

DISSERTATION

MIDDLE SCHOOL AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES:
EDUCATIONAL GOALS, CAREER ASPIRATIONS
AND HIGH SCHOOL RETENTION FACTORS

Submitted by

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE DISSERTATION PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY ROY A. LEE TITLED "MIDDLE SCHOOL AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES: EDUCATIONAL GOALS, CAREER ASPIRATIONS AND HIGH SCHOOL RETENTION FACTORS" BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

MIDDLE SCHOOL AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES: EDUCATIONAL GOALS, CAREER ASPIRATIONS, AND HIGH SCHOOL RETENTION FACTORS

The purpose of this study was to examine educational and socio-cultural influences affecting the perception of African American middle school males about schooling, in general, their educational goals, career aspirations and motivations to continue school. Identifying and understanding the factors that influence their decision to continue their education, opt out (a free choice to discontinue their education), or drop out (occurs because of extenuating circumstances such as family problems and/or obligations, expulsion or poor academic performance) of the educational system is critical to improving the retention rate of this group.

Face-to face interviews were conducted with 17 African American middle school students and the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviews focused on 43 questions, which were divided into 10 areas: personal demographics, educational experiences and attitude, goals and aspirations, perception of peers' educational experiences and attitudes, experiences and perceptions of dropping out of school, reported child perceptions of parents' behavior and attitudes, perceptions of

teachers' attitudes, school demographics, perceptions of school environment and school curriculum.

From the resulting data, several themes emerged: (a) family structure, (b) parental employment and education, (c) positive parental support for education and (d) the students' own desire to continue their education. These themes helped me understand the direction African American males in middle school were taking.

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The pursuit for this highest degree began in my childhood. My mother always stressed the importance of education in our household. She always said that, without formal education, the system has a way of keeping you back. I owe this degree to my mother, who was unable to achieve this kind of degree. Indirectly, this degree belongs to her because she instilled in me the value of education.

To the ancestors, in particular my greart-great grandfather, Sie Lee who worked as a sharecropper and owned 180 acres of oil-rich land in Jackson, Mississippi, that dated back to March 3, 1910. The Ku Klux Klan ran Sie Lee off his property and then the land was taken from him. May justice reign in my life to see the land given back to the Lee family.

I am indebted to my committee members, who have been very patient throughout this whole process. It was in their patience that I was able to press forward. Thanks for the guidance and advice. A special thank you to Dr. Gloeckner, who was with me and the cohort at the very beginning. Thanks to the staff of the School of Education Graduate Programs Office.

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*“You can never realize what you can
achieve
until you do it.
And then you realize
you can be whatever you want
in life.”*

Grandmother

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
<i>Statement of the Problem</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Purpose of the Study</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Research Questions</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Summary</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Definition of Terms</i>	<i>13</i>
REVIEW OF LITERATURE	17
<i>Theoretical Framework</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Issues Affecting African American Adolescent Males in Schools</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Historical Developments Relevant to Educating African American Males</i>	<i>41</i>
<i>School Initiatives and Program Options Supporting</i>	<i>50</i>
<i>Summary of the Review of Literature</i>	<i>59</i>
METHODOLOGY	61
<i>Research Design and Questions</i>	<i>61</i>
<i>“Coming Clean” as a Researcher</i>	<i>66</i>
<i>Sites, Participants and Sampling Procedures</i>	<i>70</i>
<i>The Interview Process</i>	<i>74</i>
<i>Summary</i>	<i>78</i>
FINDINGS	80
<i>Themes</i>	<i>81</i>
SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	96
<i>Social Reproduction Theory</i>	<i>96</i>
<i>Issues that Did Not Correspond with the Review of Literature</i>	<i>106</i>
APPENDIX A: PERMISSION LETTER FROM CHURCH PASTOR	129
APPENDIX B: VERBAL SCRIPT FOR CHURCH ANNOUNCEMENT	130
APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS	133
APPENDIX D: NOTICE FOR CHURCH BULLETIN	135
APPENDIX E: ASSENT FORM FOR STUDENTS	136
APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE	138

DEDICATION

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Inequity in Education

It is well documented that African American males have been underserved by the educational system. The African American male adolescent must not only deal with issues of low self-esteem, hopelessness and being mislabeled, but must often endure the consequences of attending an under-financed and lower-quality school system. Overall, it appears the American educational system has different sets of expectations for different groups of Americans. The system erects barriers to success for those who are poor, male and African American; however, the same system promotes the success of those who are middle- or upper-class, male and European American. By middle school, the negative effects of this double standard begin to play out in the attitudes, behavior and dropout rate of African American male students.

Teacher expectations, school curriculum and instructional materials used to convey knowledge, skills, information and experiences are powerful forces affecting the quality of education children receive (Coleman, 1990). These factors, though seemingly neutral, actually promote academic success for some, while alienating others. Depending upon how learning experiences are mediated, students within the same school or classroom may have vastly different educational experiences in which some students feel included, involved and successful, and others feel irrelevant and alienated.

Historically, certain ethnic and cultural groups have been alienated by our

nation's schools. One group, in particular, is the adolescent African American male. African American males are significantly under-represented in upper-level academic and gifted classes, and disproportionately represented in remedial classes and in dropout rates (Brookins, 1996; Gill, 1992; Harris, 1995; Joseph, 1996; Kunjufu, 1990; Mincy, 1994; Yeakey, 2002).

A Group "At Risk"

As a group, adolescent African American males are seen as poor academic performers and are often labeled "at risk." The label may be more appropriately used to describe the conditions affecting this group, such as low socio-economic status, low academic expectations and ethnic oppression. According to Lee (1996) & Lee and Bailey (1997), labeling adolescent African American males "at risk" serves to blame them for their own educational failure, thereby perpetuating feelings of hopelessness and lack of motivation, and thoughts as to why one should even bother trying to succeed academically (Brookins, 1996; Gill, 1992; Harris, 1995; Mincy, 1994; Yeakey, 2002).

High dropout rates and feelings of failure during adolescence can have dire consequences for the future of African American males, particularly those who reside in urban areas. In fact, Yeakey (2002) goes so far as to say that zero-tolerance policies and the high incidence of dropout rates have immobilized urban males, creating a marginalized, obsolete and *disposable subpopulation* that may ultimately be seen by the majority of the remaining population as unnecessary to society.

Another consequence of educational oppression is that adolescent African American males currently represent a significant percentage of crime statistics. According to the 1995 FBI report, *Crime in the United States*, African American

adolescents represented 15% of the juvenile population in 1995, yet were involved in 28% of all juvenile arrests, made up 43% of the juvenile population in public correctional facilities, and 34% in private custody facilities (Sickmund, Snyder, & Poe-Yamagata, 1997). It is often reported that police profiling and prejudice have generally resulted in more African American men being arrested when compared to others who commit similar crimes. Thus, it is possible that police and other enforcers may see African American males as *disposable* members of society (Yeakey, 2002).

Statement of the Problem

The educational factors contributing to low academic achievement and the high dropout rate of adolescent African American males are areas of primary concern for this research project. For example, the dropout rate for African Americans was 13% as compared to 7% among European Americans (Kaufman, Kwon, Klein 1999). A more recent study conducted by the Urban Institute in conjunction with Harvard University concluded that the current dropout rate among the nation's African Americans is approaching 50%. Although African Americans represented only 17% of the total school population a decade ago, they accounted for 32% of suspensions and 30% of all expulsions. Academically, they are placed in remedial or special education classes at a rate three times higher than their European American counterparts, and only 8.4% are identified as gifted or talented and enrolled in gifted and talented classes (Lee, 1996; Trescott, 1990).

On the other hand, once they are assigned to special education, African American male students are less likely than their white counterparts to receive special education services (Natriello, 2006).

Only 68 of 100 ninth-grade students will graduate on time, and of that number only, 18 students will pursue higher education. Students who fail to graduate or who graduate late most often come from “at risk” groups, which include African Americans.

Of the 18 who enter college, many will not be prepared for the challenges of academic life and culture due to many factors, including their home environment, lack of preparation for college and lack of role models.

Consequently, the African American male’s chance of graduating from college is only 8.3%, whereas the likelihood of his dropping out of high school is 25% (Trescott, 1990), a statistic that throughout the 1990s has shown very little improvement from one year to the next (Roach, 2001). Furthermore, in this millennium, the dropout rate seems to be growing (University System of Georgia Board of Regents—Office of Strategic Research and Analysis, 2004).

According to Grantham and Ford, teachers have failed to place high school African American students in gifted programs, thus keeping these students from excelling to their fullest potential. Research has indicated that testing instruments are biased against African American students, which may be to blame for their statistically lower scores as compared to their European American peers’ scores. African Americans are punished for the biased instruments by being blocked from advanced and gifted programs. The challenge is to create assessments that are less biased against the African American student. (Grantham & Ford, 2003).

Even when African American males take upper-level academic courses in high school that are composed predominantly of students of color, they tend to be taught by out-of-field teachers rather than by qualified teachers. This is because there are fewer qualified teachers and fewer resources for instruction in their classes (Kunjufu, 1995;

Education Trust, 1998; Ford, 1995).

Lewis' work in urban schools gives some startling statistics from the National Education Association, 2001, which show that during the last 30 years, the public school system comprises 70% European American teachers and only 1% African American male teachers; while 20% of the total student body consists of African Americans. This is not to say European American teachers cannot teach African American students; however, one could argue that the diversity of the student body should certainly be more closely represented by a strong and diverse faculty (Lewis, 2004).

If African American male students are not excelling in middle school and high school, the effects can be seen in the relatively low number of them who are college-bound. Among all 2004 high school graduates, 71.6% of females were headed to college, compared to 61.4% of men. Of ethnic groups, Asians were most likely to go to college, with 76% of those who graduated from high school being college-bound. While 68% of European American high school graduates in 2004 headed to college, just 61.1% of African American and 61.9% of Latino graduates anticipated going on to college. African American female students were twice as likely as their male counterparts to go to college. African American men tend to be invisible when it comes to our society recognizing the disparity between males and females pursuing higher education (Malveaux, 2005). Keep in mind that many middle school students are not fully aware of what they would like to achieve in life due to their age and limitations that come within their environment.

The problem may begin well before middle school. According to a Yale University study that examined the expulsion rate in pre-kindergarten programs serving three- and four-year-olds, African American pre-K students were expelled at a rate that is three times higher than the rates of other children. This study looked at the expulsion

rates in 40 states by program setting (public school, Head Start, private providers), gender and race/ethnicity and from state-funded schools. The study revealed that from the beginning of their educational experience, boys must overcome more obstacles than girls. They were expelled at a rate more than 4.5 times greater than girls. Furthermore, African Americans were twice as likely to be expelled from state-funded pre-kindergarten programs as Latino and Caucasian children, and five times as likely to be expelled as Asian American children (*Staff and Newswire Reports*, 2005).

Middle School as a Critical Stage

It is doubtful that children, including African American males, begin school with pessimistic outcomes in mind. By middle school, however, reactions to school experiences that include success or failure, belonging or alienation have altered many African American male students' perceptions. Early adolescence is a vulnerable stage of human development. Adolescents with feelings of low self-esteem often turn to self-destructive behavior (Ford, 1995; Lee & Bailey, 1997). Added to this typically difficult developmental stage, African American males have to deal with additional burdens such as a lack of role models, feelings of hopelessness and low teacher expectations (Lee, 1996; Lee & Bailey, 1997; Lewis, 2004).

African American males showing symptoms of failure, low self-esteem and alienation statistically begin to act out in ways that often culminate in suspension or expulsion. Townsend (2000) notes that European American teachers may often misinterpret behaviors of African American students as behavioral problems because these teachers do not understand nonstandard English and slang used by their African American students. They may also negatively interpret the African American student's

nonverbal communications. What teachers see as combative or argumentative may actually be a cultural behavior. The teacher punishes for the behavior, further ingraining the message to the student that he is disposable. In addition, African American students may be criticized because older European American teachers do not realize that, culturally, African American males are raised to be able to multi-task. They work well and, in fact, often perform better when allowed to socialize during the process (Powell & Caseau, 2004).

In the end, African American middle school males are more frequently suspended and expelled from school than their European American male counterparts for the same behaviors (Sickmund, Snyder, & Poe-Yamagata, 1997). Is it any wonder that young African American males reach middle school with a sense of futility? The patterns they are subjected to beforehand are instrumental in forming the belief that they will never belong in the academic world.

In his seminal study, Yeakey (2002) posited that African American males are not proportionately represented in higher education because they are not properly motivated to succeed academically. Furthermore, Yeakey found that African American male students do not find good performance in school to be rewarding, nor poor performance punishing. This may be due to the preset beliefs and a lack of expectations of teachers when it comes to African American male students. If these teachers believe that the students will fail, they may not notice effort and may ignore lack of effort, thereby supporting the apathetic attitude of these students toward their education. Yeakey concluded that, due to a lack of motivation, African American male students do not expend effort in academic endeavors and, therefore, may be at higher risk for academic problems such as poor grades, absenteeism, truancy, delinquency and dropping out.

Other studies suggest that African American male students do not perceive the educational system as a place for achievement. Rather, they perceive schools as places that label them as “inadequate” without providing an opportunity for them to realize their potential as individuals (Bailey, 1990; Ford, 1995; Lee, 1996). This is also reinforced when African Americans do not see themselves reflected in the curriculum itself, thus not validating who they are as African Americans (Carter, 2000).

In a 2004 study titled *African American Male Teachers in Public Schools: An Examination of Three Urban School Districts*, Lewis also discussed the phenomenon of the extinction of the African American male teacher in the classroom. This study posited that the shortage of African American male teachers in the classroom (K-12) was due to a number of factors, including: low pay, negative experiences within the school environment, weak emotional and intellectual mentoring, and a lack of an adequate support system (Gordon, 2000). As Lewis (2004) pointed out in his paper that examined Kunjufu’s 2002 report, there are three types of teachers: “(a) the black teachers, none of whom were afraid of black kids; (b) the white teachers, a few of whom are not afraid of black kids; and (c) the largest group of white teachers, who are afraid of all black kids” (p.168).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore educational and social influences affecting the perceptions of African American middle school males about their schooling, their educational goals, career aspirations and motivations to continue in school. Identifying and understanding the factors that influence the decision of African American male middle school students on whether to continue their education is critical to improving their high school retention rate. The outcomes of this study relate to (a) student perception and (b) ways in which educational systems can empower adolescent African American males for academic success based on their perceptions.

Educational institutions should empower all students to realize their potential. Empowerment serves to reinforce or restore feelings of self-worth and vanquish feelings of despair and its subsequent self-destructive behavior. In fact, experts such as Nettles and Pleck (1993) believed the future status of African American males depends, at least in some measure, on the ability of educators to help empower them for maximum educational achievement.

For this to be accomplished, it is important for educators to understand the culture of the African American male. While it is not necessary that these educators come from the same culture as their African American male students, it is necessary that they develop an awareness of and sensitivity to the African American male experience in order to provide environments that promote their inclusion and success. They must believe in the concept that all students can learn without excuses (Carter, 2000).

Adolescent African American Males' Goals and Aspirations

This study held as axiomatic that when a student has goals for himself, he will be more apt to stay in school and succeed. According to Majors and Billson (1992), the African American male desires a steady job that gives him the chance to become a productive citizen and to provide for his family. Although African American males have unique academic strengths, they face many challenges wrought by American society and the American educational system. For African American males to succeed academically, it is critical to understand their educational experiences, goals and career aspirations as they struggle in a system that fails to validate their abilities or potential.

The current study explored: (a) the educational goals and career aspirations of African American male middle school students; (b) how they perceive their educational experiences and opportunities; and (c) the factors that influence the achievement of their educational goals and career aspirations.

Finally, this study will add to the existing literature and knowledge about empowerment of and sensitivity to African American male students. Specifically, by presenting the students' own voices and perceptions, the study offers pieces of the puzzle on what affects this group in terms of their education and life decisions. The study also illustrates how middle school African American males can achieve in spite of obstacles they encounter.

Finally, this study also is intended to show the participants that their voices count. This is done by providing a compendium of their ideas obtained through the interviews. I also intend to pass on my findings to church and educational leaders in the community.

Research Questions

The research questions were designed to investigate educational and socio-cultural factors that influence the educational goals and career aspirations of African American middle school males. As a teacher and counselor in the Atlanta area school system, where I have worked with African American middle school students, I was able to develop some of the questions for this study based on personal experiences I have had with my students. I was able to connect personally and professionally with the literature on African American males in middle school. My background also contributed to the development of the interview questions. Thus, the fundamental questions that this study sought to answer are:

- a) What are the educational goals of middle school African American males?
- b) What are their career aspirations?
- c) What educational factors are identified by middle school African American males as elements when determining to drop out or continue their education?
- d) What socio-cultural influences are identified by this group of middle school African American males with regards to continuing their education or dropping out?

Summary

Low academic achievement and high dropout rates of African American males indicate that the educational system in America is failing this population. In an effort to identify factors that may affect the educational goals and career aspirations of middle school African American males, this study explored the educational experiences that influence the decisions of African American male middle school students on whether to

continue their education, as well as the influences that affect achievement of these goals. The intended outcomes of this study were to seek a better understanding of the plight of adolescent African American males and to suggest ways in which they can be empowered for success in academics and ultimately in life.

The basis for this study was the belief that when African American students are empowered, they gain a greater sense of self-motivation, control and direction in their lives.

Delimitations

This study was confined to selected adolescent African American males enrolled in middle school in Atlanta, Georgia. The study was limited to 17 students. The responses may not be representative of all African American middle school males in Atlanta or the nation.

Limitations and Assumptions

This study also was limited to African American male students who may be affiliated with St. John the Baptist Church, which is located in an urban area of working-class families. This study may not apply to all other groups of adolescent African American males due to uniqueness of this group, e.g., locale and socio-economic status.

It is the researcher's belief that the subjects in this study were willing participants who provided honest answers. By building rapport, confirming confidentiality and using open-ended interview questions, the researcher tried to minimize the limitations in how representative the study was. A higher level of authenticity can be expected by using this method.

Researcher's Statement

The topic of this research paper did not randomly come to me. It is a subject that concerns me deeply. Because I am an African American man who is currently employed in an urban public school system, the perspective of this research study will be of the specialized, heuristic approach, which requires a researcher to have personal experience with, and an intense interest in, the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2002). Patton also noted that in a heuristic inquiry, the researcher's involvement with the participants' experiences helps elucidate meaning. While research on this topic is of personal importance to me, it is of greater importance that it adds to the literature on the condition of African American males.

Definition of Terms

Achievement gap: The statistical difference in academic performance between any two or more groups of students (Guthrie, 2003).

Afrocentrism: Multicultural education concept that seeks to build pan-African social movements and calls for a return to traditional ways of knowing (Asante, 1987).

At-risk students: Students labeled as being low achievers and/or alienated from school; students considered to be at risk of either dropping out of school or of not acquiring sufficient education to succeed in the economy (Guthrie, 2003).

Charter schools: Schools that are generally developed by parents or teachers seeking an alternative to standard programs, which, nevertheless, are held to the same standards of educational achievement as public schools (Raywid, 1996).

Compensatory education: An attempt to remedy the effects of environmental disadvantages through educational enrichment programs (Guthrie, 2003).

Constructivist pedagogy: Teaching methodology that provides teaching strategies, active student involvement and student interaction that are thought to lead to increased achievement as students construct their own understandings (Prawat, 2000).

Critical race theory: A theoretical approach born of activists and scholars studying and seeking to transform the relationships among race, racism and power. A questioning of the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory and legal reasoning (Delgado & Stefaniec, 2001).

Critical theory: An interpretation of schooling that views public school systems as functioning to limit opportunities for low-income students, with proponents arguing that teachers should be *transformative intellectuals* who work to change the system (Guthrie, 2003).

Culturally relevant pedagogy: Teaching strategy that empowers students intellectually, emotionally, socially and politically by using cultural references to impart knowledge, skills and attitudes (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Cultural pluralism: The acceptance and encouragement of cultural, ethnic and religious diversity within a larger society (Guthrie, 2003).

Ethnicity: A history, culture and sense of identity shared by a group of people (Guthrie, 2003).

Eurocentric culture: A culture defined by the rules and conventions of European Americans [author's definition as a result of reading various books, in particular, Wilson (1993)].

Identity diffusion: The adolescent's inability to develop a clear sense of self (Guthrie, 2003).

Magnet schools: Educational institutions created to attract students outside their communities without the students having to submit to compulsory busing (Guthrie, 2003).

Multicultural education: Education that focuses on providing equal opportunity for students whose culture and/or language patterns make it difficult for them to succeed in traditional school programs (Guthrie, 2003).

Phenomenological methodology: Qualitative research approach that requires the researcher to focus on how people perceive and make sense of their experiences; also requires a researcher to focus on how people describe, feel about, remember and talk about their experiences with others (Patton, 2002).

Principle of correspondence: The attitudes, abilities and social relations in education, as well as in production. The principle is derived from social reproduction theory and is expressed as the correspondence between the social relations of education and those of production, i.e., social subjects accept their positions in the social division of labor because they correspond to their positions in education (Bowles & Gintis, 1976).

Public intellectuals: Teachers who, according to critical theory, are responsible for public culture and not mere transmitters of knowledge (Guthrie, 2003).

Schools-within-schools: Separate and autonomous units with their own personnel, budget and program, authorized by the board of education or superintendent. They operate within a larger school, sharing resources and reporting to the school principal on matters of safety and building operation (Raywid, 1996).

Social reproduction theory: The theory of education that advocates that schools and teachers act as agents of deliberate social change (Guthrie, 2003).

Theoretical sensitivity: As applied to those who collect and/or analyze data; insightfulness, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand and the capability to separate the relevant from the less relevant (Guthrie, 2003).

Transformative intellectuals: Teachers who work to change the system as according to critical theory (Guthrie, 2003).

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This study sought to explore the educational goals and career aspirations that influence African American middle school male students' decision on whether to continue their education or drop out of school. It also looked at influences that affect their achievement of these goals. Both the approach and results were informed by relevant theory and literature, as outlined below. There is a discussion on the studies that define and articulate the problem in terms of the current social situation, psychological developmental theory and the African American male cultural context. Also highlighted is relevant historical background on African American middle school students' educational experiences. Finally, approaches being used to ameliorate the educational plight of young African Americans males are presented.

The literature helped to justify the research issue/problem. While it helped to support the research study, it was secondary to the primary focus, which was based upon views, stories and experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2002).

Theoretical Framework

Social Reproduction Theory

This study was based on the principle of correspondence and critical theory, both of which are based upon the social reproduction theory. The social reproduction theory advocates that schools and teachers act as agents of deliberate social change and that everyone should have equal educational opportunities (Guthrie, 2003).

In an effort to clarify the concept of social reproduction in North American

education, Bowles and Gintis (1976) were led to the principle of correspondence, which was expressed as the correspondence between the social relations of education and those of production. It held that social subjects accept their positions in the social division of labor because those positions correspond to their positions in education (Bowles & Gintis). Education is considered as sometimes having equalizing and sometimes reproductive results (Carnoy & Levin, 1985). This principle was examined in light of the neo-Marxist social reproduction theory and concept of the equality of educational opportunity. This principle also is exemplified by its connection to critical theory.

Critical theorists suggest that schools are failing to treat all students equally and that students receive different knowledge and skills according to where they will fit in as workers in the economy. Proponents of critical theory believe public school systems function to limit opportunities for low-income students and argue that, in order to change this, teachers should be transformative intellectuals who work to change the system (Guthrie, 2003). The discussion in this study of the inequality of educational opportunities for African American males is related to the meaning of *critical*, which refers to the critical theorists' critique of capitalism, holding that it imposes oppressive and inherently unequal effects on individual citizens (Giroux, 1994).

For example, students brought up in lower-class homes are often not given the educational opportunities that would help them to advance into white-collar or other professional fields. Thus, their parents' socio-economic status becomes the students' future status. Schools stymie these students' opportunities for upward mobility by guiding working-class students into curricula appropriate for blue-collar workers and guiding middle- and upper-class students into curricula geared for professions that require college degrees (Gutek, 1991).

There are examples of critical theory being used in educational research in the 1970s and 1980s in which social reproduction theorists asked the question: “Why is there a strong tendency for working-class children to end up in working-class jobs?” (MacLeod, 1987). This question confronted the assumption that American public schools operated as the great equalizer of the social classes, the mechanism by which any child can raise above the poverty of her/his family and achieve wealth and success (Gutek, 1991).

Critical theorists also assert that schools tend to have a *hidden curriculum*, one that often imposes values and attitudes that are middle-class in orientation. They suggest that this orientation gives an unfair advantage to middle-class students, who usually fare better than their poor or working-class peers (Giroux, 1994).

According to critical theory, it should never be assumed that teaching, curriculum, textbooks and testing are neutral. It should be recognized that these tools will either allow various degrees of free, critical thinking or they will impose passive socialization and indoctrination into the status quo.

To address this problem, critical theorists believe that teachers and students should take an active role in the educational curriculum development. These theorists “do not simply view teachers and students either as chroniclers of history and social change or recipients of culture, but as active participants in its construction” (Giroux, 1994, p. 279). In fact, these theorists call teachers “public intellectuals” and denounce the idea that “teachers are simply transmitters of existing configurations of knowledge” (Giroux, p. 300). Teachers’ roles should be very broad; teachers must assume responsibility for their intellectual effects on the public culture, as well as address the problems of society (Giroux).

Critical Race Theory

Related to critical theory is the critical race theory (CRT). CRT is not just a passive mindset; it is a movement that tries to bring about change through social behavior.

CRT is rooted in the activities of activists and scholars of the mid-1970s who examined the transformation of relationships among race, racism and power. Derrick Bell, considered the intellectual father of the CRT movement, is currently a professor of law at New York University. Understandably then, CRT grew from the discipline of law and was at the forefront of the civil rights movement. Later, CRT migrated into many other disciplines to touch on economics, history, context, group- and self-interest, as well as emotions and the unconscious.

CRT compliments other movements that try to uplift oppressed groups within our society, such as the feminist, Chicano and Asian movements. CRT also has significant historical links to the work of European philosophers and theorists such as Antonio Gramsci and Jacques Derrida, as well as to other great American radical leaders, including Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. DuBois and Martin Luther King Jr. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

First and foremost, CRT challenges the notion that African Americans are intellectually inferior to other groups. From Delgado & Stefancic's (2001) understanding of CRT, European Americans' perception of African Americans is extremely diminished, which, in turn, limits their ability to cultivate understanding and sensitivity. Of course, everyone has limitations when it comes to entering into and understanding another's world. Yet, this is especially difficult between European Americans and African Americans.

According to Delgado, the privileged European American class will never fully understand oppression from the experience of African Americans. Only African Americans have first-hand experience of racial prejudice in the United States that is the legacy of slavery (Delgado; Rothenberg, 2002).

CRT examines the relationship between knowledge and power. Due to the persistence of racial attitudes, European Americans retain social power and enact the policies and laws that govern everyone in the United States.

Social Reproduction Theory and Adolescent African American Males

The social reproduction theory advocates that schools and teachers act as agents of deliberate social change. This theory (including the correspondence principle), along with the critical theory, formed this study's examination of the educational factors that affect adolescents. Eckert (1989) argued that adolescent peer groups, cliques and gangs are simply teenage embodiments of adult class distinctions. For example, Eckert asserted, "the Jock and Burnout categories . . . [imitate] . . . adult social class within the adolescent context" (Eckert, p. 4). Thus, social and critical literature offer explanations for the prevalence of peer group culture and other factors that have an impact on youth.

In addition, the social reproduction theory provides a context for analyzing differences in achievement by African American students, especially those who come from low-income families as compared to their European American middle-class counterparts. Willie (1994) explained that the upper-class values of the European American male dominate the educational system. Therefore, behaviors associated with low-income African Americans are devalued by the educational system, resulting in the current discrepancies between high-status European American students and low-status

African American students.

Critical theory views teachers as change agents; however, the cultural, social and/or economic differences between African American male students and their teachers often separate the two groups. Critical theory suggests that it is this disparity that leads teachers to reward certain behaviors exhibited by middle- or upper-income European American male students and to punish low-income African American male students for exhibiting the same behaviors. For example, assertiveness in a young European American male might suggest to authorities his incipient leadership qualities; while the same behaviors might be seen as boding trouble in the African American student. Differences in perception lead to unfair actions, further alienating the teacher from the African American student. Consequently, the African American male student may lose his motivation to continue with his education (Giroux, 1994).

In summary, social reproduction and critical theories have helped researchers interpret the experiences of adolescents in school. Rather than seeing students as deviants and teachers as passive lecturers and testers, these theories can enlarge educational researchers' perspectives. For this study, they provide a framework for understanding African American male adolescents and what they need and want from their educational experiences to make learning more meaningful and relevant to their lives.

Issues Affecting African American Adolescent Males in Schools

The following sections address the plight of African American male adolescents in school through an examination of the literature particularly relevant to the current study. The examination touches on some reasons for dropout rates and negative teacher

expectations. Also discussed are the psychological development of adolescent African American males, African American male culture and identity, and some expressed views of African American young men on their own lives, goals and educational experiences.

The Dropout Rate

Expulsions, suspensions and dropout rates are plaguing the African American male youth population. African American male students are three times as likely to be in “special educational” classes as European American students (Beachum, Dentith, Carlos, 2004), and reports repeatedly show that African American students are suspended and expelled at a much higher rate than other groups.

Jefferson County, Florida (1999), a predominantly African American school district, reported that 43% of its high school students and 31% of its middle school students had been suspended at least once. Among those who were suspended, African American male students in middle school were either expelled or essentially dropped out of school by inconsistency in attendance (Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, 2005).

In Phoenix, Arizona, (1999) African American students were suspended and expelled at a rate 22 times that of European Americans. In Austin, Texas, San Francisco and Denver, African Americans were expelled and suspended at three times the rate of European American students (Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, 2005).

Georgia, a state with a high African American population and the site of this study, exhibits relatively poor scores in national performance tests such as the SAT and has one of the lowest high school graduation rates of the 50 states. The following statistics quoted from the University System of Georgia Board of Regents are revealing (“The Education Pipeline,” 2004):

- (a) In 2001, 51.4% of the fall 1997, 9th graders completed high school with a diploma, ranking Georgia 49th among the 50 states.
- (b) In the 2001-02 school year, 5.3% of all students in grades nine through 12 dropped out of school. The dropout rate increased to 5.5% the next year.
- (c) In 2000, 13.5% of Georgia teenagers between the ages of 16 and 19 were not enrolled in school and were not high school graduates or in the military. Of those, only 46.2% were employed. In the entire country, by comparison, 9.8% were not enrolled in high school and were not high school graduates.
- (d) Georgia ranked 31st among the 50 states in the year 2000 in terms of GEDs awarded to those who had not earned their high school diplomas. Per 1,000 young adults (18-24 year olds), 42.5% were awarded their GEDs.

Although these statistics apply to the overall population of Georgia public schools, it seems that they are particularly salient because of Georgia's large African American student population. The federal mandate to desegregate schools led to the creation of "academies" and "Christian" schools in small, white communities throughout Georgia and other Southern states in an effort to keep their children in predominantly white schools. Consequently, statistics on Georgia public schools greatly reflect the dire situation of their African American student population.

Teacher Expectations and Attitudes

Negative perceptions and low expectations that teachers and principals bring with them into the school setting can be detrimental to the success of African American males. Garibaldi (1988) asserted that during a student's formative years, educators should hold high expectations for African American males because such expectations encourage these students to achieve and excel. Unfortunately, Garibaldi's study revealed that, at the time of his study, most teachers held poor or negative attitudes about their African American male students.

The value of having high expectations for low-income students was affirmed by Samuel C. Carter (2000), who stated that there are no excuses for labeling students who may live in poor areas as poor achievers and for thinking they do not have what it takes to be intellectually capable to succeed.

In the academic experience, many African Americans are encouraged to abandon their own culture by "acting white," which entails articulating spoken language in a "white" manner, having "white" ideas and concepts, acknowledging the contributions and role models from primarily European Americans, among other things. Both Moore, Collins (2002) & Butler (2003) concurred in stating that the unspoken push to take on the Eurocentric values and abandon the African American experience within the classroom reaffirms to many African American students that their culture is not of value to the system. When the young African American male student does act and speak in ways that express and validate his experience, he may sense that many teachers and others in the school setting dismiss his behavior as irrelevant (Moore, Collins).

Garibaldi's research revealed that, in 1988, almost six of every 10 teachers believed that their African American male students did not hold positive attitudes about

school or value education for its significance to their future. Sixteen percent of teachers believed that most of their African American male students would drop out before completing high school, and 56% did not expect these students to go to college. The teachers' expressed views seemed to confirm the students' perceptions that their teachers had low expectations of them. Teacher expectations of African American male students as performing poorly and behaving badly may lead to self-fulfilling prophecies for many of these adolescents. Moore's later work in 2005 and other studies revealed that little has changed since Garibaldi's research.

Thus, Garibaldi's suggestions on how to better the situation still seem to be relevant. He suggested that in order for teachers to have higher expectations of their African American students, they should gain more knowledge about the learning styles and teaching environments that benefit these students. He demanded a system that holds teachers truly accountable for contributing to the success or failure of African American males. He also posited that when teachers—and parents—have higher expectations of their students, they tend to do better in school. Furthermore, when students are encouraged and nurtured within the academic environment, they tend to set high goals for themselves (Flowers, Milner 2003 & Moore, Collins 2002).

This view is supported by Sefa Dei, Mazzuca, Mclsaac and Zine (1997), who reaffirmed the importance of the teacher-student relationship; the value of having the teacher understand the learning styles of African American students; and the need to include the students' culture within the curriculum.

Two important questions arise: *What is the effect of African American male students learning from mostly European American female teachers?* Eighty-seven percent of teachers for our nation's school-aged children are European American females.

Yet, by the year 2020, 48% of the nation's children in grades one to 12 will be of color (Flowers, Milner 2003 & Moore, Collins 2002).

Secondly, can students and teachers of different races relate well to one another?

European American teachers from middle-class backgrounds may experience disconnectedness from their African American male students at all grade levels. This disconnectedness may stem from the students' uniquely African American experience of the world, which includes different food, music, movies, language, behavior, dress, walk, etc., from his teachers'. If teachers have little concept of these differences, or aren't even aware that such differences exist, they may misinterpret student behavior in negative ways.

Many students do not have the maturity or skill to shift gears between the two worlds they are asked to negotiate, and their failure to do so may be perceived as unwillingness to cooperate with the school rules or a lack of desire to learn. Coming to understand the low expectations of teachers is itself a learning experience for the African American student, something which European Americans do not go through (Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002).

Julie Landsman, a European American teacher, wrote her personal story about teaching in a predominantly African American public school in the Minneapolis area. She firmly believes that European American teachers can be highly effective in such settings. Yet, she said that to be effective, teachers of European American background must allow the students to teach *them* about who *they* are. In her classroom, she learned from her students—about their language, culture, dress, music, ethnicity and problems, such as poverty. She also stated that teachers must confront their own conscious and unconscious racist attitudes and fears, and communicate with other educators. As a way to reach

diverse students, Landsman also advocated for smaller class sizes and up-to-date technology, as well as for including the students' culture in the curriculum (Landsman, 2001).

In addition to low expectations, misinterpretation and misunderstanding of culture, fear also has been documented as some educators' response to African American males (Garibaldi, 1988). Majors and Billson (1992) spoke to this issue when they described a principal's preconceived ideas about African American males based on appearance.

The belt on his baggy, faded jeans is unfastened and the strings in his \$129 high-tech sneakers untied. He's leaning low to one side, arms taking turns trailing behind him as he walks a heavy stroll down the corridor. He knows he's as cool as you wanna be. But to the gray-suited, wing-tipped principal up ahead, the profiling African American teenager is sending off a flurry of bad vibes. In fact, he's got all the markings of a troublemaker. His walk alone seems unfriendly enough, but the sexually provocative message of the loose belt makes bad matters worse. And besides, what kind of African American kid can afford hundred-dollar sneakers anyway? (p. 8)

African American male students may sense fear from non-African American teachers. It is a fear born of limited experience with their world and colored by media that consistently portray the African American male as a criminal. The "gangsta" look described above may play to that fear. But perhaps the stance is to dare authority figures to look beyond the fearful pose and see the vulnerable young person in need of the same degree of affirmation that any young person needs. In the end, however, teaching may be hindered because teachers cannot overcome the "fear factor" and get beyond the stereotypes. These external factors for the African American male student also may be perceived as obstacles to their development (Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002).

Teachers must accept and learn their own personal strengths and weaknesses as

individuals, as well as educators, in order to address their misconceptions and fears, and meet the needs of their African American students, noted Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995). Students suffer academically when their teachers fail to prepare to work with a diverse student body or when they have no interest in understanding their own identities in a multicultural environment. If teachers are interested in the well being of their students, they will make it possible for each student to develop a positive sense of self. Only then can the student be successful in learning and in gaining a sense of commitment to larger social and community issues (Rethinking Schools Online, 2005).

Despite many well-meaning European American teachers and the positive approaches some of them use, many students of color feel that only by “acting white” can they be affirmed by the majority culture. Some of these students observe behavior from teachers, as well as counselors, that could be interpreted as racist. As Tyrone C. Howard (2003) noted:

A lot of teachers, principals and counselors are just straight out prejudiced. They have all these stereotypes about us because of our culture and race, where we live, how we talk, the music we listen to, and the way we dress. The bottom line is that we have to convince ourselves that we are smart, and that we can go to college, we can own a business, or be whatever we want to be. Once we do that, then we can let all of their negativity bounce right off of us. It’s like a big tug of war for our minds. We’re pulling on one side, telling ourselves that we are smart, bright, and talented. They are pulling on the other side, saying that we are dumb, lazy, and will never amount to anything (p. 12).

Losing this tug of war will discourage many students in their pursuit of their goals and will negatively affect their self-esteem (Grantham & Ford, 2003).

Economic Class

African Americans have long endured poverty and all of its concomitant

problems. A number of variables may be involved in how the parents' class status affects the child's learning. For example, low-income parents may not have the time to monitor and encourage their children's studying because they are trying to survive financially. On the other hand, middle-income parents can not only monitor their children's study, but also can afford tutoring, coaching for standardized testing and extracurricular activities that encourage intellectual development. Their income may also allow for greater exposure to more things in life, such as the arts and travel, which open the student to more options (Flowers, Milner 2003 & Moore, Collins 2002). Thus, the cycle of class continues from one generation to the next, affecting the achievement and the choices of the students (Flowers, Milner, & Moore, Collins).

Samuel Casey Carter's article, *No Excuses: Lessons from 21 High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools, 2000*, stated that there are 7,000 low-income schools nationwide, many of which are elementary and middle schools (low-income is defined as earnings of \$21,384 for a single-income household and \$30,433 for a dual-income household). Hard work, common-sense teaching philosophies and successful leadership strategies will solve many of the problems inherent in schools in poverty-stricken neighborhoods. Carter extolled those "No Excuses Principals" from his study, all of whom were committed, innovative and entrepreneurial individuals. He said that effective outcomes for these principals came from empowerment of those in leadership positions to employ creative strategies in their schools, such as encouraging various teaching styles; helping teachers to build on their strengths, talents and gifts; and even allowing individuals to teach who did not have traditional university degrees.

Carter said he would like to see the educational system do the following:

- (a) Give principals full authority to establish curricula, hire faculties and set the

direction for the learning process of their students;

- (b) Use measurable goals to establish a culture of achievement;
- (c) Work with master teachers to bring out the very best within the faculty;
- (d) Use constant testing that gives way to student achievement;
- (e) Stress achievement in lieu of discipline; and
- (f) Work closely with parents so that the home becomes the primary learning center for students.

These strategies would all be executed to help students realize that effort creates ability.

The Psychological Development of Adolescent African American Males

Middle school is an important period in a student's development. An examination of this crucial stage can reveal some of the reasons many African American males do not complete high school. One of the overriding reasons cited for the dismal academic outcome is young African American males' often problematic development due to complex historical and social factors. A brief discussion of the African American adolescent's development and mitigating factors follows.

As students mature into an understanding of who they are, they follow a process of developing racial identity, as first identified by William E. Cross Jr. in 1991. According to this theory, African Americans may pass through three stages: (a) pre-encounter, (b) immersion-emersion and (c) internalization.

In the pre-encounter stage, the African American sees himself or herself as an American and an individual. There is no real interest in acknowledging being an African American or in exploring his or her own culture. The individual accepts without question the negative images of African Americans. There is a sense of racial self-hatred.

In the immersion-emersion stage, the African American begins to have an awareness and appreciation of his or her culture and race. At this level of awareness, issues concerning the liberation of African Americans become extremely important. A hatred for European American people may develop due to the oppression that has been experienced by African Americans. Rage—even obsession—may come with conscious awareness of the racism that exists in America.

The internalization stage balances being an African American with being an American. At this stage, the African American appreciates his or her own culture and

wants to work toward solving the problems and issues affecting African Americans; however, the individual also can now connect the racism he or she has experienced to the many oppressions within society—against women, gays, the physically challenged, the lower classes, etc. This person at this stage makes the connection that one oppression affects all (Grantham & Ford, 2003).

Of course, there are developmental stages that affect all of us. Major aspects of human development unfold in a series of life stages that are influenced by both heredity and environment (Erickson, 1985; Piaget, 1959). In order to progress from one stage to the next, individuals must accomplish a series of developmental tasks associated with each stage. Erikson's first stage—birth to 12 months—consists of the infant's learning trust. Stage two—one to three years of age—sees the child developing a sense of autonomy. Stage three—ages three to six—is when the child deals with guilt and consequences. During stage four—six to puberty—the child needs to develop a sense competency, which will allow him to feel he can master skills throughout life. In stages five and six, the young adult experiences identity confusion and begins the lifelong search for who he or she really is. The last two stages occur in the later adult years (Huffman & Piggrem, 2002). How well the person achieves tasks in one stage influences the success (or lack thereof) with later stages. Thus, failure to master developmental tasks at one stage can negatively impact success later on.

For adolescent African American males, successfully completing these early developmental stages and tasks is often problematic. During the crucial adolescent years, the African American male must often overcome negative environmental forces occurring in school, such as ineffective teaching strategies and educators' predetermined

negative views of him and his learning potential (Hare & Hare, 1985; Willie, 1994; Lee, 1996). Thus, instead of achieving the sense of accomplishment that comes from mastering fundamental school skills in reading, writing and computing, many young African American male students experience frustration with the teaching-learning process. This frustration lays the groundwork for future academic and social failure (Hare & Hare, 1985; Willie, 1994).

It is not unusual for an African American male to reach adolescence with a basic mistrust of his environment, doubts about his abilities and confusion about his place in the social structure. These factors make developing an identity during the crucial boyhood-to-manhood transition extremely challenging, especially when African American youth are often prevented from mastering crucial developmental tasks during childhood and adolescent stages. All too frequently, it appears that by the time an African American male reaches adolescence, a downward spiral has been set in motion.

African American Male Culture and Identity

Obtaining a positive cultural identity is vital to the developmental success of all youth, and the African American male is no exception. Some students will feel fully integrated into the public school culture, while others will feel vehemently rejected by it (Solomon, 1988). Teacher expectations of poor academic performance and student disrespect for authority become self-fulfilling prophecies for many young African American adolescents. Nonetheless, these actions are often only secondary responses to negative environmental stressors, which include cultural insensitivity and an oppressive system that fears the empowerment of African American male youth (Moore, Collins 2002). In their struggle for survival in the public schools, some African American males

are able to conform to expectations and survive the authority structure of the school, while others are extremely resistant (Solomon, 1988). The latter group often represents “lived experiences, systems of practices and ways of life different from those students of the dominant culture” (Solomon, 1988, p. 2). This clash and the resulting conflicts may lead to students breaking school rules and disregarding codes of conduct in an effort to find and define their identity based on negative expectations and stereotypes. This type of behavior, albeit unacceptable, must be defined and understood in the context of the vehicles that shape these young males’ identity, behavior and worldview.

One prominent vehicle is the hip hop culture, which is expressed through rap music (Stephens, 1991). While African American adolescent males are forming their personal and social identity, they can become confused because the development of socially appropriate behaviors has often been stifled by historical and social powerlessness (Majors & Billson, 1992).

According to Kunjufu (1991), rap is an artistic form of expression that communicates the experiences of the 97% of African American youth in America who like rap. A well-informed and culturally sensitive educator would know that some rap music is often part of a young African American man’s search for identity and self-respect, and that some of it is positive in that its lyrics reflect experiences of oppression while allowing appropriate ways to let off steam (Stephens, 1991). Recording artist Lauryn Hill’s album and song, *The Mis-education of Lauryn Hill*, paid homage to Carter G. Woodson’s seminal text *The Mis-education of the Negro* and best exemplified this point.

*My world it moves so fast today,
The past it seems so far away,
And life squeezes so tight that I can't breathe,
And every time I try to be,
What someone else has thought of me
So caught up, I wasn't able to achieve;
But deep in my heart, the answer it was in me
And I made up my mind to define my own destiny.
I look at my environment
And wonder where the fire went;
What happened to everything we used to be?
Searching outside of themselves,
Now I know His strength is within me
And deep in my heart, the answer it was in me
And I made up my mind to define my own destiny (Hill, 1998).*

Unfortunately, many other hip hop artists whom African American adolescents admire undermine the intent of self-respect by giving themselves labels and writing lyrics that merely support the traditional stereotypes of African American youth and hip hop culture. They have names such as African American Menace, C-Murder, Ghetto Mafia, Illegal, Homicide, The Murderers and Pimp Daddy. These artists distort gender role expressions by portraying the male role as hard-edged and masochistic, and by condoning the notion that toughness is what it takes in order to be accepted within the African American culture. This type of distortion is a self-destructive aspect of African American male culture, which has given rise to both a false identity and a false sense of security. Rappers who distort the role of the African American male put forward negative role models for adolescents to follow rather than positive ones. In addition, most young African American males have few or no positive adult male role images to offset these negative images. The range of adult African American male role models is very narrow, partly due to the historical social and economic limitations placed on African American males (Stephens, 1991).

In a 2003 study, Tyrone C. Howard, University of California-Los Angeles, examined the personal and academic stories of high schools students. His research looked into three areas of the African American student's life that affect his identity: (a) parents and family; (b) teachers and school counselors; and (c) overall interest in school and college. The study showed that the students' overall interest in school and college is based on the positive reinforcement that comes from their environments—from both the home and school. From these positive experiences come positive identities of self.

When students have a negative experience within these environments, it is more likely that they will have a very low interest in continuing their education. In addition, such students develop low self-esteem due to their negative experiences and the failure of their environments to nurture their personal identities. It is also noted that students and their parents who come from lower-income environments tend to place little emphasis on education because their energy is directed toward the personal struggle for economic survival (Howard, 2003).

African American Males' Self-Expectations

On the positive front, many educational efforts have been made to counteract the pitfalls of inappropriate identity development, low teacher expectations and culturally insensitive environments to bring educational benefits to African Americans. A discussion of relevant history in American education and attempts toward educational equity follows.

In contrast to oppressive school environments, negative perceptions and low expectations are African American males' hopes and dreams for themselves. Studies involving interviews with African American males about their views on education reveal

their initial expectations for their futures.

In 1994, a four-city survey investigated the reason some African American males stay in high school while others drop out (Commonwealth Fund, 1994). As part of the survey, interviews were conducted with 360 African American males ages 17 to 22. The young men came from New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and Atlanta—all cities that have a high ratio of African Americans. Half of the participants had dropped out of school and the other half were enrolled in, had graduated from or had attended college. The latter group cited several factors that influenced their staying in school: parents who were involved in their education and had stable incomes, caring teachers, youth programs, and part-time or summer jobs.

The adults who had dropped out revealed that they had faced more problems growing up than those who had stayed in school (Commonwealth Fund). These problems included a lack of support from parents and friends and financial stress. Many of these young men also mentioned the added pressure of caring for the family due to absent fathers. According to Roderick (1993), other reasons students decided to leave school included a dislike of school itself, poor performance, a feeling of not being safe, chose to work, marriage, poor relationships with teachers, had to help support family, pregnancy, expelled or suspended.

The achievement gap between African Americans and European Americans is noted by researchers as a problem of institutional racism that keeps African Americans from fulfilling their potential. Of course, this problem is not limited to the institutional racism within schools, but is also connected to issues within the larger society. According to Green, Gonley, Barnett, & Benjamin, 2004 many members of the larger community are failing the African American student, including family members, teachers and other

students. This failure can be understood by looking at a number of factors that seem to be missing for the African American student: teacher-family conferences, availability of tutoring, behavioral medication issues, career days for students, job fairs for parents and community outreach activities.

Another important study was conducted in Hennepin County (Minneapolis), an area that typically graduates only 28% of its African American public school students. In a series of eight focus groups, two of which were held in a correctional institution, African American males described their views (Cunningham & Keefe, 1998). When asked to list some of the things they hoped for in their lives, some expressed the need for “a stronger sense of community among African American men” (p. 31).

Others wanted a better understanding of their own cultural heritage. Still others hoped for more and better job opportunities, job skill training, more mentoring and more (or resumed) education. Conversely, when asked about the obstacles, a large number of the respondents said they felt alienated, unsafe, threatened, uncertain about whom to trust and unable to find a place within society. A large number of these males also said they had a sense of transience and instability, felt resentful about having to cope with racism, and felt inferior. One respondent summed up his negative feelings with the following statement:

If you were raised without at least one involved, caring parent, your flexibility, creativity and school achievement may have suffered. As an adult, this may also continue to have a negative effect on your employment (p. 32).

When asked what would have made his life different, one male said, “support and motivation for going to school, taking it seriously, working reasonably hard and graduating high school” (p. 32).

For his 2001 study, McKendall constructed several focus groups of young African

American male high school graduates. He asked them questions about their plans, families, identities, goals, successes and lives in general. One respondent voiced a common sentiment:

Being an African American man in society today means that . . . so many things have been brought down upon us. . . . I have to basically overlook little things that are set up as obstacles to keep me down and look towards the bright side . . . be more optimistic and work towards the future (p. 35).

When asked about peer reactions toward a desire to pursue higher education, one respondent expressed the following.

Many of your heroes—from W.E.B. DuBois to Malcolm X—clearly stressed the importance of education. Yet, many of your acquaintances think you're turning your back on your heritage simply for wanting to learn, build skills and increase your human capital. And you desperately want to avoid the downward spiral that has claimed the lives and ambitions of many people you know: a lack of education and training, drugs, street life, minor crimes, arrest, conviction, jail and the near-impossibility of getting a job and a place to rent afterward (p. 35).

This view shows that many African American males often do have high expectations and hope for future success; however, many become disillusioned and discouraged by obstacles such as oppression and lack of support. Educational efforts to benefit African Americans have been made to counteract the pitfalls of inappropriate identity development, low teacher expectations and culturally insensitive environments. If the school environment, which is controlled by teachers and counselors, is not sensitive to cultural differences, many students may not have a positive understanding or outlook on their own culture and race. A discussion of relevant history in American education and attempts toward educational equity follows.

Historical Developments Relevant to Educating African American Males

Compensatory Education

After World War II, the United States, fully realizing the benefits of education, made it available to more citizens than ever before. From this trend emerged *compensatory education* by which the federal and state governments sought to compensate for disadvantaged backgrounds and improve the performance of low-achieving students, especially those from low-income families (Guttek, 1991).

After the mid-1950s, the movement for educational equality accelerated along with the growing civil rights movement. When Martin Luther King Jr. emerged as the leader of the civil rights movement, changes in the educational system were still desperately needed, since many African American students and other minority groups were educationally disadvantaged due to their social and economic conditions (Lowe, 2000). As the civil rights movement strengthened, so did educational opportunities for African Americans and other minorities. Civil rights proponents succeeded in having the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* passed, authorizing federally initiated lawsuits to compel schools to comply with desegregation and also authorizing the withholding of federal funds from school districts that continued to discriminate (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Coleman, 1990).

Another milestone in the drive toward educational equality was the enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), which increased federal financial involvement in education. The ESEA encouraged special programs for children of low-income families and funded pilot programs to supplement the offerings of local school districts. The ESEA, coupled with the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, created a range of early childhood education “Head Start” programs for children who were

economically and culturally disadvantaged (Lowe, 2000).

Finally, in 1972, Title IX of the Education Amendments Act became law to address the discrimination of women within the educational system. This law states:

No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participating in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance (Banks & Banks, 2004, p.138).

The law helped European American women to some extent; however, for the most part, their careers were still limited to teaching, secretarial work and other so-called women's professions. Title IX appeared to give little leverage to African American women. It also appeared that African American men were not even considered to be worthy of access to education. Thus, historically, African American women were given educational opportunities first, and African American men later. This pattern seems to follow the hierarchical scale of society's power structure: European American men; European American women; African American women; African American men (Banks & Banks, 2004).

Cultural Pluralism

A belief system supporting compensatory education was followed by a period of critical examination of many long-held beliefs about education. In 1960s America, the concept of a melting-pot society was gradually replaced by the concept of *cultural pluralism*, which referred to the acceptance and encouragement of cultural, ethnic and religious diversity within a larger society (Guthrie, 2003). Cultural pluralism is a highly positive, constructive societal and educational force, as demonstrated in the following description by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (1973).

To endorse cultural pluralism is to endorse the principle that there is no one model American . . . and is to understand and appreciate the differences that exist among the nation's citizens. It is to see these differences as a positive force. . . . Cultural pluralism is more than a temporary accommodation to placate racial and ethnic minorities. It is a concept that aims toward a heightened sense of being and of wholeness of the entire society based on the unique strengths of each of its parts (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, (p. 7).

Cultural pluralism has many practical applications within education. According to Lowe (2000), practical applications take into account student learning styles, accept dialect differences, provide for bilingual education and use methods and materials involving multi-ethnic curriculum and instruction. These approaches yield beneficial results, such as the academic improvement of students of color and the advancement of the nation toward a productive pluralistic society. Cultural pluralism—like desegregation, compensatory education and multicultural education (which will be discussed next)-aims to provide all students an equal opportunity for learning within the educational system.

Multicultural Education

In "Our Spiritual Strivings," the first chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. DuBois (1965) stated that an African American had a "double-consciousness . . . two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body" (DuBois, p. 3). African Americans, who possessed their own rich culture, had to find a way to live in a Eurocentric culture defined by the rules and mindset of European Americans who viewed themselves as superior to all other races and where "white Americanism" dominated. The result was the development of a "two-ness" as a means of dealing with their contradictory position within a second culture (Du Bois, 1965; Wilson, 1993).

By the 1980s, cultural pluralism was supported by *multicultural education*, which focused on providing equal opportunity for students whose culture and/or language patterns made it difficult for them to succeed in traditional school programs (Guthrie, 2003). Progressive educators saw multicultural education as a means to develop an environment in which challenges of race, gender, ethnicity, language and class were reduced by bringing them to the forefront and incorporating diversity into the curriculum. In developing such programs, proponents of multicultural education made the following hypotheses (Shade, 1991) concerning multiculturalism, stating that it: (a) incorporates diverse ways of knowing; (b) must become the primary basis for curricular thought; (c) provides a means for increasing student motivation; (d) requires diversity in communication; and (e) provides a source of different perspectives.

Afrocentrism

Afrocentrism incorporates many of the tenets and concepts of multicultural education and emerged as part of the multicultural movement. Yet, it deviates from multiculturalism in important ways. In 1987, Molefi Kete Asante, professor and chair of African American Studies at Temple University, founded and propagated the Afrocentric approach to education as a means to address the “one-size-fits-all approach.” Asante (1987) believed that because “current literary theories like phenomenology, hermeneutics and structuralism . . . are based on Eurocentric philosophy, they fail to come to terms with fundamental cultural differences” (p. 159).

Because Afrocentrism seeks to build pan-African social movements and calls for a return to traditional gods and traditional ways of knowing, it differs from multicultural education in two aspects. First, Afrocentrism rejects multiculturalism’s “religion of

science." Second, it rejects multiculturalism's systematic study of history. The reason is that neither of these embraces the traditional African humanistic and spiritual viewpoint (Asante, 1987).

Afrocentrism emphasizes that African American people should be viewed as agents of history, not the marginal figures that have been traditionally depicted. The historical legacy of racial discrimination in the United States points to the need for continued recognition of cultural diversity. Sensitivity to diversity is significant in curriculum development because all sides should be presented equally and not slanted toward name-calling and blaming. When this procedure is followed, the historical practice of grouping people of a race together and identifying each individual with regard to the stereotypes of the group will be eliminated (Asante, 1987).

In order to be applied to the educational system, Asante argues that Afrocentrism must become a part of schools' curricula. This means teachers must be flexible and willing to assess the abilities and learning styles of African American students so that these students can be instructed in the most effective manner.

Culturally Relevant Curriculum

Several strategies have been identified to teach more effectively those African American male students whose learning styles and background experiences differ from those of their European American counterparts. Although it is important to articulate effective or promising strategies, Ladson-Billings (1995) insists that no one should assume that blindly copying a certain program or teaching method guarantees successful learning, especially concerning African American males who historically have been miseducated.

Many schools have implemented strategies that provide African American and other students of color opportunities for reaching their highest academic potential. Ladson-Billings (1995) advocated a method of teaching that is culturally relevant and by which teachers encourage students to teach each other and to be responsible for each other. This teaching strategy requires that teachers help students of color develop necessary skills by taking into account both student diversity and individual differences when defining student excellence.

Ladson-Billings (1995) referred to this teaching strategy as *culturally relevant pedagogy*; that is, teaching that empowers students intellectually, emotionally, socially and politically by using cultural references to impart knowledge, skills and attitudes. This strategy helps students of color develop a culturally relevant identity that motivates them to be academically successful. As part of this approach, teachers use instructional methods that target the strengths of their students and give them the opportunity to view topics from the perspective of their cultural backgrounds. The teachers ensure that their curriculum materials demonstrate sensitivity to various cultures, varying perspectives and authenticity. Controversial topics are addressed proactively, and teachers clarify any biases in the materials (Irvine, 1992). Culturally relevant pedagogy, also called *responsive pedagogy*, encourages students to become critical thinkers and problem solvers who are able to make good judgments to solve cultural and social problems.

Within the curriculum itself, it is important to provide information that addresses the experience of the students. This kind of approach validates students of color and provides them a rightful place within society as a whole. Banks & Banks (2004) present the five dimensions one should consider as part of the multicultural education. They are:

- (a) content integration—including knowledge in the content from diverse

- backgrounds;
- (b) knowledge construction—showing that the creation of knowledge in social and natural sciences was based on cultural assumptions;
 - (c) prejudice reduction—dealing with students’ attitudes about race, thus creating openness to others who are different;
 - (d) an equity pedagogy—employing methods that facilitate the academic achievement of ethnically and racially diverse students;
 - (e) empowerment of school culture and social structure—reforming the school culture in ways that validate ethnically and racially diverse students.

Culturally responsive educators recognize that African American students possess numerous strengths that are not measured by achievement or intelligence tests. According to Ladson-Billings (1995), many teachers reported that achievement tests do not test what children really know. In order to find the strengths of all their students, culturally responsive teachers used a variety of assessments such as projects, songs, poems, books, or plays. These allowed students to understand and learn in a different, more authentic way.

Constructivist Pedagogy

In an attempt to find out how students learn, Vygotsky (1992) examined the methods by which meaning is constructed, creating from it a socio-cultural theory that contributed to the development of constructivism. In this theory, Vygotsky contended that social experience shapes the ways in which individuals think and interpret the world. Constructivism, which was derived from Vygotsky’s theory, is a holistic approach to learning that involves students’ constructing their own understanding. Students whose

teachers apply constructivism actively learn by asking questions and using their imaginations rather than by blindly accepting prevailing ideas.

The constructivist approach takes into account the meaning, perspective, perception and feelings of the individual participant (Creswell, 2002). With this approach, one gains a self-definition within the context of time and place; one's self-understanding is built on one's experience, feelings, identity and suffering; one has a "life story" that gives validity to one's own human existence and allows that validity to be expressed from one's unique point of view and in one's own voice (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

In 1959, Piaget developed a constructivist approach that focused on causal explanation and its logical and practical justification. His constructivist theory provided a means for analyzing children's methods of explaining and of justifying their explanations. In this theory, Piaget emphasized that gaining knowledge is a process of building, creating or making mental structures. He stressed the creation of new information, not just the absorption or reproduction of existing information. As Piaget asserted, influences presented in the learning environment "do not imprint themselves upon the child, as on a photographic plate; they are assimilated,"(p. 256). That is, the context in the learning environment and the student's reactions to it agitate the mental processes and lead to construction.

Fatt (1998) insists that constructivist instruction increases student achievement. Most students, including African American males, lower achievers and those who have different learning styles, seemed to benefit from constructivist instruction. Loiacano (1996) found that constructivist instruction greatly enhanced the achievement of students in ethnically diverse classes. This current finding supports Prawat's (2000) assertion that

constructivist pedagogy provided teaching strategies, active student involvement and student interaction that led to increased achievement as students construct their own understandings. Pasteur and Toldson (1982) believed that African Americans have responded positively to constructivism because it is closely related to African philosophy, specifically, the concept of the interdependency of all things.

Lee, Lomotey and Shujaa (1990) outlined seven characteristics of an effective constructive pedagogy designed specifically for African Americans. An effective pedagogy could do the following:

- (a) legitimize African stores of knowledge;
- (b) positively exploit and construct productive community and cultural Practices;
- (c) extend and build on the indigenous language;
- (d) reinforce community ties and idealize service to one's family, community, nation, race and world;
- (e) promote positive social relationships;
- (f) impart a worldview that idealizes a positive, self-sufficient future for one's people without denying the self-worth and right to self-determination of others;
- (g) support cultural continuity while promoting critical consciousness.

The evidence from many scholars thus suggests that in order for African American males to succeed, they should learn in a manner that is most effective for them. Constructivist and culturally relevant teaching methodologies allow African American males to determine how they will learn and how they can use their preferred learning styles to accomplish assigned tasks.

School Initiatives and Program Options Supporting

African American Male Achievement

The 1980s brought recognition of the fact that a one-size-fits-all model of education did not work well for every type of student. Consequently, according to Clinchy (2000) & Raywid (1996) parents demanded restructured schools that would bring about better academic achievements and utilize resources more efficiently than traditional schools. In particular, minority groups demanded the establishment of new schools that would take the needs of all students into consideration. As a result, there was a movement away from schools that taught on a large scale to small schools that would bring individualized attention to students. Demands for this non-traditional type of school escalated in the 1990s and some commonly known types of alternative educational institutions were created. Alternative schools today offer options for African American parents and guardians who feel that traditional schools are not promoting the fulfillment of their children's abilities. Brief descriptions of these schools, along with a summary, follow.

Middle Schools

During the 1960s, middle schools were created to meet the needs of preadolescents and adolescents transitioning between elementary and high school. Later, in the small-school movement of the 1980s, middle schools were used to provide students with learning environments more conducive to their needs. This learning environment directly focused on the psychological, social and cultural needs of the student, as well as academic achievement (Clinchy, 2000; Raywid, 1996).

Charter Schools

Charter schools are publicly funded, function in accordance with an enabling state statute, and are given a charter exempting it from selected state or local rules and regulations. These schools are generally governed by a group or organization. Many African American charter schools for males were established to accommodate so-called “high-risk” students. These schools offered low pupil-teacher ratios, as well as curricula customized to the students’ unique needs. Unlike traditional schools, charter schools focused on helping students receive an education that better fit their strengths (Clinchy, 2000).

Magnet Schools

Magnet schools were created to attract students outside their communities without the students having to submit to compulsory busing. Between 1984 and 1994, the number of students enrolled in magnet schools tripled. The reason for this trend was the specialized curricula, racial integration and the academic achievement gains occurring in these schools. Charter and magnet schools have big advantages over traditional public or private schools because they are self-governed, free from most state and federal regulations, free to hire anyone they like, and they have control of their curricula (Clinchy, 2000).

Schools-Within-Schools

Schools-within-schools operate within larger schools, sharing resources and reporting to the school principal on matters of safety and building operation. However, these schools have their own personnel, budgets and programs, as authorized by the board of education or superintendent.

The implementation of the schools-within-schools model has had mixed results (MacMullan, 1996; Raywid, 1996). The obstacles typically result from the failure of school administrators, teachers, students and parents to demonstrate sufficient commitment toward establishing the complete separation of the sub-school from the larger school. When it does work, however, the schools-within-schools model promotes the concept of community as exhibited in collaborative activities and the support of the superintendent, school board and school principal (Clinchy, 2000; Raywid, 1996).

Specialized Public Schools

Several public school districts have dedicated entire schools to the development of curricula and programs that meet the needs of African American male youth. For example, following a study that revealed dire statistical failures of African American males in its school district, a Milwaukee citizens' task force planned to implement a specific school curriculum for these males. The school district statistics demanded action because African American male youth comprised half of the suspensions, dropped out at a rate of 14.4%, and had fewer than 20% of their population with a "C" average or better (Milwaukee Experiment, 1990).

As a result, in 1990, the Milwaukee school district designated a middle school as an African Immersion School, becoming the first public school district to approve such a plan. The mission of the school was to counteract the low achievement of its African American males by stressing the accomplishments and achievements of African American people. The educators' Afrocentric strategies included using the first letter of African Americans' names to teach the alphabet and teaching students about the slave trade by integrating history, writing and math skills (Milwaukee Experiment, 1990).

Specialized schools allow for greater individualization, more independent study, and more openness to the outside community than the average public schools. These nontraditional schools may be street academics, storefront schools, schools without walls or high school outposts, but all are designed to make education more relevant for inner-city students. Also, all of these schools draw heavily on community resources for learning. They tend to have a small size, high staff morale, high attendance, satisfied students, freedom from external control, and strong concern for non-cognitive goals of education (Raywid, 1996).

All-Male African American Schools

A number of school programs are designed for the education of African American males only. These schools employ various strategies in order to give their students an optimal education, such as performing early intervention with African American role models and using a multicultural curriculum to infuse African and African American history and culture into the learning experience (Asante, 1987; Ascher, 1992; Lee, 1996).

African American all-male schools and programs exist in Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Brooklyn, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Detroit, East Cleveland, East Lansing, Miami, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, New Orleans, New York, Oakland, Portland, Raleigh, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, St. Louis, Tallahassee, Tampa and Washington, D.C. (Gourdine & Smitherman, 1992). Significantly, George W. Bush's second administration undertook a review of Title IX to make certain that the law allows for the creation of such schools (Solomone, 2002).

Proponents of African American all-male schools advocate educating females and males separately for a number of reasons. For example, African American educator

Jawanza Kunjufu (1991) supported gender separation as an attempt to “do something positive for African American youth” (p. 63-64). He asserted the need for gender separation in light of the criticism that all-male schools exercise a bias against females by stating:

We are very much aware that African American females are also underachieving, leading the world in teen pregnancy, and are paid less than other American workers. Separate schools for teen mothers during and after pregnancy are currently in existence in Detroit. The reality is more males go to special education, remedial reading, are suspended, drop out and go to prison than females, who exceed African American males in college as well (p. 88).

In addition, Kaba (2005) noted the widening of the educational gap between African American males and females. He showed that females continue to dominate the educational field for the following reasons:

- (a) The high school dropout rate among African American males is higher; meanwhile there is a higher rate of African American females in college and graduating from college;
- (b) African American males entering the military force at a relatively high rate;
- (c) In the total population among African Americans, more females are born than males;
- (d) More males than females enter the work force early;
- (e) A higher death rate among African American males in the college-age bracket as compared to females.

Other proponents of the establishment of African American all-male schools explain that single-gender schools and classes allow educators more freedom to create a school mission that is customized to students' needs and to provide curriculum, management and instruction directly related to African American males. Proponents state

that these specialized schools may help prevent these students from entering the cycle of problems inherent to African American males raised in the inner city (Gourdine & Smitherman, 1992).

Opposition to all-male schools is based mainly on the claim that there has been no purposeful teacher training related to this approach. In addition, there is some fear that gender stereotypes will be intensified if there are more single-sex schools (Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Campbell & Sanders, 2002). Critics of the approach point to studies that show little or no benefits for boys at all (Banks & Banks, 2004).

Rites-of-Passage Experiences

Rites-of-passage experiences, also called *manhood training*, are provided within the context of a traditional African ritual (such as taking young males to an isolated area for instruction) to help African American male adolescents pass into adulthood. The purpose of this training is to develop the adolescent's attitudes and skills necessary for assuming the responsibilities associated with becoming a man and which allow him to survive the realities of life (Lee, 1996; Alford, McKenry, & Gavazzi, 2001). Within the traditional group experience, adolescent boys are isolated from their families for an extended period of time, during which they are given rigorous physical and mental training by respected older males (Lee, 1996). While they are taken from the community for a period of time, the young men are aware of having the full support of their families and extended families, which may include aunts, uncles and the community at large (Alford, McKenry, & Gavazzi, 2001).

These young men are also taught skills to enhance their unique gifts and given full knowledge of their heritage (Alford, McKenry, & Gavazzi, 2001). African and African

American art forms such as music, poetry and graphic expression are utilized during the ritual, as are culture-specific educational aids. Once an African American male successfully completes this rites-of-passage training, he is formally acknowledged as a man among his people. As such, he is then accorded the rights and responsibilities that go with being a man (Lee, 1996).

When a rites-of-passage approach is used in conjunction with alternative methods of schooling, scholars like Lee suggest that African American youth obtain a better education and are less likely to drop out of high school. Researchers have found that ethnic solidarity and a strong sense of ethnic identity can make significant contributions to the scholastic performance of African American youth.

Enrichment Programs

Other curricula designed for African American males schooled in predominantly European American settings include enrichment programs scheduled after school and on weekends over the summer. These programs employ empowerment strategies such as studies of African and African American history, activities designed to build positive self-identity and sessions with adult African American mentors (Ascher, 1992).

For instance, in 1992, Fulton Academics and Athletics Magnet, a school in San Diego, initiated a pilot project to enhance the achievement of young African American males for its district. The program incorporated both in-class and pullout classes, where students were allowed to leave their regular classes for a period of time to participate in this program. The program, which depended upon the counseling and tutorials of African American mentors, focused on famous African Americans and highlighted the African American culture (Ascher, 1992).

The “No Child Left Behind” education policy of the George Bush Jr. presidency has given many children in poverty-stricken areas the opportunity to learn new skills and discover new abilities in after-school programs. It has pushed low-performing schools to meet state and local student academic achievement standards in the basic areas of reading, math and science. In addition, this bill also provides schools with other programs to help in the development of the whole person: drug- and violence-prevention and character educational programs; counseling programs; and art, music, literacy, technology and recreation programs to enhance the rhythm of the regular school day (Afterschool Alliance, 2007). Critics however, have argued that these unfunded mandates have paralyzed schools in poverty areas, in particular.

Another program geared toward African American males is The HAWK Project, which was developed at Grant Union High School in Sacramento, California. It uses a combination of two pullout classes and two after-school classes each month to achieve the program’s goals, one of which is the development of a positive identity through the study of African rituals and African/African American history. After only one semester in this program, 55% of the participants improved their grade point averages and the percentage of students performing below their abilities dropped from 82% to 33% (Ascher, 1992).

Summary of School Initiatives and Programs Supporting African American Males

According to Clinchy (2000) & Raywid (1996), alternative schools and programs for African American males were designed to rescue them from an educational system that continually fails them. Student attendance and graduation levels are higher in alternative school than in traditional schools because of smaller class sizes, culturally

responsive pedagogy, interdisciplinary teaching and more positive interaction between students and teachers. These purposeful initiatives may force teachers to be more aware of the needs and abilities of their students and to develop interpersonal relationships with them, which give students a greater sense of belonging and may lead to their greater social and academic success. Overall, in these environments, teachers and students are allowed to be more creative with the teaching and learning process and both groups feel as if they are valued.

A 2003 study by Aron and Zweig supported the findings that alternative schools that offer educational options for their students, innovative or challenging curricula, flexibility in the program, sense of connectedness to the community, small class size, individual instruction, self-pacing and career counseling resulted in a greater sense of empowerment for students previously considered “the problem” within the educational system. In a 2004 study, Noll stated that the results of schools-within-schools programs revealed their students had outperformed their peers when it came to staying in school, completing course work and achieving better grades. The success of programs that embrace alternative techniques for African American adolescents has been measured by better grades, consistent attendance, a higher graduation rate and behaviors that lead to academic and social success (Aron & Zweig, 2003). Research continues to support the benefits of alternative school approaches and program options for students who are in need of special attention and support from the school system (Wagner, 2003).

Summary of the Review of Literature

As demonstrated in this review of literature, schools can make a meaningful difference in providing quality education for African American students (Solomon, 1988). If social and educational stressors—such as insensitivity to the African American male culture—elicit antisocial behavior and lack of interest in school, it would seem to be the responsibility of society in general and the educational system in particular to remedy the situation. Specifically, educators must help make it possible for African American males to be more academically successful by removing the barriers to achievement. To remove these barriers, the literature shows that educators must first identify the psychological, social and cultural forces that contribute to the underachievement of these students, and then implement appropriate methodological interventions. Only then can educators create an environment that encourages academic achievement for all students.

In order to identify the forces that contribute to undesirable behaviors and underachievement by African American male adolescents, Gourdine and Smitherman (1992) argue that educators must come to understand the nature of these behaviors and their direct connection to the socio-economic status, social injustices and education obstacles that young African American males experience. Educators should see teaching as a means of helping all their students develop their various talents to their fullest potential, rather than viewing teaching as a way of helping only certain students develop a small range of talents.

Although improvements in the educational system have been made, Asante (1987) insists that research indicates that the public educational system still needs to make a great effort to address the culture and learning styles of African American students. For example, according to Gourdine and Smitherman (1992) another practical

means of educating African American male adolescents is to present these youth with positive role models. Seeing the attitudes and behaviors of successful African American males will give these students positive images of manhood to emulate. Therefore, efforts should be made to recruit, train and support capable adult African American males who can be mentors to young African American male.

In summary, the literature shows that African American male adolescents need adequate direction, support, culture-specific methodologies and alternative education opportunities in order to overcome the challenges they face. Otherwise, they will continue to drop out of school in record numbers. Educational policies and programs must be designed not only to address issues faced by African Americans in general, but by African American males in particular. Such gender-specific programs may help remove gender-based discrepancies in their academic performance (Gourdine & Smitherman, 1992). In order to assist in this process, this research study will provide valuable first-hand data and insights from adolescent African American males on the educational and socio-cultural influences that have an impact on their educational goals and career aspirations.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to investigate the educational and socio-cultural influences affecting African American middle school males' educational goals and career aspirations. Identifying and understanding the factors that influence these students' decisions to opt out, drop out or continue their education is critical to helping them reach their goals. The outcome of this study was to determine the factors that relate to student persistence and to discover ways in which the educational system can empower adolescent African American males for academic success.

Research Design and Questions

This research was conducted with a questionnaire that was answered by participants in an interview format. The questionnaire was chosen over other popular research methods because it provided the opportunity to ask questions believed to be relevant to the study. In addition, doing these interviews directly with each participant allowed me to observe their body language and other indicators of their comfort level.

There were 43 questions on the questionnaire. The questions were developed from my years as an African American male and as a teacher of African American males. My experience as a middle school teacher and counselor also provided me with insight through the stories and concerns that African American middle school males brought to my attention.

The questions were then divided into various headings, which included: personal demographics; education experiences and attitudes; goals and aspirations; perception of peers' educational experiences and attitudes; experiences and perceptions of dropping out

of school; reported perceptions of parents' behavior and attitudes; perceptions of teachers' attitudes; school demographics; and perceptions of school environment and school curriculum.

Previous research has indicated African Americans who have trouble in school are often pre-occupied with problems outside of school, including poverty, domestic violence and lack of parental guidance (Bauer, Sapp, & Johnson, 2000).

The research questions were designed, in part, with this knowledge in mind. The goal of this study was to ask these fundamental questions:

- (a) What are the educational goals of middle school African American males?
- (b) What are their career aspirations?
- (c) What educational factors does this group identify as affecting their thoughts about whether to continue their education or to drop out of school?
- (d) What socio-cultural influences does this group identify as affecting their thoughts about whether to continue their education or drop out?

In addition to my personal and professional experiences, I turned to other educators who work with middle school African American males, as well as higher education. The five individuals were all educators in the Atlanta, Georgia, area. Three were European American female grade school teachers, one was an African American male teaching at the college level, and the last one was an African American female teaching college science.

I chose a diverse group of peer readers to ensure that my questions were not unduly influenced by my experiences as an African American male. I asked the readers to take note of any recurring themes and to provide insight on them.

I had a one-on-one conversation with each educator and discovered that they

were able to spot the same recurring themes that I found in my evaluation. I related these experiences to my research to develop the questions to be used in this study. The questions were further refined after talking with my advisers and teachers about my study and this proposal.

I chose to use open-ended questions, which allowed the students to be creative in their responses, and, in turn, were more revealing and opened more avenues for exploration (Creswell, 2002). The interviews were conducted individually, since one-on-one interviews allow participants to speak more freely and comfortably (Creswell).

Sensitivity to the participants is critical to effectiveness. This sensitivity entails taking care with the language used during the interview process. As the interviewer, I tried to remain free from any biases or assumptions about the individuals with whom I talked. The researcher's identity becomes part of the process because the researcher does not come to this process from a vacuum, but with experiences, biases, stereotypes, perceptions and opinions that cannot be totally disconnected nor objective in the research itself (Hall & Hall, 2004).

Before launching into the interview process with my chosen participants, I performed a pilot study using the research questions that I had developed. The trial interviews took place with middle school African American males who are the children of acquaintances of mine. I interviewed five youngsters to familiarize myself with the interview process and to become more comfortable with question delivery. These initial interviews helped me gain a feeling for the interview process and address concerns that included the following questions: Is the process moving smoothly? Are the students understanding the questions well and feeling comfortable with the questions being asked? As the researcher, was I feeling comfortable asking these questions and interacting with

the subjects?

At the end of the pilot study, I felt confident that the questions were relevant to this study. I believe this was an important element of this study, as the attitude and demeanor of the interviewer can have an impact on the outcome of a study. I used this pilot study to practice my ability to remain neutral in body language and facial expression while asking the questions and recording the answers. One change that resulted from the pilot study was my approach. I learned that I was coming across as stand-offish, which may have a negative impact on the youngsters' openness. I practiced my question delivery and my own body language during the pilot study and believe I was more relaxed and better able to display neutrality during the actual research interviews.

For this study, I used an in-depth interview to gain insight into the motivations, perceptions and actions of African American middle school males by hearing their narratives regarding their educational experiences and academic futures. Additionally, this phenomenological process allowed me to observe, take note of and report on nonverbal expressions such as gestures and tones of voice that many times can reveal or punctuate articulated and unarticulated thoughts and feelings. These observations added data that connected or disconnected with what the students were saying in the interview (Creswell, 2002).

The research questions, designed to examine educational and socio-cultural influences affecting achievement of African American middle school males' education goals and career aspirations, were read from a guide. The interview guide gave direction and consistency to the process, while the open-ended nature of the questions provided an opportunity for participants' to give detailed descriptions and explanations that went beyond the literal sense. This allowed me to build on connections that were not apparent

when the questions were originally being developed. A phenomenological approach requires that the researcher plan for contingencies but be open to the possibility of the interview moving in unanticipated, but relevant directions (Gliner & Morgan, 2000).

To begin an analysis of the data, I first had to separate key elements of data that the students provided. I did this by going through the interview responses that had been professionally transcribed for me and charting each response. With this process, I was able to notice emerging patterns in some of the answers.

The criteria that I used to benchmark a “pattern” was getting the same answer three or more times. Any time I got a third identical answer for a question, I placed the question and answer in an area that would be later examined as a possible factor in the decision-making process the students used in determining whether to drop out of school or to pursue a higher education.

“Coming Clean” as a Researcher

Although the perspective of this research study was primarily that of a general phenomenology, it is not far from the specialized, heuristic form of phenomenological inquiry. According to Patton (2002), a heuristic approach requires the researcher to have personal experience with, and an intense interest in the phenomenon being studied. Patton also noted that in heuristic inquiry, the researcher’s involvement and sense of connection with the participants’ experiences help elucidate the meaning of the data. I believe that within the scope of this study, the participants and I experienced a connection, which helped elucidate the meaning of the African American middle school male experience.

Although I am not currently an adolescent African American male in middle school, I was at one time. I have taught adolescent African American males, and their future is a subject that concerns me deeply. My personal history reveals my struggles as an African American male in middle school, even though the importance of education was always impressed upon me. As an adult African American male, I feel a great desire to investigate the challenges facing African American male students, with the hope of giving back to my community. While research into this topic is of personal importance to me, it is of greater importance in its role of adding to the literature on the condition of African American males.

My Story

I was raised in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, by my grandmother and parents. They were all born in Carthage, Mississippi, which is located 20 miles from Jackson, Mississippi.

Since the oral tradition of storytelling played an important role in my family, I

frequently heard my parents' and grandmother's stories of the racism experienced by African Americans in the South. I learned that, because of the poor educational opportunities and other barriers faced by African American people, my parents were not able to finish high school. Hearing stories of the limited opportunities for black people in Mississippi deepened my awareness of the racial tension that I eventually experienced many miles north in Milwaukee. In spite of the racial issues I faced, my parents wanted me to have more opportunities for success than they had, so they told me to "keep the faith and good things would come." They instilled in me the belief that education was not just important, it was the only "ticket to freedom" for African American people.

My family had come to realize the importance of education for African Americans when, for financial reasons, they migrated to the North in the 1930s and found a different school environment through the Catholic Church. Catholic nuns told my family that minorities needed a good education, namely private schooling, in order to achieve success. The concept of private education was very appealing to my family, especially since they knew that the Catholic Church helped people of color receive a Catholic education for free. My parents wanted me to have a good education in order to have the opportunities they never had. They also did not want me to suffer racism to the extent they had suffered. As a result, my parents left the Baptist church and joined a Catholic church. My grandmother, however, did not agree with their choice, saying that one's denomination did not change the attitude of people toward other races. My grandmother had a valid point in that we still experienced racism from Catholics and non-Catholics alike. Even with the change in location, my parents still regarded most European Americans with suspicion. My family could not forget the racism they had endured in the South, nor were they blind to the injustices they experienced in the North.

When I entered the sixth grade, the reality of being an African American in a European American world hit my consciousness hard. At that time, my neighborhood Catholic school closed, and my parents placed me in another Catholic grade school. At the new school of 600 students, I was the only African American student. I became intensely aware of the color of my skin, and the other students would not let me forget that I looked different from them. Some of the other students called me names; others treated me with indifference. Even some of the Catholic nuns who taught me treated me with apathy. This was a terrible time for me because I simultaneously felt disconnected from African Americans, as well as European Americans. I felt I did not belong anywhere. I was unsure of who I was as an African American male.

My experience confused and discouraged me. I lived in a community that was predominantly African American, but on a daily basis I had to “shift gears” to try and fit in with a school peopled by European Americans and founded on Catholic European American cultural traditions. Because of my race, I felt disconnected from my classmates and my teachers. I did not feel nurtured by my teachers and I found it difficult to achieve academically when I could not fit into the school culture.

After enduring a horrible sixth-grade school year, I begged my parents to let me attend the predominantly black middle school in our community. They finally agreed, and I attended public school for the first time as a middle school student. Attending school with other black students made me feel much better about myself. I quickly began to feel connected to the black community because I had much more in common with my new classmates. Besides race, my fellow students and I had other things in common, situations that are, unfortunately, all too common in many black communities: financial hardship and an absence of positive male role models. Part of the connection came from

identifying with teachers who were of African American descent who became role models for me. That connectedness also gave me a sense of identity. Fortunately, I no longer had to battle rejection, indifference and racism at my new middle school. I now shared concerns that faced everyone: trying to fit in socially, finding an identity, maintaining good grades and dating.

I am “coming clean” as a researcher to demonstrate how my experiences will help me understand and relate to this study’s participants as I investigate the decisions they make regarding their academic goals and career aspirations. My history reveals my struggles as an African American middle school male who knew the importance of education, learned about my family’s experiences with racism, experienced racism myself and struggled with schoolwork. I have a great desire to explore the challenges faced by African American males today because of the personal connection I have to this topic and its potential importance to the success of many African American male students.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in this study was that of *insider-observer* and *interviewer*. According to McMillan and Schumacher (1997), there are five roles that can be assumed during a qualitative study: (a) observer; (b) participant; (c) participant-observer; (d) insider-observer and (e) interviewer.

An *observer* is one who writes strictly about what is seen in the research setting. A *participant* is one who lives in the experience, recalls the experience or provides personal insight in writing about the experience. The role of the *participant-observer* occurs when the researcher is allowed to recreate the role for data-collection purposes.

The *insider-observer* has a role in the locale where the study is being conducted. The *interviewer* explains the purpose, discusses confidentiality and arranges times and dates for interviews relative to the research project. For this study, the researcher is an insider-observer, the interviewer and the collector and analyzer of data.

According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), those who collect and analyze data must possess *theoretical sensitivity*. Theoretical sensitivity requires insightfulness, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand and the ability to separate the relevant from the less relevant. Strauss and Corbin reported that theoretical sensitivity could be developed through familiarity with literature, professional experiences and personal experiences. Having researched the relevant literature in the area of adolescent African American males and school achievement, having experience in the teaching profession with middle school African American males, and having personal experiences as an African American male, I believe I was equipped with the desirable degree of theoretical sensitivity to facilitate this research project. It is also from the vantage point of an insider-observer that I was able to analyze the data and draw a logical and accurate conclusion, including explanations of nuances that an outsider might overlook.

Sites, Participants and Sampling Procedures

I chose to go through a church population to locate participants rather than a public school system to avoid the delays that would have been encountered trying to get through the bureaucratic maze of the Atlanta Public School System for permission to conduct this study. Instead, for this and for other positive reasons as well, I decided to work with an African American church whose members are drawn largely from the lower economic stratus. I know from personal experience that the church is central within the

African American community—not just in terms of religious life, but in social, family, educational and political arenas, as well. I also believe that in the American South, a high percentage of African Americans attend church, and their children do attend public schools.

In addition to my personal knowledge regarding the importance of spiritual practice among African American families, research has demonstrated its foundational importance as well (Brown & Brown, 2003). Therefore, I felt comfortable using a church to find publicly educated middle school African American males as participants and avoiding the red tape. Additionally, I thought my study could have relevance and more of an impact by being connected to a church. I obtained permission from a pastor who seemed enthusiastic about my work. He believed that some of my conclusions could be shared with the church and that participating families may even feel empowered to consider greater educational opportunities for their sons (see letter of support in Appendix A). This study is limited because it is done within the setting of a Christian church, and thus my subjects will be drawn from a particular subset of the population, which introduces population bias.

The method that I used is called purposeful sampling. It entails the researcher selecting the people and location for the particular phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2002). In my case, I used a Baptist church as my research site. This method gave me a homogeneous sampling because all the students in my study were African American middle school male students (Creswell, 2002). I initially prepared to interview 15 African American males in middle school, with a follow-up of at least five additional participants from the same group. The purpose of the follow-up with the sub-group was to ascertain answers about specific issues that arose during the initial interview process. This second

part of the study helped confirm and/or disconfirm issues that emerged from the initial sampling by following up on specific cases (Creswell).

The congregation at St John the Baptist Church consists of approximately 600 parishioners, including more than 20 middle school males. Although I visited the church on a few occasions, I was not a registered member of the church, did not attend services regularly, nor did I know the youth who attended this church. I held little influence over student participation in this project, which thereby ensured the study's voluntary nature.

The process used to obtain participants for this research project is outlined below.

- (a) I obtained permission from the pastor of St. John Baptist Church to interview young males from his congregation.
- (b) I made an announcement to the congregation asking for participants who would be interested in participating in my research project (see Appendix B for scripted announcement). Major details such as interview protocol, issues of safety, confidentiality, anonymity and a gift of \$10 for participating youth were shared. I explained that all the information concerning the research process was included in the consent form and a copy would be given to the parent(s)/guardian(s) (see Appendix C).
- (c) I placed an announcement in the church's weekly bulletin that ran for several weeks until I obtained the needed number of participants. Some of the students were not official members of the church, but were friends of others who belonged to the church (see Appendix D). Of those participants, several were chosen to be part of a sub-group. The sub-group participants were chosen based on their ability to articulate their thoughts in such a manner that themes emerged. This, in turn, gave strength to the internal validity of the interview process.

- (d) I continued visiting the church on consecutive Sundays, Wednesday evenings during Bible study and on other days to make the same announcement and to meet with families until I obtained a sufficient number of participants.
- (e) Each Sunday, interested youth and their parents/guardians met with me briefly following the service. I distributed two copies of the consent form to each family, went through the informed consent protocol, answered any questions, collected signed consent forms and made arrangements for future interviews. One copy of the consent form remained with the parent(s)/guardian(s) for their reference.
- (f) Interviews took place at the church on Sundays following both of the church's two services. However, other days and times were made available for the convenience of those who preferred alternate scheduling. An interview schedule and sign-up opportunity were available every Sunday after the first verbal announcement and continued until no more participants were needed.
- (g) The interviews took place in one of the church offices for convenience, safety and confidentiality.

The Interview Process

Interview Protocol: Maintaining Student Safety, Confidentiality and Consent

The interviews took place in one of the church offices. I went over the protocol (see Appendix E) with each student before beginning the interview process. After obtaining verbal and written consent from the student, the interview commenced with me presenting oral open-ended and closed-ended questions read from the questionnaire (see Appendix F). I attempted to create an environment that was comfortable enough for the students to provide information in a manner that was not mechanical, but natural—even conversational. I wanted the students to feel free to share their experiences, views and feelings.

The questioning began with demographic information (i.e. student's age, grade and family structure) and followed with questions specific to the research that dealt with family dynamic, economic status and family attitude regarding education (see Appendix F for the complete questionnaire).

I was able to meet with the students every day of the week until I met the projected number of 17. I used an interview sign-up sheet that gave me the opportunity to contact the students as well as their parent(s)/guardian(s) for the meeting time. During the time of the meeting, there were activities taking place in the church that were somewhat noisy. I was surprised that I was able to finish the interviews in a very timely manner.

The \$10 gift I provided for each interview was instrumental in gaining participants for this study. Many of the students came back with friends from the neighborhood who wanted to receive \$10 for doing the interview. I welcomed the students' friends as long as they fit the criteria for the research and the proper procedures

were followed for obtaining permission from the parent(s)/guardian(s). Some middle school African American females expressed irritation about the fact I was interviewing only middle school males. For example, when one learned about the \$10 gift, she said to me: “ I am really a boy and not a girl.”

Creswell’s (2002) description for analyzing and interpreting data is the process that was used for the interviews. Each interview was audio taped so that the researcher could freely go through each question with the anticipation of identifying recurring themes which might surface from the interview and it allowed the researcher to document any non verbal responses. The responses from the students were then transcribed verbatim and given to individuals within the field of education to read and possibly report on any relevant themes and issues that they found. In addition, the researcher read through the transcriptions analyzing the transcript for patterns and themes.

The interview session was audiotaped to support the handwritten notes of verbal responses and the documentation of nonverbal responses such as body language, pacing, posture and hesitations. Additionally, body language and facial expression were monitored to assure that students maintained a level of comfort during the process. If a student verbally expressed discomfort or if his body language or facial expressions indicated he preferred not to answer a question, I asked if he preferred not to answer. If the answer was ‘yes,’ I gave him the option to omit a particular question or conclude the interview.

The study participants appeared to be comfortable with the questions being asked. Overall, the process went as planned. One obstacle that was encountered was the cut-and-dry manner in which the students answered questions. The students in this study were often short with their answers, thereby thwarting a chance for deeper exploration. There

is no way to definitively pinpoint the cause of the students' reticence, but it was probably because they were intimidated by being in a new setting with an unfamiliar adult, or they were uncomfortable answering personal questions in such a setting. While this was problematic, it did not prevent the completion of the study as they did answer the study questions openly and willingly.

At the conclusion of each session, the student was thanked and given \$10 for his participation--even if the interview was not completed. The students initialed their consent letter to indicate that they received the \$10, and was then escorted back to their guardian or parent. The parent(s)/guardian(s) seemed very supportive of my project, some of whom orally expressed their support

After all interviews were completed, I contacted all participants and their families to follow up on any questions they may have had and to clarify some of the responses that were given to me. I also sent out thank you letters to the parents/guardians.

Post Interview Protocol: Maintaining Confidentiality

Since these interviews revealed personal views and circumstances, every precaution was taken to minimize the risk of exposure of the participants, their schools and school districts, and the church. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained in written and verbal responses, as well as in any published documents by using pseudonyms for names and sites.

For organizational purposes and to maintain confidentiality during the collection process, all dissertation information was organized into binders. One binder contained identifying information such as signed consent forms, interview schedules and any correspondence connected to actual participants and their families. The second binder

contained information important to completing the project, including a copy of the proposal, linked list to participants, transcribed interviews and the analyzed data. A small, cardboard box held audiotapes of the interviews. All documents and tapes for this project were kept in my personal filing cabinet under lock and key. Raw data were only shared with the transcriber. Transcribed data using pseudonyms and disguised site descriptions were only shared with my adviser and other researchers, who all agreed to honor participant confidentiality when helping to triangulate the data.

Upon completion of the project, all scripts, tape recordings and documents of both first and second round of interviews were turned over to the researcher's adviser, Dr. William Timpson, who will store them in a secured file according to Colorado State University procedures.

Data Analysis and Writing Process

The audiotaped interviews were transcribed by a professional who has expertise in transcription and who agreed to honor the confidentiality of the participants. I analyzed the transcripts to identify patterns, themes and categories that emerged from the collected data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The emergent patterns were clustered according to the appropriate research question or the relationship under study.

My initial analysis was to categorize responses based on the questions listed in the interview questionnaire. Then, within each question, I looked for emergent patterns with which to further categorize the responses. Upon completion of that process, I was able to look across questions for emergent themes and patterns. This process of multi-level analysis continued until a conclusion was reached (Glaser & Strauss). The themes were addressed according to the previously identified research questions. Finally, an analysis

confirmed that the findings of the literature discussed in Chapter 2 aligned with the factors affecting the academic achievement of adolescent African American males.

I then followed the guidance of Creswell (2002) in interpreting and analyzing data. Creswell explained the importance of preliminary exploratory analysis in which the researcher thinks about and gets a sense of the direction the data suggests. It is within this mind-set that the researcher not only gets a real sense of the information gathered, but determines if more information is needed for the research. From this, the researcher describes and develops themes from the data—making sure that the research questions have been answered and that there has been a clear understanding of the central phenomenon.

At this point, the researcher may give a synopsis of ideas gathered. This process is known as the narrative discussion, which objectively gives meaning to the phenomenon in the study. The research and literature, along with my personal experience, will bring together observational data with the written data (Creswell).

Summary

The purpose of this study is to investigate educational and socio-cultural influences that affect African American middle school males' educational goals and career aspirations. Identification of the influences that have an impact on their achievement is best obtained through their own voices. Phenomenology was employed as this study deals with a phenomenon that cannot be easily quantified. Phenomenological processes allowed me to document how this group of adolescent African American males describe, feel about, remember and talk about their educational experiences and career aspirations. Additionally, I took on the role of insider-observer, which acknowledged and

took advantage of my being an African American male. It is hoped that this work will inform the literature base by raising questions and furnishing fresh insights into the educational experiences of adolescent African American males.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

This study explored the educational goals and career aspirations that influence the decisions of African American male middle school students on whether to continue their education or drop out of school. To that end, a series of interviews of African American middle school male students was conducted. The students and schools were kept anonymous to maintain confidentiality.

The findings are divided into three parts. The first part reviews the survey; the second provides an analysis of the major themes that emerged; and the third part reviews the categories that surfaced from the interviews.

There were several themes that surfaced as a result of the interviews. I have provided the themes in addition to my interpretations of the responses from the students.

I chose to re-interview four of the 17 students in an effort to engage in further conversation after some themes began to surface. I did so to confirm and/or disconfirm specific issues that emerged from the initial sampling (Creswell, 2002). Getting the four to return was not difficult since they realized they would receive an additional \$10 for the second interview. I chose the four students because they had each shown an ability to effectively communicate their thoughts during the initial interview.

The fact that the students came from a particular culture and were within the same age bracket explained the use of particular language patterns, including the use of slang words that are common to the culture and age. Because I was raised in the same culture and went through similar experiences, I was able to interpret their answers and comments. Some students had difficulty understanding what was meant by a particular

phrase or word, so one challenge I had was trying to define these phrases or words.

In order to effectively analyze the collected data, I designed a standard by which the responses could be measured. I coded the words so that they were definably measurable for the purpose of the study. For instance, if a student answered with any of the following, “it’s aight” “I like it” or other comments that have a positive meaning, I would place that answer in the affirmative area of results.

Themes

I went through each section of the questionnaire and separately identified recurring themes that emerged from the answers.

The deductive analysis process involved using specific observations to detect the direction of a general pattern. Deductive analysis provided the ability to code and categorize the responses that were given in the interviews.

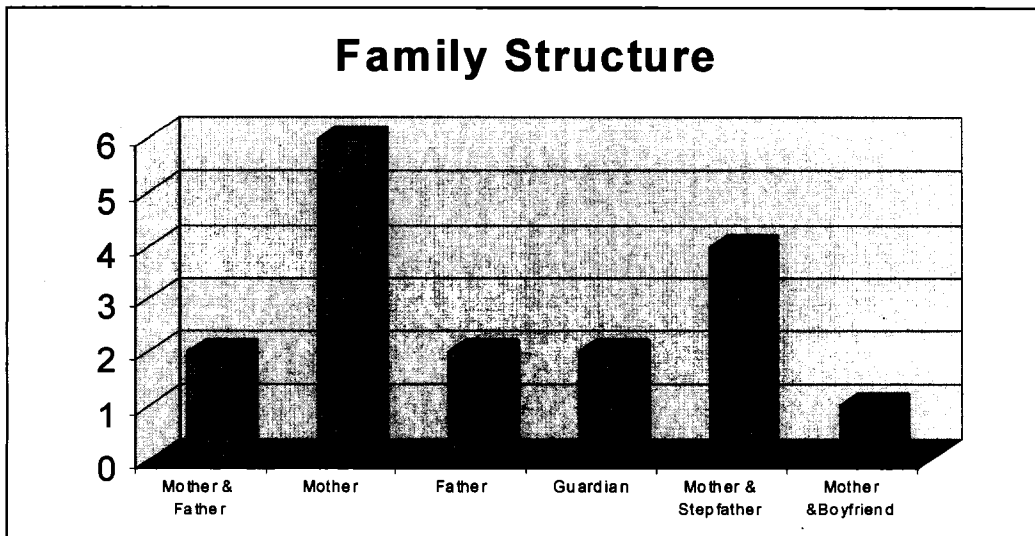
As I began coding the words based on their meaning, I saw a thematic pattern begin to develop: Family structure; parental employment and education; positive parental support for education; the students’ own desire to continue their educations; the importance of teachers and sports in school, as well as generally positive experiences with school; a belief that education leads to higher income in later life; and family members as role models were all response patterns that developed.

Theme 1 - Family Structure

The question was asked: “Who do you live with in your house?” Most of these young men resided in a single-parent household with a “stepfather” part of the household. Of the 17 participants, six lived with their mothers; two resided with their biological fathers; and two lived with a guardian/aunt. It was interesting to note that some of the students lived in a household that is part of an extended family setting, including uncles and aunts. Only two resided in a “traditional” family setting with their biological mother and father at home. Four resided with a mother and step-father, and one resided with a mother and her boyfriend. Four mentioned siblings living in the home. For the most part, these young men live with their mother alone or with a step-father or boyfriend of the mother. Nine of the 17 students have a male figure in their home. This knowledge confirmed that the majority of students in the study did have a male role model within their living environment; however, it was not disclosed how long each male role model had been present, or how many others there had been in the past.

Table 1 gives summarizes the answers to the question on family structure.

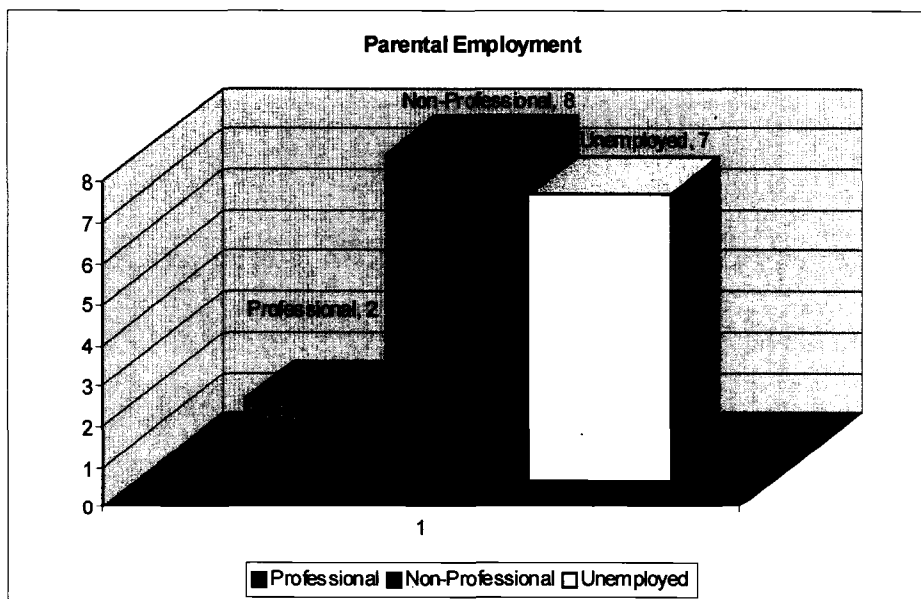
Table 1



Theme 2 - Parental Employment

When discussing parental employment, six students said that their mothers were employed. Four had fathers who were employed, along with one whose mother's boyfriend was employed. One lived with an aunt who was employed. Five mothers were unemployed, and two fathers were unemployed. Five children were unaware of parental employment. Table 2 shows a breakdown of parents/guardians in professional or non-professional jobs or unemployed. The *professional* category refers to *profession* or type of work one does for a living. The employed parents were further divided into white-collar and blue-collar workers. For this study, white-collar employment refers to a profession requiring a higher education and typically coming with a salary rather than an hourly rate of pay. A blue-collar position does not typically require a college education and is more often than not based on an hourly rate of pay.

Table 2

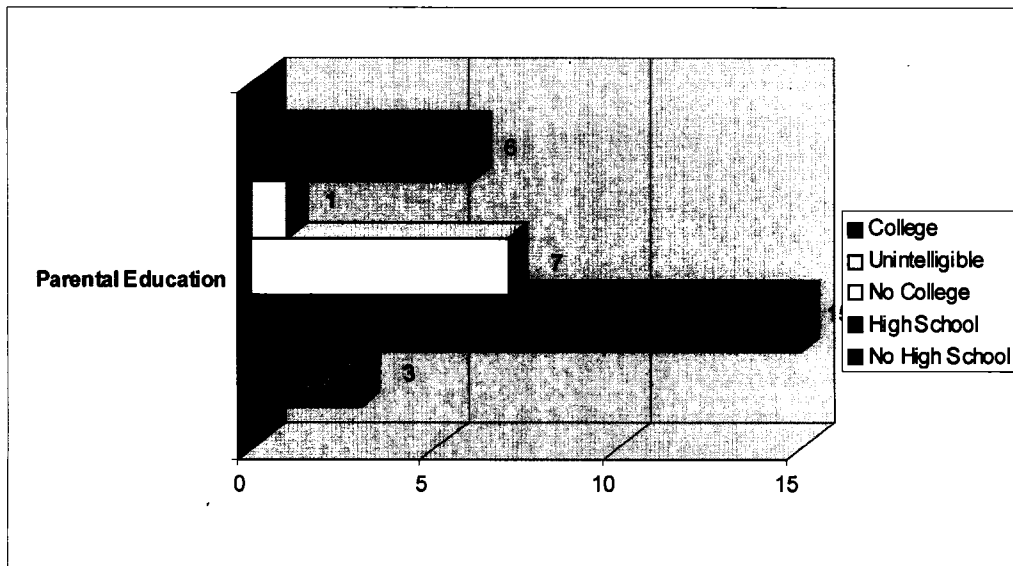


It is interesting to note that many of the parents did not have white-collar professions. There appeared to be an employment issue when some responses revealed that parents/guardians were working “some time” or not working at all. Then there was the response that a parent/guardian was an “eng,” which I interpreted as an engineer; followed by “like a ‘lectrician,” which I understood to be a connection with an engineer and electrician. The response that “mom stays at home and watch me and my sister and my step-dad do” can be understood as the mother and father both staying at home and not working at all.

Theme 3 - Parental Education

Of the 17 students interviewed, 15 reside in a home where someone finished high school and six in a home where someone attended college. One mother and one father were currently attending school. Table 3 provides a breakdown of those parents who did or did not finish high school and college.

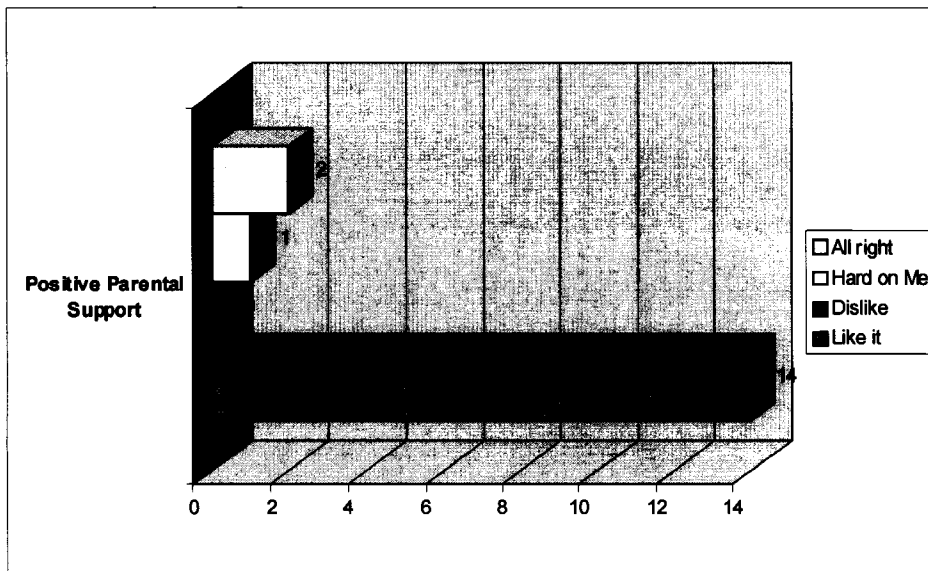
Table 3



The responses seemed very short and to-the-point due to the nature of the questions. When the student mentioned “My cou..not my cousin, yah,” I sensed that he was not really sure if that individual finished high school or college because of the hesitancy and the tone of his response. Could it be that various responses highlight the fact that the members of the extended family—not just mother and father—influence the student regarding his feelings about education? Some of the students gave a definite “yes” or “no” answer to this question. This study revealed that, regardless of their parents/guardians’ educational level, the students all aspired to attend college.

Theme 4 - Positive Parental Support for School

Table 4



As Table 4 shows, parental support for education was quite evident in the survey. Overall, the students said that their parents were pleased with their schools and their teachers. For the most part, students received reprimands from their parents/guardians for not doing well in school (see Table 5). All of the students said that there were repercussions for poor school performance.

Every child also reported that he had somebody in his family with whom to discuss academic issues. I interpreted “hard on me about it” as having an adult in the student’s life who has expectations that he will perform well in the academic environment, and the failure to meet those expectations would bring negative consequences. “The “all right” response may be interpreted as meaning that the student’s parent likes the school their child is attending, at least to a moderate degree.

There appeared to be serious repercussion for not doing well in school. This kind of reaction from their parents/guardians also can send a signal to the student about the seriousness of his academic work. Table 5 indicates that most students in the study receive some form of punishment for not doing well in school.

Four students reported positive reinforcement from their parents for good academic performance through compliments, parental bragging and excitement expressed through an emotional response. Table 6 shows that parents/guardians and family members show emotional support when their child does well in school. Most students said their mothers showed emotion expression when they performed well in school. This, again, signaled emotional support for the child’s endeavor.

I learned that rewards for school successes were by far the favored reinforcement tools used by parents to support continued good work in school, whether it was money, an outing or a special treat, such as going to a restaurant. Refer to Table 7 for responses on rewards for doing well in school.

Table 5

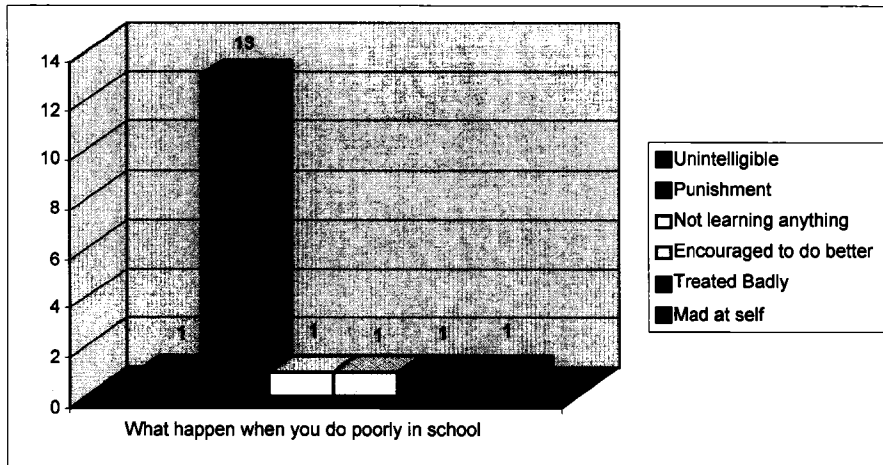


Table 6

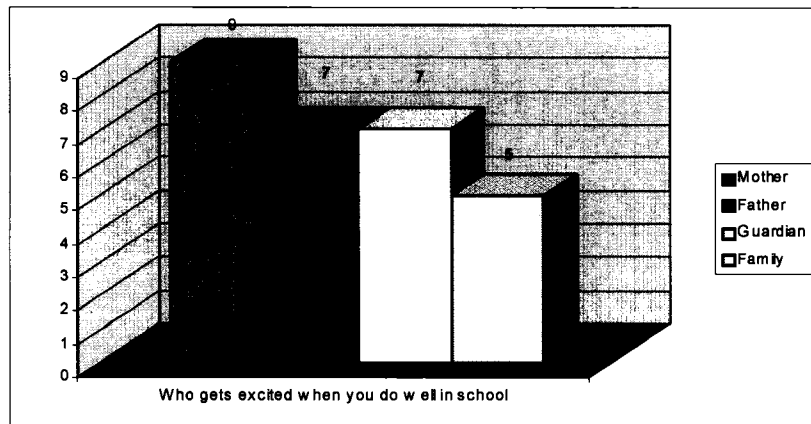
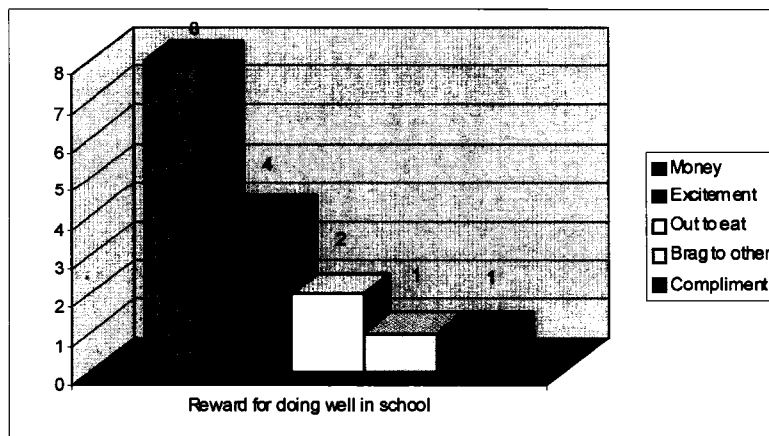


Table 7



Theme 5 - Students' Desire to Continue Their Education

One interesting outcome of the study was that all students reported their parents fully expected them to complete high school. When asked the question, "What does your family expect you to do when you finish junior high school?" the students overwhelmingly said they would attend high school (see Table 8 A). All the students indicated a desire to attend college (see Table 8 B). Two students had knowledge of scholarship availability and expressed a hope of securing their educational dreams.

Table 8 A

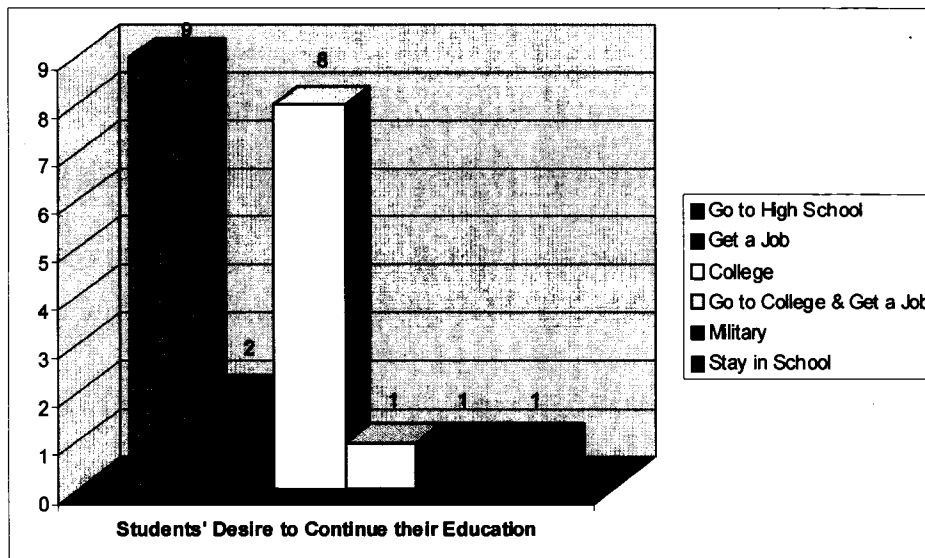


Table 8 B

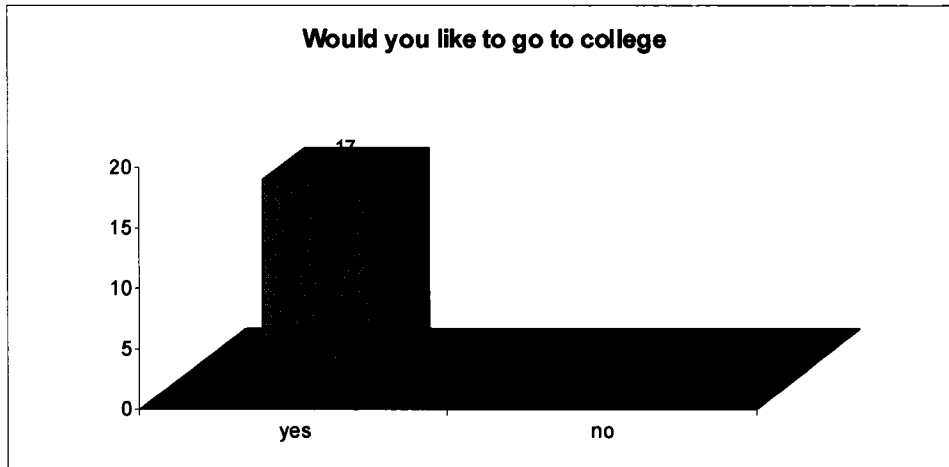


Table 9

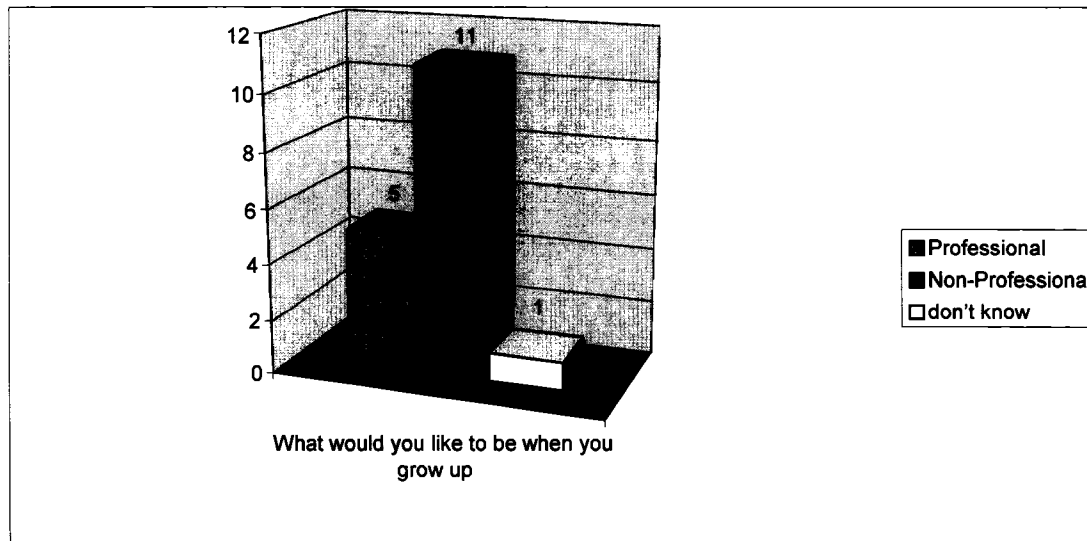


Table 9 gives some insight into the students' professional goals. Again, the profession refers to the type of career/job, whether it's white-collar or blue-collar career/job. In addition to the expectation that the student will complete high school and college, the family also expects that the student will enter the workforce with gainful employment upon completing his education. Having a "good life" is interpreted as having a good quality of life. Going into the military can be interpreted as securing not only a

career, but a job as well. Because one student's mother went to Howard University, there appeared to be a demand by his family to not only go to college, but a "really good college."

Even though the students thought that they were doing well in school, they all responded that they could be doing better. They all admitted to not working to their potential. The desires for a better job and "good money" were the main reason they said they should stay in school, followed by a good sporting program. Six aspired to be football players and one a basketball player; one desired to do child care work; four desired a professional occupation—one doctor, one engineer and two architects; one planned on a military career; one wanted to be a policeman; one a fireman; and one said he wanted to be a "hot rod builder." It is interesting to note that this student's father made his living as a "hot rod builder." One said his goal was "to be like my dad." One said he did not know.

Theme 6 – Importance of teachers and sports in school

When asked about the things they liked best about school, six said sports; six mentioned their teachers; three said their classes; one noted discipline; one said lunch; and one said having a clean school (see Table 10).

Of the 17 students interviewed, five knew of someone who dropped out of school, while 11 did not (one answer was unintelligible). The majority of the students said that they felt dropping out of school was not a good choice because it would result in the inability to find a good job or to make "good money" (see Table 11).

Table 10

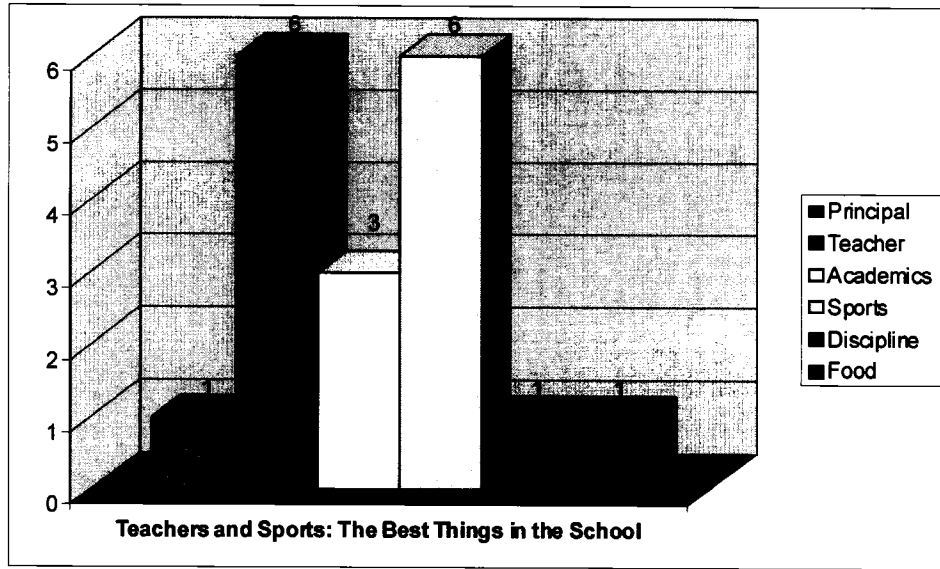
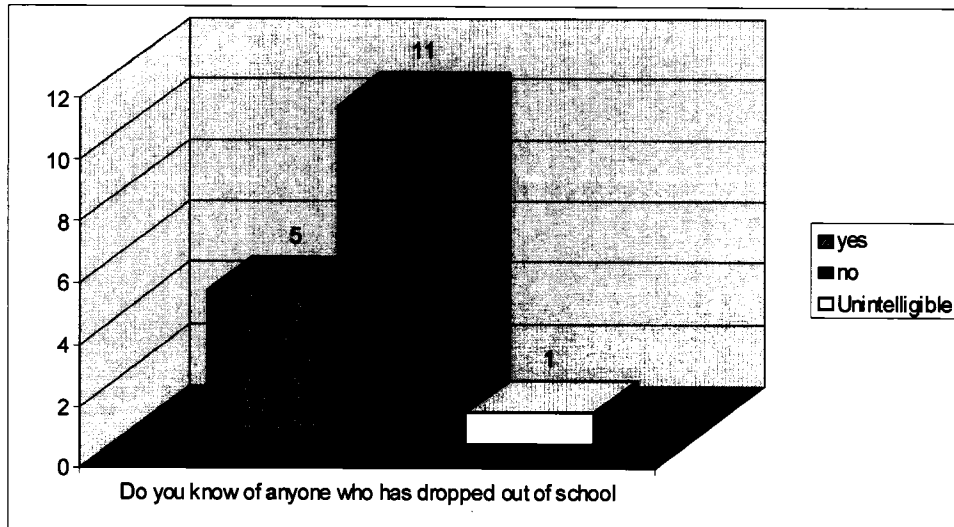


Table 11

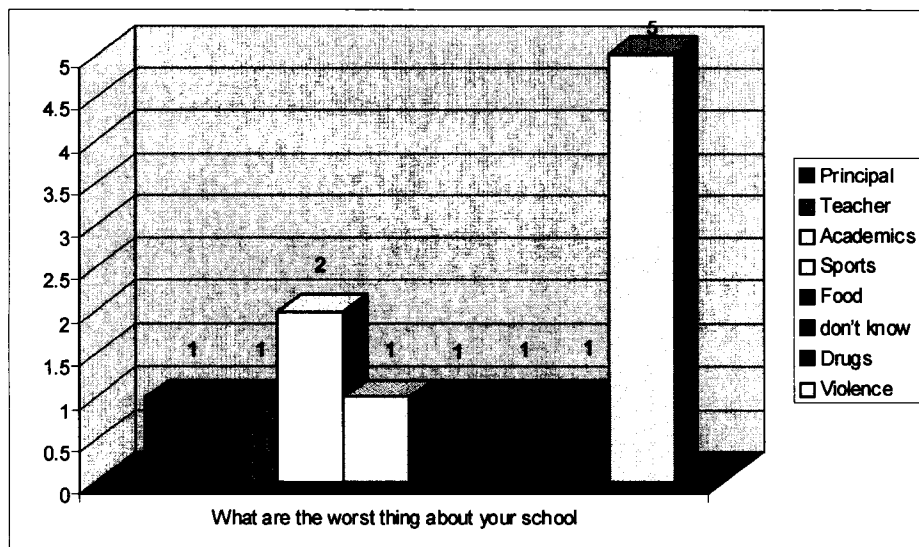


Theme 7 - Positive Experience with their Schools

The interviews revealed that the majority of the students had a positive experience with their schools. However, six students mentioned negative peer interaction due to fights, disrespectful behavior in the classroom, gang activity and bullying, which I classified under violence in Table 12.

Fourteen students reported that their teachers had positive attitudes toward them and six reported that their teachers displayed negative feedback toward other students.

Table 12



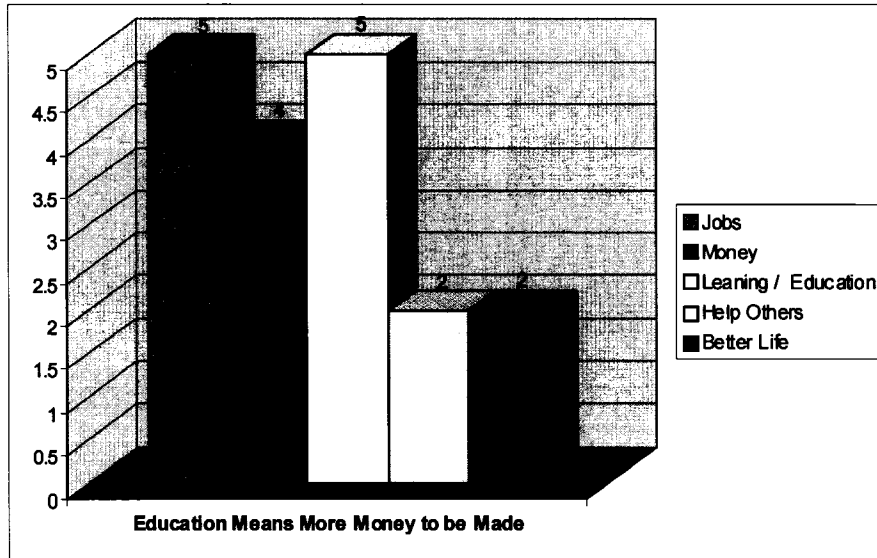
Theme 8 - Education Means More Money to be Made

Job anxiety was noticeable among eight of the students. Fear of not having future employment was evident in students' responses to the question: "What do you see as the advantages of staying in school?"

I understood "good money" and "making good money" as having a good job that pays well. "Having the things you choose in life" would also seem to fall under this answer. The students evidently connect having a good education with having a high-

paying job (see Table 13). “Being successful in my life” can be understood to mean achieving one’s goal in life. Finishing school is evidently seen to contribute to success. Overall, Table 13 reveals that the students saw education as important to getting a good job.

Table 13



Money was another major contributing factor to the socio-cultural influences. Students said that they believed that if they finished school, they would have opportunities for better jobs. When asked the question, “Do you think school is important?” they all replied, “Yes.” The next question was “Why?” The reply most often given: “If you get through school, you can get a good job.” Other contributing socio-cultural factors for this group included support from the home—from parents and other family members living in the household—as well as feeling teachers seemed to care for them and students’ liking their teachers in turn. Thus, the students’ experiences strongly affected their feelings about the future over and above any abstract ideas about educational value.

Having African American studies within the curriculum seemed to have a significant impact on these students. Question 41 asked: “Who are the famous people you study about in school?” Several students gave more than one answer to this question. However, 72% of the answers indicated an African American. Six cited Martin Luther King Jr., two Jackie Robinson and one Michael Jordan. One said “slaves.” Three mentioned Malcolm X, five Rosa Parks, one Jesse Jackson, one George Lopez and one Leonardo DaVinci. One said “inventors,” one DJs, two “presidents,” and one could not name a famous person studied. Four respondents did not specifically name a person but indicated that they studied African Americans.

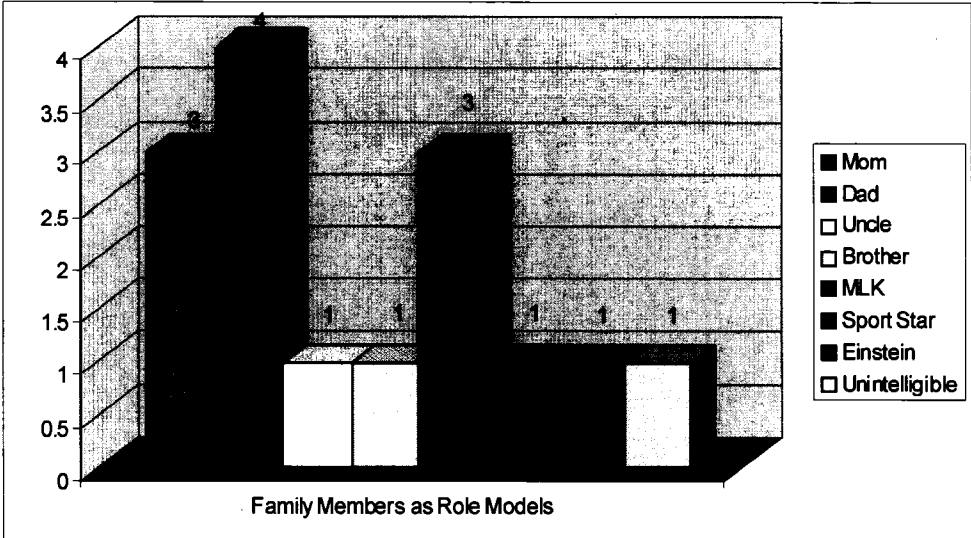
Theme 9 - Family Members as Role Models

The study showed that 50% of students’ role models were family members; yet, 25% said they have no role model. They were asked: “Do you have any role models?” (see Table 14). One indicated the singer, Usher; one cited Michael Jordan; one said Einstein; three said Martin Luther King, Jr.; four said their mother, four their father, one an uncle; and one a brother. Four said they had none. Interestingly, even though 41% of the students aspired to be an athlete, only one student indicated that his role model was a professional sports person. Thirteen of 17, or 76% of the students, said they realized that education played a significant part in helping their role models to become successful.

Educational factors identified by this group of middle school African American males as affecting their thoughts about whether to continue their education or drop out were not revealed to me from these interviews. Rather, socio-cultural influences seemed more critical, as explained in Chapter 2 in the discussion on constructivist pedagogy. It was Vygotsky who said that through social experiences, the students are shaped in ways

that help them make sense out of the world and interpret the world (Vygotsky, 1992). The socio-cultural influences I saw came through in the students' selection of role models, the majority of whom came from their own family members living in their households.

Table 14



CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Several themes emerged from the study's interview responses. This final chapter will discuss points of correspondence between my study and related literature in Chapter 2, as well as points that did not link to my findings. This study will conclude with a discussion on recommendations.

To review, the questions this study sought to answer were:

- (a) What are the educational goals of middle school African American males?
- (b) What are their career aspirations?
- (c) What educational factors do they identify as affecting their thoughts about whether to continue their education or drop out?
- (d) What socio-cultural influences do they identify as affecting their thoughts about whether to continue their education or drop out?

Social Reproduction Theory

It was quite evident that many of the students aspired to make what they perceived as a sizeable amount of money by pursuing a professional career in sports. This finding can be explained by Gutek (1991), who suggested that students who are brought up in lower-class homes were often not given the educational opportunities that were given to upper-class students. This lack of opportunity prevents many lower-class students from grasping the possibilities that are out there. These students may connect with the one thing they do recognize: big-dollar sports.

While there are few shows on television depicting the lives of MBAs or physicians, there is plenty of media coverage on professional athletes. This provides little

if any encouragement to set high academic goals. The one thing the students turn to and feel they understand about financial success is a career in sports. I do think that “making more money” can function as the only goal for staying in school. The quality of life that gives the students other options should also be important for these students. Clarence Spigner (1999) addresses this issue of putting too much emphasis on the sports world. It is this emphasis that has caused a disproportionate number of athletic scholarships given to African American students who attend college based on their athletic ability and not on their intellectual pursuit. The system often overlooks grades and focuses on athletic ability.

Based on the fact that most of the parents/guardians worked blue-collar jobs, the majority of the students came from lower-class homes. Many of these students aspired to take on jobs that reflect their parents’ jobs. Eleven students aspired to non-professional jobs, five aspired to professions that were white-collar careers/jobs and one did not know which profession he wanted to pursue. A number of them said that they wanted to become professional sports stars.

Daycare provider	1
Football player	6
Hot rod dealer	1
Architect	2
Baseball player	1
Fireman	1
Policeman	1
Doctor	1
Military	2
Engineer	1
Military purification /meteorologist/geologist/astronomer (these are possibilities)	1
Don't know	1

Do these stated aspirations contradict Gutek? Not unexpectedly, none of the students had parents who were in professional sports. Yet, the students said that sports were a large part of their environment; many played sports in school. Those who lacked realistic, attainable models of success (which for these students meant making a lot of money) in their worlds seem to jump to very unrealistic goals. Let us also not forget the maturity level of these students, which, in part, explain the limitations they place on their future. However, the majority of them are sure that they want to pursue careers in professional sports

During the interview process, I noted that every participant spoke about positive experiences with teachers. Not one participant disclosed any negative feelings or experiences with those who educate them. A possible future study may examine why none of the students aspired to be teachers. This would include probing more deeply question number 17 of the questionnaire that asks the students, “*What would you like to be when you grow up?*”

Studies have shown that African American teachers are needed to help African American students maintain their cultural confidence and identity in the school setting (Lewis, 2006). Finding out why students who enjoy teachers, but don’t aspire to be like them, may be useful. The question “*What are your career aspirations?*” was answered typically by their wanting to be a part of the professional sports world. The student’s age and maturity may help explain this response as well as their own limited sense of their skills and abilities.

It is interesting that when asked how they felt about their teachers, they did not have any negative feelings, and yet, they themselves did not indicate that teaching was a career that they might aspire to. The reason for this might be because they do not see that

our society places a high value on the teaching profession and so, perhaps, they do not think of teaching as a successful career.

If the teachers themselves have conveyed that they have low expectations of these students, then, perhaps this might influence the students desire to become educators.

All of the students said that education has a high value for them, especially because they want to be successful in life. Finishing school and going on to college seemed to be common goals of these middle school African American males because they see education as the path to high incomes. With this desire to go to college, it is unfortunate that funding for students who come from lower- income communities is becoming less available. The bureaucracy that students have to navigate can leave them feeling overwhelmed about finding funding for their education. It is important for other institutions such as the church within the community to get involved with these issues.

Cunningham & Keefe (1998) revealed that African American men hoped for more and better job opportunities. They, like the young African Americans I studied, are products of our capitalistic society. The students in my study repeatedly said they want to make lots of money. However, saying that they valued education *per se* suggests something more than a materialistic motive—perhaps they see education as a path to empowerment. This sense of empowerment through education came through in their answers reflecting a desire for a successful economic life. Their goals may seem somewhat immature or unrealistic, but they do have goals and they view education as one method of realizing those goals. It would be interesting to conduct a follow-up, longitudinal study with these young men when they are in high school to see whether they possess an awareness of options other than sports careers.

For young African Americans, it is possible that empowerment through education

is also empowerment to understand their African American life experience. In that sense, sports are as an understandable goal because it is one area where African American male achievement is undeniable and prominently displayed. Thus, a sense of empowerment comes from the students' identification with these achievements regardless of what their future goals become. This understanding is reinforced also by Paulo Freire (1993), who says empowerment of oppressed people comes, in part, from how individuals perceive themselves in the world. From this perception, individuals reflect on who they are within the context of their relationship with the world and thus form thought and action.

Harry Edwards (1973) confirmed that this understanding of unrealistic goals is reinforced by the public schools, parents and the community. Society makes the sports world particularly attractive and seemingly promising as a career for the African American male. This understanding is also reinforced by Burden et al.'s (2004) who conclude White American students are encouraged to attend to their academics while they participate in particular sports that are shared predominately by other White Americans. On the other hand, African American students are steered away from academics and encouraged to pursue the athletic world.

In 1994, Giroux addressed a lack of educational opportunities for African American males in terms of inequality as well as the critical theorists' view of capitalism that capitalism imposes oppressive and inherently unequal effects on individual citizens. The majority of the students I interviewed saw a very narrow way of achieving the American dream: being a sports star. They clearly saw very limited options for their future beyond this dream, which made me wonder if many African American males are shortsighted.

Many of the students saw their parents or sport stars as their role models. As cited by Majors & Billson (1992), many African American males have few if any positive adult male role images to offset the many negative images they may have. This appeared to be the case with the students I interviewed. Their concept of male role models seemed extremely limited; however, this may have been my interpretation because some of the students mentioned having only female teachers.

Dropping out of school was not an issue for the group I interviewed. Many of the students did not know anyone who had dropped out of school. Education was seen as a way out of ignorance and poverty. It also was evident that the students understood that education is a priority for their parents/guardians/teachers and this had a positive influence on the students' valuing education. Also, the fact that many of these students belong to a Christian church may say something about the value system that is nourished within the black church, as well as its influence in helping these youth value school.

In addition to the church's influences, the importance of the generational goals and aspirations that are passed down from grandparents through parents and children should also be considered. Although there is no research cited, anecdotally, instilling the value of education through generations—as mentioned in my personal story about how my parents enforced the importance of education in our lives as children—is a common occurrence.

Many of the participants attended schools whose curricula included a focus on Afrocentrism. When asked about the famous people they studied, many of the students mentioned African American leaders.

Question 41. *Who are the famous people you study in school?*

Presidents	2
Don't know	1
Jackie Robinson	2
Slavery people and inventors	1
Leonardo Da Vinci	1
Martin Luther King Jr.	6
Malcolm X	2
Rosa Parks	4
No one	1
Jessie Jackson	1
Michael Jordan	1
George Lopez	1
Hispanic Americans	1
Black Americans	2
D.J.s	1

Afrocentrism in the curriculum not only can provide a more comprehensive view of history but also allow these students to identify with those who look like them and who share a similar background to theirs. Students seem to make the connection between the value of education and these people's achievements. And when the positive contributions and attributes of African Americans are valued within the curriculum, African American students often feel more empowered (Grantham & Ford, 2003). Having Martin Luther King Jr. as a role model seemed to have empowered the students intellectually, emotionally, socially and politically, which in turn imparts knowledge, skills and healthy attitudes (Irvine, 1992). This empowerment may help them to better understand the world around them, as well as seek to learn more in order to improve their own world.

Understanding King and the civil rights movement also may illuminate injustices that students consciously and unconsciously are aware of within our society. This may lead to an understanding of racism, which these students see as problematic in the American society. Not fully grasping the impact of racism at this age level may give

some students a sense of self that is negative.

The importance of a critical approach in thinking about African American males in middle school is evident in the conclusions drawn from the literature in Chapter 2 that teaching, curriculum, textbooks and testing are not neutral. A lack of critical thinking can engender passive socialization or indoctrination into the status quo. The participants did appear to demonstrate this passive socialization; for example, in the limited options they saw for their own destinies (i.e., sports star or non-professional work).

Passive socialization also determines how people see themselves in society (in this case as being invisible to the process). Consider Maslow's understanding of self-actualization; that first there must be a choice made about your destiny before you can actualize any decisions. Are these students consciously aware that education can lead to a better quality of life? They believe that their view of the outside world can bring forth a better life for them, as well as their families.

Another question I asked was: "*Do your teachers have high expectations of you?*" It was difficult for me to identify any themes from the interviews. Fourteen of the students said they felt they "could do better" in school. The remaining three students were not asked the question due to the flow of the conversation. It appeared that the teachers did not place a high level of expectation on the participants' school performance. As Samuel C. Carter (2000) explained, just because a student resides in an economically depressed area does not mean that he or she is incapable of high academic performance. Garibaldi (1988) suggested that in order for teachers to have higher expectations of their African American students, they need to gain more knowledge about the learning styles and teaching environments that benefit these students. Could there be a serious lack of connection with these students and a lack of awareness of their learning styles?

Part of the literature review addressed cultural pluralism as embracing different dialects. Thus, I used and responded to language that was familiar to the study participants. I believe a greater comfort level was achieved because of my familiarity with their dialect. Many of the students seemed at ease with integrating standard English with their own dialect. Since the students did not know me during the time of the interviews, they communicated with both dialect and Standard English. On the other hand, the students may have connected with me because I am an African American male; therefore, the language issue may not have been a problem for them at all. Within the constructivist pedagogy, Vygotsky (1992) contended that social experience shapes the ways in which individuals think and interpret the world. It appeared that the students' social experiences also shape their use of language.

As addressed in Chapter 2, many students have learned to shift gears between the worlds of standard English and the English dialect that is unique to the African American young male. The ability to understand and relate to these two worlds is the key to success. Failure to do so may be perceived as an unwillingness to cooperate with the school rules or a lack of desire to learn (Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002). Mastery of both languages reflects mastery of both worlds. The reviewers of the script, particularly European American reviewers, had serious concern about the students not using Standard English.

Having a clear and positive sense of self can be difficult at this age level. It is important for teachers to help students develop a positive sense of self through various teaching techniques. From a positive sense of self, a young man gains a sense of commitment to the larger social and community issues (Rethinking Schools Online, 2005). Many of the study participants did not share a sense of commitment to the larger

social and community issues. Thus, I wonder if the study participants had developed a *solid* sense of self: i.e., feeling good about themselves, as well as having a level of comfort with themselves. Having exposure to more things—such as the arts, travels, reading, technologies, etc.—can help with a positive sense of self (Flowers, Milner 2003 and Moore, Collins 2002). Having parents/guardians with non-professional careers, as well as not having much exposure to white-collar careers, may contribute to a lack of high self-esteem.

Many of the specialized schools and programs discussed in Chapter 2, such as charter schools, magnet schools, all-male African American schools, rites-of-passage experiences, enrichment programs and after-school programs, could, I believe, greatly benefit these students in many areas of their academic training. These models of school meet the students where they are when it comes to particular styles of learning by acknowledging that one-size-fits-all is not the case for learning. These various kinds of models give the students a greater sense of connectedness with their teachers, as well as the larger community. None of the students mentioned any of these special programs.

The “No Child Left Behind” program, which was addressed in Chapter 2, speaks well of the government when it comes to children living in poverty-stricken areas. This bill gives low-income students the opportunity to learn new skills and discover new abilities in after-school programs. On the other hand, there is something to be said about the persuasive critiques that penalize schools in these poor areas for scoring lower than schools in wealthy communities.

Many of the students said they could do better with their academic work; therefore, I wondered if they would perform better under some of the programs mentioned above. In particular, after-school programs may allow students to focus more

on the academics and expose them to more educational opportunities.

Issues that Did Not Correspond with the Review of Literature

Although my research raised the issue of students' quality of education and questioned whether African American students enjoy equal educational opportunities as compared to other groups of their age, this was not the focus of the research questions. The hidden curriculum theory also was not revealed, nor was any active role in curriculum development by these students or their teachers.

Peer groups, cliques and gangs did not appear to have a major effect on the participants. Eckert (1989) argued that adolescent peer groups, cliques and gangs play a significant role in adolescents' decision-making and behavior. It was difficult to determine if school was a topic of discussion among these students and their peers. On the other hand, there is something to be said about a contradiction between a positive attitude about peers and the lack of perceived problem with gangs. Table 12 in Chapter Four notes the question: "*What are the worst thing about your school?*" The majority of the students responded by saying violence is a major issue.

Willie (1994) explained that the upper-class values of the European American male dominate the educational system. Critical theory suggests that the cultural, social and economic differences between African American male students and their teachers often separate the two groups. Such issues did not emerge from my research because the questionnaire did not address the ethnicity of the teachers. However, there appeared to be no racial issues between the students and their teachers. Some of the students did mention a preference for female teachers over male teachers because they felt male teachers were too hard on them. There was only one student who revealed that an European American

teacher said that he had a problem teaching African American students.

The critical theorists suggest that there still exists in schools a bias of expectation. The data suggests that not all students are given equal access to the knowledge and skills that are needed to offer them a future that includes many choices and possibilities. Because of this, many of the students that I interviewed saw a career in professional sports as the only viable way in which they could achieve financial success and status, which, of course, is unrealistic, since very few people can attain this goal. There seems to be a chasm between how the students see themselves as workers in our economy (without the skills and knowledge to become doctors, lawyers, teachers, etc.). They see their options as very limited and so they are forced to look at the other end of the spectrum for a model of success (sports or entertainment industry).

It was in this extreme and limited understanding of how they perceived their futures that pushed these students towards a hope that was based on a very narrow and limited scope. They saw the abilities and skills that they possessed in such a limited way that they believed the only arena in which they were equipped to compete was athletics (Guthrie, 2003).

The students' responses did not reveal any problems with cultural, social or economic differences between themselves and their teachers. The students' overall attitude about their schools and their teachers was positive. I saw no issue/correlation with the students acting out another race, or "acting white" as mentioned by Moore and Collins (2002) as mentioned in their research. Moreover, no participant mentioned having been suspended or expelled or coming close to either, which Moore discussed as evidence of problems unique to African American male students and evidence of race bias in the schools. This may have been because these students attended predominantly

African American schools, which may have a larger number of African American teachers and/or European American teachers, who, because of their surroundings, have developed sensitivity to the African American student.

I sought to investigate more closely the issue of why students of African descent have such a limited vision of their futures. Garibaldi's research revealed that, in 1988, almost six of every 10 teachers believed that their African American male students did not hold positive attitudes about school or value education for its significance to their future. From my interviews, the opposite appeared to be the case for all the students. They understood that education was a way to move ahead in life. They also understood that education provided a better understanding of the world when in return they made a sizeable income. Since all the students said they planned to go to college, students' awareness of the importance of education appeared to be a factor in making decisions for their future. The students' parents/guardians reinforced the importance of education by punishing the students when they didn't do well in school and rewarding them when they did—thus fostering the students' conscious awareness of the need to go to high school and college.

The critical race theory attempts to bring about change through social behavior or by modifying social behavior. The results of my study reveal that the school has become a vehicle of hope for these students. Education was interpreted as a way of attaining additional options for their futures. School can be seen as the ticket to a future with greater choices, which would then offer more students a realistic chance at achieving success.

Howard (2003) suggests that the students and parents who come from lower-income environments tend to place little emphasis on education because their energy is

directed towards the struggle for economic survival. This was not the case in my research. In spite of the inherent difficulties that come from a lower-income environment, the 17 students that I interviewed all stated that their families were strong advocates for education.

The results of my study also showed that these students had a good understanding of the rewards that education can bring and the reality of what not getting an education can impose on them.

McKendall (2001) suggests that many of the African American heroes from W.E.B. DuBois to Malcolm X, was a teaching on turning one's back on your heritage simply because you want to learn, build skills and increase your human capital. My students did agree with this idea, but rather saw education as an opportunity to succeed in life.

Recommendations

The study “Middle School African American Males: Educational Goals, Career Aspirations and High School Retention Factors” was designed to explore the educational and socio-cultural influences that affect the decisions of African American male middle school students on whether to continue with their education and how they feel about achieving their career goals.

This study raises the question “*How can the educational system find ways to empower adolescent African American males for academic success?*” The research was conducted by using a questionnaire format that consisted of 43 open-ended questions specifically designed to be relevant to this study. The participants were interviewed individually, which allowed them to be creative in their responses, speak freely and comfortably, as well as allowing me, the interviewer, to observe each participant’s body language, as well as other indicators of their comfort level.

The questions were designed from my own experience, both as an African American male and as a teacher and counselor of African American middle school males. In addition, I consulted five other educators in the Atlanta, Georgia, area whose expertise is in the field of education. A diverse group of peer readers reviewed the questions to ensure objectivity and to note any recurring themes, as well as to provide their own insights on them.

To determine how many students would be interviewed, I consulted with members of my committee and then made the decision to conduct interviews with 17 African American middle school males. Because of the small number of students chosen, the data collected can not be applied to all African American middle school males;

however, the research does attempt to understand the issues that affect this particular group of students, such as the influences of family structure, parental employment and education, positive parental support for education, the importance of teachers and the students' own desire to continue their education.

The number of questions used, 43, was also problematic because they did not generate the in-depth dialogue and personal connection that I was seeking. After completing the initial interview process, I chose to re-interview four of the 17 students in an effort to probe more deeply into themes that had emerged from the initial interview. I did this to confirm and/or disconfirm specific issues that emerged from the initial sampling (Creswell, 2002). These particular students were chosen because they had each shown an ability to effectively communicate their thoughts during the initial interview process.

The challenge for me as the researcher was to avoid being too subjective in the interpretation and analysis of the data. To ensure objectivity and to further the validity of the data, other educators read and shared their interpretations. In summary, there are seven areas of concern that I have regarding this research:

1. The number of interview questions used.
2. The number of individual interviews.
3. The quality of the students' responses.
4. The use of probes during the interview process.
5. The role of the church and school.
6. Inclusion of an Afro-centric curriculum.
7. Educational opportunities beyond college.

First, it appears that there were too many questions in the questionnaire. Limiting the number of questions and focusing on key words and phrases may have led to more engaging and in-depth conversation with the students. However, this lack of engagement can have other explanations, such as the students' not wanting to divulge too much personal information to a stranger. In addition, it has been noted that students of this age group listen differently to one another, as well as adults (Patton, 2002). Students of this age group listen to each other, whereas adults tend to talk at each other (Kunjufu, 1990).

Although the students and I share a common history (Wilson 1993), because of my age, there may have been a generational gap that influenced the quality of the students' responses. Their limited responses could also be explained by the fact that these students at this age may not have matured enough to understand what they would like to do, as well as what they would like to become.

I define communication as that symbolic process where people bring together shared meanings. Symbols consist of both words and the actions and objects that represent something that has meaning. This meaning is a perception, thought or feeling that the individual experiences. The process is understood in the sense that things are changing; they are not static (Lustig & Koester, 1999). I now have a sense that these students' words were symbolic representations that may have been different from my interpretations of the same words. Language reflects perceptions that can differ due to many factors, including age, experience, family, school, religion, etc. — most of which I do not have in common with these students.

The impersonal atmosphere of an office environment and the noise level that existed in the building during the interviewing process contributed to my feeling uncomfortable and may have been noticeable to the students making them feel uneasy

during the interviewing process. These kinds of distractions can influence the dynamics of the interview process, which can, in turn, interfere with the students' own listening capabilities (Koch, 2004).

Second, although I cannot be completely certain that the length of the questionnaire played a part in the quality of the students' responses, it probably does explain why their answers were so brief. If the questionnaire had been shorter and/or the questions been more specific to this age group, perhaps it would have elicited more in-depth and more personal responses from the students.

Third, if I had conducted more interviews per student, I would have been able to ask questions that would help me to probe more deeply into the students' responses.

Fourth, perhaps asking indirect questions may have made the students feel more comfortable with sharing their stories, and might have provided better responses to the more direct questions that were asked. Approaching the students with too many direct questions may have made them feel disconnected and uneasy because they did not know me personally. Also coming in as an outsider could have been part of the issue. The fact that we shared the same culture and that I am an African American male may not necessarily have given me an advantage (Patton, 2002).

Being able to maintain a continual conversational flow and at the same time probe the issues at hand was a challenge for me. Providing constant reinforcement and feedback by using body language (nodding the head and using words of thanks, support and praise) can give the interviewer the impression that the researcher understands, empathizes and is comfortable with the responses (Patton, 2002).

In retrospect, as the interviewer I feel I was displaying positive body language, but there may have been unconscious body language that gave the students a sense that I

was not relating to their responses. As Patton says, maintaining control and enhancing the quality of responses ensure positive feedback. This control is facilitated by the researcher knowing what he or she wants to find and therefore focusing on the question and listening to the responses so that his or her verbal and nonverbal feedback to the student is appropriate.

One way that I could have avoided some of these shortcomings would be to conduct a pilot study with several students using open-ended questions (Stephens, 1991). Interviewing students of the same age, grade and race may have provided a more secure setting, which would have fostered more open communication. This kind of atmosphere may have allowed the students to express themselves more freely and creatively, as well as motivated them to ask questions about their own issues and concerns (Patton, 2002).

Open-ended questions are a vehicle that can help open communication. As stated earlier, students within their own age group tend to listen to one another and give each other a sense of understanding of their shared experiences. However, the danger of conducting a group interview is in the possibility that one student will take over the whole conversation and leave the other students out of the dialogue. Open-ended questions can also give way to students having their own conversation with each other in a group and this can in turn precipitate other questions as well as eliminate questions that may not be relevant (Kunjufu, 1990, Patton, 2002).

To further this research, I would recommend meeting with the students before the interview process begins so that both the students and the researcher can begin to bond with one another and begin to build a relationship that would establish a sense of trust. Relationship-building can bring forth more personal and more in-depth responses for both researchers and teachers (Landson-Billings, 1995). Understanding the psychological

development of human relationships begins with the sense of trust (Huffman & Piggrem, 2003).

I would also recommend expanding the research to include the high school experiences of African American males, which may shed light on the transition from middle school to high school. This may help the study's participants make better choices in middle school. In addition, I would include African American males who attend private schools and suburban schools.

Changing the structure to a group setting of eight to 10 students of the same age, grade and race might also prove valuable and stimulating (Gliner & Morgan G, 2000).

Even with the limitations of this study, the themes and responses from the students seem to give some insight into issues confronting African American male students when it comes to family structure, parental education, employment and support as they decide on the course of their education. The students' personal desire to continue their education and their ability to make the connection between education and having a successful future were evident in the responses that were given

Future studies can provide greater information and understanding of the issues that affect the decision-making of middle school African American males in regards to their educational goals, career aspirations and high school retention.

In addition, it is clear that the church has appeared to play a significant role in the life of the African American community. Many believe that it is the responsibility of the church to ensure that the quality of life within the community is maintained and sustained. To assist in achieving that quality of life, the church, as well as the school, could consider utilizing successful African American men who are not just in the sports world as role models for those in middle school as well as high school. This kind of

exposure would give the students that rich array of choice that is part of many communities.

Moreover, holding seminars and workshops for the parents of these children could prove helpful when it comes time for students to understand the process of applying for scholarships and other possible funding sources that are available for college. The church could be that vehicle to help prepare the students for their SATs and ACTs and to give parents a better understanding what kind of school would be the best fit for their child.

The schools' curriculum could also embrace a rite of passage that would separate the males from the females and concentrate on early intervention programs so that students do not become lost in the system. It would give students the opportunity to develop a relationship with positive adult figures.

It is important to give students an array of choices for college. Not all students aspire to a four-year college and others may not have the grades to get into college. Therefore, it is important to promote not only the traditional four-year college, but also community colleges, apprenticeship programs, etc. as other options for these students.

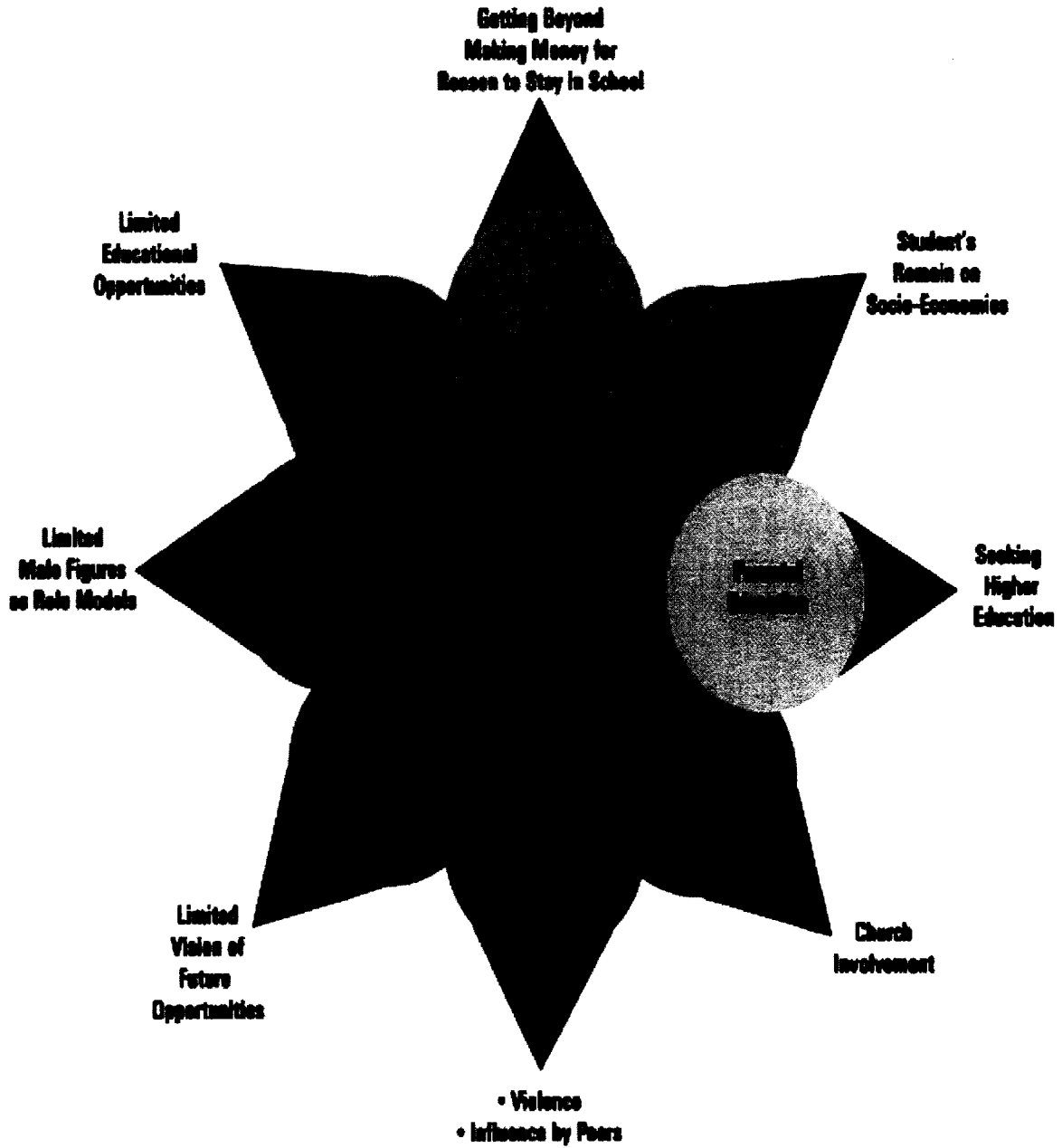
The challenges facing these young men are enormous, especially considering the violence that constantly stares them in the face – on television, in the music world, within the community, school, etc. These students must be ready when it comes to violence which can take on the appearance of normality when it becomes just part of the environment. The soaring numbers of African American men in prison is a reality within the African American community. These young men live in a world where African American adolescents represented 15% of the juvenile population in 1995, yet were involved in 28% of all juvenile arrests, made up 43% of the juvenile population in public correctional facilities, and 34% in private custody facilities (Sickmund, Snyder, & Poe-

Yamagata, 1997).

However, the students from this study gave me a great sense of hope for our youth. They have the same aspirations and desires of any other youth, including privileged ones. In spite of the odds these students face, they desire a quality of life that includes family, education, career and income.

The challenge that is put before us is this: Where are the dollars to pay for the reconstruction of the educational system of students in poor areas? I believe that schools need to expose these students to a world beyond the sports arena. There also needs to be an examination of other avenues beyond the four-year college for our students that would include community colleges, apprenticeship programs, etc. While the present research offers some insights and much that is hopeful, much more research is needed about a population that is seriously at risk otherwise.

The Interconnected Model



This model reflects the connectedness of these middle school African American males. The core of the model is *Family Structure*, which is the foundation of the students' aspirations for his future. Developing a self-identity comes from this central core and then branches out to the interconnectedness of others – coming from the themes that surfaced from the interviews with the students. The overlapping of the circle shows the effect that one has on another. The outer dark spikes show what comes from the overlapping of the circle which may not align itself with the circle but reveal a limitation or enhances one's life. It is a development that comes from an experience that leads the student to another way of seeing their future. For an example, *Parental Education* is a limitation if the parent did not complete high school, thus making it challenging to assist with difficult homework assignments. Where as, *Parental Support* may enhance the student's life because the parent reinforces the importance of education within the household by rewarding the child when he has positive results from school or punishing the child if there are negative results from school.

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APPENDIX A: PERMISSION LETTER FROM CHURCH PASTOR

Dear Human Research of Colorado State University:

My name is Pastor Eric Jackson of Greater New Hope Baptist Church. I have had the opportunity to speak with Roy A. Lee concerning his research project on *Middle School African American Males: Educational Goals, Career Aspirations, and High School Retention Factors*. I have agreed to allow Roy A. Lee to do his project here at New Hope Baptist Church. My understanding of this project will include:

- 1 Roy A. Lee placing a brief announcement describing the project in the church bulletin for several Sundays
- 2 Roy A. Lee making an announcement from the pulpit (written script) on Sundays with the instructions about the project and giving out the permission forms to the parent/guardian after the service on that given Sunday.
- 3 Participation will be strictly voluntary
- 4 Roy A. Lee will meet with those middle school males in one of the church offices on Sundays after the service or at other agreed upon dates and time
- 5 The child will bring a signed consent form from his parent/guardian on or before the Sunday of the interview and as an additional precaution will sign a consent form at the time of the interview
- 6 Each session will take approximately one hour
- 7 Each session will be audio-taped
- 8 In the unlikely event of emotional distress, I as pastor agree to counsel the student or help the student seek counsel elsewhere
- 9 Roy A. Lee will give \$10 as a small thank you gift to each child who volunteers his time for this project
- 10 I will counsel any student needing help from the interview process

I am satisfied that the research will be done in a safe and respectful way by Roy A. Lee at Greater New Hope Baptist Church.

Sincerely,

Pastor Eric Jackson

APPENDIX B: VERBAL SCRIPT FOR CHURCH ANNOUNCEMENT

Good Morning St. John the Baptist Church! Thank you for giving me a little of your time during your service today. My name is Roy A. Lee. I am a graduate student at Colorado State University working on my Ph.D. in Educational Leadership. As a teacher, I am particularly concerned about the lack of achievement for young African American men in today's educational system so I am writing my dissertation and doing my final graduate project on *Middle School African American Males: Educational Goals, Career Aspirations, and High School Retention Factors*.

Like many of you, I'd like to understand what influences a young man to continue his education or drop out. I want to see what factors contribute to his success or lead to his discouragement. I can think of no better way to do this than to talk to the young men themselves at the critical stage of middle school.

Please allow me a few more minutes to tell you how you can support this project. My goal is to interview between fifteen and twenty African American young men in sixth, seventh, or eighth grade about their overall experience in middle school and their career goals.

I will be conducting research; this is how the process will work:

1. I will meet with each young man one-to-one for about an hour here in one of the church offices.
2. I will ask each young man a series of questions about their educational experiences, their career goals and aspirations, and the influences that keep them from achieving their goals and those that help them achieve their goals. All information shared will be confidential.
3. For confidentiality, I will ask each young man to choose a pseudonym or "fake

name” to call themselves so that no one will know who they are or what they said to me.

4. I will audio-tape the sessions to help me remember all of the important information I am told. Once I am done using the tapes, they will be destroyed.

5. For the safety and protection of each young man as assured under the regulatory compliance office of the Colorado State University, we will meet in one of the church offices.

6. Each young man who volunteers his time will be given \$10 as a small thank you for his participation.

7. There are no known benefits, but I hope this research will help in the understanding of the educational goals and career aspirations of middle school African Americans and help keep them in school. I also hope it may start conversations here in the church, in community, and in families about issues being experienced at school.

8. There are no known risks to participating. But if the participant feels any discomfort or embarrassment over a particular question, he may at any time skip over a question or even end the interview process.

9. The primary investigator is my advisor from Colorado State University, Dr. William Timpson of the Department of Education.

In closing, I need you to know that this project is strictly voluntary. For those young men who are interested in helping me by participating in this project, I need you to have your parent or guardian see me after today’s service to pick up a permission form that explains the entire project and process. At that time, I will go over the form, answer any questions you or your parents might have, and set up an interview time. You will need to bring a signed copy of the consent form with you to your interview, which will take place for the next three Sundays or on other days within the next three weeks if that

is more convenient. Thank you for your time and your willingness to participate in this project.

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS

Students must return signed form before or on the day of their interview

Dear Parents/Guardians:

As you are no doubt aware, there is a good deal of discussion across the nation about the dropout rate of adolescent African American males. As a teacher of this group and as an African American man who has come through the American educational system, I have more than a passing interest in this problem. As a graduate student at Colorado State University I am working on my graduate project titled, *Middle School African American Males: Educational Goals, Career Aspirations, and High School Retention Factors*. I am attempting to answer the question of why so many African American males are not reaching their potential and are dropping out of school. To help me answer this question, I will be interviewing African American male middle school students and asking them to tell me about the influences that encourage them to stay in school or drop out. With this letter, I am asking for your son's assistance and for your permission for your son to be interviewed for this project. I will be conducting research on this topic. The primary investigator is my advisor from Colorado State University, Dr. William Timpson of the Department of Education.

Examples of the types of questions I'll be asking include:

- 1 Overall, what is your experience like in school?
- 2 What would you like to be when you grow up?
- 3 What do you see as the advantages or disadvantages for staying in school?
- 4 What thoughts go through your mind when you see or hear that of others who drop out of school?
- 5 What/Who encourages you to stay in school?

Participation is Voluntary and Information is Confidential. The one-to-one interviews with me will take approximately 1 hour and will be held at the church in one of the offices. Every effort will be made to make the process safe, comfortable, and confidential. The interviews will be audio taped and transcribed using only fictitious (fake) names and locations to maintain confidentiality. Furthermore, if at any time your son feels uncomfortable with a particular question, he need not answer, and if he expresses discomfort at any time during the interview and wishes to end the interview, he will be allowed to do so. Confidentiality and other issues concerning this process will be addressed according to the strict observance of Colorado State University's rules of working with human subjects. **By signing this consent form I am willing for my son to participate in the interview and it is okay for the researcher to contact him if a second interview is needed. He can change his mind at any time and not participate in either interview.**

Risks and Benefits to Participants. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks. Risks include potential discomfort or embarrassment over the questions asked. This risk will be mitigated by the researcher's telling your son that if at any time he feels uncomfortable about a certain question, he can choose to move on to the next or cease the interview process entirely.

There is no known benefit in participating, but the researcher hopes your son will likely benefit from participation in this study by having the opportunity to discuss his own goals and by examining experiences that may make him mindful of the opportunities he has and how to overcome the challenges he may face. Another potential benefit is that he may think constructively about issues important to his future and education. The interview process may open dialogues between him and his parents/guardians, teachers, or others involved in his education. The educational community will benefit as this study becomes a part of a larger effort by educators to address the challenges facing African American males in education today. I encourage you to ask your son to participate if you would like to contribute to the knowledge-base on this issue.

PAGE 1 OF 2 PARTICIPANT'S INITIALS _____ DATE _____

Compensation

The participant will receive \$10 cash as a small thank you gift for his time.

Please call 404-226-8170 or email me at RLee641999@joimail.com to express your interest, ask me any questions before you decide, establish verbal consent, and/or to schedule the interview. You may express your consent by filling out the second page of this letter and returning it to me before your child is interviewed. After receiving your verbal or written consent, we will schedule the interview.

If you and your son choose to participate, please fill in the information below and sign your consent. If this signed copy has not been returned prior to the interview, please have your son bring it with him to our interview. Prior to the interview, we will once again review the process and ask for his verbal and written consent. Upon completion of the interview, I will have your son return to you a copy of this agreement signed by both of us.

As a teacher, I believe I have the experience and sensitivity to discuss these issues with boys your son's age. I am committed to listening to him and making him feel he is truly being heard. Thank you so much for considering my request. I wish you and your family all the best for the future.

Roy A. Lee, Researcher phone: 404-226-8170 email: RLee641999@joimail.com

Participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which your son is otherwise entitled. Your son may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which he would be otherwise entitled.

Confidentiality Issues. The researcher will make every effort to prevent anyone not on the research team from knowing who you are or what information you gave. The researcher will keep private all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law. Only the research team will see the data. However, the law may require us to tell authorities if we believe you have abused a child, or you pose a danger to yourself or someone else. When the researcher writes about the study to share it with other researchers, will write about the combined information he has gathered. Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. You will not be identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep you name and other identifying information private. Your son's name will be kept separate from your research records and these two things will be stored in different places under lock and key.

Liability Waiver. Because Colorado State is a publicly-funded state institution, it may have only limited legal responsibility for injuries incurred as a result of participation in this study under a Colorado law known as the Colorado Governmental Immunity Act (Colorado Revised Statutes, Section 24-10-101, et seq.) In addition, under Colorado law, you must file any claims against the University within 180 days after discovery of the injury. **Questions concerning treatment of subjects' rights may be directed to Janell Meldrem, Human Research Administrator 970-491-1655.**

Please sign below to indicate that you fully understand the information above and that you are permitting your son or charge to participate in the study. Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 2 pages.

_____	_____
Child's Name	Phone number
_____	_____
Parent's or Guardian's Signature of Consent	Date

Page 2 of 2 Participant's initials _____ Date _____

APPENDIX D: NOTICE FOR CHURCH BULLETIN

EDUCATING OUR AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE YOUTH

Roy A. Lee is a graduate student at Colorado State University working on his Ph.D. in Educational Leadership. As a teacher, he is particularly concerned about the lack of achievement for young African American males in today's educational system so he is writing his dissertation and doing his final graduate project on *Middle School African American Males Educational Goals, Career Aspirations, and High School Retention Factors*.

Like many of you, he wishes to understand what educational and societal influences impact achievement of our young men's educational goals. What better way to find out than to talk to the young men themselves in the critical stage of middle school. He is asking for approximately fifteen to twenty African American young men from in sixth, seventh, or eighth grade to volunteer for interviews describing their overall experience in middle school and their career goals. There will be follow-up interviews with three to five African Americans males from this church that will have some common theme or thread. Roy will choose from the fifteen to twenty which three to five appear to express their thoughts well enough to come up with a possible theme or thread. This process will also add and give strength to the internal validity of this interview process.

He will be visiting our church next Sunday and subsequent Sundays to tell us more about his project. You can also meet with him after the service or you may contact him at 404-226-8170 or <RLee641999@joimail.com>.

Parents and/or minors who are interested call the researcher at the number above.

APPENDIX E: ASSENT FORM FOR STUDENTS

The following Assent Form will be given to participants at the time of the interview

Hi. My name is Roy Lee, and I am a teacher in the Atlanta area. I'm also a student myself, a graduate student at Colorado State University, and like you, I have homework. My final project is about something you and I share – being Black and being male. I want to figure out why so many kids are dropping out of school these days. That's where you come in.

I want to hear your views on school like what you like or don't like, what's going well for you, what changes you would like schools to make, and how you feel about school in general. I also want to hear about your goals for the future. You and your parent(s) have agreed to your being a part of this study and now I'm asking you for your permission to go ahead with the interview.

Here's how it will work. You and I will meet one-to-one for about an hour in this church office. I'll be asking you some questions about school, but it will be more like a conversation. There are no known risks to your participating. If you decide you don't want to talk about something, that's cool. We'll just skip that question and go to the next one. If you decide you don't want to keep going with the interview, that's cool too and we can stop it at any time. On the flip side though, you can also feel free to tell me what's on your mind about school even if I don't ask because I want to hear it.

You will receive \$10 for participation. Whether your answers are good responses or not, or if you do not respond at all during the interview, you will still receive the \$10.

This whole process will be totally confidential. I won't use your name and you will even get to choose your own "stage name." I won't tell anyone what we talked about. The interview will be audio taped and I will write up the stories you tell me by listening to the tape and using your stage name, but I will be the only person who knows who you really are. Your participation is strictly voluntary, and you can quit at any time during the interview process.

There are no known benefits, but I hope that you will be helping a lot of people understand how to African American males like yourself can meet their full potential in school and in life. If you would still like to participate, I need you to sign this letter and take a copy with you to your parents when we are finished. I will sign it too letting them know that I explained everything to you and we both agreed to the terms of the interview.

I will be conducting research on this topic. The primary investigator is my advisor from Colorado State University, Dr. William Timpson of the Department of Education.

By signing this consent form I am willing to participate in the interview and it is okay for the researcher to contact me if a second interview is needed. I can change my mind at any time and not participate in either interview.

Student Signature: I understand the information above and agree to participate in this interview.

(Date)

Researcher Signature: I have explained the process with the student and he has agreed to the interview.

(Date)

_____ I have received the \$10 for participation with this research
Student Initial

Date: _____

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Note: The following protocol will be read to the participant. These questions were developed to investigate the experiences you have had at school and how you and others around you feel about your education and goals. First, I will ask you some basic, factual questions about yourself. Then, I will ask you to share your opinions, feelings, and any stories related to the questions. Feel free to expand on any that especially interest you or to say you don't wish to answer. There is no right or wrong answers to any of these questions. If, at any time, you feel uncomfortable about any of these questions, just tell me and we can either move on or stop the interview if you wish. Again, remember, that this is completely confidential. None of your answers will be revealed to your friends, teachers, family, or church members. Your name will not be used in my final write-up.

[Personal Demographics]

1. What is your name? What name would you like me to call you?
2. What name would you like me to call you for this interview and write-up?
3. How old are you? When is your birthday?
4. Who do you live with?
5. Who takes care of you?
6. What school do you attend?
7. What grade are you in now?
8. Who in your home or family finished high school?
9. Who in your home or family finished college?
10. What kind of work do your parents do?

[Personal Educational Experiences and Attitudes]

11. How do you feel about school? Your teachers?
12. Tell me how you are doing in your classes?
13. Are you happy with how you're doing?
14. Could you be doing better?
15. Who helps you with school work?
16. Do you think school is important? Why or why not?

[Goals and Aspirations]

17. What would you like to be when you grow up? Explain.
18. What things do you look forward to in high school?
19. What things are you fearful of about high school?
20. Would you like to go to college?

[Perception of Peers' Educational Experiences and Attitudes]

21. How do your friends feel about school? How do they feel about their teachers?
22. How do you feel about students in your school who always make good grades?

[Personal Experiences & Perceptions of Dropping Out of School]

23. Do you know of anyone who has dropped out of school?
24. What are your feelings about dropping out of school?
25. Have you ever thought about dropping out of school?
26. What do you see as the advantages of staying in school?
27. Are there any disadvantages to staying in school?

[Reported Child Perceptions of Parents' Behavior and Attitudes]

28. How do your parents feel about your school?
29. How do your parents feel about your teachers?
30. Who in your home do you talk to about school?
31. Who gets excited when you do well in school? Tell me about that.
32. Have you ever gotten in trouble at school? Tell me about that?
33. What happens when you do poorly in school?
34. What does your family expect you to do when you finish junior high school? High School?

[Personal Perceptions of Teachers' Attitudes]

35. How do your teachers let you know what is important to them?
36. How do your teachers treat students? Are all students treated the same? Explain.
37. How do you think your teachers feel about you?

[School Demographics]

38. Describe your school including the teachers and students who go to your school.

[Personal Perceptions of School Environment]

39. What are the best things about your school?
40. What are the problems or worst things at your school?

[School Curriculum]

41. Who are the famous people you study about in school?
42. Do you have any role models?
43. Do you know if or how education helped your role models to become successful?

APPENDIX G: INTERVIEWS

Interview #1

Demographics

1. **Question: What is your name?**

Answer: Bobby D.

Question: What name would you like me to call you?

Answer: Bobby

2. **Question: What name would you like me to call you for this interview and write-up, when I write this up?**

Answer: Bobby.

3. **Question: How old are you?**

Answer: Fourteen.

Question: When is your birthday?

Answer: February.

4. **Who do you live with right now in your household?**

Answer: My mom.

Question: You live with your mother?

Answer: Yep.

5. **Question: And she's the only one who takes care of you?**

Answer: Yep.

6. **Question: What school do you attend for middle school?**

Answer: Umoja.

Response: Umoja Middle School. Okay.

7. Question: And what grade are you in now?

Answer: Eighth.

8. Question: And who in your home or family finished high school? Did your mother finish high school?

Answer: Yes.

Response: Oh, she did, okay.

9. Question: And did she go to college? Do you know?

Answer: No.

10. Question: What kind of work does your mom do?

Answer: She don't work right now.

Response: She doesn't work, okay.

Personal Educational Experiences and Attitudes

11. Question: How do you feel about school?

Answer: It's aiight.

Response and Question: It's all right. And that means, is it good? Is it okay?

Answer: It's good.

Response: Okay

Question: And how do you feel about your teachers?

Answer: Oh, I like all my teachers.

Response: You like them all?

Answer: Un-huh.

12. Question: Tell me how you are doing in your classes.

Answer: I'm doing good.

Response: You're doing good. Okay.

13. Question: Are you happy with how you're doing?

Answer: Yep.

14. Question: And could you be doing better, you think?

Answer: No,... well, yeah, I could.

Response: You could?

Answer: Uh-huh.

Question: So are you making straight As or no?

Answer: No, I ain't making straight As.

Question: What's your grade point average.

Answer: About a.. I'd say, about a 3.0.

Response: That's not bad.

15. Question: Who helps you with school work?

Answer: Nobody. I just....

Response: Nobody helps you?

Answer: Well, the teachers, but I pretty much know what I be doing.

16. Question: Do you think school is important?

Answer: Uh-huh.

Question: Why?

Answer: Because you will have it going on.

Goals and Aspirations

17. Question: What would you like to be when you grow up?

Answer: A day-care provider.

Response: Okay, good.

18. Question: What things do you look forward to in high school?

Answer: Being a good student.

Response: Being a good student. Okay.

19. Question: What things are you fearful of about high school; do you fear anything about high school?

Answer: No, I don't fear anything.

Response: You don't. Okay.

20. Question: Would you like to go to college?

Answer: Uh-huh.

Perception of Peers' Educational Experiences and Attitudes

21. Question: How do your friends feel about school; do you know?

Answer: They all like it and everything.

Response: You think they like school.

Question: How do they feel about their teachers; do you know?

Answer: I don't even know.

Response: They don't tell you how they like their teachers or dislike them?

Answer: No.

Response: Okay.

22. Question: How do you feel about your classmates, the students in your school who always make good grades?

Answer: Oh, they straight.

Response: Okay, so you have no problem with that?

Answer: Nope.

Personal Experiences and Perceptions of Dropping Out of School

23. Question: Do you know of anyone who has dropped out of school?

Answer: No. No.

Response: Okay.

24. Question: What are your feelings about dropping out of school?

Answer: I don't really have no feelings about that.

Response: Do you think it's a bad thing, do you think it's okay, do you think it's good.

Answer: It ain't all that good, no.

Question: Why is it not good to drop out?

Answer: So, you drop out of school, you... It just ain't right.

Response: It makes life difficult?

Answer: Yeah.

Response: And it's hard to get a good job...that's right.

25. Question: Have you ever thought about dropping out of school?

This question was not asked.

26. Question: What do you see as the advantages of staying in school?

Answer: Making good money.

Response: (chuckling) Making good money.

27. Question: Are there any disadvantages to staying in school?

Answer: No.

Reported Child Perceptions of Parents' Behavior and Attitudes

28. Question: How do your parents feel about your school?

Answer: She... she's hard on me about it.

Response: Is she? Okay.

29. Question: How do your parents feel about your teachers?

Answer: She like 'em, she know my teachers.

Response: She does, and she likes them?

Answer: Uh-huh.

Response: Good.

30. Question: Who in your home do you talk to about school?

Answer: My uncle.

Response: Okay.

31. Question: Who gets excited when you do well in school?

Answer: My mama and my uncle.

Response: Do they get excited? Okay.

Question: When they get excited, what do they do then? Tell me about that.

Answer: They give me money.

Response: They give you money for doing well?

Answer: Uh-huh.

Response: Good, okay.

32. Question: Have you every gotten in trouble at school?

Answer: Uh-huh.

Question: Tell me about it, what kind of trouble.

Answer: I had lots of trouble.

Response: Have you? Like what? Give me an example.

Answer: Right, one time I wasn't walking in line straight.

Response: Is that it? And what did they do to you?

Answer: Oh, now, she just told me had....'Cause I had kept doin' it.

Response: Okay.

33. Question: What happens when you do poorly in school, when you do bad?

Answer: I get in trouble.

Question: What do you parents do, your mom?

Answer: She puts me on punishment.

Response: Does she? Okay.

34. Question: What does your family expect you to do when you finish junior high school? Do they want you to go to high school? They do, right?

Answer: Uh-huh.

Response: Okay.

Personal Perceptions of Teachers' Attitudes

35. Question: How do your teachers let you know what is important to them?

Answer: They tell us.

Response: Okay. They talk to you about it, okay.

36. Question: How do your teachers treat other students?

Answer: They treat 'em as if we their kids.

Response: Really.

Answer: Uh-huh.

Response: That's good.

Question: Are all students treated the same, you think?

Answer: Uh-huh.

37. Question: How do you think your teachers feel about you?

Answer: They... All the teachers like me.

Response: Do they like you?

Answer: Uh-huh.

Response: Good.

School Demographics

38. Question: Describe your school including the teachers and students who go to your school.

Answer: Uh, it's all right, my school all right.

Response and Question: (Question was reiterated.) Okay. Is it a big place, is it nice building, is it clean?

Answer: It's a nice building, it's a pretty big, nice building. Yeah.

Response: Clean?

Answer: It's clean.

Response: Adequate, and all that?

Answer: Yeah.

39. Question: What are the best things about your school, what do you think is the best thing about your school?

Answer: Sports.

Response (chuckling): Is that the best thing?

Answer: Yes.

Response: Okay.

40. Question: What are the problems or worst things at your school?

Answer: Some kids be fighting, that's it.

Response: The fighting?

Answer: Yeah.

Response: Okay.

School Curriculum

41. Question: Who are the famous people you study about in school?

Answer: The Presidents.

Response: Okay, the presidents. Anybody else?

Answer: That's about out it, famous like.

Response: Okay.

42. Question: Do you have any role models?

Answer: Yes.

Response: Okay, who are they?

Answer: My uncle.

Response: Your uncle is your role model?

Answer: Yes.

Response: And who else?

Answer: Just him.

Response: Okay.

43. Question: Do you know if or how education helped your role models to become successful?

Answer: It helped my uncle 'cause in high school he took up business and accounting, and now he can count money.

Response (chuckling): He can count money. Okay, is he pretty successful with that?

Answer: Uh-huh.

Response: Okay.

Question: Is there anything else you would like to share about in this interview.

Answer: It was all right.

Response: Good. Okay. Thank you

Interview #2

Demographics

1. Question: Give us your name?

Answer: Kenny T.

Response: Okay, say that again.

Answer: Kenny T.

2. Question: What name would you like me to call you for this interview and write-up?

Answer: Ken.

Response: Ken.

3. Question: How old are you, Quinquin?

Answer: Thirteen.

Question: And when is your birthday?

Answer: May.

Response: Okay, May.

4. Question: And who do you live with?

Answer: My father and my mother.

Response: Okay, father and mother.

5. Question: Who takes care of you?

Answer: Both.

Response: Both of them.

6. Question: What school do you attend right now?

Answer: Umoja.

Response: Umoja.

7. Question: And what grade are you in now?

Answer: Seventh.

Response: Seventh grade?

Answer: Yeah.

8. Question: Who in your home or family finished high school?

Answer: My cou..., not... my cousin, yeah.

Question: Did your dad finish high school?

Answer: Nah.

Question: Did your mother finish..?

Answer: No.

Question: Ah, your cousin lives in the house with you?

Answer: Yeah.

Question: And how old is he?

Answer: It's a she.

Question: And how old is she?

Answer: Nineteen.

Response and Question: She's nineteen. She's the only one who's finished high school?

Answer: Yes, for now.

Response: For now.

9. Question: Who in your home or family finished college? Did anyone finish college?

Answer: Ah, my other cousin. He doesn't live with me though.

Response and Question: He doesn't live... But the people in your house, though,

who lives with you...

Answer: Nobody.

Response: So it's your mother, father, you, your ...?

Answer: Sister...

Response: ...sister

Continuing Answer: ... and cousin.

Continuing Response: And your cousin.

10. Question: What kind of work do your parents do?

Answer: My daddy, he, um, is a hot rod dealer, and my mother baby sits.

Personal Educational Experiences and Attitudes

11. Question: How do you feel about school?

Answer: I feel good about school.

Response: Do you?

Question: Do you like your teachers?

Answer: I like Yeah, I like my teachers....

Response: Okay.

Continuing answer: ...they're cool.

Response: They're cool?

12. Question: Tell me how you are doing in your classes.

Answer: I done good in every class except one.

Question: Which one is that.

Answer: Math.

Question: You're not doing well in math.

Answer: I done aiight, but I ain't done like I, like I wanna be doing.

Response: Okay.

13. Question: Are you happy with how you're doing now, overall?

Answer: No.

Response and Question: Okay, you're not.

14. Question: Could you be doing better?

Answer: Yes, of course.

Response: Okay.

15. Question: Who helps you with school work?

Answer: My sister....

Response: Okay, your sister...

Continuing answer: and my teachers.

Response: ... and your teachers.

16. Question: Do you think school is important?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Why?

Answer: Well, school is important 'cause if you don't graduate you won't... it's gonna be hard to get a job...

Response: Okay.

Continuing answer: ...and if you do graduate from college and stuff, you can make good money and be successful.

Response: Okay, good.

Goals and Aspirations

17. Question: What would you like to be when you grow up?

Answer: What I'd like to be when I grow up is a football player or a hot rod dealer.

Response: Okay.

18. Question: What things do you look forward to in high school?

Answer: At Grady, I look forward to playing varsity football.

Response: Okay.

19. Question: What things are you fearful of about high school?

Answer: Nothin'.

Response: Nothin'.

20. Question: Would you like to go to college?

Answer: Yes.

Response: Good, okay.

Perception of Peers' Educational Experiences and Attitudes

21. Question: How do your friends feel about school?

Answer: Some of 'em.... Most like school, and some don't.

Response: Okay.

Question: How do they feel about their teachers?

Answer: They like 'em.

Question: They like them?

Answer: Yeah.

22. Question: How do you feel about students in your school who always make good grades?

Answer: Oh, they, they cool...

Response: You don't have a

Continuing answer:they're a good influence.

Response: They're a good influence?

Answer: Yeah.

Response: Okay

Personal Experiences and Perceptions of Dropping Out of School

23. Question: Do you know of anyone who has dropped out of school?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Who?

Answer: My friend's cousin.

Question: And...

Answer: He is sixteen year old.

Question: He's sixteen and he dropped out. Wow.

24. Question: What are you feelings about dropping out of school?

Answer: It's bad to drop out of school, because you probably won't never get a job..

Response: A good job, huh?

Answer: Yeah.

Response: Okay. Never get a job.

25. Question: Have you ever thought about dropping out of school?

Answer: No.

Response: No, okay.

26. Question: What do you see as the advantage of staying in school?

Answer: Being successful in my life.

Response: Being successful in your life. Okay.

27. Question: Are there any disadvantages to staying in school?

Answer: Nope.

Response: Okay.

Reported Child Perceptions of Parents' Behavior and Attitudes

28. Question: How do your parents feel about your school?

Answer: They like it. They like.... They feel comfortable.

29. Question: How do your parents feel about your teachers?

Answer: Aiight.

Response: All right, okay.

30. Question: Who in your home do you talk to about school?

Answer: E'r'body.

Response: Everyone. Okay.

31. Question: Who gets excited when you do well in school?

Answer: E'r'body.

Response: Everyone.

Question: Tell me about it. How do they get excited; what to they say; what do they do?

Answer: They give me gifts and give me money.

Response: They give you money and gifts? Okay, they reward you.

32. Question: Have you every gotten in trouble at school?

Answer: Yeah.

Question: Give me an example. Tell me about it.

Answer: I didn't keep my.. my, I didn't keep my shirt tucked in and I had my earring in my ear.

Response and Question: Shirt wasn't tucked in and you had an earring in your ear. And what did they do to you?

Answer: They took my earring and told me to tuck in my shirt.

33. Question: What happens when you do poorly in school?

Answer: Punishment.

Response and Question: Okay, From whom?

Answer: My parents.

Response. Your parents. Okay.

34. Question: What does your family expect you to do when you finish junior high school? Do they expect you to go to high school?

Answer: Yeah.

Response: Okay.

Personal Perceptions of Teachers' Attitudes

35. Question: How do your teachers let you know what is important to them?

Answer: If I do good on my work, they'll give us, like, a note to take home to our parents.

Response: Okay, they send a note to say you are doing well.

36. Question: How do your teachers treat students?

Answer: The same.

Question: Are all students treated the same?

Answer: No.

Response: You don't think so?

Answer: No.

Question: Explain. What do you mean?

Answer: Like, the student don't come to school proper... properly to learn, they don't...uh, the teachers don't ask them questions, like, we'll be in class, they don't ask them questions. Like, when they tell us to raise a hand and ask a question, then they had their hand raised and they called 'em.

37. Question: What do think about your teachers, or how do you feel about your teachers?

Answer: They nice.

Question: How do you think your teachers feel about you?

Answer: They goo... (*Unintelligible*) I want to be somebody when I grow up.

Response: Okay.

School Demographics

38. Question: Describe your school including the teachers and students who go to your school.

Answer: My school is big and they have a good athletic department.

Response: Okay

Answer: The students are sometimes bad, sometimes good, and the teachers and staff is sometimes mean and sometimes nice.

39. Question: What are the best things about your school?

Answer: Sports.

40. Question: What are the problems or worst things at your school?

Answer: Sports.

Response and Question: That's the problem? How is that?

Answer: 'Cause, when... if we lose a football game, we got to come back to school and e'r'body talk about the football players.

Response: Oh, okay.

School Curriculum

41. Question: Who are the famous people you study about in school?

In the background: I don't know.

Question: Any famous people in school.

Answer: Yes.

Response: Okay, who are they? Do you remember any of them?

Answer: I don't remember.

Response: Okay.

42. Question: Do you have any role models?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Who?

Answer: Your dad. Okay.

43. Question: Do you know if or how education helped your role models to become successful?

Answer: Uh. (*Unintelligible*)

Question: Is there anything you want to add to in this interview?

Answer: The interview, pretty interesting.

Response: Okay. Good job. Thank you, sir.

Interview #3

Demographics

1. Question: What is your name?

Answer: Kevin.

Response: Kevin.

Question: And what name would you like me to call you?

Answer: Just call me Kevin.

Response: Okay.

2. Question: What name would you like me to call you for this interview and write-up?

Answer: Kevin.

Response: Kevin.

3. Question: How old are you, Kevin?

Answer: Fourteen.

Response: You're fourteen.

Question: And when is your birthday?

Answer: July.

Response: July. July what?

Answer: 25th.

Response: July 25th... two thousand and what?

Answer: 199?.

Response: Huh?

Answer: 199?.

Response (chuckling): 199?, okay, yeah.

4. Question: Who do you live with?

Answer: My dad.

Response: You live with your dad.

5. Question: And who takes care of you?

Answer: My dad.

Response: Your dad.

6. Question: What school do you attend?

Answer: Umoja.

Response: Umoja.

7. Question: What grade are you in now?

Answer: Eighth.

Response: Eighth grade.

8. Question: Who in your home or family finished high school?

Answer: My aunt... my auntie.

Question: She lives in your house with you?

Answer: No.

Response and Question: Okay, who in your house, right now, finished high school, in your house.

Answer: My dad.

Question: Did your dad finish, or you're not sure?

Answer: I don't know.

Response: You don't know? You're not sure.

Answer: I think he did.

Response: You think he did or you're not sure?

Answer: Yeah, he did.

9. Question: Anybody in your house finish college or go to college?

Answer: I don't think so.

10. Question: What kind of work does your dad do?

Answer: He don't really work, ya' know.

Response: Oh, he's not working right now. Okay.

Personal Educational Experiences and Attitudes

11. Question: How do you feel about school?

Answer: It's aight, it's straight

Response: It's okay, it's straight.

Question: And how do you feel about your teachers?

Answer: They're nice.

Question: They're nice?

Answer: Uh-huh.

12. Question: Tell me how you are doing in your classes.

Answer: I'm...I...I'm doing all right, though.

Response: You're just doing all right?

Answer: Uh-huh.

Question: So what kind of grade point are you making?

Answer: I don't know.

Question: You don't know what your grade point average is?

Answer: Uh-uh.

Response: Okay.

13. Question: Are you happy with how you're doing?

Answer: Uh-huh. But I could do better though.

14. Question: Can you do better?

Answer: Uh-huh.

Response: You've got to speak nice and loud.

15. Question: Who helps you with school work?

Answer: Nobo...my teachers.

Response: Your teachers. Okay.

16. Question: Do you think school is important?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Why?

Answer: 'Cause, if you get through school so you can get a good job.

Response: You can get a good job. Okay.

Goals and Aspirations

17. Question: What would you like to be when you grow up?

Answer: A football player.

Response and Question: Wow! Why?

Answer: It's what I like.

Response: You like football. Okay.

18. Question: What things do you look forward to in high school?

Answer: Um... (*Unintelligible*)

Response: (*Unintelligible*)

19. Question: What things are you fearful of about high school?

Answer: Nothin'.

Response: Nothing.

20. Question: Would you like to go to college?

Answer: Yes.

Perception of Peers' Educational Experiences and Attitudes

21. Question: How do your friends feel about school?

Answer: They straight with it, they aiight.

Question: How do they feel about their teachers?

Answer: I don't know how they feel about their teachers.

Response: You don't know. Okay. You gotta speak nice and loud with all this background noise going on.

22. Question: How do you feel about students in your school who always make good grades?

Answer: Um,...

Response: You don't have any feelings about it?

Answer: Uh-uh.

Response: Okay.

Personal Experiences and Perceptions of Dropping Out of School

23. Question: Do you know of anyone who has dropped out of school?

Answer: No.

24. Question: What are you feelings about dropping out of school? What do you think about dropping out of school?

Answer: Not doing good. Not so good.

Question: It's not a good thing to do?

Answer: Naw.

Question: Okay.

25. Question: Have you ever thought about dropping out of school?

Answer: No.

26. Question: What do you see as the advantages of staying in school?

Answer: So you can get some money.

Response: So you can get some money?

Answer: Uh-huh.

Response: Okay.

27. Question: Are there any disadvantages to staying in school?

Answer: Um.... Not doing your work and stuff.

Response: Okay.

Reported Child Perceptions of Parents' Behavior and Attitudes

28. Question: How do your parents feel about your school?

Answer: Uh, they're aiight with it.

Response: Okay.

29. Question: How do your parents feel about your teachers?

Answer: My parents don't know my teachers.

Response: Okay.

30. Question: Who in your home do you talk to about school? Is there anybody in your house you talk to about school?

Answer: My dad.

31. Question: Who gets excited when you do well in school?

Answer: My dad and my granma.

Response: Your dad and your grandmother. Okay

Question: What do they do when they get excited?

Answer: Sometime they give me some money and stuff.

Response: They give you money.

32. Question: Have you every gotten in trouble at school?

Answer: Yes.

Question: And, for an example, what did you do?

Answer: Well, sometimes we talkin', the teacher tells us be quiet.

Response: Okay. You were talking.

Answer: Uh-huh. He touch on my clothes.

33. Question: What happens when you do poorly in school?

Answer: Uh, I get on punishment.

Response: You get on a punishment.

34. Question: What does your parents expect you to do when you finish junior high school?

Answer: They expect me to go to high school.

Response: They expect you to go to high school. Okay.

Personal Perceptions of Teachers' Attitudes

35. Question: How do your teachers let you know what is important to them?

Answer: They be teaching me and stuff.

Response: Okay.

Continuing Answer: ..and um.

Response: ...you get through school. Okay.

36. Question: How do your teachers treat their other students, classmates?

Answer: They treat them the same, though, like children.

Question: So, all students are treated the same, you would say?

Answer: Uh-huh.

Response: Okay.

37. Question: How do you think your teachers feel about you?

Answer: They feel good about me.

Question: Do they like you, you think?

Answer: Yes.

Response: Okay, good.

School Demographics

38. Question: Describe your school including the teachers and students who go to your school.

Answer: The teachers are nice and the school is big and things.

39. Question: What are the best things about your school?

Answer: S.. The sports (*Unintelligible*)

Response: The sports, you like....

Answer: Yeah.

40. Question: What are the problems or worst things about your school?

Answer: Nothing I can think of.

School Curriculum

41. Question: Who are the famous people you study about in school?

Answer: The president.

Response and Question: The president. Anyone else you've studied?

Answer: Naw.

Question: You don't study anyone else famous?

Answer: I don't...

Response: Okay.

42. Question: Do you have any role models?

Answer: My dad.

Response: Your dad is your role model.

43. Question: Do you know if or how education helped your role models to become successful?

Answer: Uh-huh

Question: How?

Answer: When they be... um, doing good in school and they pass doing all their work and stuff.

Response: Okay. Say that again.

Answer: They be passing they tests and stuff...

Response: They pass their tests... Let me ask the question again.

Do you know if or how education helped your role models to become successful? How did education help them to be great people? Do you know.

Answer: Uh-huh. 'Cause, so when they ha.. do all their work and stuff and they get a good job.

Response: They get a good job. Okay. Very good. Well, thank you for this interview.

Interview #4

Demographics

1. Question: What is your name?

Answer: Brian Q.

Question: What name would you like me to call you?

Answer: Brian.

2. Question: What name would you like me to call you for this interview and write-up?

Answer: Brian.

3. Question: How old are you, Brian?

Answer: Twelve.

Question: When is your birthday?

Answer: March 10.

Response: Nineteen...

Answer: 199?.

Response: 199?.

4. Question: Who do you live with?

Answer: My dad.

Response: Your dad.

5. Question: Who takes care of you?

Answer: My dad.

Response: Your dad.

6. Question: What school do you attend?

Answer: Umoja Middle School.

Response: Umoja Middle School.

7. Question: What grade are you in now?

Answer: Seventh.

Response: Seventh grade. You're going to have to speak nice and loud.

8. Question: Who in your home or your family finished high school?

Answer: Um...

Question: Do you know? In your household?

Answer: No.

Response: Okay.

9. Question: Who in your house finished college? Do you know?

Answer: In my house, or...

Response: Uh-huh.

Answer: Nobody.

Response: No one.

10. Question: What kind of work does your dad do?

Answer: He don't work right now.

Response: He doesn't work.

Personal Educational Experiences and Attitudes

11. Question: How do you feel about school?

Answer: Good.

Question: How do you feel about your teachers?

Answer: Good.

12. Question: Tell me how you are doing in your classes.

Answer: All right.

Question: Just all right?

Answer: Uh-huh.

13. Question: Are you happy with how you're doing?

Answer: I can do a little bit better.

Response: Okay.

14. Question: Could you be doing better?

This question was not asked because it was answered in number 13.

15. Question: Who helps you with school work?

Answer: My dad and my teacher.

Response: Your dad and your teacher helps.

16. Question: Do you think school is important?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Why?

Answer: So you can get a good education and get a job.

Response: Okay, good education and get a job.

Goals and Aspirations

17. Question: What would you like to be when you grow up?

Answer: A football player.

Question: Why do you want to be a football player?

Answer: 'Cause I like playing football.

Response: You like playing football.

18. Question: What things do you look forward to in high school?

Answer: Um, playing football.

Response: Playing football

19. Question: What things are you fearful of about high school?

Answer: Nothin'.

Response: Nothing.

20. Question: Would you like to go to college?

Answer: Yes.

Perception of Peers' Educational Experiences and Attitudes

21. Question: How do your friends feel about school?

Answer: All right.

Response: They feel all right?

Question: How do they feel about their teachers?

Answer: All right.

22. Question: How do you feel about students in your school who always make good grades?

Answer: Good.

Response: You feel good about other people making good grades.

Personal Experiences and Perceptions of Dropping Out of School

23. Question: Do you know of anyone who has dropped out of school?

Answer: No.

24. Question: What are your feelings about dropping out of school?

Answer: I don't really have no feelings.

Question: Do you think it's a good thing, a bad thing...?

Answer: A bad thing.

Question: Why is it bad to drop out of school?

Answer: 'Cause you won't have no where to stay or get no good job.

Response: Okay. Have no place to stay nor get a good job. Okay.

25. Question: Have you ever thought about dropping out of school?

Answer: No.

26. Question: What do you see as the advantages of staying in school?

Answer: Get.. .. Make.... Get money.

Response: Okay. Make money. Okay, make more money, huh?

27. Question: Are there any disadvantages to staying in school?

Answer: No.

Response: No, okay.

Reported Child Perceptions of Parents' Behavior and Attitudes

28. Question: How does your dad feel about your school?

Answer: He feels good.

Response: He feels good about it.

29. Question: How does your dad feel about your teachers?

Answer: He don't know 'em.

Response and Question: He doesn't know them. Okay. Does he ever talk to your teachers, your dad?

Answer: He talked to 'em one time.

Response: Just one time.

30. Question: Who in your home do you talk to about school?

Answer: My dad.

Response: Okay, your dad.

31. Question: Who gets excited when you do well in school?

Answer: My dad.

Response: Okay.

Question: What does he do when he gets excited?

Answer: Sometimes he takes us places and gives money.

Response: He gives you money.

32. Question: Have you every gotten in trouble at school?

Answer: One time.

Response: One time.

Question: What did you do.

Answer: Talking when we're not s'pose to be talking.

Response: Talking when you're not supposed to talking.

33. Question: What happens when you do poorly in school?

Answer: I get on punishment.

Question: You get on a punishment?

Answer: Yes.

Response and Question: Okay. What kind of punishment?

Answer: Like, I can't watch TV....

Response: You can't watch television...

Continuing answer: ...or go outside.

Continuing response: ...or go outside.

34. Question: What does your family expect you to do when you finish junior high school?

Answer: Go to high school.

Response: Go to high school.

Personal Perceptions of Teachers' Attitudes

35. Question: How do your teachers let you know what is important to them?

Answer: By teaching me.

Response: By telling you and teaching you.

36. Question: How do your teachers treat students?

Answer: Good.

Question: Are all students treated the same at your school?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Girls are treated the same, like boys?

Answer: Um-hum, they treated the same.

37. Question: How do you think your teachers feel about you?

Answer: All right.

Response: They feel all right about you.

School Demographics

38. Question: Describe your school including the teachers and students who go to your school.

Answer: My school, it.. it, my school big.

Response: Very large place, okay, what else.

Answer: Uh...

Question: Anything else? Clean?

Answer: It... sometimes.

Response (chuckling) and Question: Sometimes, okay. Describe the students you go to school with. What are they like?

Answer: Like sometimes they fight and sometimes they don't, they're good

students.

Response: Okay

39. Question: What are the best things about your school?

Answer: It, uh, we got a football team, uh, and P.E.

Response: And P.E.

40. Question: What are the problems or worst things at your school?

Answer: When they fight.

Response and Question: Okay. Are there a lot of fights?

Answer: Sometimes.

Response: Sometimes.

School Curriculum

41. Question: Who are the famous people you study about in school?

Answer: Jackie Robinson.

Response and Question: Jackie Robinson. So you study famous people like sports people. Who else? Anyone else?

Answer: Uh, no.

Response: No, Okay.

42. Question: Do you have any role models?

Answer: My dad.

Response: Your dad.

43. Question: Do you know if or how education helped your dad to become successful?

Answer: What did you say?

Question reiterated: Do you know how education helped your dad.

Answer: Cool.

Question: How did it help him? How?

Answer: By having somewhere to stay.

Response: Having a place to stay, a nice place to stay, huh? Good.

Question: Is there anything you want to add or ask?

Answer: No.

Response: Okay, very good. Thank you.

Interview #5

Demographics

1. Question: What is your name?

Answer: Shawn T.

Question: And what name would you like me to call you during this interview?

Answer: Shawn.

2. Question: What name would you like me to call you for this interview and write-up? This question was not asked. At this point this question was merged with the second point of question one and was not asked again.

3. Question: How old are you, Shawn?

Answer: Thirteen.

Question: And when is your birthday?

Answer: July 8.

Response: Okay.

4. Question: Who do you live with in your house?

Answer: My mom and step-dad.

Response and Question: Your mom and your step dad. That's it?

Answer: And my brother.

Response and Question: And you got a brother. Older or younger.

Answer: Younger.

Response: Okay.

5. Question: Who takes care of you?

Answer: My mom and my step-dad.

Response: Your mom and your step-dad.

6. Question: What school do you attend?

Answer: Nia.

Response: Nia.

7. Question: And what grade are you in?

Answer: Seventh.

Response: Okay, seventh.

8. Question: And who in your home or family finished high school?

Answer: My mom and step-dad.

Response: Your mom and step-dad finished high school. Okay.

9. Question: Who in your home or family finished college?

Answer: No one.

Response: No one finished college.

10. Question: What kind of work do your parents do?

Answer: My mom stay at home, but sometimes she works at the Georgia Dome

for security, and my step-dad is a eng... like a 'lectrician.

Response: Like an electrician. Okay, good.

Personal Educational Experiences and Attitudes

11. Question: How do you feel about school?

Answer: Good.

Response: You feel good about school. Good.

Question: How do you feel about your teachers at school?

Answer: My teachers are good.

Question: Are they good as well?

Answer: No audible response.

12. Question: Tell me how you are doing in your classes.

Answer: Wel-l-l-l-l, most of my classes are good. But they not all As and Bs

though.

Response and Question: Not all As and Bs. Okay. What's your favorite subject?

Answer: Uh, Math.

Response: Math. Okay, good.

13. Question: Are you happy with how you're doing?

Answer: No.

Question: Why not?

Answer: I need to do better.

Response: So you can do better.

14. Question: In what field... in what area can you do better?

Answer: All of my classes.

Response: All your classes. Okay.

15. Question: Who helps you with school work?

Answer: My mom and my teachers.

Response: Your mom and your teachers.

16. Question: Do you think school is important?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Why?

Answer: 'Cause I need a education and to get a job and make money.

Response: Okay.

Goals and Aspirations

17. Question: What would you like to be when you grow up?

Answer: Architect.

Response and Question: An architect. Good. So are you an artist, can you draw?

Answer: A little bit.

Response: Good, okay.

18. Question: What things do you look forward to in high school?

Answer: Parties, having fun, and football games.

Response: And football games.

19. Question: What things are you fearful of about high school? Do you fear anything about high school?

Answer: Uh..., the work.

Response: The work, okay.

20. Question: Would you like to go to college?

Answer: Yeah.

Response: Okay.

Perception of Peers' Educational Experiences and Attitudes

21. Question: How do your friends feel about school?

Answer: Uh..., good. The same way, most of 'em.

Response: Most of 'em. Okay.

Question: How do they feel about their teachers?

Answer: Most of 'em feel the same.

22. Question: How do you feel about students in your school who always make good grades?

Answer: It's good, but I know it's hard.

Response and Question: It's hard. So you feel good that they are making good grades?

Answer: Yeah.

Personal Experiences and Perceptions of Dropping Out of School

23. Question: Do you know of anyone who has dropped out of school?

Answer: Um-m-m, my sister.

Question: Your sister dropped out?

Answer: Yeah, but she went back.

Question: But she went back?

Answer: Uh-huh.

24. Question: What are your feelings about dropping out of school?

Answer: You shouldn't drop out unless you have to, and I wouldn't want to.

Response: You wouldn't want to.

25. Question: Have you ever thought about dropping out of school?

Answer: No.

Response: Okay.

26. Question: What do you see as the advantages of staying in school?

Answer: Well, you make more money, stay out of trouble.

Response: And stay out of trouble, okay.

27. Question: Are there any disadvantages to staying in school?

Answer: Uh, not really.

Response: Not really.

Reported Child Perceptions of Parents' Behavior and Attitudes

28. Question: How do your parents feel about your school?

Answer: Uh, my parents like my school.

Response: Good.

29. Question: How do your parents feel about your teachers?

Answer: Uh, they good with my tea... They think my teachers are good teachers.

Response: They think your teachers are good teachers. Okay.

30. Question: Who in your home do you like to talk to about school?

Answer: Everybody.

Response and Question: Okay, you talk to everyone about school?

Answer: Uh-huh.

31. Question: Who gets excited in your household when you do well in school?

Answer: My mom, step-dad, and my brother.

Question: So when they get excited, what do they do?

Answer: They were like screaming and saying "Yeah." And they give you money for being good.

Response: So they give you an allowance for being good. Okay.

32. Question: Have you every gotten in trouble at school?

Answer: Yeah.

Question: Tell me about it. Give me an example.

Answer: I had got into an argument with someone.

Response and Question: Okay. And did your parents find out about that?

Answer: Yeah.

33. Question: So, what happens when you do poorly in school?

Answer: Punishment.

Response: So you got on a punishment.

34. Question: What does your family expect you to do when you finish junior high school?

Answer: Uh, go to college.

Response: Okay, good.

Personal Perceptions of Teachers' Attitudes

35. Question: How do your teachers let you know what is important to them?

Answer: By telling you what you need to know and it's important for you to

know.

Response: Okay.

36. Question: How do your teachers treat all the other students?

Answer: Good and the same.

Question: Do you think that's fair with everyone?

Answer: Yes.

37. Question: How do you think your teachers feel about you?

Answer: Uh. Prob'ly on the good feeling.

Question: Do they like you?

Answer: Yeah.

School Demographics

38. Question: Describe your school including the teachers and students who go to your school. (student hesitates) Is it a big place, is it clean, are the people nice?

Answer: It's a big school and everybody nice.

Question: Everyone's nice?

Answer: Yeah.

Question: Very clean, atmosphere?

Answer: Yeah.

Response and Question: Okay. What about the students who go to school there,
what are they like?

Answer: Nice, the same way.

Response: Are they nice? Okay. Not a lot of fighting, cursing?

Answer: Naw.

Response: No. Good.

39. Question: What are the best things you like about your school?

Answer: Uh-h-h, the teachers.

Response and Question: You like the teachers. Why is that?

Answer: 'Cause they be wantin' to teach you.

Response and Question: They want to teach you. What about helping you?

Answer: Yeah, they help you.

Response: Okay.

40. Question: What are the problems or worst things about your school?

Answer: Nothin', really.

Response: Nothing. Okay.

School Curriculum

41. Question: Who are the famous people you study about in your school?

Answer: The slavery people and inventors.

Response: Inventors, slavery, history, black history. Okay.

42. Question: Do you have any role models?

Answer: Yeah, my mom.

Response: Your mom is your role model. Okay.

43. Question: Do you know if or how education helped your role models to become successful? How did education help your mother?

Answer: Helped her get a job and home.

Response: A home and a job. Okay. Very good.

Question: Is there anything you want to add to in this?

Answer: No.

Response: Okay. Thank you for your time.

Answer: Aiight.

Interview #6

Demographics

1. Question: What is your name?

Answer: Berry Q.

Response: What's your name? (*Question was repeated due to discrepancy between response and paperwork.*)

Answer: Berry Jackson.

Response: Okay.

2. Question: What name would you like me to call you during this interview?

Answer: Berry.

3. Question: How old are you, Berry?

Answer: Thirteen.

Question: When is your birthday? Question was not asked.

4. Question: Who do you live with?

Answer: My mom, my brother, my sister, and my step-dad.

Response: Okay.

5. Question: Who takes care of you?

Answer: My mom and my step-dad.

Question: Your mom and your step-dad?

Answer: Uh-huh.

6. Question: And what school do you attend?

Answer: Nia.

Response: Okay.

7. Question: What grade are you in now?

Answer: The seventh.

Question: You're in the seventh grade?

Answer: Yes.

8. Question: And who in your home or family finished high school?

Answer: My mom and my step-dad.

Response: Your mom and step-dad.

9. Question: Who in your home or family finished college?

Answer: My step-dad and my mom.

Question: Oh, they both finished college?

Answer: Yes.

Response: Good.

10. Question: What kind of work do your parents do?

Answer: My mom stays at home and watch me and my sister, and my step-dad
do maintenance work.

Response: Okay.

Personal Educational Experiences and Attitudes

11. Question: How do you feel about school?

Answer: I feel good about school.

Response: Okay, so...

Question: How do you feel about your teachers?

Answer: They all right to me.

Response: Okay, good.

12. Question: Tell me how you are doing in your classes.

Answer: I'm passing almost all my classes.

Response: Okay, good.

13. Question: Are you happy with how you're doing?

Answer: Yeah.

14. Question: Could you be doing better?

Answer: Yeah.

Response and Question: Okay. Better in what class.

Answer: I can be doing better in Science and Social Studies.

Response: Okay.

15. Question: Who helps you with school work?

Answer: My brother and my mom.

Response: Okay.

16. Question: Do you think school is important?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Why?

Answer: It is important so you can.. so you can graduate and get a education.

Response: Okay.

Goals and Aspirations

17. Question: What would you like to be when you grow up?

Answer: An architect.

Question: You want to be an architect?

Answer: Yes, sir.

18. Question: What things do you look forward to in high school?

Answer: I look forward to graduating and completing all my goals.

Response and Question: Okay. What are some of your goals?

Answer: To get out of middle school and go on farther and farther.

Response and Question: Okay. In your education?

Answer: Yes.

Response: Okay.

19. Question: Are there any things you fear about high school?

Answer: Yeah.

Question: Why.

Answer: I fear (unintelligible stammering) the work.

Question: You fear the work?

Answer: Yes.

Response: You fear the work might be....

Answer: Hard.

Response: Might be too hard. Okay.

20. Question: Would you like to go to college?

Answer: Yes.

Response: Okay.

Perception of Peers' Educational Experiences and Attitudes

21. Question: How do your friends feel about school?

Answer: They don't feel nuthin' about school. They act disrespectful.

Question: Are they disrespectful about school?

Answer: Yeah.

Question: They don't like school?

Answer: I guess not.

Question: How do they feel about their teachers?

Answer: Some of 'em don't like their teachers.

Response: Oh, they don't?

Answer: Nope.

22. Question: How do you feel about students in your school who always make good grades?

Answer: I feel respect for them because they are learning things and the other students are not learning anything.

Response: Okay.

Personal Experiences and Perceptions of Dropping Out of School

23. Question: Do you know of anyone who has dropped out of school?

Answer: No.

24. Question: What are you feelings about dropping out of school?

Answer: My feelings is bad, because I think you should not drop out of school.

Response: Okay.

25. Question: So, have you ever thought about dropping out?

Answer: No.

Response: Okay.

26. Question: What do you see as the advantages of staying in school?

Answer: I see the advantages are like getting a job and that's it.

Response: Getting a job, okay.

27. Question: Are there any disadvantages to staying in school?

Answer: No.

Response: Okay.

Reported Child Perceptions of Parents' Behavior and Attitudes

28. Question: How do your parents feel about your school?

Answer: They feel all right about my school.

Response: Okay.

29. Question: How do your parents feel about your teachers?

Answer: My mom likes my teachers.

Response: Okay.

30. Question: Who in your home do you talk to about school?

Answer: I talk to my brother and my mom about school.

Response: Your brother and your mom, okay.

31. Question: Who gets excited when you do well in school?

Answer: My mom. She starts shouting when I do good in school.

Response and Question: Okay, she gets excited, huh?

Answer: Yes.

32. Question: Have you every gotten in trouble at school?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Tell me about it.

Answer: I have got suspended from school for fighting.

Response: For fighting, okay.

33. Question: And what happens when you do poorly in school?

Answer: When you do poorly in school you will never learn.

Response and Question: Okay. So what happens to *you* when you do poorly in school?

Answer: When I do poor in school, it just like I'm not learning anything.

Response: You're not learning, okay.

34. Question: What does your family expect you to do when you finish junior high school?

Answer: Go to high school and get a job.

Personal Perceptions of Teachers' Attitudes

35. Question: How do your teachers let you know what is important to them?

Answer: When they tell you that you're doing a great job, you're on a roll, you're on the ball.

Question: So they encourage you?

Answer: Yes.

Response: Okay, good.

36. Question: How do your teachers treat other students in your school?

Answer: They treat 'em with respect.

Response: Okay.

Question: Are all students treated the same? Is everybody treated the same, girls and boys and all that?

Answer: Yes.

Response: Okay.

37. Question: How do you think your teachers feel about you?

Answer: My teachers feel happy about me that I'm doing my work in school.

Response: Good.

School Demographics

38. Question: Describe your school including the teachers and students who go to your school.

Answer: My school is great but it need improvement and some students and the teachers are all right.

Response and Question: What about the students who go to your school, are they good students, bad students, or just....

Answer: Some are disrespectful and half of 'em are respectful students.

Response: Okay.

39. Question: What are the best things you like about your school?

Answer: I like that my Science teacher is a nice lady and she, um, she, um, takes up for me when people run and tell stories on me.

40. Question: What are the problems or worst things at your school?

Answer: Nothin'.

School Curriculum

41. Question: What famous people do you study about in school?

Answer: I study Leonardo Di Vinci and, um, Martin Luther King.

Response: Okay.

42. Question: Do you have any role models?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Who are your role models?

Answer: My mom and my brother.

Response: Okay.

43. Question: Do you know if or how education helped your mom or your brother to become successful?

Answer: Yes.

Question: How?

Answer: It helps me become successful when I see my mom doing the right things and...

Question: Did education help your mom become successful?

Answer: Yes.

Question: How, how did it help her?

Answer: By her following by what she did at school.

Response and Question: Okay, and what about your brother. How did it help your brother to become successful?

Answer: Uh, not listening to what people, um, tell what to do and just listen to the teacher.

Response: Okay. Good. Okay, thank you.

Interview #7

Demographics

1. Question: Give me your name?

Answer: My name is Larry Z..

Question: What do you want me to call you during this interview?

Answer: Um, ...

Question: Larry?

Answer: Yes.

Response: Okay.

2. Question: What name would you like me to call you for this interview and write-up? Question was not asked. See Question 2, interview #5.

3. Question: How old are you, Larry?

Answer: Thirteen.

Question: And when is your birthday?

Answer: May 15.

4. Question: Who do you live with?

Answer: My mother.

Question: And who else?

Answer: And her boyfriend and my brother.

Response: Okay.

5. Question: And who takes care of you?

Answer: My mother and her boyfriend.

6. Question: What school do you attend?

Answer: Umoja Middle.

Response: You go to Umoja Middle. Okay.

7. Question: What grade are you in now?

Answer: Seventh.

8. Question: Who in your home or your family finished high school?

Answer: My grandmother and my mother.

Response: Okay.

9. Question: And who in your home or family finished college?

Answer: Um, my sister.

Response: Okay.

10. Question: What kind of work do your parents do?

Answer: My mother's boyfriend, he do roofing; and my brother he likes to work
on cars.

Question: And what kind of work does your mom do?

Answer: Well, she just... work at the Georgia Dome. She help people and she
serve food.

Response: Okay, good.

Personal Educational Experiences and Attitudes

11. Question: How do you feel about school, Larry?

Answer: I feel very good because I think that when you go to school you can get
more knowledge about things you don't know.

Response and Question: Okay. You can do what? More knowledge?

Answer: Yes, sir.

Response: Okay, good.

Question: How do you feel about your teachers?

Answer: They are nice, they are caring, and, if you get hurt they'll take care of you.

Response: Okay. So, they are nice and caring. Okay.

12. Question: Tell me how you are doing in your classes.

Answer: I'm doing very good. I get As and Bs.

Response: Do you? Good for you.

13. Question: Are you happy with how you're doing?

Answer: Yes, sir.

14. Question: Could you be doing better?

Answer: Yes.

Question: What could you be doing better in?

Answer: Listening and, um, responsibility.

Question: Okay, so you could listen much better? Huh?

Answer: Yes.

Question: And responsibility when it comes to school, huh?

Answer: Uh, hum.

Question: Responsibility with what?

Answer: Things that we gotta hold and...things that are dealing with school.

Response: Okay, good.

15. Question: Who helps you with school work?

Answer: My uncle and my brother.

Response: And your brother.

16. Question: Do you think school is important?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Why?

Answer: Because if kids don't go to school they won't know anything about money and they'll...the language they speak all ghetto.

Response: Oh, okay. All ghetto. (chuckling) Okay.

Goals and Aspirations

17. Question: What would you like to be when you grow up?

Answer: A basketball player.

Response: Would you? Okay.

Question: Why is that?

Answer: Because some... a lot of people in my family try to get scholarships for that.

Response: Okay.

18. Question: What things do you look forward to in high school?

Answer: Um, being a computer technician.

Response: Okay, good. A computer technician.

19. Question: What things are you fearful of about high school?

Answer: The things that we're going to learn and things I ain't gonna know.

Response: Okay, things that you may not know.

20. Question: Would you like to go to college?

Answer: Yes, sir.

Response: Good.

Perception of Peers' Educational Experiences and Attitudes

21. Question: How do your friends feel about school?

Answer: Some of my friends, they really say they gonna drop out because they don't get the things that I get. I tell them they need to look forward and see what will happen next.

Response: Okay.

Question: How do they feel about their teachers?

Answer: They like their teachers but sometimes they get into arguments but they shouldn't do.

Response: Okay, about things they shouldn't do. Okay.

22. Question: How do you feel about students in your school who always make good grades?

Answer: I feel that they are doing good. They help me a lot...

Response: Oh, okay.

Answer: ...for what I can do.

Response: So they help you in turn. Good.

Personal Experiences and Perceptions of Dropping Out of School

23. Question: Do you know of anyone who has dropped out of school?

Answer: No, sir.

24. Question: What are your feelings about dropping out of school?

Answer: My feelings about dropping out of school that if on... if I drop out before I get to college, I might not know anything.

Response and Question: Okay. May not know anything. Anything else?

Answer: No, sir.

25. Question: Have you ever thought about dropping out of school?

Answer: No.

Response: Okay.

26. Question: What do you see as the advantages of staying in school?

Answer: The.... That you can help people who is on the street.

Response and Question: Okay, so that's an advantage. Can you think of anything else if you stay in school? Go to college, what else.. What good things can happen to you?

Answer: You can help people who don't know how to do things.

Response: You can help others who may not know how to do things.

27. Question: Are there any disadvantages to staying in school?

Answer: Yes. Learning.

Response: Okay – that's a disadvantage?

Answer: Oh, naw.

Response: No, okay. So there are no disadvantages,

Answer: No.

Reported Child Perceptions of Parents' Behavior and Attitudes

28. Question: How do your parents feel about school?

Answer: Happy.

Response: So they are happy about it.

29. Question: How do your parents feel about your teachers?

Answer: They like them because sometimes I don't get anything they'll help me
with it.

Response: Okay.

30. Question: Who in your home do you talk to about school?

Answer: My aunt.

Response: You talk to your aunt about it. Okay, good.

31. Question: Who gets excited when you do well in school?

Answer: My grandmother.

Response: Your grandmother gets....

Question: What did she do when she gets excited about school.

Answer: She starts telling people how good I'm doing.

Question: So she brags about you to other people?

Answer: Yes.

Response: Good.

32. Question: Have you every gotten in trouble at school?

Answer: No.

Response: Never. Okay. Good for you.

33. Question: What happens when you do poorly in school?

Answer: I get in trouble and then my mother tells me to pull up my grades and try
to do better next time.

Response: Good.

34. Question: What does your family expect you to do when you finish junior high school?

Answer: They expect me to get a third job and take care of the family.

Question: Do they expect you to go to high school?

Answer: Yes.

Response: Okay.

Question: Do they expect you to go to college, do you think?

Answer: Uh-huh. So I can get a scholarship for something I know how to do.

Response: Good.

Personal Perceptions of Teachers' Attitudes

35. Question: How do your teachers let you know what is important to them?

Answer: (unintelligible sound) When we do something good.

Question: How do they let you know what's... If your teachers feel that there's something important you should know, what do they do? Do they...How do they let you know what's important to them?

Answer: They give you something valuable.

Response and Question: Okay. Do they talk to you about what is important...

Answer: Yes.

Continuing question: that you need to know.

36. Question: How do your teachers treat the other students?

Answer: They treat them the same way, uh, they treat me.

Response: Good.

Question: So they treat all the students the same?

Answer: (*Inaudible response*)

Response: Okay.

Question: Do you want to talk a little more about that? They just treat them all fairly?

Answer: Yeah.

37. Question: How do you think your teachers feel about you?

Answer: They feel that I'm funny, and I can learn more.

Response: They think you can learn more, okay, but you can also be funny at school. Okay.

School Demographics

38. Question: Describe your school for me including the teachers.

Answer: The school is big and they got people who want to learn and the school teachers they..., they're, um, helpful to students like PC people.

Response and Question: Okay. And do you have a lot of men teachers a lot of men teachers, a lot of women teachers.

Answer: Both.

Response and Question: Oh, you have both. Okay. Describe the other students who go to school with you. What are they like—your other classmates and the other students who go to school—what are they like?

Answer: Some of them are smart and some of them are crazy.

Response and Question: Crazy. What do you mean by crazy?

Answer: Like, they like to play around when they got to do work.

Response: Okay.

39. Question: What are the best things you like about this school?

Answer: Um, they love to talk about things that we don't know so we can get it through where we can, uh, so we can succeed in life.

Response and Question: Okay, so the best thing you like about your school is....?

Again, tell me that again.

Answer: They will help us succeed in life.

Response: They help you succeed in life.

40. Question: What are the problems or worst things about your school?

Answer: Um, the teachers, they don't let things go when they supposed to.

Response and Question: So your teachers, let the... The worst thing you think it is because your teachers let things.. what?

Answer: Let things go when they don't supposed to.

Response and Question: Oh, what do you mean by that?

Answer: Like somebody getting into an argument and then they – it's really not a big thing about it, like somebody just takes somebody's pencil, they can go get it back.

Response: So do your teachers ignore it? Or do they settle it? Do they talk to them about it? What do your teachers do about it.

Answer: They take them to another class and try to let them calm down and see what they did.

Response: Okay.

School Curriculum

41. Question: Who are the famous people you study in school?

Answer: Um...

Question rephrased: Can you think of who are the famous people you study about in school?

Answer: Malcolm X.

Response and Question: Oh, you study about Malcolm X. Good. Any other famous people you can remember you studied about in school?

Answer: Um, no.

42. Question: Do you have any role models?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Who?

Answer: Um, um, Michael Jordan.

Response and Question: Michael Jordon is your role model? Who else?

Answer: Martin Luther King.

43. Question: Do you know if or how education helped your role models to become successful?

Answer: Because they went through everything that they knew they can do.

Response: Okay. They went – say that again.

Answer: They went through everything they knew they can do.

Response: Okay, good. Well, thank you.