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The Obama Effect on African American High School Males

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THE OBAMA EFFECT ON AFRICAN AMERCAN

HIGH SCHOOL MALES

by

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(Under the Direction of Paul M. Brinson)

ABSTRACT

"Of all the challenges in education today, I can think of none greater than the challenge of motivating, educating, and empowering black male learners" (Kafele, 2012, p. 67). Research documents the struggles of African American males in society and education. There is concern among educators for role models for young people to emulate (Lines, 2001). To explore President Obama as a role model and the impact of his historic election on African American recent high school male graduates, a qualitative research study was used. A phenomenological design helped described the "essence" of the phenomenon— *the election of an African American president*—from the perspectives of African American high school males.

Eight African American recent high school male graduates from a medium-sized school district in southeast Georgia participated in a semi-structured interview process. For anonymity, students used a pseudo name. The recorded interviews were transcribed and analyzed. From the data analysis, three recurring themes emerged: 1) All participants had heroes who were positive and often familial that remained relatively the same as they got older; 2) President Obama's election changed the way they perceived themselves as well as how they perceived the way the world sees African American males; and 3) Most participants were positive about their futures and believed that President Obama's

election has increased their likelihood of success. Seven (7) out of (8) eight participants

reported that the historical phenomenon had impacted their lives and described how they

see a more positive outlook for their future success.

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DEDICATION

*"This is the L*ORD*'s doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day which the L*ORD *hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it."* Psalm 118: 23-24

First and foremost, I thank God Almighty for His amazing grace, for His Son who died on the cross for my sins, and for His precious gift of the Holy Ghost, who has been a comforter and keeper during this period of my life. I dedicate this dissertation to my wonderful, supportive, loving, and encouraging family who has seen me through the highest and lowest points of my life while I completed this endeavor. Although you wanted to help when you saw me struggling, you did the best thing – you prayed for me. To my husband, Clyde, thank you for helping me to realize that I needed to finish this project, each time I wanted to give up. To Althoney (Mason) Sallins, Jr., *my son,* who helped with the animals, Max and Oreo; who helped with the housekeeping, and who ate McDonald's three to four times per week, so that I could work on my dissertation, I love and appreciate you. To my Goddaughter, D. Shaniqua Reed, I am so honored that you are following in my footsteps as a counselor; this gave me strength to continue because I want to be a good role model for you. I love you and am expecting even greater personal and professional successes from you for our next generation. To my father, George E. Simmons, Sr., who has gone to be with the Lord, I thank you for instilling in me the desire learn and to value a good education. To my mother, Beatrice Simmons, thank you for sacrificing so much for your children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great grandchildren throughout the years to help us to take advantage of opportunities that were not afforded to you. For always believing in me, loving me in spite of myself,

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A debt of gratitude is owed to the eight participants of the study, who gave of their time to share their lived experiences. I am a better counselor as a result of working with each of you. Congratulations! On your college enrollment!

Finally, I would like to thank the administrators and the support staff of the district that allowed me to conduct this research.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On August 28, 2008, forty-five years to the date that the Reverend Dr. Martin

Luther King, Jr. delivered his now famous speech, *I Have a Dream,* Senator Barack

Obama accepted the Democratic nomination for President of the United States of

America. This honor made him the first African American nominated for the highest

office from a major political party. Journalists, social science researchers, educators, and

average citizens proclaimed the historical significance of this event (Walter, 2008).

President Obama's charismatic style helped to propel him to national prominence very

quickly and led many to equate him as a rock star or a celebrity. Sveltkey (2009)

proclaims that the new president was a bigger celebrity than Brangelina and Beyonce,

that he has become the biggest celebrity in the world, and that President Obama has

changed pop culture forever. Walter (2008) suggests, in fact, that Barack Obama's

nomination is a "phenomenon that transcends 'rock star' enthusiasm and emotional

appeal" (p. 24). It empowers not only African Americans but also White and Hispanic

citizens to become involved in a phenomenon that could potentially change America

(Walters, 2008).

With Barack Obama as president, America was in uncharted territory. Poussaint

(2008), Professor of Psychiatry at Judge Baker Children's Center in Boston and Harvard

Medical School, believes that President Obama's election will have a psychological

effect on children everywhere. In his CNN commentary, Poussaint says that Black

children's image of the world and the image of what they think they can accomplish will

change. Poussaint (2008) contends that African American children will have a greater

sense of self because they will see visual images of a Black man being President of the United States and understanding very early that that's the highest position in the United States and presumably, the world. Coleman (2008) states that this historical moment is an opportunity for parents, teachers, mentors, and other volunteers to help minority children benefit from the inspiration generated by President Barack Obama. Because of documented low self-esteem and self-efficacy of African America males, Coleman (2008) contends that President Obama's election may be particularly inspirational to African American children.

As educational leaders, it is important to utilize this phenomenon to help inspire Black students toward success. Researchers find that African American males suffer disproportionately from social ills (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2007; Mauer, 1999), overrepresentation in special education (Bush-Daniels, 2008; Conahan, Burggraf, Nelson, Bailey, & Ford, 2003; Dukes, 2008; Harris, 2013; Thompson, 2014) and educational attainment (Noguera, 2001). One study finds that more than 50 years after the *Brown v. Board* decision, over 50% of Black male students nationwide fail to graduate on time with their cohort and in the inner cities the numbers are near 60% (Schott Foundation, 2008). A National Education Association (NEA) status report identifies the need for positive Black male role models in both the personal and school lives of many young Black males as one of the keys to turning around the steady decline of economic and educational achievement (Mobley & Holcomb, 2008). In "Race Against Time: Educating Black Boys" (2011, February), researchers state that after three years with an African American president, Black males are still more likely to be on the street; but unlike the past, there are more resources available to change the outcome for some.

In a Vanderbilt University study, researchers studied President Obama as a possible role model for African Americans and discovered what they termed, an *Obama Effect*—the positive influence of President Barack Obama as a role model on study participants (Marx, Ko, & Friedman, 2009). This study (2009) reports significant academic performance gaps in scores between Black and White test-takers before President Obama's nomination and shortly before his election. After the election, another administration of the test showed the gap as *statistically non-significant*. Another writer concludes that although the president's educational policies could help close the achievement gap, his mere election has actually already begun the process ("The Obama Effect", 2009). The need for appropriate role models for children has been addressed by the United States Congress in its Partnership in Character Education Program in 1994 (*Strategic Plan 2002-2007),* and the cause renewed and re-emphasized under *The No Child Left Behind Act* (2001).

President Obama's presence in the election has had an impact on African Americans, perhaps most especially on Black males. This study explored the effect of Barack Obama's election as President of the Unites States on African American high school males. As Black males in middle and high schools move through the educational pipeline, their interest in educational attainment decreases (Whiting, 2006), and they reject school as a place to develop their sense of self (Whiting, 2004). Discussions with African American high school males about the impact of an African American president on their view of the world may prove beneficial for educators as they develop strategies and interventions to improve the achievement of this specialized population.

Background

On November 4, 2008, the world watched the election returns with great anticipation. One of the questions that loomed since Illinois Senator Obama became the presumptive presidential nominee of the Democratic Party was this: Would America, mired with her past of slavery, segregation, and oppression, elect an African American president? When the night was over, the 44th President of the United States of America was Barack H. Obama, making him the first African American to hold the nation's highest political office. *The Boston Globe* captured the reaction of national political leaders on the historical significance of the 2008 Election (Rhee, 2008). Former rival, Hillary Clinton, noted, "In quiet, solitary acts of citizenship, American voters gave voice to their hopes and their values, voted for change, and refused to be invisible any longer" (para. 3). Howard Dean, Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, declared, "This has been a truly historic, transformational election. Tonight, our country chose hope over fear, the future over the past, and unity over division" (para. 12).

Lusane (2008) writes, "The election of President Obama ignited a movement of progressive activism that has the potential to reshape American and global politics unseen in generations" (p. 34). An exploration of how this historic event might impact education may be insightful for educational leaders, who struggle to provide appropriate interventions for African American males. This overview of the literature began with further analysis of the Vanderbilt study that reports an *Obama Effect* exist because of the influence of President Obama as a role model (Marx et al, 2009). A review of the plight of African American males helped to establish a need for interventions for this group if educational leaders are to meet accountability standards. Next, the study looked at the

value of role models in general and role models for African American males. Finally, the

study examined President Obama as a potential role model for African American males.

This research explored how African American high school males view President

Obama's election as a vehicle to dream the American dream.

The "*Obama Effect"* Study

Since his nomination became official, there has been much coverage on President

Barack Obama as a model of hope and inspiration for a variety of audiences, creating

what some term an *Obama Effect*. A study (2009), *The "Obama Effect:" How a Salient*

Role Model Reduces Race-Based Performance Differences, assesses whether the

influence of President Obama could affect African Americans' academic performance.

Marx, Ko, and Friedman (2009) report that when they assess both Black and White

students' performance while Obama's stereotype-defying successes were highly

publicized, there was a beneficial effect on the exam performance of African American

participants. The researchers (2009) find that after different administrations of a verbal

ability test, a pronounced race-based performance gap seen before his nomination and

before his subsequent election had nearly disappeared after his election as President of

the United States of America.

Marx et al. (2009) believe that the theory of stereo-type threat could be at work in

the race-based performance differences. Steele and Aronson (1995) originally coined the

term, *stereotype threat,* as they sought to explain why capable Black students fail to

perform as well as White counterparts, even when they are statistically matched. The

term refers to being at risk of confirming to a negative stereotype about one's race (Steele

& Aronson, 1995). Marx et al. had equally matched Black participants who did not

perform as well as their white counterparts on the ability test when Senator Obama was not prominent in the headlines. Williams (2006) agrees that awareness of negative stereotypes about the intellectual inferiority of one's "in-group" undermines performance on academic tasks for students who have a strong interest in the success of the task.

Fast forward, Senator Obama is highlighted in the media. The verbal ability test is given again, but this time, no significant performance gap was present. According to *ReducingStereotypeThreat.org*, stereotype threat has been studied in more than 300 experiments in hopes that learning more about the theory will increase understanding and reduce its impact. Good, Dweck, and Rattan (2008) cite that in education, stereo-type threat may cause students not to be fully engaged in learning opportunities and, consequently, limit their potential. Therefore, the long-term effects of stereotype threat impacts educational and social inequality (Good et al., 2008).

The results of the *Obama Effect* research show that before the Democratic Convention and in early October 2008, the race-based performance gap reflected Blacks performing lower than Whites (Marx et al., 2009). However, after President Obama's acceptance speech and after he wins the election, there was a change. The differences in scores among Blacks and Whites are statistically insignificant (Dillon, 2009; Marx et al., 2009). The more President Obama succeeded against the odds, the better the Black students perform even in the midst of stereotype threat manipulation (Marx et al., 2009).

Proponents of the study. Proponents of the *Obama Effect* study argued that President Obama as a Black role model can help Blacks overcome anxieties about racial stereotypes linked to academics and standardized testing (Rasheed, 2009). Ferguson, a Harvard professor who studies the factors that affect the achievement gap between White

and nonwhite students, says, "There is certainly a theoretical foundation and some empirical support for the proposition that President Obama's election could increase the sense of competence among African-Americans, and it could reduce the anxiety associated with taking difficult test questions" (Dillon, p. A15). Another testing expert states that the study is interesting and wonders about the long-term impact of an *Obama Effect.* Wagaman (2009) writes that implications of the study are vast: in essence, African American students perform better simply by having an African American role model demonstrating the importance of a good education. Most agree, replication of similar studies can help verify the finding, but the study starts a dialogue about strategies to help African American students become more successful in school.

Detractors of the study. Begley (2009) was originally one of the first to break the story about the potential of the *Obama Effect* study in late January of 2009. Noting that, it was too soon to assess whether President Barack Obama's effect on African Americans would extend beyond providing hope and inspiration. In May of 2009, Begley reported on a new unpublished *quasi*-replication of the *Obama Effect* study. The term *quasi* underscores the fact that *The Obama Effect* is about a phenomenon that occurred as Barack Obama became the first African American presumptive nominee for president from a major political party and when he subsequently became the first African American President.

The original study received mixed reviews from researchers. Some felt the study was intriguing and believed that President Obama can influence Americans, and that he has the potential to be a role model for African Americans (Dillon, 2009; Wagaman, 2009). Aronson, Cohen, McColskey, Montresse, Lewis, & Mooney (2009) cite that, most

likely, the theory of stereotype threat accounts for the race based performance gap of the original study. Other reviewers question sample, sampling, and other statistical data (Aronson et al, 2009; Rasheed, 2009). Marx et al. (2009) write that the participants are part of a pre-existing pool of American adults who agree to take part regularly in experiments presented via eLab, which is an online web-based research site by Vanderbilt University. The authors also note that no one participated in the study more than once. Begley contends that the reason the earlier study might have found an effect is the participants lack random assignment to a control group or a treatment group and only those interested in President Obama participated. Opponents of the study express a note of caution, in that the *Obama Effect* may only apply to a particular sub-population of African Americans, if at all. Still, practitioners recommend further research for information that is more conclusive in order to substantiate the claim that President Obama's election can cure all the ills of Black males.

The Plight of African American Males

For more than a generation, research documents the struggles of African American males in society and education (Bailey, 2001; Bass & Coleman, 1997; Chan, 2103; Lee, 1991; Young, Wright & Laster, 2005). The television and movie industry perpetuates negative stereotypes by portraying Black men, as usually dangerous men (pimps, thieves or gangsters) to be feared (Chan, 2013; Dhaliwal, 2009). According a Pew Center on the States' Public Safety Performance Project study (2008), one in every nine black males between the ages of 20 and 34 was in jail, compared with 1 in 30 among all American men in the same age group. Darensbourg and Perez (2010) believe that because African American males, being overrepresented in exclusionary discipline

practices (e.g. detention, out of school suspension, disciplinary alternative placements),

may contribute to their involvement in the criminal justice system as they enter

adolescence and on to adulthood. The researchers go on to report, "The connection of

exclusionary discipline with incarceration rates is termed the School to Prison Pipeline"

(Darensbourg & Perez, 2010, p. 197).

African American males connect to a negative schooling experience due to

various factors, but primarily, high suspension/expulsion rates (Darensbourg & Perez,

2010; Smith, 2005), overrepresentation for identification of special education services

(Conahan, Burggraf, Nelson, Bailey, & Ford, 2003, Harris, 2013; Thompson, 2014), and

high failure/dropout rates (Dianda, 2008; Noguera, 2003). Harper (2006) writes that more

than any other group in our society, Black males are perceived as lacking in intellectual

skills. Fifty-percent of all African American high school males withdraw and do not

graduate (Batten et al., 2010; Gewertz, 2007). A national report by The Council for the

Great City Schools best sums up the discussion about African American males with its

finding:

> The nation's young Black males are in a state of crisis. They do not have
>
> the same opportunities as their male or female counterparts across the
>
> country. Their infant mortality rates are higher, and their access to
>
> health care is more limited. They are more likely to live in single-parent
>
> homes and less likely to participate in early childcare programs. They
>
> are less likely to be raised in a household with a fully employed adult,
>
> and they are more likely to live in poverty. As adults, Black males are
>
> less likely than their peers to be employed. At almost every juncture,

the odds are stacked against these young men in ways that result in too

much unfulfilled potential and too many fractured lives. (Lewis, Simon,

Uzzell, Horwitz, & Casserly, 2010, p. iii)

Role Models

Archbishop Tutu writes in the foreword of *Reclaiming youth at-risk: Our hope for the future,* "Children from difficult circumstances need someone to throw them a lifeline, since it is very difficult to pull oneself up by one's own boot" (Brendto, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, (2002). Lockwood and Kunda's (1997) foundational research on role models defines positive role models as individuals who have achieved a high degree of success who can encourage others to pursue similar accomplishments. Past research finds that positive role models provide vivid examples of success motivated individuals (Cann, 2013; Lockwood, Jordan, & Kunda, 2002). There is concern, especially among educators, for role models. There is such a scarcity of positive constructive examples of academic excellence for young people to emulate (Garcia et al., 1995; Lines, 2001; Taylor, 1977). Deeming and Johnson (2009) cite, "Bandura's social learning theory to suggest that the effect of learning can be enhanced when observers believe that the person demonstrating the behavior is similar to themselves; a 'similar other'" (p. 204). Educators and policy makers hold hope that President Obama's example as a model student can inspire millions of American students (Dillon, 2009).

Marx et al. (2009) cite that past works demonstrate that role models may be capable of preventing the influence of stereotype threats when the role model is perceived as competent, available, and share the same gender or racial group. A discussion of role models who fit the previously mentioned characteristics gives credence to the impact of

The Obama Effect. The need for appropriate role models for children continues to be addressed by the federal government. On the 10th Anniversary of the Character Education Program, Secretary Paige (2003) said that he is concerned about the lack of positive role models in this culture of callousness. He declares that negative role models teach negative values and encourages positive role models to take center stage in education.

Although critics hold his Ivy League education as a point of contention suggesting that some black children cannot identify with President Obama (Bigg, 2008), supporters disagree and believe that his Harvard education demonstrates to inner-city youth that higher education is attainable for anyone. Reyes (2008) writes in an article entitled, "Barack Obama: The New Role Model for Black Children," that too many Blacks see sports and the entertainment business as the only way out of the inner-city, but they should consider President Obama as a worthy role model. An African American high school student from Corona, California, tells ABC News, "An African American like President Obama, he shows you can actually obtain an education, you can actually be smart and make a difference. President Obama is the perfect role model for all black men" (Gomstyn, 2008, para. 10).

African American Youth and the 2008 Presidential Election

For more than two hundred years, white men governed America and that was the status quo. For most Americans, the idea of an African American Democratic nominee for President of the United States was inconceivable. Therefore, the thought of an African American president probably never really occurred to the vast majority of citizens, especially African Americans. The election of Barack Obama as the first Black President is a phenomenon. A phenomenon is a once in a lifetime experience, an event, or a person

that is out of the ordinary or truly extraordinary. America changed because of the 2008 Presidential Election.

African American children across the country were paying more attention to presidential politics in 2008, even if they were not old enough to vote because they saw a reflection of themselves in a candidate (Pitts 2008, 2009). Kirby and Kawashima-Ginsberg (2009) report that approximately 22.4 million American youth (ages 18 to 29) voted in the presidential election, which represents an increase of more than two million votes from 2004 and more than 6.5 million votes from 2000, making it one of the highest voter turnout in recorded history. Morgenstern (2008) records it to be the second largest youth voter turnout in American history. Sujatha Jahagirdir, program director of the Student Public Interest Research Groups' New Voters Project, declares that many young voters silenced the naysayers by voting in record numbers (Lipka &Wiedeman, 2008). She goes on to say, "Young people do vote, they do matter, and when you pay attention to them, they pay attention to you" (Lipka &Wiedeman, 2008, para. 3).

Godsay, Nover, and Kirby (2010) conclude that the 2008 Presidential Election had the highest turnout rate ever observed for any racial or ethnic group of young Americans since 1972. About 13 percent of the 131 million votes were from African Americans, or 17 million. Keeter, Horowitz, and Tyson (2008) in a Pew Research study find that Blacks matched Whites in voting rates on November 4, 2008. Sixty-five percent of Blacks went to the polls in the 2008 Presidential Election, which nearly matched the less than 66% voting rate for Whites (Keeter, Horowitz, & Tyson, 2008; Lopez & Taylor, 2009). Kirby and Kawashima-Ginsberg (2009) also found that fifty-eight percent of African American youth voted on Election Day 2008. Data shows that there was

something very different about the 2008 Presidential Election. The youth population, as a whole, and African Americans more specifically, made their voices heard (Godsay, 2008; Kirby & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2009). Perhaps that difference was Senator Barack Obama, but some discuss the feeling of hope and change embodied in the candidate is what moved a country to change (Pitts, 2009; Von Drehle, 2008). *No More Excuses* (2009) gives the clarion call to African American youth:

> But let us be clear. The presidential inauguration of Obama is not about one world changing moment. For African Americans, this election marks the birth of a new movement, one with a simple defining creed: *No more excuses.* To our young black men, too many of who have been allowed to embrace the sin of low expectation: *No more excuses…* The election of Obama to the Oval Office proves once and for all that we can achieve anything as African Americans. The question is no longer whether anything is possible, the question is whether we are committed to doing what needs to be done. No one is saying it will be easy—after all, racism is still alive, even if it's been dealt a serious setback by the majority of American votes—but we can no longer accept that it cannot be done. Yes, the ceilings on our potential still exist, but we now know beyond a shadow of a doubt that they are not impermeable. The rallying cry of the Obama campaign was not "Yes He Can" but "Yes We Can." Now that we have, now that the impossible has proven possible after all, there is no turning back. *There are no more excuses.* (Graves, 2009, para. 7, 9-10)

This historic election changed the way that the world views America, as evidenced by the global publicity of the 2008 Presidential Election. Many African American children, specifically males, lack role models of this stature. President Obama has proven that a Black person can achieve success in any arena, and that a person of color can shatter the ceiling (Reyes, 2008; Stout & Le, 2012). For African Americans, education is the principal passport to personal development and social mobility (Holliday, 1984; Hout, 2012; Matthew, 2011). The American Dream is still alive, but parents and educators should stress to children that a quality education is one of the keys to bringing their dream to fruition. Children need to know that there are no shortcuts to success, and that it takes hard and smart work. Pitts (2008) writes that it has often been said that, in America, the land of opportunity, any child could grow up to be president. Now, maybe for the first time, Black children have reason to believe that is true. Stout and Le (2012) find, "Blacks are more optimistic about the American Dream after Obama's election to the White House despite their worsening economic outlook" (p. 1340). This research explored how African American recent high school graduates viewed and heeded the clarion call. "The narrative of a poor African American child being raised by a single mother, working his way through college and law school, and ultimately being elected to the highest office in the United States may serve to change Black's opinions about the attainability of the American Dream," writes Stout and Le (2012, p. 1339). In an interview with Pitts (2009), another African American male student at Southwest Atlanta Christian Academy, said, "It helps to see that it's okay to be the best. As Black males, we can look at that and say, 'you know what? We can strive for excellence.' Because it says that you can do it no matter what the odds are against you, you can do it."

Statement of the Problem

Research concludes that from an early age, African American males face hurdles that decrease their likelihood to succeed in academia. Success in the academic arena is mainly measured by academic achievement and performance on high stakes tests. Even with a decade of No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) implementation, the preponderance of research shows that African American male students are frequently at the lower end of the success ladder, at the top of the school's discipline ladder, and is more likely assigned to alternative educational programs and services.

In an era of accountability that forces schools to be responsive to various groups and subgroups, educational leaders can no longer seek interventions that are advantageous for the masses. While the plight of African American males in the educational setting is well-documented, including several paramount mentoring studies with African American males from middle to high school that show some immediate success for its participants, there is limited research that provides interventions or strategies with long term success. In wondering if the election of President Barack Obama, as the first Black President of the United States, makes a difference to African American males, this study focused on African American recent high school male graduates and how they view themselves and their potential after the election of President Obama.

Research Question

Social scientists and citizens agree that the election of the first African American president is an example of a defining moment in our nation's history. Marx et al. (2009) write that although Obama's influence is undoubtedly clear, it remains to be seen whether

the *Obama Effect* can move toward positive outcomes for African Americans. This study explored the effect of Barack Obama's election on African American high school males. Analyzing how their views of the world changed as a result of the election of the first African American President of the United States may prove beneficial for educators. Therefore, the research question that guided this study was this: What effect has the election of Barack Obama to the Presidency of the United States of America had on African American high school males?

Significance of the Study

President Obama as an example for African American children may impact how children view themselves and their opportunities for success in life. This study is especially important for African American males because President Obama provides an in-group, same gender example for African American males, who traditionally are far below other racial groups in performance on standardized tests, graduation from high school, and admittance to post-secondary opportunities. Research shows that African American male students who interact with African American role models have a better chance for success.

This study may help provide an understanding of how these African American recent high school male graduates think about education and their chances for success. The more that educators know about this important subgroup, who are at a pivotal transitional point in their lives, the better schools can provide appropriate resources and enable the leaders to improve motivational efforts.

It is the duty of professional school counselors to provide real world models and examples for children to identify with, so that they can strive to fulfill their greatest

potential. The significance of the phenomenon provides credible proof that African

American males truly can grow up to be President or anything they desire to become. It is

important to use this opportunity to provide culture-specific counseling activities for

these students as a way of elevating their self-esteem and self-competence. Once they

change their thinking about who can be successful, their belief may change. President

Barack Obama is a visible, salient example of what can be for these African American

high school males.

<div align="center">**Procedures**</div>

Research Design

To explore the effect of President Barack Obama's election on the lives and

outlook of African American high school males, a qualitative research method was

employed. Merriam (2002) writes that qualitative researchers are interested in learning

how individual's experience and interact with their social world and the meaning it has

for them. Glesne (2006) reports that the qualitative researchers study things in their

natural setting and seek to understand and to interpret the meaning it held for the person.

The intent of qualitative research is not to generalize the information, but to illuminate

the specifics (Creswell, 1998).

A phenomenological design was utilized and focused on describing the "essence"

of the phenomenon—*the election of President Barack Obama*—from the perspectives of

African American high school senior males. In phenomenology, the researcher seeks to

establish the meaning of the phenomenon from the views of the participants (Creswell,

2009). Through a semi-structured interview process, the researcher gained information

from the students on how they saw their lives as a result of the election of an African

American president.

Sample and Sampling

African American high school recent male graduates from a school district in

southeast Georgia served as the participants for this research. Both convenient and

purposive sampling was used to collect information from the participants. Johnson and

Christensen (2008) state that convenience samples include subjects who are available and

volunteer to participate in the study. Purposive sampling allows the researcher to select

participants that best represent the population to be studied (Bernard, 2013; deVaus,

2002). The high school population for this medium-sized district was approximately

3300 students. African American high school students for the district accounted for 1100

students or about 34% percent of the total student population. There were about 115

Black senior males, which represented about 3.5% of total student population and about

10.5% of the African American student count (School Enrollment Report as of April 24,

2014). A sampling of eight to ten African American senior males was used to provide

their thoughts about the election of the first Black president. Researchers recommend that

the sample size for a phenomenological study should range from six (Morse, 1994) to no

more 10 participants (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007; Creswell, 1998).

Each high school registrar provided a list of African American senior males from

their respective schools. The researcher met with the senior counselor from each high

school to discuss the purpose of the study. Eighty-eight students were recommended as

possible participants. A criterion for participation was that the student had the ability to

verbalize, illustrate, or sign responses in a face-to-face interview. Since more than ten

students were eligible to participate in the study, each eligible student's name was placed in a basket. The researcher drew out twenty-two names of students who were eligible to participate. The researcher sent letters to the students' residences and invited them to participate in a research study about President Obama. The students and parents or guardians signed and returned the consent forms in the self-addressed stamped envelope. The researcher interviewed eight African American males, who had recently graduated from high school.

Instrumentation

Merriam (2002) states that the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis in qualitative studies. The researcher was able to clarify and summarize the information immediately. Based on a thorough review of the literature, interview questions were created by the researcher that guided the face-to-face interviews. The interview protocol included a heading, instructions for the interviewer to follow standardization, four questions with probes from the research plan including an icebreaker, and another 4 to 5 questions with probes for further expounding by the participants (Creswell, 2009). Before using the protocol, the researcher's dissertation committee reviewed the questions in an effort to establish content validity.

Data Collection

The researcher was granted initial permission from the superintendent of the selected school district to conduct research after approval from Georgia Southern University was received. Forms necessary for Institutional Review Board (IRB) were submitted to the researcher's supervising committee for accuracy, and then submitted to the IRB for approval. After IRB approval, students were contacted about the study from

names collected from the high school registrars and recommended by their senior

counselor. With returned parental consent forms to the interviewer, the students were

scheduled for interviews. On the day of the interview, the researcher reviewed the

university's assent policy with the participants. Each student signed a letter of assent to

participate in the study. Follow-up contacts were made to students and parents until 8

participants were secured for the study.

In addition to use of the interview protocol, the researcher took field notes and the

interviews were digitally recorded. The interviews were conducted over a two week

period, and individual interviews were scheduled for 30 to 45 minutes at the student's

school, home, or agreed upon location.

Data Analysis

Each student selected a pseudo name that was used for anonymity. A professional

transcriber transcribed the audio files verbatim; the transcriber signed a third-party

confidentiality agreement. The initial data was organized and analyzed for emerging

themes that addressed the study's purpose. More in-depth analysis occurred at the

completion of all interviews to extrapolate themes and categories that was used to

interpret and analyze the data. Data is being stored in a locked drawer in the researcher's

office for three years after the completion of the research. After that time, the data will be

destroyed.

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Limitations/Delimitations

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Limitations

Since the election of Barack Obama as the first African American President of the

United States is so recent, very little empirical research exists and limits the study. It is an

assumption that high school seniors will be able to act as autonomous and reliable research participants. Also, phenomenological research does not lend itself to generalization of its findings to the masses. This researcher does not suggest that eight African American recent high school graduates from southeast Georgia should be the voice of African American males around the world; nevertheless, they can speak to the phenomenon as it relates to their lived experiences.

Delimitations

The historical significance of the 2008 Presidential Election should not be taken for granted, but the focus of this study explored the effect of the election on African American high school males. These students have lived with Barack Obama for the past six to eight years as senator, nominee, and the first Black President of the United States. These participants are at a transitional point in their lives—from high school to adulthood—they are the ideal participants.

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Summary

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Few could have imagined that after watching a relatively unknown, junior Senator from Illinois deliver a ten-minute address at the 2004 Democratic Convention that four years later Barack H. Obama would become the first African American President of the United States of America. Voters, especially young voters, believed that President Obama could restore the American Dream (Von Drehle, 2008; Walters, 2008). He embodied a symbol of change, hope and inspiration for Americans. Marx et al.'s (2009) quantitative study capitalized on Obama's role model status as a way to provide the first real world documentation of how specific markers of President Obama's success can positively influence African Americans academic performance, using the term an *Obama Effect.*

Critics refuted the *Obama Effect* and a replication of the study found no effect (Aronson et al., 2009; Begley, 2009).

In spite of these studies, educators, community activists, and students are hopeful that President Obama would provide the needed inspiration for Black youths (Gomstyn, 2008; Pitts, 2008; Reyes, 2008). Black males continue to perform lower than any other group in school (Schott Foundation, 2008). Some schools saw an increase in student's performance as President Obama became a role model for African Americans males (Pitts). Barack Obama—his candidacy, nomination and election—was called a phenomenon (Walter, 2008). The present research sought not to quantify the *Obama Effect,* but through a phenomenological study explored the impact of the election of President Barack Obama on the lives of African American high school males. The participants were interviewed and their transcribed responses were analyzed for categories and themes. Findings were provided to administrators and counselors to develop appropriate strategies and interventions for African American high school males.

Definition of Terms

Achievement gap. An achievement gap refers to the observed difference on educational measures between the performance of subgroups of students and their peers. Subgroups for accountability include students with disabilities, English Language Learners, socio-economic status, and racial/ethnic destinations (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

African American or Black. It includes people who indicate their race as Black, African American, or Negro (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census of Population, Public

Law 94-171b, Redistricting Data File. African-American used interchangeably with the term *Black* describes Black Americans of African heritage

*American Dream***.** It embodies the ideals of freedom, equality, and opportunity traditionally held to be available to every American according to ability or achievement (Adams, 1931; as cited by The Center for the New American Dream, 2010). A newer definition emphasizes community, ecological sustainability, and a celebration of non-material values, while upholding the spirit of the traditional American dream of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness *(*Hanson & Zogby, 2010).

College and Career Performance Readiness Index (CCRPI). CCRPI is a comprehensive school improvement, accountability, and communication platform for all educational stakeholders that will promote college and career readiness for all Georgia public school students (Georgia Department of Education, 2013).

Role models. They can be defined simply as a person who is respected, followed, and copied by another person who can encourage others to pursue similar accomplishments (Briecheno & Thornton, 2007).

Mentoring. Mentoring is defined as the positive relationship with a non-parental adult and a young person. (Gordon, Iwamoto, Ward, Potts, & Boyd, 2009). Struchen and Porta (1997) go onto define a mentor as an older, more-experienced person who seeks to further the development of character and competence in a younger person.

Stereotype Threat. The term refers to being at risk of confirming, as self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one's group when race is emphasized in the task (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

White/ Caucasian. It is a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa. It includes people who indicate their race as "White" or report entries such as Irish, German, Italian, Lebanese, Near Easterner, Arab, or Polish (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census of Population, Public Law 94-171. Redistricting File Data).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

As Georgia prepares to meet standards of its new accountability measure, the College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI; Georgia Department of Education, 2013), strategies and interventions are needed to improve the performance of African American male students. "CCRPI is a comprehensive school improvement, accountability, and communication platform for all educational stakeholders that will promote college and career readiness for all Georgia public school students" (Georgia Department of Education website: Accountability, 2013). The literature is sated with the bleak conditions and experiences of Black males in education (Howard, Flennaugh & Terry, 2012; Noguera, 1996; Noguera, 2003; Richardson, 1992; Rogers, 2013). However, there is little empirical research on the impact of President Barack Obama as a role model of success for African American high school males. Chapter II begins with an analysis of the research from Vanderbilt University that found an *Obama Effect*. It continues with a review of the relevant literature on the plight of African American males in the educational system and explores prior research designed to help this group. As then Senator Barack Obama became the presumptive Democratic nominee for President, many lauded him as a role model for America's youth. Further examination of President Obama's election, as the first African American President of the United States of America, helps to understand why educators and psychologists proclaimed that Obama could serve as a role model for Black males and the importance of role models in general.

The Obama Effect

The presence of Senator Barak Obama in the 2008 Presidential Election caused many to deem him as a positive model for youth, Black youth, and especially Black males. Some compare his influence to that of rock star status. The phenomenon of having an African American male candidate as a nominee for president was unheard of and made people take notice, especially in the educational arena (Poussaint, 2008). Pitts (2008) proclaims, "African American children across the country were paying more attention to presidential politics. For the first time, they could see themselves in a candidate" (CBSNews.com: picture caption). Pitts goes on to say that for young people the presence of Senator Barack Obama on the national stage is not about him being a politician, but it is about the hope and possibilities that he represents as an African American man. It is this impact on African Americans that researchers seek to qualify and quantify as an *Obama Effect*.

Marx, Ko, and Friedman (2009) were the first to explore this notion of Senator Obama as role model beyond simply inspiring hope and determined that there was an *Obama Effect.* Marx et al. (2009) question whether the *Obama Effect* could "create more objective, positive outcomes for Black Americans in domains where they have often contended with negative racial stereotypes" (p. 953). The study (2009) was conducted over a three month period where a verbal ability examination was given to four separate, statistically matched groups of Black and White Americans at four specific testing points. The study covers specific times during the 2008 Presidential Election. Times when Candidate Obama was not in the forefront, and times when Senator Obama's stereotype-defying accomplishments were front and center in the national media; for example, when

Illinois Junior Senator Barack Obama was named the first Black presidential candidate from a major political party. African American participants scored equal to their White counterparts, and the previous achievement gap that was shown in the first administration was no longer significant. Marx et al. (2009) conclude that Candidate Obama was a competent, in-group and same gender model, and his accomplishments were well publicized. As a result, President Obama is a great role model for African Americans, especially for troubled, unsuccessful Black males.

In an article entitled, "No O Effect," Begley (2009) comments on a research study that tests the *Obama Effect* theory. In the study, the researchers (Aronson, Jannone, McGlone, & Johnson-Campbell, 2009) had 119 undergraduates take a 24-question verbal section of the Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT). Informed that the test measures ability and predicts whether they will get into medical school, the students participated in a group to think about Obama, a group to think about McCain, or a control group, who thought about neither candidate. The result was that when prompted to think about Obama before they took the MCAT's verbal test, this group of Black students' scores did not improve relative to White students' compared to when they were not prompted (Aronson et al., 2009). In every group in the experiment, Whites performed significantly better than African-American students. The website, ReducingStereotype-Threat.org (2009), suggests that the findings of the Aronson et al. (2009) study is not similar to the Marx et al. (2009) study because data for the second study was collected at times when President Obama's accomplishments were not in the forefront. Begley (2009) believes that role models can close the gap caused by stereotypes, but the

individual must be able to identify with the role model on different levels. Plans are in the works to replicate this study as well.

Since these two main studies about the impact of an Obama Effect, other researchers examines, tests, or infers an *Obama Effect*. Ong, Burrow, and Fuller-Rowell (2012) finds that "writing about President Obama increases positive emotions, which in turn increases the likelihood that people would think in terms of more inclusive super-ordinate categories (e.g., *we* and *us* rather than *they* and *them*)" (p. 427). Ong, Burrow, and Rowell-Fuller's findings support previous work by Dasgupta and Greenwald (2001) that suggest exposure to positive, African American role models reduce stereotyping and racial bias. Smith (2011) with the use of videos reports that low achieving students exposed to President Obama perform better than low performers who were exposed to former President Bush, in both the pilot and the research studies. Goldman (2012) concludes that massive media exposure to President Obama and his family contradicts negative stereotypes associating blacks with laziness, crime, and fatherless families and lead to a decline in racial prejudice in the 2008 Presidential Election.

A research study on the perception of Blacks on education and social mobility finds that the 5 adult and 5 student participants overall did not change their perception of life and schooling as a result of the election of a Black president, but President Obama's presence creates a deeper sense of hope for their future and a motivation to put more effort into whatever each individual happens to do (Young, 2010). Plant et al. (2009) determines, "Obama's meteoric rise to fame and success provided a naturally occurring sequence of events whereby a counter-stereotypic Black individual's rise to prominence seems to have influenced the underlying associations at least some people carried around

in their minds about Black people" (p. 963). Columb and Plant (2011) test Dasgupta and Greenwald's findings (2001) by evaluating if non-Black participants who were exposed to President Barack Obama as a positive Black representation could reduce the implicit racial prejudice against Blacks. They (2011) once again find an *Obama Effect.* Ong, Burrow, and Fuller-Rowell (2012) suggest that, in part, their research give validity to the need for more role model research with African Americans.

The Black Male Crisis

One of the most consistent findings in educational research is the underachievement of African American males at all levels (i.e., elementary, secondary, and postsecondary) of the educational pipeline (Mandura, 2006; Jordan & Cooper, 2003; Garibaldi, 1992). The dilemma of Black males in America has been termed the *Black Male Crisis* (Scott, 2006). The data for failure in the African American group holds true for middle and high school Black males (Whiting, 2006). Research shows that academic problems hindering the educational progress of Black males begin early in their school career and maintains its hold on these students ability to complete high school (Palmer & Wilson, 2009). Howard, Flennaugh, and Terry (2012) proclaim, "The bad boy image of Black males occurs early and can interfere with any efforts for normative social and psychological development" (p. 90). Holcomb-McCoy (2011) suggests that the transition from middle school to high school is not always smooth. Grant and Dieker (2011) state that 13 to 18 year old Black males rank near the top of every indicator of school failure, including dropout rates (Dianda, 2008; Irving & Hudley, 2008; Noguera, 2003), absenteeism (Finn & Servoss, 2013), suspension and expulsion (Darensburg, Perez, & Blake, 2010; Smith, 2005), and low achievement scores (Glassman & Roelle, 2007).

Harvey (2008) purports, "Black males with lower educational attainment were predisposed to inferior employment prospects, low wages, and poor health and were more likely to be involved with criminal justice system" (p. 139).

When examining causes for African American school failure, there are many. Mandara (2006) posits that the causes include low teacher expectations, tracking into low ability classes, underperforming schools with undereducated teachers, and under-achieving peer groups. Other research finds that Black males are disproportionately disciplined (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Gregory, Russell, & Noguera,2010), underrepresented in gifted classes and advanced placement classes (Whiting, 2009), overrepresented in special education services (Bush-Daniels, 2008; Conahan, Burggraf, Nelson, Bailey, & Ford, 2003; Dukes, 2008; Palmer,2010), possessed higher rates of illiteracy, and that teachers and counselors are far more likely to impose negative expectations upon Black males as it relates to college attendance than their White counterparts (Palmer, Davis, and Hilton, 2009). McMillan (2004) suggests that African American students are susceptible to academic disengagement. They reject school as a place to develop their sense of identity, particularly self-worth and self-efficacy (Whiting, 2004). Ford (1996) reports that these students learn underachievement, and Ogbu (2005) notes that they devalue school and academics. Aronson and Steele (2005) argue that these students feel stereotyped and alienated, and the result becomes them disengaging from school. Irving and Hudley (2008) posit, "As mistrust increases for African American males, their academic outcome expectations decrease, and as their mistrust increases, oppositional cultural attitudes also increase" (p. 677). Noguera (2003) declares that

"consistently schools that serve Black males fail to support, protect, and nurture them" (p. 435).

Further research points to factors outside of school which may influence the success of young African American males. One such influence is the perpetuation of negative stereotypes of African American males in the media. There are very few opportunities for young developing Black males to see African American males as stable, productive men. Batten et al. (2010) purports that media characterizations of Black men has a detrimental effect on society's perceptions of this group as well as their own sense of self. In literature and film, Noguera (2008) notes that Black men are characterized very negatively as violent dregs of society to be feared because of their uncontrolled and unrefined masculinity. Today's characterizations are dichotomous. Some Black males are seen as great athletes, musicians, or a celebrities, which may or may not be a good thing. Others are seen as irresponsible fathers, drug dealers, and criminals (Noguera, 2008). Research suggests that African American male students who lack confidence in school become unmotivated and unengaged, and they discover their identities, their self-efficacy, and their self-esteem in other areas like sports and entertainment (Whiting, 2006; 2009).

One may question why these students do not look homeward for guidance. Family structure and home life play an important role in the success or failure of African American males (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013). Innis (2013) finds in a 2011 report from the National Fatherhood Initiative that approximately 24.7 million children, the equivalent of 33% of all children living in the United States, reside in homes without their biological father. Of these 24.7 million, 20.3 million reside in homes without any

male figures—biological, adoptive, or step—in the home at all. On a recent episode about *Children from Fatherless Homes* on the OWN Television Network (2014), the host cites the following statistics about children who come from fatherless homes are:

Five (5) times more likely to commit suicide;

Thirty-two (32) times more likely to run away;

Twenty (20) times more likely to have a behavioral disorder;

Fourteen (14) times more likely to become sexually aggressive or commit rape; and

Ten (10) times more likely to engage in drug abuse.

U.S. Census Bureau (2012) reports that approximately 50 percent of Black children in the United States live in households without a father figure. Many social misfortunes (crime, premature sexual involvement, poor educational achievement, and poverty) associated with the downfall of Black males are related to the absent father (Cartwright and Henriksen, 2010). America's Dad, Bill Cosby, chastises Black males for their current plight, and he goes on to say in his speech during the commemoration of the 50th year of the *Brown v. Board* decision that Black males, especially lower class Black males, are "not holding up their end in this deal" (Cosby & Poussaint, 2007). Oware (2011) cites an excerpt from then Senator Barack Obama's 2008 Father's Day speech in a Chicago church that demonstrates that other prominent African American males are in agreement with Cosby's opinion. Obama says:

But if we are honest with ourselves, we'll admit that too many fathers are also missing—missing from too many lives and too many homes. They have abandoned their responsibilities, acting like boys instead of men.

And the foundations of our families are weaker because of it. You and I know how true this is in the African-American community…We need fathers to realize that responsibility does not end at conception. We need them to realize that what makes you a man is not the ability to have a child—it's the courage to raise one (Obama Speech 2008).

Grantham and Henfield (2011) agrees with previous research by stating, "Father involvement in schooling decreases a child's likelihood of academic failure, behavior and psychological problems, and economic despair in adulthood" (p. 47). In his article, *Decent Daddy, Imperfect Daddy: Black Male Rap Artists' Views of Fatherhood and the Family,* Oware (2011) writes that although rappers and musical artists are often characterized by society as examples of Black fathers who shirk their fatherly duties, their lyrics express mixed feelings about their own father, but they embrace fatherhood with their children, even in the case where there is a fractured relationship with the birth mother. Research suggests that providing African American males with positive models (fathers or mentors) help to boost their self-esteem, and they take ownership in their learning because they have someone whom they believe believes in them ("Black Boys and Mental Health," 2013).

There is more than twenty years of research which chronicles the struggle of the Black male from early childhood through adulthood (Barton & Coley, 2009; Bass & Coleman, 1997; Bush-Daniels, 2008; Conahan, Burggraf, Nelson, Bailey, & Ford, 2003; Darensburg, Perez, & Blake, 2010; Dukes, 2008; Garibaldi, 1992; Heckman & LaFontaine, 2007; Mauer, 1999; Palmer, Davis, & Hilton, 2009; Rogers, 2013). Black males still perform at the lower levels of achievement. Roderick (2003) believes that for

the African American male too often the high school years are a time of decline in student motivation and engagement. A few leave school as graduates but a greater number drop-out of school. There are very few models in schools for these students to positively identify with (Shure, 2001), and their home life presents even fewer models (DeBell, 2008). Synder, McLaughlin, and Findeis (2006) find that approximately 25% of all children are raised in homes led primarily by mothers and grandmothers. Connor and White (2005) conclude that there is little doubt that too many Black children reside in single-parent, low-income homes and have limited meaningful interactions and relationships with men as fathers. Connor and White's research also suggest that when the father or a male role model is in the picture, Black children have a greater chance for success.

Role Models

Nolte (1972) writes about how the experiences that children live shape their lives. The poem, *Children Learn What They Live,* goes like this:

> If children live with criticism, they learn to condemn.
>
> If children live with hostility, they learn to fight.
>
> If children live with fear, they learn to be apprehensive.
>
> If children live with pity, they learn to feel sorry for themselves.
>
> If children live with ridicule, they learn to feel shy.
>
> If children live with jealousy, they learn to feel envy.
>
> If children live with shame, they learn to feel guilty.
>
> If children live with encouragement, they learn confidence.
>
> If children live with tolerance, they learn patience.
>
> If children live with praise, they learn appreciation.
>
> If children live with acceptance, they learn to love.

If children live with approval, they learn to like themselves.

If children live with recognition, they learn it is good to have a goal.

If children live with sharing, they learn generosity.

If children live with honesty, they learn truthfulness.

If children live with fairness, they learn justice.

If children live with kindness and consideration, they learn respect.

If children live with security, they learn to have faith in themselves and

in those about them.

If children live with friendliness, they learn the world is a nice place in

which to live.

The author (1972) begins by expressing that when children grow up without good examples and models they are being set on a negative, unproductive course. In the latter verses, the writer contrasts the different productive developments that can occur in the lives of children when they are exposed to favorable character traits through positive models and experiences. Bandura (1977) suggests that anyone an individual comes into contact with rather, directly or indirectly, impacts the person's behaviors, attitudes, and goals. Discussions of role models tend to emphasize the lifting up of one who possess admiral, positive qualities that another could emulate. Role models are used to reinforce desired behaviors (Lockwood & Kunda, 1999). Positive exemplars are individuals who achieve great success sometimes in the midst of great odds, or someone who does something for the good of mankind.

Negative models can be seen through two different lenses. On the one hand, negative role models can send the message "to stay away" from negative behaviors (Lockwood, 2002; Lockwood, Jordan, & Kunda, 2002). In the late 1970's, the Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention instituted a crime prevention

program, *Scared Straight*, to deter juveniles from continuing a life of crime (Royster, 2012). Juveniles are taken to prisons, where they are confronted by adult offenders. The premise behind the program is that once youth see the punishment and consequences of their choices, they would be persuaded to change their illegal behaviors (Petrosino, Turpin-Petrosino, & Buehler, 2004). Although research shows these types of role models and programs to be ineffective in the long run, the programs are still used (Petrosino, Turpin-Petrosino, Hollis-Peel, & Lavenberg, 2013). Now, with the advent of reality television, these tactics are more popular for their shock value and a part of the weekly line-up on Arts and Entertainment cable television ("Beyond Scared Straight," n.d.).

Another side of negative models is that there are role models who are popular and well-liked, but their character and actions are not worth imitating. Some celebrities often fall into this group, like Charlie Sheen, Dennis Rodman, and Lindsay Lohan. They are talented in their craft, but their personal drama often takes center stage. Lawler (2010) quips, "Being a celebrity isn't necessarily connected to an extraordinary display of virtue or excellence in accomplishment. Reality shows have connected celebrity to quite mundane accomplishments—like having lots of kids or losing lots of weight" (p. 420) or even living a polygamist life style.

When access to positive role models are not available to students, many schools partner with community organizations for mentors as role models and mentoring programs as an intervention to close the achievement gap and to improve the graduation rate (Struchen, & Porta, 1997). Similar to role models and often used interchangeably, mentors are usually older, more experienced adults, who seek to further the development of character and competence in a younger person (Struchen & Porta, 1997). Mentoring

dates back to the biblical days when Apostle Paul wrote letters to his "son in the Lord," Timothy, to encourage him to be diligent and strong in the faith.

Several landmark community role model and mentoring programs are in operation to address the poor academic performance and improve socialization skills of youth. Programs like Boys Scouts of America, Girl Scouts of America, and Big Brothers/Big Sisters have introduced caring role models into the lives of children for more than a hundred years, respectively. Perhaps the most notable mentoring organization is the *Boys and Girls Club of America*, which as of 2014 has a 154 year history of providing positive alternatives to boys and girls on the streets and promoting character development ("Boys & Girls Clubs of America," n.d., para. 1 & 7). The mission of the Boys & Girls Clubs is "to enable all young people, especially those who need us most, to reach their full potential as productive, caring, responsible citizens" ("Boys & Girls Clubs," n.d., [mission statement]). Relevant to this study is the fact that one of its core beliefs is for these students to have "on-going relationships with caring, adult professionals" (para. 2 [core beliefs]).

Another well-known mentoring organization is Big Brothers Big Sisters. "As the nation's largest donor and volunteer supported mentoring network, Big Brothers Big Sisters' mission is to provide children facing adversity with strong and enduring, professionally supported one-to-one relationships that change their lives for the better, forever" ("Big Brother Big Sisters", n. d., para.1). Big Brother Big Sister is committed to the children in the program "achieving measurable outcomes, such as higher aspirations; greater confidence and better relationships; educational success; and avoidance of delinquency and other risky behaviors" ("Big Brother Big Sister," para. 2).

These mentoring programs and more like them try to provide resources and services to underserved youth. Most children served by Big Brothers Big Sisters are from single-parent and low-income families or households where a parent is incarcerated ("Big Brother Big Sister"). Some programs operate during the school day, immediately after school, or on weekends. Some of the other mentoring programs are sponsored by schools, local churches, and other community organizations (Davis, 2009). School based mentoring programs account for seventy percent (70%) of mentoring programs. These programs are created for the express purpose of helping remove barriers to education for children and to provide role models who can inspire them toward improving their station in life (Davis, 2009).

Role models for African American males

In the wake of the Trayvon Martin verdict, President Obama spoke about the many painful encounters with racism that African American men and boys endure almost daily and even shared some of his own personal, negative experiences of being a Black man in America (Maxwell, 2013). His remarks should start new conversations about what school and educators can do to support African American youth. President Obama questioned,

> We need to spend some time in thinking about how do we bolster and reinforce our African-American boys. There are a lot of kids out there who need help who are getting a lot of negative reinforcement. And is there more that we can do to give them the sense that their country cares about them and values them and is willing to invest in them? (Maxwell, 2013, p. 7).

Gladding and Villalba (2014) believe that when role models are positive, appropriate, and present, boys become productive citizens. For many Black males, it is difficult to imitate the men in their lives when 69% of Black students in kindergarten through 12th grade live in fatherless homes (DeBell, 2008). In 1950, only six percent of Black children lived in homes with a single mother and only 24% in 1994 (Fatherless Homes, 1995). Weaver (2012) cites facts from the National Fatherhood Initiative report that finds, "Children who live absent from their biological fathers are, on average, at least 2-3 times more likely to be poor, to use drugs, to experience educational, health, emotional and behavioral problems, to be victims of child abuse, and to engage in criminal behavior than their peers who live with their married, biological (or adoptive) parents" (p. 298).

When young Black males enter the educational system, in-group role models are still missing. Although African American students spend a large portion of their day at school, Irvine (2003) reports that more than 44% of the K-12 schools in America do not have teachers of color employed. Some decry that as the nation's student body grows more diverse, the teaching force becomes even less diverse (Ingersoll & May, 2011). The research is clear that having more Black teachers in the teaching force could potentially improve a wide range of situations and needs of Black students (Milner, 2006). Pang and Gibson (2001) maintain, "Black educators are far more than physical role models, and they bring diverse family histories, value orientations, and experiences to students in the classroom, attributes often not found in textbooks or viewpoints often omitted" (p. 260-61). Role models are often professionals who provide visual examples of what Black children can become (Milner, 2006).

Boys also model after figures they see in the media (Gladding & Villalba, 2014). Sports figures are often at the top of the list of heroes, idols, and role models for African American males and are the most visible role models for some adolescents. They represent for young children, especially poor African American children without other outlets, someone and something to idealize and aspire toward with the thought of making a better life for themselves and their families ("Not a Role Model", 2010). Holcomb-McCoy (2011) cites a national study that reports 10 year-old Black males choose athletes or sports figures 85% of the time as a role model; while 98% of the 18 year-old Blacks also choose this group.

Charles Barkley, former NBA superstar, caused much controversy when he shot a 1993 Nike commercial and proclaimed, "I am not a role model… I'm not paid to be a role model… I'm paid to wreak havoc on the basketball court… Parents should be role models… Just because I dunk a basketball doesn't mean I should raise your kids" (DaniBoxx, 2009). Advertisers and professional sports organizations spend millions of dollars each year to have athletes present their product or sport; thus supporting the theory that athletes are models (May, 2009). The trouble is "like it or not, they have a power of influence on worshipful young fans multiplied by the huge factor of television-perhaps even more so among the minority poor, who have few other avatars of success to excite their hopes" ("Not a Role Model," 2010, para. 5). Burton, a Northwestern University psychiatrist who specializes in treating athletes, believes, "Kids need to have someone they can idealize in order to aspire to become better themselves. Without that, there is not much hope for them"("Not a Role Model," 2010, para. 5).

Mainstream America through the Boys and Girls Club, Boys and Girls Scouts of America, Big Brother Big Sisters and other groups provides role model and mentoring programs to serve all who would avail themselves. While many African American students participate in these organizations, the need for gender specific, in-group positive role models are still needed (Kafele, 2012). In his article, *Empowering Young Black Males,* Kafele proclaims that in order to excel in school, Black male students need role models and dreams. He goes on to say,

> Who is going to provide my black male students with the proper male
> guidance, direction, leadership, and structure that they desperately need? I
> wanted my black male students to see adult males who were striving to
> fulfill their own potential and who were also committed to the growth and
> development of the younger generation (p. 68).

Because of the need, Kafele (2012) developed a manhood training program in his high school for male students. The program gave the Black males a strong sense of purpose for achieving in school (Kafele, 2012).

As necessity is the mother of invention, like Kafele, many community groups and Black educators create role model and mentoring programs to provide relevant, positive male role models to this group whom some have termed as an endangered species (Gibb, 1988; Jackson & Moore, 2006) and at-risk (Howerton, Enger, & Cobb, 1994; Oliver-Longworth, 2013). One national group is Mentoring Brothers in Action. The group is comprised of the three largest African American fraternities: Alpha Phi Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, and Omega Psi Phi. Mentoring Brothers in Action has partnered with Big Brothers Big Sisters to help recruit more African American men in fraternal, social, faith-

based, and professional organizations to serve as one-on-one mentors for African

American boys ("Mentoring Brother in Action," n. d.). The website reports, "With the

support of the Fraternity Collaborative, Mentoring Brothers.org provides direct ways for

African American men to become a part of the solution either as big brothers or as

participants in group mentoring programs and career and motivation events sponsored by

our national and local community partners" (para. 2). The site is also a source of

information for African American families (largely headed by single mothers and

grandmothers). It provides family resources on how to help youth succeed in school;

avoid risky/delinquent behaviors; and have higher self-esteem and aspirations.

The 5000 Role Models of Excellence Project, in its 30th year of existence, is

another role model program designed to meet the needs of underserved male populations

(Davis, 2009). The project is the brainchild of then Miami-Dade County, Florida school

board member Dr. Frederica S. Wilson, who noticed that more minority boys were being

incarcerated, entering the drug trade, or dropping out of high school at disproportionately

high rates ("5000 Role Models of Excellence Project," n. d., para. 1). Wilson challenged

the men of Miami-Dade County to become a part of the change for these "at-risk" youths.

Originally called 500 African American Role Models of Excellence Project, the program

was initiated through the schools in Miami-Dade County, Florida with Wilson's vision to

serve as a major force in the transition of raising young boys into manhood ("5000 Role

Models of Excellence," n. d., para. 2). As many school districts nationally seek to identify

viable solutions to confront the problem of educating Blacks males, the 500 Role Models

of Excellence Project was seen as a model of success in partnerships with major

corporations, support from several presidents, strong community involvement, and a

determination to provide opportunity and experiences for these young men ("5000 Role Models of Excellence," n. d., para. 4). Within a year of its inception, the name was changed to the 5000 Role Models of Excellence Project to reflect representation of more than 6,000 male role models assisting students at every level of education: elementary, middle, and high schools ("5000 Role Models of Excellence," n. d., para. 5). In a research study on the project, Davis' (2009) findings recommended, "Educational leaders consider a new education model, one that fully integrates the five elements of field trips, mentoring, consistent male father figures, guidance, and the prospect of college into every student's academic experience" (p. 103). Davis believes that since the Project took place in Miami-Dade County Schools in Florida, the fourth largest school district in the nation, this should verify its universality. Unlike many current mentoring programs that focus on academics alone and neglect the cultural and social development of its participants, the 5000 Role of Models of Excellence uses a blended approach which leads to success years after students graduate from high school and for some college (Davis, 2009).

Other role model and mentoring programs have grown from the educational research of practicing professionals. Perhaps one of the most well-known professionals in the field on School Counseling – Group Work is Courtland C. Lee. He has studied, practiced, presented, and written articles and books about counseling, multi-cultural counseling, and group work with African American students for almost 30 years ("American Counseling Association: Speaker's Profile", n. d., para.1). His landmark work (Lee, 1984; 1987; 1992) was on a "group counseling model for promoting the development of a manhood identity among Black male adolescents in grades 7-12, based

on a traditional African ritual known as manhood training. This model is designed to increase awareness and promote skills associated with a positive Black masculine identity" (Lee, 1987, [abstract]). Similar to today's findings, Lee (1987; 1996; 2003) finds that Black males in the society are in trouble and at-risk. He suggests that the manhood training is a tool counselors can use to help young males develop stronger sense of self and improve socialization skills (Lee, 1991).

     Courtland (1992) published his ground-breaking work, *Empowering Young Black Males*, to provide information to counselors and other helping professional on how to understand the issues surrounding the development of young Black males and to help facilitate the educational and social empowerment of this group. The book (1992) also provides directions on how to implement strategies that promote Black male empowerment in the elementary and secondary schools, and how teachers and the community can get involved. Ptau, Program Curriculum and Facilitator Development Specialist at Sankofa Passages in Philadelphia remarks:

> We have to start by focusing around the historical contributions and
> identity of young men with African ancestry. We have to deal with the
> social and emotional issues that young people come to school with and give
> them strategies to transcend and rise above them. We have to give them an
> academic environment that also supports their social and emotional needs
> so they start to see themselves as learners, as scholars. (Maxwell, 2013, p.
> 7).

     For the purpose of this study, we examined very closely the work of Lee (Lee, 1992) because his work on manhood and empowerment training is the cornerstone of

many other role model and mentoring studies and programs (Bailey, 2001; Bailey &

Bailey-Bradbury, 2010; Gullan, Power, & Leff, 2013; Kafele, 2012; Lee & Bailey, 1997).

After the original research, Lee updated the framework with *Saving Our Native*

Son (1996) and *Empowering Young Black Males III. A systematic modular*

training program for Black male children & adolescents (2003). In *Saving Our*

Native Son, the updates include an emphasis on the need to focus on African

American culture and its crucial rule in fostering socialization, providing

guidelines for action with specific strategies about who should conduct

empowerment groups and activities that teach young Black males the desired

behaviors, and the need for counselors to become educational advocates for Black

male students, by providing professional development to those educators who

work with Black males (Lee, 1996). Lee's third book (2003), *Empowering Young*

Black Males III. A systematic modular training program for Black male children

& adolescents, is a revision of *Saving Our Native Son* (Lee, 1991; 1996) that

provides strategies for the African American males to take charge of their own

lives to achieve optimal educational and social success. While the basic themes

remain the same, each of the modules are revamped to offer new approaches

based on research findings for empowering young Black males, new references,

new media resources including internet sites to enhance implementation of the

program (Lee, 2003). Lee (2003) identifies five crucial components of effective

empowerment initiatives, which provide the framework for the modules in this

program. Empowerment initiatives should:

      1) "Be developmental and preventive in nature (p. 15);

2) Provide relationships with competent African American men (p. 15-16);

3) Capitalize on the strengths of African American families (p. 16);

4) Incorporate African and African American culture (p. 16); and

5) Include a rite-of-passage experience" (p. 17).

The program provides a comprehensive, culture-specific, and developmental approach to empowering young African American males to improve academic performance, to develop a positive sense of self and culture, to emulate the work of positive African American role models, and to overcome the plight that has befallen so many like him, that have come before him. There are other role model and mentoring programs that are national, statewide, or local like the 100 Black Men of America or MAC Scholars Program in Shakers Height, Ohio. Lee (1992) says that in terms of manhood training, it is very important to remember that programs as part of a school counseling curriculum must keep in mind that while almost anyone can successfully raise a Black boy to adulthood, only a Black man can teach him how to be a [Black] man.

President Barack Obama as a role model from African American males

Even with all of the mentoring programs, Scherer and Rhodan (2014) report, "Black men have a 32% chance of serving time in prison at some point in their lives, compared with a 17% chance for Hispanic men and a 6% chance for White men" (p. 31). In citing a U. S. Sentencing Commission report, Scherer and Rhodan (2014) also note that when Black men are caught, they serve longer sentences--an average of 20% longer than white men for the same crimes. The introduction of Senator Barack Obama to the national scene as a speaker at the 2004 Democratic National Convention and with the extensive media coverage he received during the 2008 Presidential Election as a

candidate, nominee, and subsequent choice as President of the United States have some

testifying that he can be the new role model for African American males (Neal, n. d.;

Reyes, 2008). Many declared President Obama's election as a social movement (Pitts,

2009; Von Drehle, 2008; Walters, 2008). Graves (2008) in his clarion call to young Black

men sees President Obama's selection and election as the President of the United States

as a pseudo-panacea, that there will be no more excuses for the failure of Black males in

our society. While there is little empirical research on Obama as a role model for African

American males, there is much commentary, supposition, and hope.

Who is Barack Obama, not the politician, but the relatively unknown African

American man who caused Americans to, for the first time in history consider and elect

an African American President of the United States? Much of the personal information

about the 44th President of the United States is public knowledge as it has been

broadcasted throughout every major media outlet during his campaign and re-election.

Barack Obama's story is the "American story — values from the heartland, a middle-

class upbringing in a strong family, hard work and education as the means of getting

ahead, and the conviction that a life so blessed should be lived in service to others"

("President Barack Obama", n. d., para. 2). He is the product of an interracial marriage

between Ann Durham, a white college student from Kansas, and Barack Obama, Sr., an

international student from Kenya, both studying at the University of Hawaii. Barack was

born in Honolulu, Hawaii, and was raised there for the earliest years of life. He moved

away with his mother, but Obama returned around age eleven. His father left the family

when Barack was about two years old. Barack did not see his father again until age ten,

and that would be the last time he would ever see his father alive. Barack's mother

married another foreign student, and from age six to ten, he and his family lived in Indonesia ("Life before the presidency," n. d., para.1).

Valuing his education, his mother sent young Barack back to Hawaii around fifth grade. His grandfather, Stanley, who served in Patton's army, and his grandmother, Madelyn, who worked her way up from the secretarial pool to middle management at a bank, helped to raise him until his high school graduation ("President Barack Obama, n. d., para. 2). President Obama noted that his mother deeply admired the civil rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s and often shared with him the "great inheritance" and "glorious burdens" that Black men faced ("Life before the Presidency," n. d., para. 3). Living in paradise with no father or person who looked like him, young Barack tried to reconcile the people around him with the man he saw in the mirror. President Obama later reflected, "I was trying to raise myself to be a Black man in America, and beyond the given of my appearance, no one around me seemed to know exactly what that meant" ("Life before the Presidency," n. d., para. 3).

After graduating from high school, he attended college to study political and international affairs at Columbia University in New York, where he graduated with a degree in political science in 1983. After working his way through school with the help of scholarship money and student loans, Barack moved to Chicago's largely poor and Black South Side, where he worked as an organizer to help rebuild communities devastated by the closure of local steel plants ("About Barack Obama," n. d., para. 2). Biographer, David Mendell, noted in his 2007 book, *Obama: From Promise to Power* ("Life before the Presidency," n. d.), "the job gave Obama his first deep immersion into the African American community he had longed to both understand and belong to" (para. 4). His

organizing efforts led him to law school, so that he would be better prepared to help the people fight the city's bureaucracy. He graduated magna cum laude from Harvard Law School, where he became the first African-American president of the *Harvard Law Review* in 1990-91 ("About Barack Obama," n. d., para. 3). Upon graduation, Barack returned to Chicago to help lead one of the most successful voter registration drives in the state's history ("About Barack Obama," n. d., para. 3; "Life before the Presidency," n. d., para. 5; and "President Barack Obama, n. d., para. 5). He returned to his community work as a civil rights lawyer and also taught constitutional law at the University of Chicago ("Life before the presidency," n. d., para.5).

After garnering widespread media attention as the first African American president of the *Harvard Law Review*, Obama was offered a contract by Random House to write a book on race relations. One source wrote, "The book, *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* (1995), turned out to be mostly a personal memoir, focusing in particular on his struggle to come to terms with his identity as a black man raised by whites in the absence of his African father" ("Life before the presidency," n. d., para.5). President Obama later reflected, "I was raised as an Indonesian child and a Hawaiian child and as a Black child and as a White child, and so what I benefited from is a multiplicity of cultures that all fed me" ("Life before the presidency," n. d., para.1). He exercised this belief in his public service that catapulted him into the political arena where he launched a political career, which led him from community organizer to a civil rights attorney to Illinois State Senator to United States Senator to the White House as the 44th President of the United States of America – the first African American president.

Barack Obama came to terms with himself in the city of Chicago. He was able to live, thrive, and succeed as a Black man. After his first year at Harvard during a summer internship at a Chicago law firm, Barack met the former Michelle Robinson, a Princeton University and Harvard Law School graduate. Michelle was assigned to supervise his work at the law office. In 1992, still heavily involved in community service work, Barack and Michelle were married. To this union, two daughters were born: Malia Ann (1998) and Natasha "Sasha" (2001). The Obamas continued to live in Chicago until their move to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D. C.

The Presidential Election of 2008 was called a phenomenon which motivated voters (both young and old, White and people of color) to go out in record numbers to elect Senator Barack H. Obama as the first Black President of the United States of America (Godsay, Nover, & Kirby, (2010); Keeter, Horowitz, & Tyson, 2008; Kirby & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2009; Lipka &Wiedeman, 2008; Lopez & Taylor, 2009). Grantham and Henfield (2011) believe that President Obama models for all Americans a new day is here; whether married or single, professional, working class, or unemployed, some Black fathers are demonstrating their love for children by attending more to education. Bosman and Falcone (2008) purport that Obama's presidency calls for a new national image of Black fatherhood. One writer posits that the president debunks the stereotypes about Black families – and Black men (Chappell, 2009). Valbrun (2009) says that President Obama is not only a role model for the sons but also the fathers; when she proclaims:

> Boys without positive male role models run a serious risk of becoming the
> same kind of men who fathered them, abandoned them and are

unaccountable to them. I can't help but believe, and pray, that Obama's election will make these boys think they can be different. And I can't help but believe, and pray, that last week's inauguration -- that the daily global presence of President Barack Obama -- will have some bearing on some of those missing fathers. Men who want to be engaged in their children's lives, but don't know how, men who are too ashamed to face their children or their children's mothers; men who feel they have little materially or financially to offer but don't realize the emotional and spiritual dividends of simply giving their children love and attention. (para. 2)

Educators and others who work with African American children believe that President Obama can be a role model for this underserved, underachieving segment of the education population. Research studies previously mentioned in this review find an *Obama Effect* – when exposed to Obama, participants perform better (Marx, Ko, & Friedman, 2009; Ong, Burrow, & Fuller-Rowell, 2012; Smith, 2011); reduce racial prejudice against Blacks (Columb & Plant, 2011; Goldman, 2012); and create a deeper sense of hope for the future (Young, 2010). Bonner, a sociology professor at Howard University, contends, "When our young men see the president and Mrs. Obama stepping from Air Force One, they are wonderful role models for Blacks and for the country…that elevates the spirit and attitudes about what you can do" (Chappell, 2009, p. 39). During President Obama's commencement address to Morehouse College, a historically Black college with an all-male student population in Atlanta, Georgia, he speaks of "no more excuses" for young Black males, especially to make bad decisions and blame others (Boyer, 2013; Williams, 2013). President Obama stands before the group as the

embodiment of potential excuses, but as he speaks, he reminds these graduates that although they may have come from broken, fatherless homes the fact that they are graduating shows that they have risen above excuses. Speaking very candidly about his introspection on race and Black male responsibility, he shares that he didn't always make the right choices, but he learned better and then did better even without the presence of a father. He said, "I was raised by a heroic single mom, wonderful grandparents - made incredible sacrifices for me... But I sure wished I had had a father who was not only present, but involved. Didn't know my dad" (Boyer, 2013, para. 4). In fact, he said that being without a father makes him want to be a loving, doting father to his children, and fatherhood/family man is his most important job (Obama, as cited by Boyer, 2013, para. 13). Williams (2013) emphasizes the part of the speech about "in today's global market place, we are competing against those who came from less, are facing greater odds, and are scrambling for fewer opportunities; they overcame, as did previous generations of African-Americans" (p. 13).

While educators, psychologists, and columnists comment on Obama as a role model for young Black males, the literature is scant of research that discusses how young African American males view Barack Obama as a role model other than anecdotal interviews found in popular magazines or covered in news stories. For an example, after a visit by the first couple to a Charter City Public Charter School, the teacher asked students to write a poem about their experience. One student was inspired to write:

> Obama is coming, what can I say.
> Change is coming
> and it's starting today.
> I walk down the street
> and enter the school.
> I heard 'Oh yes'

and 'this could be cool.'
I asked my friend what's
all of the drama.
She said he's coming,
Obama, Obama.
I smiled and laughed
and fell out of my seat.
I got back up and stood to my feet.
Lights, cameras,
everything is here.
My eyes start to water.
I feel a tear.
Obama, Obama, he is the man.
Obama, Obama, hoping I can
shake his hand.
Obama, Obama, he is heaven sent.
Obama, Obama,
My new president
(Paige Pender, as cited by Chappell, 2009, p. 42.)

Summary

Institutional, environmental, and individual factors contribute to the achievement gap between Black and White students. Researchers believe that while education is the institution used in America to distribute social status, economic power, and facilitate how society functions, it has not accepted or provided equal opportunity to all members of its society. This is evident in the results that show African American males perform below every other subgroup in terms of educational measures and accountability, but this group exceeds all other groups in participation in special education, remedial classes, high school drop-out rate, unemployment, and incarceration. While many schools and community organizations develop programs and interventions to improve the outlook for these students, interventions specific to African American males need to be implemented that would improve their performance both academically and socially.

The image of an attractive, well-educated, and articulate Black man in the 2008 Presidential Election, who had come through great personal, social, and cultural adversity, had educators, researchers, and the average citizen declaring that President Obama could be the example for many: young, old, fatherless, impoverished, hopeless, and disillusioned. The world saw a Black man, who shattered many of stereotypical images that represent Blacks, especially Black males, as failures. People are drawn to him for many reasons. For some, President Obama looks like them; for others, he grew up without a father like them; still others, he knows the difficulty of financing a college education and being straddled with student loans like them; others he knows what it is like to struggle for acceptance like them; for some, it is his willingness to help others through community service like him; others his declaration to being a God-fearing Christian like them; and yet, others identify with him as a father/parent desiring to support his family and children like them. Fiero (2008), an adjunct professor at San Francisco State University, sums it up succinctly when he writes:

> The Barack Obama Effect will inspire little Black boys to find the
> courage to choose the road less traveled and explore the many
> options available to them. The Barack Obama Effect will motivate
> the parents of little Black boys to instill an authentic, deeply rooted
> confidence which allows and enables them to have personal and
> professional lives that are only limited by the boundaries of their
> imagination and efforts, not the lack of opportunities. The Barack
> Obama Effect will linger because Black men and boys will know

that in their hearts and in their minds, *they are* The Man – the *only*

man – who controls their own thoughts, actions, and destinies

(p. 32).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

For decades, there has been an abundance of statistical data that underscores the dilemma of African American males in the United States (Bailey, 2001; Bass & Coleman, 1997; Garibaldi, 1992; Jordan & Cooper, 2003; Mandura, 2006; Young, Wright & Laster, 2005). Johnson and Christensen (2008) write that the objectives of educational research include exploration, description, explanation, prediction, and influence of certain phenomenon. In wondering if the election of Barack Obama made a difference to African American males, this study focused on African American males, who had recently graduated, from high schools in southeast Georgia. The research explored how they viewed themselves and their potential since the election of President Obama as the first African American President of the United States. This study was beneficial for educators who struggle to close the achievement gap between White and Black students.

Research Question

The Presidential Election of 2008 was a defining moment in our nation's history, perhaps even the world. Marx, Ko, and Friedman (2009) say that although Obama's influence is undoubtedly clear, it remains to be seen whether the *Obama Effect* can move toward positive outcomes for African Americans, especially young males. This research study explored the effect of Barack Obama as a role model for African American high school males. In completing this study, it was important to determine if the outlook on the life of these participants have changed as a result of the election of the first African

American president. This proved beneficial for educators who seek to educate and motivate this underachieving segment of the school population. Therefore, the research question that guided this study was this: What effect has the election of Barack Obama to the Presidency of the United States of America had on African American high school males?

Research Design

The researcher employed a qualitative research method to explore the impact of President Obama's election on the lives and outlook of recent African American high school male graduates. In qualitative studies, researchers are interested in learning how individual's experience and interact with their social world and the meaning it has for them (Merriam, 2002). Glesne (2006) reports that qualitative researchers study things in their natural setting. Then, the researcher seeks to understand and to interpret its meaning (Glesne, 2006). The intent of qualitative research is not to generalize the information, but to illuminate the specifics (Creswell, 1998). Johnson and Christensen (2008) contend that qualitative research involves the collection of non-numerical data.

The study focused on describing the "essence" of the phenomenon—*the election of the first African American President of the United States of America*—from the perspectives of African American high school males. A phenomenological design was utilized for the study. Creswell (2009) writes that in phenomenology, the researcher pursues the meaning of the phenomenon from the views of the participants. Moustakas (1994) also adds that phenomenology is the first method of knowledge because what is important is the essence of the phenomenon itself and not the result of the phenomenon being studied.

Participants and Sample

African American high school senior males, who recently graduated, from a school district in southeast Georgia served as the participants. The school district in the study has two high schools. The high school population for this medium-sized district has approximately 3300 students with about 2200 identified as White, Hispanic or multi-racial. African American students (not Hispanic or multi-racial) account for about 1100 students. The count for potential participants of the study (Black senior males) was estimated at 115 students or about 3.5% of the student population.

Both convenience and purposive sampling was drawn upon for this study. Johnson and Christensen (2008) state that convenience samples include subjects who are available and volunteer to participate in the study. Purposive sampling allows the researcher to select participants that best represents the population to be studied (Bernard, 2013; deVaus, 2002). Researchers recommend that the sample size for a phenomenological study range from six (Morse, 1994) to no more than 10 participants (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007; Creswell, 1998). Miles and Huberman (1994) find, "Qualitative researchers usually work with small samples of people, nested in their context, and studied in-depth" (p. 27). Eight to ten participants were sought for the study.

Each high school registrar provided a list of African American senior males from their respective schools. The researcher met with the senior counselor from each high school and received their recommendation for participants. The counselors recommended 88 potential participants. A criterion for participation was that the student had the ability to verbalize, illustrate, or sign responses in a face-to-face interview. Since more than ten students were eligible to participate in the study, each eligible student's name was placed

in a basket. The researcher drew out twenty-two (22) names or 25% the recommended students. The researcher sent letters to the students' residences and invited them to participate in a research study about President Obama. The students and parents or guardians signed and returned the consent forms in the self-addressed stamped envelope. The researcher interviewed eight African American males, who had recently graduated from high school.

<div align="center">**Instrumentation**</div>

Creswell (2009) suggests, "In qualitative research, the intent is to explore the complex set of factors surrounding the central phenomenon and present the varied experiences or meanings that participants hold" (p. 129). Interviews are the most familiar strategies for collecting qualitative data (Diciccio-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006) because it provides "the opportunity to learn about what you cannot see and explore alternative explanations of what you do see" (Glesne, 2006, p. 81). While Gill, Stewart, Treasure and Chadwick (2008) report that there are three fundamental types of research interviews: structured, semi-structured and unstructured. A semi-structured interview approach was utilized in this study to allow participants the freedom to express their views in their own terms and to provide reliable, comparable qualitative data (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006) in order to address the overarching question of this study: What effect has the election of Barack Obama to the Presidency of the United Stated of America had on African American high school males?

Based on a thorough review of the literature, comprehensive interview questions were created by the researcher that guided the face-to-face interviews. In writing interview questions, Creswell (2009) says that one or two central questions be asked,

followed by no more than five to seven sub-questions. The sub-questions narrowed the

focus of the study but left open the questioning. An interview protocol was created based

on the following components of Creswell's model:

- A heading (date, place, interviewer, interviewee)

- Instructions for the interviewer to follow so that standard procedure are
  used from one interview to another

- The questions (typically an ice-breaker question at the beginning)
  followed by 4-5 questions that are often the sub-questions in a qualitative
  research plan, followed by some concluding statement or a question

- Probes for 4-5 questions, to follow up and ask individuals to explain their
  ideas in more detail or to elaborate on what they have said

- Space between the questions to record responses

- A final thank-you statement to acknowledge the time the interviewee spent
  during the interview (Creswell, 2009, p. 183.)

Before the protocol was used, the researcher's committee reviewed the questions

in an effort to establish content validity. During the interview, Glesne (2006) suggests

that the researcher pay close attention and record both the verbal as well as the nonverbal

responses of the participants. Glesne encourages the interviewer to provide adequate wait

time when interviewing participants. This allows the participant to not feel rushed and put

thought into their responses. The researcher used probing questions and asked the

respondents to elaborate on their responses for the purpose of clarity (Glesne, 2006).

Merriam (2002) finds that because the researcher was able to clarify and summarize the

information immediately, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and

data analysis in qualitative studies.

Data Collection

The researcher contacted the superintendent of the selected district and obtained

approval to conduct a study once approval was received from the Institutional Review

Board (IRB) at Georgia Southern University. Completed forms necessary for IRB were

reviewed by the researcher's supervising committee for accuracy, and then the forms

were submitted to the IRB for approval. After IRB approval, students were contacted

about the study from names collected from the high school registrars and recommended

by the senior counselor. With returned parental consent forms, the students were

scheduled for an interview. On the day of the interviews, the researcher reviewed the

university's assent policy with the participants. Each student signed a letter of assent to

participate in the study. Follow-up contacts were made to students and parents until 8

participants were secured for the study.

The researcher followed the interview protocol. Following Creswell's (2009)

heeding, the researcher took notes during the interview. Additionally, a digital recording

of the interviews were made. The interviews were conducted over a two week period, and

individual interviews were scheduled for 30 to 45 minutes at the designated locations,

which was most convenient for the students and parents. Data will be maintained in a

locked drawer in the researcher's office for three years after the completion of the study.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences and thoughts of

African American high school males as they witnessed the campaign and now live with

the subsequent election of Barack Obama as the first Black President of the United States

of America as a model of inspiration and hope. While interviews were the primary

method of data collection, field notes were also reviewed. Each student selected the name

of a famous African American male to protect their identity. After each interview, the

audio files were transcribed verbatim; the transcriber signed a third-party confidentiality

agreement (Appendix D). The initial data was organized and analyzed for emerging

themes. More in-depth analysis occurred at the completion of all interviews to extrapolate

themes and categories to interpret and analyze the data (Creswell, 2009). This was similar

to the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method (SCK) of Phenomenological Analysis as

described by Moustakas (1994). The steps in this analysis structure included:

1. Obtain full descriptions of the phenomenon. This will be done through the

    extensive interview process with each of the eight participants.

2. Using the verbatim transcriptions:

    a. Consider each statement with respect to value.

    b. Record all relevant statements.

    c. List all non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements. These become the

        invariant horizons or meaning of the experience.

    d. Cluster the invariant horizons into themes.

    e. Bring these themes together into a "description of the textures of the

        experience." This step should include direct quotes from the interviews.

    f. Reflect on the meaning of the phenomenon.

    g. Construct a description of the essence of the experience.

    h. Integrate the individual descriptions into a universal description of the

lived experiences of the participants in the study. (Moustakas, 1994)

Use of the SCK method is further confirmed by findings from Glesne (2006) when he writes, "Within the sociological tradition, the most widely used means of data analysis is *thematic analysis*" (p. 147).

Limitations/Delimitations

Limitations

Since the election of Barack Obama as the first African American President of the United States is so recent, very little empirical research exists and limits the study. It is an assumption that high school seniors will be able to act as autonomous and reliable research participants. Also, phenomenological research does not lend itself to generalization of its findings to the masses. This researcher does not suggest that eight African American recent high school graduates from southeast Georgia should be the voice of African American males around the world; nevertheless, they can speak to the phenomenon as it relates to their lived experiences.

Delimitations

The historical significance of the 2008 Presidential Election should not be taken for granted, but the focus of this study explored the effect of the election on African American high school males. These students have lived with Barack Obama for the past six to eight years as senator, nominee, and the first Black President of the United States. These participants are at a transitional point in their lives—from high school to adulthood—they are the ideal participants.

Summary

Although there are decades of research which focuses on the gaps in achievement between White students and students of color, the gap remains one of the most urgent problems in education. The Presidential Election of 2008 brings to the forefront the need for appropriate role models for Black youth, especially Black males. This study explored the one overarching question which guided this research: What effect has the election of Barack Obama to the Presidency of the United States had on African American high school males? A qualitative research method was used which sought to understand the phenomenon on the lives of young Black males and President Obama's potential to be a role model for this underserved group. Eight African American high school males, who had recently graduated, from a medium sized school district in southeast Georgia through the use of convenient and purposive sampling participated in one-on-one interviews with the researcher. After being professionally transcribed, the initial interviews were organized and analyzed. Then, more in-depth analysis was completed that rendered themes to interpret and analyze the experience and outlook of these participants as it related to the election of the first African American President of the United States. The results of the study is reported in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV

REPORT OF DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

The review of the literature in Chapter II emphasized the need for African

American males to have positive male role models, as well as categorized the perils that

exists in the lives of this group in the absence of fathers and other positive male models.

This study explored the effect of Barack Obama's election as the first Black President of

the Unites States on African American recent high school male graduates from a school

district in southeast Georgia. Participants shared their experiences about life as recent

graduates as well as their outlook for success after the phenomenon of the election of the

first African American president. Discussions with these Black males on their views of

the world are beneficial for educators as they develop strategies and interventions to

impact student achievement and create conducive learning environments for African

American high school males.

In this phenomenological study, semi-structured interview questions (*see*

Appendix A) were created based on a thorough review of the literature. The researcher

created a table that correlated current research with the interview items (*see* Appendix B).

The researcher's dissertation committee served as the panel of experts to authenticate

face and content validity by determining if the questions addressed information and

insight that would provide information from African American high school males about

their lived experiences and the possible impact of the election of the first African

American president. Interview questions were revised based on the feedback from the

dissertation committee members. Once updated, the semi-structured protocol was sent to

the college's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for final approval before use. After revisions of the interview questions, the IRB approved the use of the protocol. A copy of the approval letter is included in the appendices (*see* Appendix C).

From the recent African American high school male graduates of a medium-sized school district in southeast Georgia, a convenient and purposive sample was utilized. After consulting with the senior counselor from each high school in the district, eighty-eight students were identified as potential participants. Some students were excluded because of their severe mental disabilities. The names of the 88 students were placed in a container and 25% of the names were drawn. Letters to participate in the research study were mailed to these recent graduates. Included in the mailings was a combination of a Parental Consent form, an Adult Student Consent form or a Minor's Assent form, and a stamped envelope addressed to the researcher. Parental Consent letters were sent to all parents of the identified students as a condition of approval to conduct the study in this district. For those students under 18, a Minor's Assent form was also included for the student to give his agreement to participate. Students who were 18 or older were sent a separate Adult Student Consent form for participation, and the Parental Consent form was not required to be returned for the adult student to participate in the study.

Two weeks after the letters were mailed, only one response was received. The student was not available to participate because he had left the country. The parent wrote a note saying that she was sorry that her son would not be able to participate, but said she was, "Glad that someone was looking into the education of Black males in my area." The researcher then followed up with the other 21 seniors with a phone call to make sure they had received the mailings and to answer any questions. Some numbers were no longer in

service or had been reassigned to another person. Several of the students wanted to participate but because of work schedule could not to participate. Six of the letters were returned as "no longer at this address" or "insufficient address."

After three weeks of recruitment, eight students agreed to participate in the study. Due to lack of transportation and work, interviews were conducted over a two week period at the convenience of the students and parents' schedules. Two recent graduates were interviewed at a high school facility; three interviews were held at neighborhood middle schools. Two parents agreed for the interviews to be conducted in their homes, and one student was interviewed in the food court at the local mall. In examining the results of the study, this chapter reviews the overarching research question that guided this research, the research design, and the demographics of the participants. Finally, participant interviews were transcribed and analyzed to determine recurring themes, which ultimately led to three findings.

Research Question

To complete this study, one overarching research question guided the research process: *What effect has the election of Barack Obama to the Presidency of the United States of America had on African American high school males?* The semi-structured interview questions solicited in-depth information on the lived experience and essence of this phenomenon for these Black high school senior males.

Research Design

To explore the effect of Barack Obama's election on the lives and outlook of African American recent high school male graduates, a qualitative research method was employed. Merriam (2002) writes that qualitative researchers are interested in learning

how individuals experience and interact with their social world and the meaning it has for them. The intent of qualitative research is not to generalize the information, but to illuminate the specifics (Creswell, 1998).

A phenomenological design was utilized to focus on describing the "essence" of the phenomenon—*election of an African American president*—from the perspectives of eight African American high school males. Through the semi-structured interview process, the researcher gained information from the students on how they see their lives as a result of the election of President Barack Obama.

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Eight Black recent male high school graduates from a medium-sized school district in southeast Georgia were interviewed as participants of this study. To protect their identity, students were presented with the names of famous African American male figures for which they selected a pseudo name. Most of the students were 18 years old, with the exception of one 17 years old.

Table 1 is a detailed description of the respondents in this study. All participants resided in private housing; none lived in public housing. One hundred percent (100%) of the students participated in the federal lunch program. Three students lived in single parent homes with one household being headed by a single father. Two parent families accounted for 37.5% of the group. Grandparents were in charge of two respondents or 25% of the participants.

All participants were involved in extra-curricular activities while in high school. Five of the participants were active in competitive high school sports, and four students had already signed to play collegiate sports their freshman year in college. Several

respondents were members of Beta Honor Society, Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA), Marching Band, and Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA), respectively. Behaviorally, the participants had no major discipline issues. Cellphone, Tardies, or Dress code (No Id) violations were recorded. Attendance for most of the sample was above average with fewer than five absences per year for the past three years of high school. One outlier showed 25 absences in his senior year. Two students had perfect attendance for at least two of the last three years of high school.

All participants of this study spent their high school career in the school system of the study. The academic performance of this group ranged from average (2.0 grade point average to an honor graduate). Students who earn the distinction of an honor graduate obtain a weighted grade point average of 3.5 or higher on a 4.0 academic grading scale. One of the males participated in the Dual Enrollment program where he received a Technical Certificate of Credit from the local technical college. Dual enrollment involves high school students attending college and earning credits at the high school and college level. Two males participated in the Early College program for high achieving scholars, and another student had been identified as Gifted eligible. By definition, a gifted student demonstrates a high degree of intellectual ability, creative and/or artistic ability in specific academic fields. One out of eight students had attempted rigorous course work by enrolling in an Advanced Placement class. 100% percent of these African American male graduates enrolled in college for the fall 2014 semester.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Pseudonyms	Residence	Household	GPA	Activities
Idris	City	Two parent	B	Sports, FBLA, Beta, Healthcare
Kevin	Suburb	Single parent (mother)	B	Sports
Terrence	Rural	Two parent	B	Band, DECA, Early College
Samuel	Rural	Grandparents	B	Gifted, Sports, Early College
LeBron	Rural	Grandparents	C	Agriculture classes
Cam	City	Single parent (father)	A	Honor Graduate, Sports, Beta
Will	City	Two parent	C	Sports, Early Childcare classes
Denzel	Rural	Widowed parent	C	Dual Enrollment

Idris

He lives with his mother and stepfather in a close knit sub-division in the city of the study. Graduating in the top 50% of his class, Iris graduated with a non-weighted numerical average of an 84 (B). While in school, he played football all four years of high school. Being a well-rounded young man, he also participated in FBLA and Beta Honor Society. During his senior year, he attended the local career academy where he was able to explore careers in the Healthcare Science field. His experiences in the Health Science courses solidified his desire to go into medicine. Iris is a pre-dentistry major studying Molecular Biology at a public four year institution in Georgia.

Kevin

Kevin was reared by his single parent mother in the suburbs. He began sports at a young age and continued his love for the game throughout high school. Although Kevin

earned a non-weighted numerical average of 82 (B-), he graduated in the bottom 50% of his class. His attendance for the last 3 years, included an average of one day of absence. His junior year Kevin received perfect attendance recognition. Being a standout in football all four years of high school opened the door for him to be offered a college football scholarship. Currently, Kevin is enrolled as a Criminal Justice major in a neighboring state.

Terrence

Currently enrolled at a historically Black university in southeast Georgia, Terrence is an education major. He lives with his parents in the rural part of the county. While in high school, Terrence was active in the Marching Band and Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA). He was a scholar at the Early College Academy for students with academic promise until the county ended the program. During his interview, Terrence was very vocal about all the blessings he had received as a result of a personal relationship with God. Although he graduated with an 82 (B-) non-weighted numerical average, his class rank placed him in the bottom 50% of his class.

Samuel

In his interview, Samuel was very clear that his goal was to graduate from high school, go to college, and be able to get a job that would allow him to take care of his younger siblings. Samuel and his siblings were raised by his grandparents in a quiet, middle class neighborhood in the rural part of the county. He has always been drawn to do well in school as a way to improve his life. As a middle school student, Samuel was identified as Gifted and placed in intellectually challenging classes. Like many young boys, football was a passion of his, and he noted that his earliest heroes were sports

figures. Playing football all four years of high school while maintaining a B (83) non-weighted numerical average made Samuel a true student athlete. This very driven young man is on his way to accomplishing his goals. On a full football scholarship, Samuel is attending a four year state university in the Midwest.

LeBron

LeBron was raised by his grandparents. Spending most of his time in the rural part of a neighboring county, he trained hunting dogs, rode horses, and fixed cars with his grandfather. He reported that it was difficult for him to concentrate on school, and he was sent to live with his aunt and uncle as a last resort to stay in school. Things changed once LeBron registered at the local career academy and became active in Agricultural Science classes. His courses included Animal Science & Biotechnology, Small Animal Care, and Veterinarian Science. As a result of his interest being piqued, his grades improved, and he was able to graduate from high school with a non-weighted numerical average of 78 (C+).This did place him in the lower 50% of his class. In the end, his interest took him back to working on vehicles. Currently, LeBron is matriculating at an auto diesel college out of state.

Cam

Cam lives in the downtown area with a single parent father and siblings. While in high school, Cam was a student-athlete. He played football all four years of high school while maintaining good grades. He was also a member of the Beta Club Honor Society. The district graduated about 650 students in the Class of 2014, and Cam was 1 of 10 African American males who graduated as honor graduates, placing him in the top 17% of his class. Students earning the distinction of an honor graduate must have a minimum

grade point average (GPA) of 3.5 on a 4.0 scale. Cam's transcript reported a 3.67 GPA

and a 91 (A-) non weighted numerical average. Today, Cam is playing college football

and studying Pre-Engineering.

Will

He lives with his parents in the city of the study. He enjoyed working with

children and completed the Early Childhood Education pathway while in high school.

Sports have also been a major part of his life. Will played football all four years of high

school and has been signed to play college football. At the final grade posting, he earned

a 76 (C+) non-weighted numerical average. Will is currently enrolled at a public four

year university as an Early Childhood Education major.

Denzel

After having taken advantage of Dual Enrollment classes in high school, Denzel

earned a Technical Certificate of Credit in Criminal Justice during his senior year. He

lives with his widowed mother and sister. As a high school freshman, Denzel was

enrolled as a scholar at the Early College Academy for students with academic promise

until the county ended the program. The untimely death of Denzel's father impacted his

life, and consequently his grades. Graduating in the bottom 50% of his class, he earned a

79 (C+) non weighted numerical average. With a desire to get back to his goals, Denzel

has enrolled at the local technical college to complete his Associate of Science Degree in

Criminal Justice.

Research Findings

The final sample for this study consisted of eight (8) African American males,

who had recently graduated from high school in southeast Georgia. Each student

participated in a digitally recorded interview session. While conducting the interviews, the researcher took notes to capture behaviors, key words and phrases of the interviewees as well as insights of the researcher. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, data categorized, and analyzed for common themes found in the related experiences. The researcher listened to each interview and compared the content to the transcription to verify accuracy. The field notes and the transcriptions were reviewed for consistency and identification of themes and powerful phrases to understand the effect of how African American recent high school male graduates were affected by the election of the first Black President of the United States, Barack Obama. Similarities emerged as the researcher analyzed the lived experiences and thoughts of each participant. From the analysis of all data, three recurring themes emerged as the participants discussed how President Obama's election has impacted their world:

1) All participants had heroes who were positive and often familial that remained relatively the same as they got older;

2) President Obama's election changed the way they perceived themselves as well as how they perceived the way the world sees African American males; and

3) Most participants were positive about their futures and believed that President Obama's election has increased their likelihood of success.

Theme #1: Participants' heroes were positive, familial, and have remained relatively the same since elementary.

Interview questions 1, 2, and 4 asked participants to identify their heroes/role models. Question 1 solicited who their heroes were in elementary school. All of the

participants had heroes ranging from superheroes, to athletes, to parents. Kevin said that

Static Shock, a black superhero, and the Green Lantern were his heroes because they

were both leaders and no one was like them. Cam, Samuel, and LeBron idealized athletes

such as Reggie Bush, Emit Smith, Jerry Rice, Kobe Bryant, and of course, Michael

Jordan. Reasons for these choices included that these players were very talented,

passionate about the game, good team players, good sportsmanship, and because the

participants themselves loved the game. Cam also said that Reggie Bush was his hero

because he was from California like he was and that Reggie was inspiring. While four

participants had fictional or national athletic heroes, four others found people in their

daily lives as heroes. Will mentioned that he also looked up to his coaches. Will said,

"*My coaches built blocks for me like a path. They basically built the path where I am*

going right now. They gave me motivation, encouragement, and built discipline."

In moving to middle school, the participants were asked if their heroes were the

same or if they had changed. For the most part, their heroes were the same. Idris,

Terrence, and Samuel added teachers as heroes. Idris remembered a science teacher, who

accepted him even though Idris had behavior challenges while in middle school. He noted

that a 7th grade science teacher made him work hard and allowed him to become the

teacher's helper, setting up labs for the class. Terrence found a sixth grade math teacher

to be warm-hearted and helpful. He said that she was all right with him when one

Monday they returned to school, she had painted each of the four walls in her classroom a

loud color of paint. She was different, and it was okay with Terrence. Less dramatic was

Denzel's 7th grade math teacher, his personality was laid back and down to earth. He

remembered enjoying the class. Coaches and athletes were still influential. Kevin had

outgrown the Green Lantern and Static Shock, but he was still drawn to people with strong leadership, who possessed great tenacity. He mentioned, *"I started liking LeBron James and Muhammad Ali. They both took a lot of criticism, talked their trash, but in the end they were winners. They didn't let it get them down. It motivated me to keep striving to be the best."*

In wondering about influences outside of home and school, interview question 3 examined who students were exposed to in their neighborhoods, asking specifically about males that they may have looked up to when they were younger. Six out of eight found little impact on their lives from community members. Kevin and Samuel experienced some mobility in their years before high school and couldn't recollect much. Cam, Terrence, and Denzel stated that they mainly had family living around them, but Denzel noted that some family men were not always good role models. The other participants seemed hesitant at first to answer. Denzel went on to say that they mainly yelled at each other and always stayed out late, which inevitably got them into trouble. LeBron responded that there were not many, and then said that he did not remember much about the men. Comments from the field notes reported that LeBron seemed to have become a little defensive when responding to this question. The researcher wondered if it was about breaking a street code of silence or whether the participants felt judged being in proximity to what they were about to mention. After being assured of no judgment and confidentiality, the remaining participants described men on corners and under trees selling and/or using drugs. Idris and Will explained that older men were not positive influences. They could see drugs being sold on a daily basis. Cam said that there were sex

offenders in his neighborhood. Cam said, *"We would be scared. Having my little sister there, I would be scared for her to walk from the bus and stuff like that."*

Reflecting on those negative influences, all eight participants shared with this researcher that they had made a conscious decision to not live that lifestyle and to work hard in school to increase their chances for success. Now that they were transitioning from high school to adulthood, they were asked who they were using as role models. What this researcher discovered was that the common thread between elementary, middle, and high school transition in terms of who were their heroes /role models was that it was their parents/stepparents and grandparents (acting in *loco parentis*). While people may have come into their lives, from the first question on heroes and role models, parents and grandparents were almost always mentioned.

At first, Kevin's early heroes would be expected of a child in elementary school, cartoon character heroes. Later, he named his father as his hero as he transitioned into high school. As the interview progressed, it became clear about his relationship with his father. Previously in the findings, it was pointed out that Kevin's family moved a lot. The reason for the frequent movement was that his father was active duty military, and the family had been through several deployments of his father to Afghanistan. So, Kevin looked to his dad as much as he could and older peers that had been through what he was about to face. Now his father is home and he says that they are catching up on lost time. Kevin said that he has great respect for his dad and all the sacrifices he has made as a soldier and as a father. Another example of most of the group's adoration toward their parental figures was when Idris reported that while in elementary, he found his father to be strong, confident, and hardworking, and his desire was to emulate him. In middle

school, he began developing his dreams based on the work ethic he saw in his father. As a high school student preparing for graduation, Idris focused on his mother who he said gave him a lot of knowledge. He noted that she works in healthcare, and as a result, he wants to work in healthcare. Idris also mentioned his stepfather, who he described as a very humble man, active with him and his younger brother, a hard worker, and as "*a man who treats a woman like how a woman should be treated*."

Parental figures were on the minds of most of participants, Cam said that early on his dad raised him up to be the man that he is today. Cam also mentioned a school athletic coach who was a father figure to him and who taught him to be disciplined in school and on the field as an athlete. According to Cam, the coach encouraged him to do well in school, go to college, and have an even better life. With much pride, Cam discussed how he is a good person and a better man because his father has taught him many things that he needs to know to be responsible in life. Sometimes sharing a common enthusiasm for a past time can bring people together. Will remembered that from a young boy he had a relationship with his dad because his dad had played sports, and he and his dad shared a love of sports. He said that his dad wanted him to work hard and succeed. As a result, his dad pushed him harder and harder and even kept him from negative influences, even if it was a relative. Will said that the school athletic coach never gave up on him when he got in trouble. Because of his father and the school coach, Will believes they have given him the drive over the past four years to complete high school and look forward to college.

Unlike Kevin, Idris, Cam and Will, who talked mainly about their fathers, Terrence stated, "*My parents were my heroes because they have made provisions for me*

to have more than a mediocre life." He said that his parents are older parents; and although they were not ones to verbalize their love for him, he knew they loved him and he them. He fondly said that he always looked up to his father because he was such a hard worker even when he was sick. During Terrence's high school years, he developed a relationship with the Lord, and church played an important role in his life. He now seeks guidance from above and also utilizes the influence of his pastor, whom he sees as a powerful and positive influence because his pastor encourages the youth in his church.

Denzel had a life changing event that has impacted his life. He said that his dad was his hero, and he remembered how his dad kept him out of trouble and talked to him when he misbehaved. Denzel proclaimed that his father really impacted him at a very young age. He reported that he had a great relationship with his mom and dad during middle school because they were there for him. He looked up to them because they did not show any weakness and that they were strong with him. It took this researcher a few minutes before it was realized that this young man was truly speaking of his father in the past tense. Denzel's father died in 2008 suddenly and unexpectedly from a heart attack. He said that this tragedy has brought him and his mother even closer. He also noted that he has uncles and other male family members who "look in on him," but admits that "*No one can take the place of his father.*"

Both Samuel and LeBron were raised primarily by grandparents acting in *loco parentis* with some contact with one or both biological parents. This is not unusual in the African American culture, especially in terms of the old African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child." It was interesting to note that neither respondent mentioned

parent or grandparent in their elementary or middle school response, but both mentioned athletes as heroes for early and middles years of schooling. Their replies follow:

Samuel saw football players as heroes in elementary school while LeBron idolized basketball players. As they entered middle school, Samuel found encouragement from a math teacher, and LeBron added Allen Iverson to his list of heroes. However when asked about role models as they transitioned to adulthood, LeBron added Michael Jordan, discussing how he transitioned from playing the game to branding himself and making millions of dollars. Samuel responded, "*None, outside of my grandfather. He always gave me insight on things and that's the stuff I take from him. I don't have other people that I look up to.*"

Theme #2: President Obama's election changed the way they perceived themselves as well as how they perceived the way the world sees African American males.

Interview questions 5 and 6 asked the participants to describe how they perceived how the world viewed African American males in different situations (home, school, community) and if they believed that the world saw African American males differently after the election of President Obama. In doing so, not only did the participants describe how African American males were perceived in general, but also they exposed their own personal experiences. Five (5) out of the eight (8) respondents described being judged by stereotypical behaviors, low expectations, and being less educated. Two (2) members of the group said that it depended upon how one carried oneself. One (1) participant replied that he didn't have an opinion, and that he really didn't look at "it." In terms of how African Americans males are perceived in their neighborhood, most of the participants and their families were well-known in the community and felt everyone got along

together. Idris, with a big smile on his face, said, "*Even though we have predominantly White neighbors, all the kids and the cook-outs are at my house. Everybody looks out for everybody else.*"

Most of the participants felt that perceptions of African American males had changed after the election of President Obama. However, it became clear that they themselves had almost always viewed themselves in a positive light, perhaps even before the election of President Obama. School was one area where the responses were relatively consistent among the group; in that, most participants felt that school was fair and equal, based on your behavior and performance toward African American males for them. Five (5) students mentioned that teachers were helpful and supportive. Denzel said that this was especially true for him because he was in a predominantly Black school with mostly Black teachers. Kevin relayed a specific situation when that view came into question. He said, "*When they saw other Black students acting up, they expected the rest of them to do the same. Sometimes students of both races would be acting up, but the African American males would be called out for it. Now, that was unfair.*"

During the discussion of how they perceived the community viewed African American males, six (6) of them found the community view to be negative and stereotypical with phrases like: "*thought we were going to steal,' 'gonna do something bad,' 'not supposed to be in that area,' 'you feel them looking at you, and 'judged because of past problems with other Blacks.'*" However, Kevin and LeBron commented that it was more based on how you carried yourself. LeBron said, "*If you sagging your pants, they going have a bad impression, but if you have your pants pulled up, they have a good impression.*"

Observing the expressions on some of their faces, this researcher could see that these were not stories that someone told them about; rather, these were their testimony of their actual lived experiences as African American males in this town. And despite their predominantly positive feelings, most participants could remember a time when they felt slighted or were insulted just because they were Black. Idris recounted an incident, "*My friends and me went into a store at the mall owned by a White man. An employee saying that we're on camera; just 'cause we in a group of five Black guys? Guess he thought we were going to steal.*"

Samuel believed that they have already passed judgment on African American males. He said, *"They think there is already trouble when you walk into a place. You can tell on how they looked at you, their body and their facial expressions. They are watching, and then they start following you around in the store – making sure you don't do nothing you're not supposed to do. I don't pay attention to them."* Will described a time when his family had gone out to a "real nice restaurant." There were not a lot of Blacks in that area, let alone the restaurant. He shared that without saying a word the people's reaction made him feel like he was not supposed to be there. He said, *"I felt like we didn't belong. It was uncomfortable and I felt real out of place and awkward."* Cam shared a story with a twist. He said, *"One night, me and my friends were walking to McDonald's. Someone pulled up and said, 'Y'all have your pants pulled up look like y'all ain't about to get in trouble, and I respect that.' I was like, 'Dang, it really is like when people see African American males they think trouble, especially in a group.'"* Cam went on to say that from that point, he has made sure that he is respectful to represent and tries to influence his friends to do the same.

The second question in this area asked if they believed that the election of an African American president changed the way that the public viewed African American males. Five years after this historic phenomenon, some participants still speak as if it is still unfathomable. Two (2) participants said at first that President Obama's election did not change for them personally, but as they continued their responses, their answers changed to say that his election did show that anything was possible for African Americans. Six (6) respondents immediately gave an affirmative response that they believed that the election of President Obama had made a difference on how the world viewed African American men. This researcher gathered from the expressions and responses that these students felt that the election put Blacks in a positive light, suggesting that like the president, Blacks are smart, Blacks are hardworking, Blacks are trustworthy, and Blacks are capable.

Idris said, *"The election was a big thing in the history of the world."* Denzel saw President Obama's election as a big thing for all African Americans. Cam replied, *"'Yes ma'am!' His election gave me hope and opened the eyes of the country to what African American males can do and that anything is possible."* LeBron, who has been the most reserved of all the participants, enthusiastically replied, *"Yes, it was crazy! A lot of people thought it wasn't gonna happened, but it did... Anything is possible!"*

Theme #3: Most participants were positive about their futures and believed that President Obama's elections has increased their likelihood of success.

The final two questions dealt with President Obama as a possible role model for African American males and if his historic election had impacted how these males viewed their own opportunities for success. One respondent did not see President Obama

as a role model for him. Samuel said that the way he looks at it is, "*If you are going to do something, it is a personal decision. Something you have to do for yourself.*" Will, very candidly, said that since he did not have a personal relationship with President Obama, he did not see him as a model in the traditional sense, but by the end of the interview, Will had shifted to say that President Obama was motivational and a role model.

The other students, including Will, saw President Obama as an inspiring model. One student identified with him because he is "a real person, out in the community playing basketball, and picking brackets in basketball (Kevin)." Idris saw him as very smart, and Terrence saw him as influential and not just in the Black community. Will said that honestly this was probably the first time Black kids watched the presidential elections. Denzel believed that President Obama is a model in most people's eyes. Others saw that the president had trials and tribulations, grew up in poverty, but still succeeded against the odds (Idris, LeBron, Terrence and Denzel). The study rested on the answers to interview question 8, *Has the election of President Barack Obama impacted your view of life after high school?* Only one (1) respondent was not impacted by the election of an African American president. He explained that his motivation comes from within because he knows that there are things that he needs to accomplish in order to be in a position to take care of his younger sister and brother. Samuel maintained that, "*He [President Obama] is not a figure I use as a reason why I could do something. Like, I could use myself as the reason why.*" On the free response question, he went on to say that people talk about Black males and the problems... Samuel believes that it is not necessary because African Americans use that as an excuse as to why they can't do something.

Seven (7) participants were very decisive that the election of President Barack Obama had impacted their present as well as their future. Most of the group found him inspirational and motivational. This researcher felt that the direct words of each of the seven (7) participants expressed the passion and essence of how these students experienced the election of an African American president and the clarity it brings to their lives.

LeBron – "*… Go forth in anything I do… press harder. I am inspired and motivated to do something after high school.*"

Denzel **–** "*I can achieve my goals if I have the same attitude that he [President Obama] had. I am not letting anyone stop me from doing it [achieving my goals].*"

Will – "*It made me see that changes can happen. You can actually push forward and be somebody in life. You know, like I can work in a company, sit behind a desk like any other person, and instruct people to do things just as I am an equal.*"

Kevin – "*Way back when I was younger, I thought that I would go to college, get my degree, and start a nice life. But I was getting bad grades, getting into trouble, and then we get a Black president! Everything just straightens up. I thought, 'Oh, ok. I really can do it now.' Like there's no excuses at all.*"

Cam – "*He was very inspirational, made me want to push harder, and open opportunities from African American males to go to college. He has inspired me to major in Electrical Engineering and I know I can get through it.*"

Terrence – "*It [election] shows me that if I work hard and focus that I could be, not necessarily the president, but whatever I want to be.*"

Idris – *"It [election] made me broaden my major from being a police officer. Now, I'm going to college for pre-dentistry. It just changed how I look at life, like you go through something hard now, but it will pay off in the near future."*

Summary

The analysis of this phenomenological study found three recurring themes:

1) All participants had heroes who were positive and often familial that remained relatively the same as they got older;

2) President Obama's election changed the way they perceived themselves as well as how they perceived the way the world sees African American males; and

3) Most participants were positive about their futures and believed that President Obama's election has increased their likelihood of success

Seven (7) out of eight (8) participants shared very similar responses and experiences. One (1) respondent categorically had different views and opinions on more than 50% of the interview questions. Nonetheless, his lived experiences gave credence that everyone does not see things the same. Seven (7) out of eight (8) participants consistently from elementary to the present named their parents/ grandparents as an important hero or role model in their life. While 100% of the students were cognizant of the negative stereotypes of African American males, they have not been deterred as evident by the fact that they are recent high school graduates. This fact is noteworthy in and of itself because of the statistics on African American males and school completion. Most agreed that the election of President Barack Obama as the first African American president has brought hope, change and inspiration to America, especially African Americans, and particularly African American males. The majority of the respondents have made a personal

declaration of how their lives have been impacted by the historical phenomenon, and

how, as a result, they see a more positive outlook for their future success.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

This chapter begins with a summary of the study on the impact of the historical election of President Barack Obama on African American males in southeast Georgia. Chapter V includes a discussion of the research findings as well as conclusions and implications based on the findings. Finally, the researcher makes recommendations for further research based on the analysis of data from the study and presents the dissemination of the study. The concluding thoughts of the researcher will end the chapter.

Summary

Kafele (2012) wrote, "Of all the challenges we face in education today, I can think of none greater than the challenge of motivating, educating, and empowering black male learners" (p. 67). Research has shown that academic problems for Black males begin early in their schooling and is a struggle throughout high school (Mandura, 2006; Jordan & Cooper, 2003; Palmer & Wilson, 2009). These struggles place them near the top of every indicator of school failure, including dropout rates (Dianda, 2008; Irving & Hudley, 2008; Noguera, 2003), absenteeism (Finn & Servoss, 2013), suspension and expulsion (Darensburg, Perez, & Blake, 2010; Smith, 2005), and low achievement scores (Glassman & Roelle, 2007). There is a need for additional strategies and interventions to help educate African American males.

As a result of the 2008 Presidential Election, a phenomenon occurred, and Americans elected Senator Barak Obama as the first African American president.

Poussaint (2008), Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, believed that President Obama's election would have an enormous psychological effect on children everywhere. Educational leaders could utilize the phenomenon of the election of President Barack Obama to help inspire Black students toward success.

The researcher employed a qualitative research method to explore the impact of President Obama's election on the lives and outlook of eight African American recent high school male graduates. The phenomenological design was useful in describing the "essence" of the phenomenon—*the election of the first African American president*—from the perspectives of African American high school males. Face-to-face interviews were beneficial in understanding how African American males' views of the world and themselves changed as a result of the election of President Obama. Information gathered can be used by educational leaders and counselor educators to support African American males.

This study had one overarching question that guided the research. It was this: *What effect has the election of Barack Obama to the Presidency of the United States of America had on African American high school males?* Interviews were recorded, transcribed, categorized, and analyzed for common themes found in the related experiences. The researcher listened to each interview and compared the content to the transcription to verify accuracy. The field notes and the transcriptions were reviewed for consistency and identification of themes and powerful phrases.

ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Similarities emerged as the researcher analyzed the lived experiences and thoughts of each participant. From the analysis of all data, three recurring themes

emerged as the participants discussed how President Obama's election has impacted their world:

1) All participants had heroes who were positive and often familial that remained relatively the same as they got older;

2) President Obama's election changed the way they perceived themselves as well as how they perceived the way the world sees African American males; and

3) Most participants were positive about their futures and believed that President Obama's election has increased their likelihood of success..

DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

While one overarching question guided the study, eight interview questions were constructed to capture the responses of the participants. From the data analysis, three recurring themes were present and will be discussed in this section.

Theme #1: Participants' heroes were positive, familial, and have remained relatively the same since elementary.

Interview questions 1, 2, and 4 asked students who were their heroes from elementary to post high school. When one of the participants was asked to name his elementary school role model, he selected cartoon superheroes. After all, the Green Lantern and Static Shock represented to this youngster power and strength. To the adult mind, one would say that these characters epitomized caring, responsibility, and leadership. Who would not want to emulate those qualities? Besides cartoon superheroes, all of the participants had heroes ranging from athletes to teachers to fathers/grandfathers. This study concurs with an article about role models that reports sport figures are often at

the top of the list as heroes, idols, and role models for African American males and the

most visible role models for some adolescents ("Not a Role Model", 2010). Research

agrees with this study by suggesting that the heroes for young Black boys are figures they

see in the media, whether they are positive or negative (Gladding & Villaba, 2014;

Howard, Flennaugh, & Terry, 2012). McCoy (2011) cites a national study that found 10

year-old Black males choose athletes or sports figures 85% of the time as a role model;

while 98% of the 18 year-old Blacks also choose this group. Burton, a Northwestern

University psychiatrist who specializes in treating athletes, believes, "Kids, need to have

someone they can idealize in order to aspire to become better than themselves. Without

that, there's not much hope for them" ("Not a Role Model," 2010, para. 5).

Three (3) of the eight (8) students named teachers as role models. Davis (2010)

say that teachers as role models/mentors date back to the days of Homer and Socrates,

where boys and young men would sit at the proverbial feet of wise, older men to learn.

Three (3) of the participants mentioned a high school coach, citing him as a person who

inspired them to become responsible young men as well as great players. Gladding and

Villalba (2014) write that when role models are positive, appropriate, and present, boys

are more self-empowered, and as a result, they are more likely to be productive adults. As

schools are charged with meeting standards on the College and Career Readiness and

Performance Index (CCRPI), role models are critical in helping students decide on a

profession and in helping students visualize the possibilities of their life (Milner, 2006).

There is much research on the absent father and the negative impact it has on

young African American males (Cartwright & Henriksen, 2010; Cosby & Poussaint,

2007; DeBell, 2008; Hines & Holcomb, 2013). President Obama (2008), in a Father's

Day speech, said, "… too many fathers are also missing – missing from too many lives

and too many homes…" One report notes that approximately 50% of African American

children in the United States live in household without a father figure (U. S. Census

Bureau, 2012.) Contrary to past research, most participants of this study consistently

named fathers and grandfathers as their role models. Connor and White (2005) discuss

the importance of the study by saying that when the father or a role model is in the

picture, Black children have a greater chance for success. Barton and Coley (2009)

concur by purporting that when fathers are engaged in the education of their children, this

involvement promotes positive behaviors and reduces likelihood of academic, behavioral,

and economic hardship as adults. Fain (2010) validates the findings in this study by

reporting that children have a healthier self-image when they know the identity of their

father, and the father is actively engaged in their lives. Weaver (2012) cites facts from

National Fatherhood Initiative that finds, "Children who live absent from their biological

fathers are, on average, 2-3 times more likely to be poor, to use drugs, to experience

educational, health, emotional and behavioral problems, to be victims of child abuse, and

to engage in criminal behavior than their peers who live with their married, biological (or

adoptive) parents" (p. 298). Since the participants of this study live with their parent(s), it

does not appear that they face the same perils as young men without fathers. Considering

the size of this sample, Batten et al. (2010) reminds us that although there is a subset of

African American fathers who have made significant progress; there is still a large

segment of Black men and boys who remain in a state of crisis.

Theme #2: President Obama's election changed the way they perceived themselves
as well as how they perceived the way the world sees African American males.

Even as teenagers, eight (8) out of eight (8) participants were cognizant of the prejudice shown to African American males by the general public. The participants believed that they were being judged on stereotypes related to their race. Batten et al. (2010) supports their observation by reporting that media characterizations of Black men and boys as jokesters or as irresponsible, lazy, or dangerous has an immense effect on society's perceptions of this group and their sense of self. Will said poignantly, "*I get viewed as a trouble maker and bad person when I am not bad at all. I get misjudged.*" Howard, Flennaugh, and Terry (2012) write, "Inaccurate portrayals of groups can contribute to the development and maintenance of deeply ingrained ideas and beliefs about groups that can profoundly shape their experiences in a given society" (p. 91). One participant weighed in by describing an experience at a mall in general for African American males. He said, "*They think it is trouble already. You can tell by their look-facial expression and their body language. Then, they start to follow you around and keep watching you.*"

Fifty percent (50%) of the participants reported that school staff often had negative perceptions of African American males that staff members would generalize to the group. How Black males are depicted in the larger society filters down into schooling practices and policies used by teachers and counselors (Howard, Flennaugh, & Terry, 2012). In his interview, Kevin declared, that when some teachers saw other African American males acting up, he felt that they were expecting all other African American males to behave the same way. Mckown and Weinstein (2008) find that teachers' expectation levels contribute greatly to the academic disparities that exist among racial groups. Their study reports that teachers had high levels of preference for White and

Asian students over Black and Latino students. Five (5) of the participants saw school as fair toward most African Americans with the caveat of "*depending on how they carry themselves*," but they were not lost on the fact that although many of them were not perceived negatively in school, they had friends who were. Just as participants of the present study were keenly aware of the differences in treatment of African American males, less well-versed students were as well. Whiting (2006) infers that these students reject school as a place to develop their sense of identity, particularly self-worth and self-efficacy. Noguera (2003) purports that "consistently schools that serve Black males fail to support, protect, and nurture them" (p. 435).

The researcher found the resiliency of this group of respondents commendable. In that, while they could so eloquently articulate the negative perceptions of African American males in a variety of settings, they themselves chose not to succumb to the stereotypes or feed into the negativity. Bonner, a sociology professor at Howard University, believes, "When young men see President Obama and Mrs. Obama stepping from Air Force One, they are wonderful role models … that elevates the spirit and attitudes about what they can do." (Chappell, 2009, p. 39). Fiero (2008), an adjunct professor at San Francisco State University, declares that little Black boys will be inspired to find the courage to choose the road less traveled and explore the many options available to them as President Barack Obama did. Denzel sums it up best when he says, "*For me, it* [election of the first Black president] *was a really big accomplishment for every African American. If he can do it, then it is like beyond… more things that African Americans can accomplish by seeing him* [President Obama] *as an example*."

Theme #3: Most participants were positive about futures and believe that President Obama's elections has increased their likelihood of success.

Seven (7) out eight (8) participants affirm that the phenomenon of an African American president have positively impacted their lives and outlook on the future. Only one (1) student did not base his future potentiality on the election of President Obama. He felt that he is the master of his own destiny, and he needs to "do" in order to make things happen in his life. However, the group consensus is that because of President Obama's election there are more opportunities for Black males. Similar to the current study, Young's (2010) research on perception of Blacks on education and social mobility reveal that President Obama's presence has created a deeper sense of hope for their [African American Males] future and a motivation to put more effort into whatever each individual happens to do. An African American high school student from California, tells ABC News, "An African American like President Obama, he shows you can actually obtain an education, you can actually be smart, and you can make a difference. President Obama is the perfect role model for all Black men" (Gomstyn, 2008, para.10). This study validates Poussaint's (2008) claim that Black children's image of the world and the image of what they think they can accomplish will change as a result of President Obama's election. Aymer (2010) asserts:

> President Obama can be an inspiring role model that can be used to
> deconstruct the stereotypic depiction of African American males. The
> seismic implications of the first African American president—who will
> be a powerful presence for the next 4 years—could have an amazing
> effect on the self-image and consciousness of young African American

men. (p. 835)

Seven (7) out of the eight (8) verbalized how their lives and prospect for success have been affected as the result of the election of President Barack Obama with such phrases as: "*go forth*," "*press harder*," "*achieve*," "*focus*," "*inspirationa*l," "*accomplish*," "*future*" "*change*," "*inspired*," "*motivated*," "*broaden*," and more.

CONCLUSIONS

The Obama Effect, the positive influence of President Barack Obama as a role model on African Americans, was first posited in a quantitative research study by Marx, Ko, and Friedman (2009). That study found when African American participants were exposed to President Obama before a test was given, they scored higher on the assessment than when they had no exposure to him before taking a test. The present researcher's study was different in that it used a qualitative approach to understand how African American high school males in southeast Georgia experienced the phenomenon – *the election of an African American President of the United States of America*. Many declared that the election of President Obama was a defining moment in history, for the world in general, particularly African Americans, and most specifically Black males. The research was guided by one overarching question: *What effect has the election of Barack Obama to the Presidency of the United States of America had on African American high school males?* The research findings concluded that African American males have role models who are positive and often familial; that their views on the way the world sees them and how they see themselves have changed; and that they are more positive about their futures as a result of the election of the first African American President, President Barack Obama.

While the preponderance of literature on African American males chronicles their dilemma from early involvement in the educational system to adulthood, the findings concluded that not all Black males are in crisis and should be treated as such. Based on their interactions during the interviews, the researcher determined that these participants were an unusual group who possessed a strong sense of self and high degree of self-efficacy. Each participant clearly identified role models/heroes from elementary school through high school. An important finding of the study was that the role models of the participants did not change. The heroes ranged from superheroes, athletes, and most poignantly, parents – fathers and grandfathers. Surprisingly, these young men did not look up to rap and hip-hop stars, as one might have expected. Instead they chose fathers/grandfathers who had been there for them, taught them responsibility, and showed them how to become young men. Again, honing in on the fact that not all Black males in the school system are down and out without a positive male figure at home. They were able to discern positive from negative influences in their lives, and each participant unequivocally chose positivity.

This researcher questions how much of their strong sense of self is the result of having President Obama as a model for almost 10 years, since his 10 minute speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention. In addition, many of the participants noted that their parent and grandparents saw President Obama's candidacy and election as change and opportunity for Blacks. To this point, one can perceive that the election of the first African American president impacted the way that parents and grandparents reared their charges. Again, the positivity and hopefulness expressed by these African American respondents were notable. Educators can begin looking at African American males

individually to identify those with innate abilities and strengths. African American males similar to the participants of this study can be used as student leaders, role models, and members of development teams to discuss concerns and solutions to benefit their group; in lieu of prescribing a one size fits all cure for Black males.

Secondly, students' views on the way the world sees them and how they see themselves have changed as a result of the election of President Obama. Participants described their lived experiences of growing up Black and male in America. They were acutely aware of negative perceptions of African American males in a variety of settings. Half of the students saw school as a caring, supportive place for all students, even naming teachers and a coach who had made an impression on their lives. The other participants highlighted encounters with school staff and personal observations where they felt the punishment was not commensurate with other ethnic parties; and other instances, where their teachers had lower expectations for African American students. The study found that even in the midst of these circumstances this group was not deterred from their goals. This point can be used by school counselors, teachers, and other staff members to be cognizant of how they interact with students and families of different racial, ethnic, economic, and cultural backgrounds. As America's schools become more culturally and racially diverse, this study can be used to renew discussions of multi-cultural and cultural sensitivity training for staffs.

As students described how the world/community viewed them, they were very emotive in their recollections of their lived experiences: details of being watched and followed, being talked down to, and being deprived of opportunities because of their skin color. Although it seemed reminiscent of many recent incidents that have occurred in this

country involving young African American males over the past few years, these students

chose to "live through it." Their retorts reflected responses of mature men rather than of

high school males stating that they would carry themselves in a positive light. During the

candidacy and subsequent election of President Obama, reports stated that he provided

hope and inspiration. The statements of these participants found that to be true. The

majority of them felt that the President's presence has changed the way the world views

African Americans. Schools who create positive, caring environments for all students,

especially underserved groups like African American males, will see the return in better

academic achievement. Also, schools who address the social/emotional well-being of

students, where students feel valued by the staff and a part of the school, can benefit

perhaps with less discipline concerns.

Lastly, students were more positive about their futures as a result of the election

of President Barack Obama. They saw the president as inspirational and motivational. His

accomplishments made it possible for them to believe that they can also achieve success

in life. As with previous mentoring programs, school counselors can use the visual image

and testimony of the first Black President of the United States of America to work with

unmotivated, low and moderate performing Black males. These participants, who already

appeared intrinsically motivated, still verbalized how they wanted more for their future,

how they felt that they could go further, and how they could also be role models for

younger African American males. Some students changed their career plans from the

traditional, and one might even say stereotypical, to pursue teaching, dentistry, and

engineering. African American males can now refocus on what they can achieve as

opposed to what they cannot accomplish. The researcher concluded that the African

American males of this study needed to see that what others say about African American males is less important than what they believe about themselves. President Obama's election helped them understand that point, and as a result, they have all entered institutions of higher learner to bring their dreams to reality. These students are heeding the clarion call to African American male students:

> Yes, the ceilings on our potential still exist, but we now know beyond a shadow of a doubt that they are not impermeable. The rallying cry of the Obama campaign was not "Yes He Can" but "Yes We Can." Now that we have, now that the impossible has proven possible after all, there is no turning back. *There are no more excuses.* (Graves, 2009, para. 7, 9-10)

IMPLICATIONS

This study explored the effect of Barack Obama's election as President of the Unites States on African American recent high school male graduates. This study adds to the limited body of literature on the *Obama Effect*, which are mostly quantitative in nature. This qualitative study which explored the phenomenon of the election of the first African American president and the effects of President Obama's election on African American high school males in southeast Georgia, but went a step further by examining how these students saw themselves and their potential for future success after the election of an African American President. Similar to the premier study, an *Obama Effect* was found in the current study. The lived experiences and perceptions shared by the participants enhanced the validity of an *Obama Effect*.

This study helps provide an understanding of how these African American high school males think about education and their chances for success. As schools begin to create programs and interventions to increase student achievement for African American males, the inclusion of this population– by asking African American males about needs, problems, pitfalls, and solutions – can be beneficial. The more educators know about this subgroup, who are at a pivotal transitional point in their lives, the better schools can provide appropriate resources and enable the leaders to improve motivational efforts. This researcher was amazed at how open and articulate these participants were about their lived experiences and goals for the future.

Educational leaders can take from this study that placement in remedial programs and other academic strategies should not be the only solutions when it comes to educating African American males. Schools should include resources that address the whole child, such as counseling, mentoring, and other community partnerships. School counselors can work specifically with this population to address social, emotional, and cultural needs that may impact performance in school. Schools can create school climates that are family engaging and culturally relevant. President Obama was seen by the participants as a role models, and as a result, their views about what they could do changed, and they felt empowered to succeed. Students who have positive experiences at school are more likely to be a self-advocate and more likely to utilize services that may already offered at schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Presidential Election of 2008 produced a phenomenon – *the election of the first African American President of the United States*. This study explored how eight

African American recent high school male graduates from southeast Georgia experienced the phenomenon and its impact on their futures. As a result of this study, the researcher offers several recommendations:

1. A longitudinal study be conducted to determine if the phenomenon was an event or truly motivational and for the participants to share their current beliefs and perceptions of an *Obama Effect*.

2. Expand the study beyond southeast Georgia to other areas of the state or country in order to gather data from a geographically diverse population of African American males.

3. Similar studies be conducted that would use different participants (African American girls, Hispanic males, and white students, respectively), to determine if there is an *Obama Effect* across gender and racial lines as research has shown that President Obama is a potential role model for all children.

4. Similar studies be conducted with bi-racial children who often struggle with racial identity issues in school to determine if the election of President has impacted their perceptions on how the word sees them and how they view their future.

5. Similar studies be conducted with parents of African American males to determine if their parenting style has changed as a result of the election of an African American President.

DISSEMINATION

This researcher plans to share the findings of this research study in several ways. First, the research findings will be presented to the professional school counselors in the selected school district. A copy of the findings will be made available by email to the

superintendent, high school curriculum coordinator, and high school principals of the selected school district. Then, the researcher plans to present her findings at the 2015 Georgia School Counselor Association state conference. Finally, the research study will be made available through the Digital Commons website at Georgia Southern University for a wide variety of educational professionals to view.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The literature is copious with statistics, facts, and anecdotes about the dilemma of African American males from early childhood to adolescences through adulthood. There is concern, especially among educators, for role models and the scarcity of positive constructive examples of those who stand for academic excellence for young people to emulate, especially Black males. The image of an attractive, well-educated, and articulate Black man in the 2008 Presidential Election, who had come through great personal, social, and cultural adversity, had educators, researchers, and the average citizen declaring that President Obama could be the example for many: young, old, fatherless, impoverished, hopeless, and disillusioned. This study found an *Obama Effect.* The participants saw President as a positive role model, and as a result, their views on what they can accomplish in life changed. Educational leaders can use this phenomenon to help inspire Black students toward success.

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Appendix A

THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Who were your heroes when you were in elementary school?
   Possible Probe: What drew you to them?

2. Did your heroes change while in middle school? If so, how?
   Possible Probe: Who were they?

3. Who were the men in your neighborhood that males your age looked up to?
   Possible Probe: Describe whether they were positive or negative models.

4. Now that you have transitioned from high school to adulthood, who are your role models? Why?

5. Describe how you believe the world views African American males?
   Possible Probe: Home? School? Community?

6. Did the election of an African American president change your belief on how the world sees African American males? Explain your point of view.

7. Do your Black male friends view President Obama as a role model? Explain your response.

8. Has the election of President Barack Obama impacted your view of life after high school? Why or why not?

9. Thank you for participating in this interview. Are there any final thoughts or comments that you would like to share? This concludes our interview.

Appendix B

Table 2

Correlation of Interview Questions with Literature Review

#	Interview Questions	Literature Review
1	Who were heroes when you were in elementary school? What drew you to them	Bandura, 1977; Gladding & Villaba, 2014; Kafele, 2012; Lockwood, Jordan, & Kunda, 2002; Lockwood & Kunda, 1997; Marx, Ko, & Friedman, 2009; McCoy, 2012; Nolte, 1972; Struchen & Porta, 1997
2	Did your heroes change while in middle school? If so how? Who were they?	
4	Now that you have transitioned from high school to adulthood, who are your role models? Why?	
3	Who were the men in your neighborhood that males your age looked up to? Describe whether they were positive or negative models?	DeBell, 2008; Fatherless Homes, 1995; Holcomb & McCoy, 1997; Petrosino, Turpin-Petrosino, & Buehler, 2004; Schrerer & Rhodan, 2014; Weaver, 2012
5	Desribe how you believe the world views African American males? At home neighborhood)? School? Community?	Darensbourg & Perez, 2010; Dhaliwal, 2009; Grant & Dieker, 2011; Lewis, Simon, Uzzell, Horwitz, & Casserly, 2016; Noguera, 2003, 2008; Ogbu, 2005; Scott, 2006; Whiting, 2006;
6	Did the election of an African American president change your belief on how the world sees African American males? Explain your point of view.	Godsay, 2008; Graves, 2009; Kirby & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2009; Matthew, 2011; Poussaint, 2008; Stout & Le, 2012; Von Drehle, 2008;

7	Do your Black male friends view President Obama as a role model? Explain your response.	Begley, 2009; Coleman, 2008; Columb & Plant, 2011; Dasgupta & Greenwald, 2001; Dillon, Marx, Ko, & Friedman, 2009; Ong, Burrow, & Fuller-Rowell, 2012; Smith, 2011; Walter, 2008
8	Has the election of President Barack Obama impacted your view of life after high school? Why or why not?	Bosman & Falcone, 2008; Boyer, 2013; Chapell, 2009; Coleman, 2008; Fiero, 2008; Grantham & Henfield, 2011; Pitts, 2008; Poussaint, 2008; Reyes, 2008; Valbrum, 2009; Williams, 2013; Young, 2010;
9	Thank you for participating in the interview. Are there any final thoughts or comments that you would like to share? This concludes our interview	

Appendix C

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Georgia Southern University		
Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs		
Institutional Review Board (IRB)		
Phone: 912-478-0843		Veazey Hall 2021
		P.O. Box 8005
Fax: 912-478-0719	IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu	Statesboro, GA 30460

To: Aundra Vaughn
Dr. Paul Brinson

CC: Charles E. Patterson
Vice President for Research and Dean of the Graduate College

From: Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees
(IACUC/IBC/IRB)

Initial Approval Date: 6/18/14
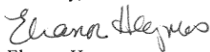
Expiration Date: 5/31/15

Subject: Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research –
Full Board Process

After a review of your proposed research project numbered **H14418** and titled **"The Obama Effect on African American High School Males"** it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable. You are authorized to enroll up to a maximum of **10** subjects.

Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research. – <u>Description:</u> **The purpose of this study is to explore if the election of an African American president has impacted the views and outlook of African American high school males via interviews.**

If at the end of this approval period there have been no changes to the research protocol; you may request an extension of the approval period. Total project approval on this application may not exceed 36 months. If additional time is required, a new application may be submitted for continuing work. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, **whether or not it is believed to be related to the study**, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator **prior** to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a *Research Study Termination* form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

Sincerely,

Eleanor Haynes
Compliance Officer

Appendix D

TRANSCRIPTIONIST CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I, _____ transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audio files received from Aundra Vaughn related to her research study entitled, *The Obama Effect on African American High School Males.*

Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be

    inadvertently revealed during the transcription of digitally recorded interviews.

2. To **not** make copies of any audio files of the transcribed interviews, unless specifically requested

    to do so by the researcher, Aundra Vaughn.

3. To store all study-related audio files and transcripts in a safe, secure location when they are not in

    my possession.

4. To return all audio files and completed transcriptions to Aundra Vaughn on the completion date

    specified in the contract.

5. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my

    computer hard drive, Drop Box account, and any back-up devices.

I am aware that I can be held legally responsible for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audio files and/or transcriptions to which I will have access.

Transcriber's name (printed): _____

Transcriber's signature: _____

Date: _____