vein, a longitudinal study conducted by Rist (1970) indicates that teachers' first impressions are powerful predictors of how students' academic and social behaviors are viewed over time. Teachers who communicate low expectations towards their students will find that the students will fulfill these expectations and fail to reach their full academic potential.

Teacher motivation is an essential part of the academic foundation for African American males. Educators should encourage students to take risks and challenge themselves academically in order to understand and gain new knowledge. Students need

to feel that the teacher is excited about teaching and are interested in developing a closer teacher-student relationship that exists beyond the walls of the classroom. They need to feel that the teacher is there to help them achieve academic success.

For many young African American males, the lack of motivation that is communicated through the teacher is very evident. Robert felt some of his teachers did not seem to care whether or not they did well academically. Ronnie also thought the teachers were unaware of him in the classroom; they viewed him as a student who was not motivated to learn and do the work. For many students this behavior demonstrated in the classroom by the teacher can be discouraging and disheartening. Ultimately, motivating students is essential to keeping them engaged in the learning and on the right path to academic achievement. These findings could be used to inform teacher training and professional development to show the powerful impact of teacher motivation on student achievement and engagement.

Preparatory School for African American Males

It is my desire to see a K-12 college preparatory school developed for African American males where they are able to receive the academic preparation needed to make them competitive for universities and colleges. The purpose of a preparatory school designed and created specifically for African American males is to provide competitive course work and leadership development. The findings of this study revealed that many African American males who enter high school are not guided towards more competitive and challenging academic courses. Offering challenging curriculum raises the expectations of the students and allows them to use background knowledge they already have and expand their understanding in new concepts and ideas.

It is my belief that African American males would have greater academic success in a school where the curriculum, teachers, support staff, administrators, and educational programs were created to help promote academic achievement and excellence as the main priority. In order for student achievement to occur within this school the individuals such as teachers, support staff, and administrators must have a common goal, attitude and belief about high levels of academic achievement and expectations. Noguera (2008) suggests that school professionals who succeed in elevating student achievement accept responsibility for student outcomes and avoid attributing student performances to factors they cannot control. In this preparatory school, educators would be encouraged to work collaboratively with one another to maintain focus on academic achievement. Collaborative work would entail intense professional development and retreats to help school professionals create and develop relevant learning environments that will both engage and challenge the student to academic achievement.

I believe that any successful school has effective learning communities among professional educators and certain criteria that ensure student achievement. Several areas must be evident and in place in order for this preparatory school for African American males to be successful. There must be a common mission, vision, and goals among all school professionals. It should include a system for prevention and intervention to ensure academic success for all students, resources for developing and maintaining positive teacher-parent relationships, teacher-student mentoring programs, and an overall collaborative work environment among all staff to build open, honest communication among school professionals. If the above criteria were in place for the preparatory school

for African American males, I believe this group of students would find greater success in the education system.

Reflections of the Researcher

Dialoguing with seven young African American male teens was a fascinating experience as an educator. I am normally around nine and ten year olds all day, so to sit and have a conversation with young adults, especially males, was quite interesting. In the first dialogue I sensed that most of the young men were a little uncomfortable because they did not know me very well. However, after several questions, they became more comfortable, opened up, and shared a tremendous amount of information with me. I felt very honored and privileged to have been a part of a process that allowed others to reflect on their lives, share personal experiences, and give these experiences greater meaning.

Most participants spoke of the strong family support system that encouraged them to do well in school. They mentioned the love and respect they each had for their parents and the desire to make their parents proud of them. Several participants also shared the same sentiments for a specific teacher or coach from school for whom they held great respect. It was interesting to observe each participant and the level of motivation and desire they each had for pursuing higher education.

The importance of sports related activities was a prevalent theme that surfaced during participants' dialogue. Several of the participants shared how being part of a sport in high school helped motivate them to do well in school. They expressed how belonging to a team meant you had people who were there to support and motivate you in and outside of the classroom. They also mentioned that playing a sport helped them maintain a certain grade average, which would benefit them later when applying to college. Daniel

said that his school required that all students who play a sport maintain a “C” average in their grades. When asked what his grade point average was, he informed me that he was maintaining a “C” average. His average was not very high, but did allow him to play on the team. Daniel and Devon both mentioned they will be attending community college with hopes of being recruited on a sports scholarship to a four-year university to play basketball. I sensed that these young men had a strong desire to play basketball at a highly competitive level for a university and would do whatever it takes to accomplish this goal. I asked the question: What would they study in college if they were not able to play basketball? Both replied that they would study psychology.

It became very clear to me that playing a sport was beneficial for two different reasons, first it allowed the participants to use their time after school in a positive and constructive way, second, it motivated them to work hard academically to maintain a certain grade point average, ultimately making applying to college easier. Listening to the stories of these seven young men helped me realize that there are more African American males who have a success story to share. Many young African American males have a strong support network that is helping them succeed. The educational community must highlight these individuals and their accomplishments. It is the sharing of these stories and experiences that will help transform the negative and stereotypical images of the African American male.

Conclusion

A tremendous amount of research reports the steady decline of African American males in the U.S. Franklin, Mizell and Andre (1995) suggest that African American men suffer from a number of social pathologies such as disproportionately higher mortality

rate, higher rates of school drop-outs, unemployment, delinquency and crime, and teenage parenthood. Despite the bleak picture, African American men are achieving educational and social success in American society.

A number of factors help to promote educational and social process among African American males. They are successful because of the support systems that have been put into place to form a solid foundation for their personal achievements. The participants of this study navigated their way through several support systems to achieve academic success. These support systems included close parental, teacher and mentor relationships, and extra-curricular activities. The participants were able to manage these complex relationships throughout their high school career and relied upon the support, encouragement and love from those who held high expectations for them to achieve.

This study was conducted to help school administrators, teachers, parents, and community leaders understand that African American males can attain educational achievement. They need support and encouragement, love and care from parents and teachers, motivation, high expectations held by both parents and teachers, and an understanding of their background. The research demonstrates that in order for these young men to have educational achievement, we as part of an educational system have to be willing to provide the necessary support and understanding they need in order to succeed. Administrators, teachers, and other individuals who work with African American students must continue to find ways in order to create and develop relevant after school programs where these students can be active participants. Within these after school programs African American students can learn how to build stronger relationships with their teachers as well as find support for their educational goals.

My research is relevant in helping to guide educators to support and encourage all students that enter the classroom. It is my desire to see African American males produce more active positive role models into society. Currently, our U.S. President Barack Obama has been a singular example of a positive African American male who has achieved one of the greatest accomplishments in the U.S. There are many more African American males who are providing a positive image for the Black male in American society. However, more African American males who are leading positive and successful lives need to be more visible in society. Hopefully, my research can make a small dent in changing the current situation in our U.S. educational system.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT CONSENT COVER LETTER

My name is Samantha Rainer and I am a doctoral student in the International and Multicultural Education program at the University of San Francisco. I am doing a study on African American males and higher education. You have given me approval to conduct this research.

You are being asked to participate in this research study because you are an African American male between the ages of 18-20. I am interested in your educational perceptions and experiences as an African American male. If you agree to be in this study, you will be participating in two dialogues which will be taped and later transcribed.

It is possible that some of the questions I ask may cause you some discomfort, but you are free to decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer, or stop participation at any time. Although you will not be asked to mention or state your name during the dialogue, I will know that you were asked to participate in the research because I sent you this cover letter. Study records will be kept as confidential as possible. Study information will be kept in a private location. Only my dissertation chair, Dr. Susan Katz and I will have access to the files and the tape recordings will be destroyed upon completion of the dissertation.

While there will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study, the anticipated benefit will be a better understanding of the African American male's success in higher education and the supporting factors that contribute to that success. Also, there will be no cost to you as a result of taking part in this study. You will be reimbursed a \$10 gift card for your participation in the study.

If you have any questions about the research, you may contact me at (408) 272-0552. If you have any further questions about the study, you may contact the IRBPHS at the University of San Francisco, which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. You may reach the IRBPHS office by calling (415) 422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, by e-mailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to the IRBPHS, Department of Psychology, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point.

Thank you for your attention. If you agree to participate, please complete the attached consent form, and return it to me at your earliest convenience.

Respectfully,
Samantha Rainer,
Doctoral Student University of San Francisco

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONS THAT WILL GUIDE INITIAL DIALOGUES

Research Question 1: According to successful African American males, how does society perceive the academic achievement of African American men? What role does the media play in that perception?

Dialogue Questions

1. How do you think the media perceives African American males?
2. Do you think the perception of the media play a role in the academic achievement among African American males? If so, how?
3. What effect does the media have on African American males?

Research Question 2: What specific variables do successful African American males attribute as leading to their academic achievement?

Dialogue Questions

1. Do you feel that your parents should have played a more active role in your academic preparation? If so, how would they go about doing this?
2. How strong is your community/neighborhood influence on your academic achievement?
3. How important is having a role model as a positive figure for you?
4. What factors have enabled you to successfully complete high school and want to pursue higher education?

Research Question 3: To what extent do successful African American males perceive teacher expectations contributing to their motivation to complete high school?

Dialogue Questions

1. Do you think that teachers were highly motivated in preparing you as an African American male for higher education?
2. In the past, how do you feel teachers perceived you within the classroom? What factors do you think contributed to this perception?
3. When you first began high school, did you feel that you were enrolled in courses that were going to prepare you academically for higher institutions of learning? If not, why?

APPENDIX C
IRBPHS LETTER OF APPROVAL

December 13, 2007

Dear Ms. Rainer:

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco (USF) has reviewed your request for human subjects approval regarding your study.

Your application has been approved by the committee (IRBPHS #07-112). Please note the following:

1. Approval expires twelve (12) months from the dated noted above. At that time, if you are still in collecting data from human subjects, you must file a renewal application.
2. Any modifications to the research protocol or changes in instrumentation(including wording of items) must be communicated to the IRBPHS. Re-submission of an application may be required at that time.
3. Any adverse reactions or complications on the part of participants must be reported (in writing) to the IRBPHS within ten (10) working days.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRBPHS at (415) 422-6091. On behalf of the IRBPHS committee, I wish you much success in your research.

Sincerely,

Terence Patterson, EdD, ABPP
Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

IRBPHS University of San Francisco
Counseling Psychology Department
Education Building - 017
2130 Fulton Street
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APPENDIX D

Themes Revealed from the Data

	Media Perception of AA males	Media's Effect on AA males Academic performance	How involved did you feel parents were in academic prep.	Community Influence/ Positive Role Model	Factors that support AA males completion from high school	Teacher motivation	Teacher perception of AA males in the classroom	Enrolled in courses to academically prepare you for higher ed.
Devon-18 yrs. old Single Mother and sister Father lives in a different state Attended public High School Plan to attend community college	AA males are either star athlete or out causing trouble	Effect of the media is up to the person. A person always has a choice to do the right thing in life.	Mom motivates reinforcing focusing on school work in order to graduate. Dad used to, but don't see him often.	Not really a strong community. The community if anything cared about sports; dialogue from the community would be sports related only	-Sports-basketball -Relationships-basketball coach	Basketball coach Mentoring teacher	-Social student -Teachers pushed him to complete work	-Would have chosen different classes at the beginning of high school career. -Focused more on the classes that were chosen Didn't meet counselors very much in 11 th and 12 th grade year.
Daniel- 18 yrs. old Lives with mother and step-father Stepbrother (20 yrs. old) Father lives in a different city in California Attended public High School Plan to attend community college	Media perception of AA males based on stereotypes such as style of dress, music, etc.	A lot of AA males make themselves fit the stereotype that people gives them, which makes it easier for the media to have a negative perception of AA males.	Parents were definitely involved. Suffered consequences when less desirable grades were produced.	Not really sure, nice community, not lower class. Not a lot of poverty around here.	-Sports-basketball -Relationships-basketball coach, uncle, and parents	Felt some teachers' motivated students to succeed to the next level.	A positive perception from teachers.	-Entered high school and picked classes of your choosing -Didn't really receive counseling
Robert -18 yrs. old Single Mother Attended public High School Plan to attend community college in Los Angeles	Media thinks AA males are not smart and speak in ghetto vernacular.	AA males can be influenced by the things they see on t.v. like being a drug dealer is cool	If needed help would receive it from family (i.e. mom, aunt, etc.)	Mother is role model, a strong black woman who motivates to do the right thing.	Interesting courses in school such as Science, family, etc.	-Some teachers -3 to 4 teachers challenging during high school	-Perceived me as a stereotype, behave silly, talk a lot, play around and not do the work. -Some teachers were over the top	-Classes were pre-set before entering 9 th grade -Classes helped prepare for higher education
Jeremiah- 21 yrs. old 2 Parent Family Attended public High School Attends State College in the Bay Area	Seen as criminals, a statistic already in a jail cell.	AA males think they have to behave like a rapper or athlete, especially if there is no father figure in the home.	Grandparents were influential and helped in high school, but parents didn't "show-up" until college	Community was motivation to get out and do something different.	Ticket out of community; Parents; college prepared program	-A teacher and assistant principal helped to motivate	-Shy, quiet, kept to self -Over time was perceived as class clown, smart, got work done.	-Placed in mediocre courses in 9 th grade year -In 10 th grade pursued more challenging courses to prepare for higher ed.
Ronnie-18 yrs. old 2 Parent Family Attended public High School Plan to attend community college	Singular portrayal of AA males.	Has a strong influence on AA males and the choices they make.	Both parents help to motivate him through high school.	Basketball coach provided a positive model for all athletes.	Sports-basketball -Relationships-basketball coach, parents, etc.	Felt teachers were unmotivated and unaware of AA students in the class.	-Social student -Seen as a student who was constantly reminded to do his work.	Completed prescribed courses between 9-12 grade.
John-18 yrs. old 2 Parent Family Attended private High School Plan to attend a 4 year university	Media sees AA males as troubled and not interested in attaining academic achievement.	Media has a tremendous amount of influence on AA males and the choices they make.	Parents were actively involved in motivating and encouraging him to academic success.	Did not really feel community played a significant role in academic achievement.	Teachers provided students additional help outside of formal classroom setting.	Felt teachers were motivated to help students achieve academic success.	Teachers perceived him as a hard worker who will challenge themselves to do better.	Felt the course work helped prepare him academically for higher education.
Joshua-18 yrs. old Live with single mother and sister Attended public High School Plan to attend community college	AA males are seen as trouble makers, gang members, drug dealers, etc.	Many AA males feel that the images they see through the media dictates some of the choices they make.	Mother was very supportive and motivating throughout academic career.	Football coach showed interests in the athletes.	Football provided a outlet that help to motivate through high school.	Teachers did not show a tremendous amount of interest in him.	Felt that the teachers perceived him as just an athlete, not really motivated to pursue higher education.	The work load was o.k., not really challenging.

*AA-African American