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# Factors That Impact the Achievement Gap Between African American Male and Female Siblings

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FACTORS THAT IMPACT THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP BETWEEN  
AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE AND FEMALE SIBLINGS

by

GAMBLE-HILTON, EVELYN B.

(Under the Direction of Linda M. Arthur)

ABSTRACT

This study examined factors that impact the achievement gap between African American male and African American female siblings. The researcher gathered data through interviews and academic artifacts consisting of Georgia's writing test for grades 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>, the 8<sup>th</sup> grade Criteria Reference Competency Test results, and Georgia High School Graduation test requirements. Through this qualitative research, participants including : African American male and African American female siblings, African American parents, teachers, and administrators were able to explain personal experiences that impacted the academic success of African American males and African American female siblings. The African American male and African American female siblings, teachers, and administrators were all affiliated with a Southeastern Georgia high school during the 2008-2011 academic school years. Each participant was asked specific interview questions to determine their perspective on factors that impact the achievement gap between African American male and African American female siblings. Factors contributing to the achievement gap between African American male and African American female siblings consist of: (1) social environment, (2) family support, (3) parenting, (4) education, and (5) order of siblings. Data from the study also revealed five

themes such as: (1) parent expectation, (2) peer acceptance, (3) school culture. (4) family relationship, and (5) teacher/student relationship that impact the academic success of African American males. In short, African American male students' academic success improved when they are understood, nurtured, and supported.

**INDEX WORDS:** Academic Success, Achievement Gap, African-American male and female Siblings, Low Achieving, Siblings

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my biological parents, Roger and Gladys Howard Gamble, my step-mother, Betty M. Gamble, my brother, Denorris Gamble, and Aunt Ida Bell Ellis.

My adoptive mother, Emma Jean Moore, was my spiritual angel. You always had positive comments and encouraging words when situations or circumstances were not acceptable. Because of your love and spiritual guidance, I'm able to know without a shadow of doubt that God chose and appointed me for this calling (John, 15:16). These are my deceased love ones who supported me despite the many obstacles or challenges I had in life at an early age. Although they are no longer with me physically, their *spirit* is with me daily.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

*“Go into any inner city neighborhood and folks will tell you that government alone can’t teach kids to learn”*

Senator Barack Obama,  
2004 Democratic National Convention

Although many educators advocate for the appropriateness and effectiveness of using variables such as End of Course Tests, Georgia High School Graduation Test, Scholastic Aptitude Test, America College Testing, or grade point average as a means to determine the success of students, others believe that such variables should not be used to determine or predict the success for African American male students. Different environmental factors affect almost every aspect of society causing an underachievement for African American students (Pritchard & Wilson, 2003). An increasing divergence in academic achievement between African American males and African American females also exists according to Thurgood Marshall College Fund Institute, 2006. In attempting to address the gender gap in African American students, a village approach using all members of the community to advocate and support African American males is needed (Harper-Collins, 2001).

Although African American males and African American females may be exposed to similar barriers or obstacles that could be detrimental to their academic success, African American males continue to fall behind their African American female counterparts educationally (Ogbu, 2003). Rounds-Bryant (2008) concluded early failure

in school typically leads to classroom frustrations, academic withdrawal, and negative behaviors.

According to Douglas (2007), the experiences of African American males in American schools differ dramatically from those of African American females. “School is the first public place that many children get the opportunity to demonstrate mastery and competence outside of their early family environment” (Rounds-Bryant, 2008, pg. 27). This wide achievement gap between African American males and their female siblings has led some scholars to examine factors such as social environment, family support, siblings, education, and parenting to explain the phenomenon (Noguera, 2003).

### **Background**

Although significant gains have been made in the rates of high school completion for African American students during the past twenty-five years, there is an increasing divergence in the academic outcomes of African American males and African American females (Garibaldi, 2007). Closer examination of the data indicates African American males maintain a greater risk status than other students even when they are compared to African American females (Simons, et al., 2002). In most instances, African American males are lagging well behind their female peers who are graduating from high school and college at higher rates (Saunders, Davis, Williams & Williams, 2004). In addition, African American males are more underrepresented in gifted programs than African American females (Walker, 2002). In order to maintain pace with the demands of an ever-increasing technological society, America’s educational system must provide rigorous and relevant experiences to ensure that its citizens may advance efficiently and quickly (Le & Kazis, 2008).



The experiences of African American males remain an enigma, but the data delineates underachievement as a precursor to a lifetime of socioeconomic injustice affecting every aspect of one's life not only economically, but also physically, mentally, and emotionally (Clark & Dugdale, 2008; McCoach, 2002).

- In 2003, nationally 72% of females graduate from high school compared to 65% males (Greene & Winters, 2006)
- In 2003, nationally the high school graduation rate for African American students was 55% (Greene & Winters, 2006)
- In 2003, nationally 59% of African American females graduated with a diploma from high school compared to only 48% of African American males (Greene & Winters, 2006)
- In 2003, nationally the college completion rate for African American males was 21% compared to 47% African American females (Greene & Winters, 2006)
- In 2005, nationally only 55% of all African American students graduated from high school with their cohort and a regular diploma compared to 78% of White students (Editorial Projects in Education, 2008),
- In 2005, nationally only 47% of African American male students received diplomas with their cohort opposed to 74% of their White male peers (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2008; National Center for Education Statistics, 2010)

- In 2007, college enrollment was 70% white high school graduates compared to 56% for African American high school graduates (U.S. Department of Education, 2009)
- In 2008, nationally the cohort graduation rate for African American males remained at 47% but the White males graduation rate increased to 78% (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010)
- In 2008, nationally approximately 40% of African American students failed to graduate with their cohort (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010)
- In 2009, 73% of all African Americans ages 18-21 graduated high school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010)
- In 2009, 69% of African American males ages 18-24 graduated from high school compared to 77% of African American females the same age (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010)
- In 2009, 41.5% of all African Americans ages 18-24 were enrolled in college (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010)
- In 2009, 36.1% of African American males ages 18-24 were enrolled in college compared to 47% of African American females the same age (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010)
- In 2009, there were 1,058,000 African American males in college compared to 1,831,000 African American females (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010)

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2006), Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) African American female enrollment doubled the African American male population. Forty-seven HBCUs reported to the Thurgood Marshall College Fund Institute –TMCFI (2006-2007) that females represented 62% of the HBCU undergraduate enrollment compared to 38% males. Females also represented 71% of the HBCUs graduate enrollment compared to 39% males. The HBCU first professional enrollment for females was 59% compared to 41% of males. African American females exhibited higher levels of interest in graduating from high school and reported higher levels of academic self-efficacy (Saunders et al., 2004). For example, Western and Pettit (2005) stated that African American females are more apt to advance in education than African American males because of their positive attitude toward academic achievement. As a result, African American females obtain higher educational degrees and have increased job opportunities.

Skolnick & Currie (2006) stated many African American males are not successful because to their low educational level, lack of parental involvement, and poor economic status. Compared to other groups in society, African American males are permeating our prisons, scoring worst on standardized test, dropping out of school at a higher rate, and dying of drugs, alcohol, and violence (pg. 442-424). An important aspect that has been discussed among researchers is the notion of African American male's concept of masculinity and its impact on academic achievement. For some African American males, education is seen as feminine or irrelevant to their masculine identity (Noguera, 2003).

Sullivan, Riccio, and Reynolds (2008) found that males report more negative attitudes toward teachers than females. This inappropriate behavior is often related to the

socialization of males and females (Ding & Hall, 2007). Because obedience is more important to females than males, McCoach (2002) indicated African American females are less likely to be confrontational with their teachers' and the general attitude of African American females is more positive towards teachers and academic success than that of African American males.

The implications of the educational disparity between African American males and African American females, as evidenced in the gradual shift of power, are visible in today's society (Kaba, 2005). For example, more African American females are a custodial parent than African American males; African American females' college enrollment rate is higher than African American males; job opportunities for African American females are greater than that of African American males; and the high school graduation rate of African American females is higher than African American males (Noguera, 2003b). These statistics do not indicate the incompetence of educators and policymakers to solve the achievement gap dilemma tormenting the African American male population (Tatum, 2008). Therefore, this study provided findings which the African American male population and society as a whole can use to move beyond merely describing the situation to improving the situation.

### **Statement of the Problem**

African American males are not graduating from high school and post-secondary school at the same rate as African American females. In order to change that tradition, African American males need positive experiences within a learning environment that prepare them for continuous engagement in the academic arena. As schools across America spend money, invest in programs, sponsor workshops, offer teacher incentives,

and raise accountability standards in effort to raise the academic achievement of African American males, we must redirect the current educational trajectory for African American males. In today's economy, it is imperative for African American males to earn at least a high school diploma in order to pursue post-secondary skills which will enhance their opportunities for obtaining employment in a competitive market.

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine factors which impact the achievement gap between African American male and female siblings. Most African American male students claim obtaining an education is important to them and is a determining factor in how successful they will be in life. On the other hand, some African American males report they do not put forth much effort in school which results in low academic achievement (Joseph, 2000). The obstacles that African American males experience are persistent and complicated by factors which affect them long before high school and college. Regardless, it is imperative for the educational community to examine the discrepancy between African American males and females in order to close the achievement gap (Ford, 2008).

### **Research Questions**

Based on African American male and female siblings' academic statistics in high school environments and research which verifies an achievement gap between African American male and female siblings, the following overarching question of the study was this: What accounts for the academic differences between African American male and female siblings within the same family? In addition, the following sub-questions guided the study:

- 1) How do African American male and female siblings explain the academic achievement gap between them?
- 2) How do the parents/guardians explain the academic achievement gap between African American male and African American female siblings?
- 3) How does the teacher explain the academic achievement gap between African American male and African American female siblings?
- 4) How does the administrator explain the academic achievement gap between African American male and African American female siblings?

### **Significance of the Problem**

After reflecting on this phenomenon, the researcher conducted a qualitative case study focusing on factors which impact the achievement gap between male and female African American siblings. When making decisions about the participants, Creswell (2003) recommends you involve the participants. After a careful review of the literature, it was determined no other study has used this theoretical approach to study why the academic achievement rate for African American females is higher than their African American male sibling. This investigation examined the perceptions of former high school students, parents of the former high school students, educators, and administrators about the achievement gap between African American males and African American females. This study attempted to influence the implications for educational theory and practice and the society at large.

The “*No Child Left Behind*” (NCLB) mandates make it imperative that educators implement different strategies to improve student achievement. Students become aware of factors which promote achievement motivation in the classroom and how they can

increase their overall engagement in the learning process. They also understand the reasons or goals which underlie their involvement or noninvolvement activities. Consequently, every school system is rated based on “Adequate Yearly Progress” (AYP) and students’ academic performance. Therefore, the lack of effort and creativity in improving the environmental and educational experiences of African American males could be detrimental to society and the school system.

In this investigation, the researcher provided data and information which helped people understand the nature of a problem in order to intervene, thereby allowing human beings to more effectively control their environment (Patton, 2002). School leaders who are targeting students for additional assistance in preparing for state examinations or meeting promotion requirements could benefit from understanding external factors which impact African American students’ academic achievements. Identifying specific factors would narrow the focus on specific students; therefore, money would be saved and spent on the targeted students within the sub-group rather than the whole sub-group. This study provided educators a tool to enhance their practice and as motivation for reflecting on the educational experiences of all African American male students.

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to examine factors which impact the achievement gap between African American male and female siblings. This investigation took a qualitative approach utilizing a collective case study. Lincoln and Guba (2000) stated, “Qualitative methods come more easily to human-as-instrument (p, 198).” In the same manner, human-as-instruments is inclined toward methods which are extensions of normal human activities such as looking, listening, speaking, and reading.

## **Participants**

All participants in this study attended a school district in the Southeastern United States. A purposive sample of former local high school students, parents, teachers, and an administrator were interviewed. The students were chosen based on the specific criteria:

- African American male and female sibling must be a graduate of the same local high school during the 2008-2011 academic school years.
- African American male and female sibling must have been a high school student no more than four years.
- African American male and female siblings must live in the same home environment with their parents or guardian.
- African American female grade point average is 3.5 or higher and the African American male sibling grade point average is 3.5 or lower.

After identifying the students for this research, their parents, former teachers, and an administrator were contacted to introduce the researcher and the elements of the study. The researcher interviewed students, parents, teacher(s), and an administrator from one school district who met the criteria for this study.

## **Procedures**

Data was collected primarily through face-to-face interviews and document analysis (Creswell, 2003). Since the purpose of the study was to understand how different factors shape the African American male and female achievement gap in high school, the face-to-face interview process was the best method to use (Creswell, 2003).



Every effort was made to preserve the voices of the participants by using direct quotations when appropriate.

At least three cases were interviewed and the interviews lasted approximately 60 – 90 minutes per session. The interview questions served as a guide to ensure all participants responded to the same issues. When themes emerged from the participants' common experiences, the questions and probes changed as each interview continued and new issues emerged.

The collective case study was comprised of three cases with each case including male and female siblings, parents/or guardian, at least one teacher, and a school administrator. All interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed verbatim by a third party. The third party was required to sign a confidentiality agreement form before transcription began and each participant was identified by pseudonyms for confidentiality.

### **Data Analysis**

Once the researcher received the interview transcriptions, each participant's interview was read to get a better understanding of the different factors in the family and school process which influenced the achievement gap between African American males and African American females from the perspectives of the students, parents, teacher(s), and administrators. The researcher searched for similarities and differences in key words or phrases, times, relationships, feelings, and perceptions. Similarities were color coded in order to make a conclusion about the research. Furthermore, all interview documents were kept in a safe place and destroyed once the research process was completed.

### **Delimitations and Limitations of the Study**

The purpose of a collective case study was to identify factors which impacted the central phenomenon of the study (Creswell, 2005). This collective case study identified the sociocultural and educational factors influencing achievement among African American male and female siblings who were attending a school district in the Southeastern United States. The study has some limitations. The scope was limited because the researcher only examined achievement between African American males and females from one local high school. Subsequently, the findings may not be generalizable enough to all students which fit the criteria. In addition, as Creswell suggests, in this type of qualitative study, “the findings could be subject to other interpretations (Creswell, 2003, p.149).”

### **Summary**

The research presented in the literature reviewed above addressed factors associated with impacting the achievement gap between African American male and female siblings. Personal experiences with their social environment, family, parenting, siblings and education, exposed them to adversities in high school (Benard, 2004). How these factors operate in the lives of African American males from adverse circumstances was the focus and challenge of this research effort (Benard, 2004).

Researchers observe the goal of educational equity and excellence might be a very elusive issue, especially for most schools where African American males are considered an “*at-risk*” sub-group (Jordan and Cooper, 2003). This is a relevant topic in the educational arena given the conceptualization of equity on student outcomes. If educators are to facilitate successful learning opportunities for all learners, they must

know the learners. This includes knowing the innate personality and also learned cultural values which affect behavior. All students are products of external influences, especially within their immediate family, extended community, and culture. Every child of every culture, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, age, ability, and talent deserves to have an equal opportunity to be successful in school. Knowing each student's culture is essential for providing successful learning opportunities. African American males do "learn and succeed in school despite circumstances that include low socioeconomic status, minimal teacher expectations, and inadequate representation of their successes" (Fashola, 2005).

African American males are not lazy, criminal – minded, or academically inept. They are not socially defiant or deficits to society. Instead, African American males are respectful, intelligent, scholarly, and skillful. They are loving sons, loyal friends, and productive community members (Jones, 2005). They are high school and college graduates, business leaders, professional educators, husbands, and fathers (Cleveland, 2003). Consequently, there are African American males who truly beat the odds (Cleveland, 2003).

### **Definition of Terms**

#### *African American and Black*

The two terms were used interchangeably to represent people of African descent. However, cultural ecological theory identifies African Americans as a caste-like minority, a group that was involuntarily and permanently incorporated into a society by the processes of slavery or conquest (Ogbu, 2003); African American descendants of Africans brought to this country as slaves fit this definition.

### *At-Risk*

The presence of one or more factors or influences that increase the probability of a negative outcome for a child or youth (Masten & Reed, 2002)

### *Family Environment*

A group of individuals living under one roof and surrounded by the same conditions.

### *First Professional Enrollment*

Enrolled in any of the following degree programs: Audiology (Au.D.), Chiropractic (D.C. or D.C.M.), Dentistry (D.D.S. or D.M.D.), Law (L.L.B., J.D.), Medicine (M.D.), Nursing (D.N.P.), Optometry (O.D.), Osteopathic Medicine (D.O.), Pharmacy (Pharm.D.), Physical Therapy (D.P.T.), Podiatry (D.P.M., D.P., or Pod.D.), Theology (M.Div., M.H.L., B.D., or Ordination), Veterinary Medicine (Thurgood Marshall College Fund Institute, 2009) .

### *Low Achieving Student*

Students who do not meet or exceed the requirements for student performance and achievement based upon the standards set by the Georgia Performance Standards Commission.

### *Protective Factors*

Characteristics and events that positively influence children and help limit the impact of risk factors (Seifer, Sameroff, Arnold, Baldwin, & Baldwin, 1992)

### *Risk Factors*

Background characteristics or life events that may have a negative impact on child development (Seifer, Sameroff, Arnold, Baldwin, & Baldwin, 1992)

*School Official*

Someone the institution has employed, contracted with, or has an official relationship with to access pertinent educational data to perform his/her designated job functions.

*Status Dropout*

Students who were enrolled in school and who never completed a high school program (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010)

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A person's education is closely linked to his or her life chances, income, and well-being (Battle & Lewis, 2002). Therefore, it is important to have a clear understanding of what benefits or hinders one's educational attainment. In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, globalization caused a myriad of effects upon the African American community. Workers are required to think independently, solve problems, and make decisions (Silva, 2009). Reports question whether public schools are providing adequate preparation to meet this challenge and whether the United States is as competitive in the global market as it once was (Bybee & Starkweather, 2006). In the wake of *No Child Left Behind*, teachers and administrators are constantly being challenged to find new ways to teach and connect with every student. Likewise, federal and state standards mandated evidence of improvement among all groups of learners and required all students to have access to highly qualified teachers. *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) also used federal funds to reward schools that had an increase in their student test scores (Arce et al., 2005).

Re-evaluating the practices and procedures used to educate African American male students requires attention to the NCLB performance indicators. Based on the achievement data, the NCLB performance indicators in Georgia are disaggregated for fifteen different subgroups (The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2012). Despite attention to the aforementioned subgroups, significant gaps in academic achievement between African American males and African American females still exist. Because this legislation focuses on student achievement and directly affects schools, it is important to examine how factors impact the achievement gap between African

American male and female siblings. As the century progresses and employment opportunities become more competitive, it will become imperative for African American males to acquire skills and an education to remain competitive in a global market (Mackie, 2003).

The achievement gap between African American males and African American females is limited to aggregate reporting of gender and ethnicity; however, it is detrimental to the decline of the African American family and has a negative impact on our nation's economy (Winters & Greene, 2006). According to Grantham (2004) gender differences in the academic performance of African American students suggest females had higher levels of achievement than males. For the past 25 years, African American males' social, educational, and economical outcomes have been more systemically devastating than any other racial group or gender (Oliver, 2006). Consequently, African American males have lower educational attainment levels, are more chronically unemployed, and are more likely to be sent to jail or prison (Noguera, 2003). The effect of the educational challenges encountered by African American males is the low number of African American males graduating from high school and enrolling in post-secondary education (Mincey et al., 2010).

In addition to globalization, there is also a gradual shift of power from African American males to African American females. Grantham (2004) examined the significance of interracial disparities between African American males and females and discovered at every socioeconomic level, African American females outperformed African American males. In urban school settings, African American males are more likely than African American females to attend the most segregated and least resourced

public schools (Rothstein, 2004). African American males are over-represented in all academic failure categories (Dallmann-Jones, 2002). Moreover, African American males compared to other racial groups or genders are more likely to be placed in special education programs and suspended or expelled from school (Noguera, 2008). On the other hand, they are under-represented in advance and honors courses (Noguera, 2008).

Balfanz and Legters (2004) stated African American males are suspended from school and leaving schools for the street corners at a rate which supersedes the rate in which African American males are graduating or receiving academic achievement. Despite the many obstacles that African American males are exposed to in today's society, African American males can learn (Obgu, 2003). The support African American males need extends far beyond academic assistance (Toldson, 2008). According to the Schott Foundation for Public Education (2008), African American males are in need of socio-emotional supports to aid in building resilience, positive self-concepts, and character development. Therefore, the community must create a system where African American males have the support and resources needed for their educational success. Furthermore, a deliberate, intense focus is needed to disrupt and redirect the current educational trajectory for African American males.

### **Social Environment**

Socializing African American males for educational success is essential for producing academic success in today's society (Bell, 2010). Historically, African American males have been the recipient of self-hatred and the looming effects of slavery. In addition, they are often thought of as possessing less than acceptable qualities such as being lazy and irresponsible (Douglas, 2007). Because many African American males



have internalized negative stereotypes about themselves, their looks, and their abilities, these negative beliefs about their culture may have baffled their academic potential (Bell, 2010; Douglas, 2007). “The treatment African American males have received from America’s society has contributed greatly to the development of self-hatred” (Douglas, 2007, pg. 4). Ogbu (2003) argued community perceptions suggesting the history of discrimination against African American men, even those who work hard, will never receive rewards equivalent to their white counterparts. This alone can contribute to self-defeating behaviors which African American males portray in the community, school, and family environment.

Ogbu (2003) suggested certain cultural influences can lower the aspirations of African American males and contribute to the adoption of self-destructive behaviors. Each day African American males suffer experiences of being ignored for service, assumed guilty of negative behaviors, receive inferior treatment, stared at because of color, ridiculed because of hair texture, or singled out for being different (Carroll, 2006). The stress of living in such an environment can cause Mundane Extreme Environmental Stress (M.E.E.S.) because stress becomes a regular part of the day-to-day experiences for African American males. The stress also has a harsh impact on the psyche and world view of African Americans’ environment because the ultimate effect of the stress causes African American children and their families to exhibit inappropriate behaviors (Carroll, 2006).

Throughout America, African American males face numerous social and economic barriers (Bryant, 2000). African American male students are more likely to be exposed to environments which do not foster educational and economic success (Bryant,

2000). These environments consist of poverty, unemployment disparities, gang violence, under-resourced neighborhoods, homelessness, constant mobility, inadequate education experiences, and limited resources and services (Bryan, 2005, Chau, Thampi, & Wight, 2010). Georgia and nine other states with the lowest graduation rates enrolled more than 1,600,000 African American male students, which represent 40% of the African American male public school population (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2008). In larger metropolitan areas, African American males more so than their peers are educated in schools with fewer certified teachers, less-rigorous curriculum, less access to technology (Barton & Coley, 2009), fewer social support networks, and lack of parental supervision and involvement in education at school and home (Brady-Smith, Fauth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Evans 2004), lower teacher expectations concerning their academic performance (Barton, 2003; Bennett et al.; Carey, 2002), and less access to books, computers, and other devices which enhance or stimulate learning (Evans, 2004). Furthermore, the chances an African American male will have highly effective teachers are a third of that for a White, non Hispanic male student (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2008).

Research indicates African American male students' academic success is higher in predominately White, Asian, and Non-Hispanic schools. These schools provide better resources, more highly effective teachers, challenging curricula, quality opportunities for success and supportive administrators (Schott Foundation of Public Education, 2008). Moreover, the overall quality of a school is measured by the quality, effectiveness, and commitment of its teachers. These teachers are better equipped to provide rigorous,

culturally responsive instruction which may lead to improved academic outcomes for African American male students (College Board, 2010; Tate, 2005).

Furthermore, poverty has been consistently associated with the achievement gap for African American students. For many low-income African American families, the challenges African American males experience are directly or indirectly related to the poor economic condition of their families and not parenting style (Pong & Ju 2000). In 2010, 38% of African American children under the age of 18 were living in poverty, compared to 12% of Caucasian children (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010). Poverty directly reduces the access and quality of resources, social and health service, and opportunities such as food, shelter, health care, education, and transportation. Indirectly, poverty impacts the ability of parents to provide consistent supervision and monitoring, adequate family management practices, and an array of socially and educationally stimulating experiences (Fraser, 2004).

According to Jencks and Mayer (1990), growing up in a disadvantaged neighborhood negatively affects academic achievement because of the collective socialization processes which occur in the neighborhood. As a result, African American males are more likely than their peers to: experience poor academic success marked by completing few years of school or dropping out of school (Hill & Taylor, 2004); display more externalized aggressive behavioral problems (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000); have less parent involvement in education (Bowen, Bowen, & Ware, 2002); and have less access to educational opportunities and resources (Fraser, et. al., 2004).

Other risk factors related to disadvantaged neighborhoods may include lower adult supervision, inadequate public resources such as parks and youth activities, greater

exposure to aggressive peers and deviance, less constraints against acting out, or justifiable reasons to defend themselves aggressively in a hostile environment (Fraser, et al., 2004). African American males are being incarcerated at the highest rate in history; more are rejecting the responsibilities of fatherhood; fewer are going to college; more are dropping out of college; and more household responsibilities are shifting to the woman (Muwakkil, 2006). According to McAdoo & McAdoo (2009), the crisis of the African American family is indisputably the crisis of the African American male and his inability to carry out those responsibilities associated with being a husband and/or father in the nuclear family. Statistics reveal the following information about African American males and females:

- Jails, as well as federal and state prisons, housed more than 12 times as many African American males as African American females (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2009).
- In 2005-2006, Georgia's total African American enrollment was 308,716 and only 40% of the African American males graduated with their cohort (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2008).
- In 2009, 9.3% of all African Americans ages 16-24 dropped out of school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).
- In 2009, 10.6% of African American males ages 16-24 were drop outs compared to 8.1% of African American females (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).

- In December 2011, 15.7% of African American males ages 20 and over were unemployed compared to 13.9% of African American females (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012).

Meyers (2002) reported African American men are faced with the dilemma of being placed in a relatively inferior social- structural position while they are urged strongly to perform roles which may lead to a positively evaluated social-structural position. “African American males frequently have no clear, positive, or realistic adult ambition. They wish to succeed, but have no clear notion of how or what that will entail for them” (Hare & Hare, 1991, pg. 10). Therefore, educators must understand environmental and cultural factors have a profound influence upon African American males’ behavior and academic performance (Noguera, 2003). In conclusion, educators must also understand how environmental and cultural factors influence the ways African American males perceive, interpret, and respond to education as a result of their unique experiences and adaptations to their status in society (Ogbu, 2003).

### **Family Support**

Family culture is vital to a student’s life inside and outside of school; it has a major impact on the student learning; and it is the primary site for social capital (Majoribanks, 2005). Updegraff, Helms, McHale, Thayer, & Sale (2004) suggest children get ideas about friendship interactions and control from how their parents demonstrate relationships. According to Caspe, Lopez, and Wolos (2007), when African American students have family support, academic achievement increases and discipline issues decrease. A supporting family, encouraging educators, and enduring perseverance

were positively associated with academic success (Flowers, Zhang, Moore, & Flowers, 2004).

Risk factors such as two-parent versus single-parent households, socioeconomic status, maternal and paternal characteristics, and parenting practices play an important role in students' academic achievement (Jeynes, 2005). The environment at home is a primary socialization agent and influences a child's interest in school and aspirations for the future (Long, 2007).

The traditional nuclear family is slowly fading away in all communities. In White American communities, about 80% of the families include a two-parent home while only 47% of African American families maintain a two-parent structure (Reddick, 2003). The radical difference in family structure does not mean African American families are falling apart. Families no longer consist of a mother, father, and children. It can include a grandfather, a grandmother, an aunt, or a neighbor (Sholes, 2009). These changes to the face of families were the results of urbanization (Patterson, 2010). Grandparents influence African American students' academic achievement more than African American fathers (Cheng & Starks, 2002).

Usually, children from African American two-parent families have better academic achievement than children from African American single-parent families (Majoribanks, 2005). African American children who grow up in two-parent families also have lower dropout rates than those with a single parent or step-parents (Majoribanks, 2005).

The fact that families are headed by one parent is nothing new to the African American community (Reddick, 2003). While 46% of all children live in a single parent

household, 69% of African American children are born into single parent households according to the African American Healthy Marriage Initiative (2010). Majoribanks (2003) suggests African American single-parents are less involved with their children; therefore, provide less encouragement and lower expectations of their children. In addition, African American single-parent household income is less and the lack of financial support causes an increase of stress and conflicts for the single-parent (Majoribanks, 2003). Regardless of which parent is missing, the mother or father, children from African American single-parent families find it more difficult to connect with school (Fraser, 2004). Although African American single-parent families may struggle, the family remains committed, support their children, and provide for their children (Reddick, 2003). Despite the circumstances, the African American families want the same thing the rest of America wants for their children: to be fed, educated, and protected (Reddick, 2003).

Wealth is the factor which has the greatest impact on student achievement (Orr, 2003). The socioeconomic status (SES) of a child is most commonly determined by combining parents' educational level, occupational status, and income level (Jeynes, 2002). Studies indicate SES affects all children and especially African American students' educational success (Eamon, 2005 & Hochschild, 2003). African American males who are reared in homes with more financial resources have better odds of performing well in school (Toldson, 2008). African American students who have a low SES earn lower test scores and are more likely to drop out of school (Eamon, 2005 & Hochschild, 2003). Furthermore, all students' family SES is highly associated with the differences in math grades and grade point averages (Payne, 2003). The economic

hardships caused by low SES lead to disruptions in parenting, an increase of family conflicts, and an increase in parent depression (Eamon, 2005). Studies that focus on how family structure and income influence academic performance of children from two-parent and single-parent homes find differences in performances when the family income is equal (Tillman, 2007).

Maternal characteristics are key elements which affect African American students' academic achievement (Eamon, 2005). According to Hymowitz (2005), 70% of African American children are born to single African American mothers. When the mother of African American children is absent from the household, the children's grades tend to be lower than if the father was absent from the home (Belch & Willis, 2002). The children of mothers who are more educated have higher self-esteem and earn higher test scores (Belch & Willis, 2002; Eamon, 2005). Essentially, mothers who delay childbearing provide more "cognitively stimulating" and supportive environments at home which has a positive effect on student achievement (Eamon, 2005).

The roles of fathers in families are influenced by internal as well as external factors (Toldson, 2008). African American males with both mothers and fathers at home reported higher levels of academic achievement (Toldson, 2008). The father's education has a significant impact on African American male, but not as much on African American females' academic achievement (Toldson, 2008). African American students who have fathers involved in school have greater academic success and are less likely to be expelled or suspended (Alderman & Swain, 2000).

Every high school student should have at least one faculty member who is knowledgeable of the student's aspirations, strengths, and weaknesses (National



Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004). A major problem for African American males in educational institutions is the lack of African American role models (Atwater & Russell, 2004). Research suggests mentoring has the potential to be a powerful and effective component for success with African American males (Woodland, 2008). In order to fulfill the absence of positive male role models, educational institutions study the role of mentoring as a predictor of African American male academic success (Lewis, 2009). African American males view the role of the mentor as providing them with the values, cultures of the new environment, awareness, and personal experiences on how to become productive citizens in society (Jones, 2005). African American males who experience supportive adult-child relationships tend to exhibit more confidence, experience greater sense of security, have higher grades, and increased college enrollment rates (Woodland, 2008).

Toldson's (2008) research suggests modeling is a more important component to academic development among African American males than African American females. African American males need positive adult role models to promote positive engagement and behavior, as well as guidance as they transition into adulthood (Suarez-Orozco, Pimental, & Martin, 2009). In other words, successful African American male role models are essential for enhancing African American males' academic and social development in the educational environment (Span, 2000).

Nevertheless, the high number of African American males who are being raised in homes without fathers increases the need for policies to support parent cooperation programs (Toldson, 2008). According to Kunjufu (2007), more than 63% of African American children come from single parent homes where mothers are the primary source

of support and only 32% of African American children have their father in the home. In homes with single parents, only about 30% of the absent fathers offer financial aid or have even sporadic contact with their children. Many African American men failed to provide for their families because they could not, not because they did not want to (McAdoo & McAdoo, 2009). Because so many African American males are raised without a father or role model, African American women are fulfilling the roles and responsibilities of both the mother and father (Atwater, 2004).

### **Parenting**

Parental involvement for African American males is positively associated with student academic success, increased attendance rates, fewer discipline problems, lower dropout rates and higher aspirations in life (Kunjuku, 2007). When African American parents are actively involved in their son's academic efforts by monitoring homework as well as other academic pursuits, limiting nonproductive activities, and communicating with teachers and school officials, they increase their son's opportunities to succeed in school (Mandara, 2006). Regardless of what the parent involvement program is, African American males whose parents are involved in their education do better in school than those students whose parents are not involved (Cooney & Bottom, 2003). Moreover, Bainbridge and Lasley (2002) noted once the collaboration of the school and the family exists, the parental involvement ensures a home environment that is more conducive to learning. Likewise, the communication between the home and school is more effective regardless of race, education, and environment.

High parental expectations also improve student outcomes (Jeynes & Trusty, 2003). Parental expectations for student success and high expectation for achievement

stand out as the most significant influences on high school students' achievement growth, credit completion, and enrollment in extracurricular academic programs (Chen, 2008).

When African American adolescents perceive their parents have high educational goals for them, they have more interest in school, greater academic self-regulation, and higher goal pursuits (Spera, 2006). There is evidence African American parents' expectations have an even greater effect on math scores when parents also communicate to their young adolescents that academic success is defined by effort, rather than by a desire to outperform others (Gutman, 2005).

Although the educational aspirations of African American males are influenced by the choices which are available to them, parents' aspirations and expectations affect the students' aspirations and expectations academically (Hong & Ho, 2005). When African American students perceive their parents value education, they are also more likely to feel competent and motivated in their schoolwork (Paulson, 2002). Parental aspirations and supervision are also important predictors of African American males who will graduate from high school (Hong & Ho, 2005). When African American families discuss school issues on a regular basis, the parents' expectations for the students have a more positive influence on academic achievement (Jeynes, 2005).

African American males who are academically successful are more likely than at-risk African American females to have nurturing, but firm parents who are confident about their educational outlook (Mandara, 2006). According to Hofferth (2003), the authoritative parenting style, warm and controlling, is used predominately with African American females because of their academic success. On the contrary, the authoritarian parenting style, firm disciplinarian, is used with African American males. Fine, Bruns, &

Payne (2004) argued African American males who were successful academically had parents who were either over-protective or over-empowering. Furthermore, these African American males were reared in families characterized by high levels of academic engagement, strictness, nurturance, and community support (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). Edwards (2004) believes the primary function of the parent is that of an encourager. This often takes the form of verbal inspiration “ ‘to study so you won’t have to work hard,’ or ‘go to school so you can make something of yourself,’ and even ‘make more of your life than I was able to do’ ” (Edwards, 2004, p. 413). African American males with strong orientations toward the future view education as an avenue to life success (Brown & Jones, 2004).

### **Education**

Blum (2005) and Klem & Connell (2004) cited a child’s sense of connectedness to school is a major predictor of academic achievement and should be considered seriously by educators when looking to improve the academic achievement of students from high risk environments. As Godfrey (2003) stated, “Just as early adolescents are undergoing the physical, cognitive, and emotional changes of puberty, educators ask them to adjust to a different format in their schooling” (p.3). The social environment of the school and the cultural actions within the environment influence students’ perceptions of their own effort and success in school (Kaufman, 2004). Moeller (2005) suggested students’ perceptions of school climate and their own sense of responsible behavior are correlated. Therefore, family support may be lacking if the school environment denies their cultural expression and heritage (Baker, 2005; Pinkney, 2000). When African American males do not receive social and emotional support which encourages success in

school from home, they seek attention in inappropriate ways in the classroom (Obgu, 2003). Cross (2006) concluded the experiences African American students bring to the classroom may be contrary to what the school expects.

The achievement gaps between African American males and females are insignificant in elementary school (Carter, 2003). During middle school and high school, African American males tend to focus more on being accepted by their peers and less on academic achievement (Taylor & Graham, 2007). Tatum (2005) noted African American males often adopt a “cool pose” which includes a nonchalant, tough, hostile, and uncaring demeanor to save face and to cope with external pressures. Cool pose is a defense mechanism which is adopted as a way to cope with oppression and invisibility (Tatum, 2005). According to Carey (2002), African American males become far more alienated from academics than do African American females as they move through high school. For example, Western and Pettit (2005) stated African American females catch up in education better than African American males because of their positive attitude toward academic achievement. As a result, African American females have increased job opportunities and obtain higher educational degrees. In higher education, African American males persist toward graduation at a rate lower than their peers (Jackson, 2003). Presently, academic trends indicate African American females at the secondary level continue to outscore African American males in reading and writing, while African American males’ mathematical levels are higher than African American females (NCES, 2008). For African American males, these gaps are influenced by their attitudes toward school, peers, and school climate, whereas, African American females are affected by their culture and socioeconomic status (Mickelson & Green, 2006). In addition, African

American male students reported negative views about their future (Adelabu, 2008). According to McCoach (2002), a poor attitude toward school may cause poor academic performance which may be a prerequisite for lower wages and socioeconomic status in the future. Educators know teaching and learning take place in nurturing environments; therefore, to transform the poor attitude toward school for African American males, educational institutions must provide a nurturing environment (Jones, 2005). The environment will reassure African American males someone cares for them, someone believes they can achieve intellectually, someone is willing to work with them, and someone will show them the path to enlightenment (Jones, 2005). In the same way, this kind of nurturing environment supports positive institutional experiences and African American male students' self-esteem and self-efficacy is strengthened (McGillin, 2003). As a result, these students overcome the negative effects attributed to at-risk factors and there is a positive impact on African American students' achievement (Obgu, 2003; McGillin, 2003).

Teacher attitudes and expectations also impact student achievement (Evans, 2005; Kober, 2001; Varlas, 2005). Wood, Kaplan & McLoyd (2007) found that some teachers display biases toward African American male students compared to African American female students. Teachers of African American students must adjust their teaching styles to accommodate teaching in terms of caring, using mothering skills, demonstrating a strong belief in African American students, demanding the best, balancing discipline, as well as adopting the teaching profession as a calling (Love & Krueger, 2005).

In successful schools of all gender groups, teachers believed all students could and would learn (Moore, 2005; Tucker & Stronge, 2005). Findings from the Walker and

Greene (2009) study suggested “high school students who felt a sense of belonging are more likely to focus on the development of understanding and then use cognitive efforts to make understanding possible (p.470).” Irvine and Armento (2001) stated effective teachers of African American students adapt their knowledge, strategies, and philosophy in addition to modifying instruction to meet the students’ cultural needs, interests, learning preferences, and prior experiences. On the other hand, ineffective teachers lower expectations for African American students because of the students’ current performance and not the students’ potential to perform (Kober, 2001). Feeling sorry for the students because of their environment, family, socioeconomic status, and lowering expectations does a disservice to the students (Diffily & Perkins, 2002).

For many African American males, schools represent a hostile environment in which educational success is thwarted by a lack of intellectual rigor and expectations for success (Conchas, 2006). According to Noguera (2003) school performance of African American students is influenced by a number of variables which include the following:

- African American males are more likely to be placed in vocational high school curricular tracks rather than college preparatory curricular.
- African American males are much more likely to be placed in special education or general education classes than gifted, honor, or advance placement courses.
- African American males have higher dropout rates among all gender groups.
- African American males are suspended from school more frequently and for longer periods of time than any other race or gender group.
- African American males are more frequently viewed negatively by school staffs.

These barriers assist in the creation of the deficiency in African American male achievement which ultimately results in the possession of a poor quality education with few chances for upward mobility in the future (Obgu, 2003).

Educational experiences serve as the antecedents to social successes or social ills depending on the quality of the experience (Noguera, 2003). A confluence of ills has long conspired to marginalize African American males and track them into a trajectory of failure (Muwakkil, 2006). Lamb (2006) reported the primary socializing agent for African American males is elementary and secondary education, but regrettably, this socializing agent has negatively affected the achievement of African American males by disproportionately placing them into special education classes, lower academic tracks, and excessive discipline infractions. Furthermore, in almost every category of academic failure, African American males is disproportionately represented (Toldson, 2008).

African American males must be taught how to survive in today's classroom environment (Bell, 2010a). Raising African American males can be a challenging pursuit in a world which tends to undervalue the culture and achievements of the African American population (Bell, 2009; Douglass, 2007). As a matter of fact, educators must realize African American males can be raised to have a great sense of who they are and what their place is in the world (Noguera, 2003). They can be educated to understand what the world expects of them and how they can change the negative opinions associated with them (Obgu, 2003). Spencer et al. (2003) supports this concept by stating "The existing literature ignores the fact that many African American males are quite successful in spite of extreme reactive coping efforts required for life in high-risk environments" (p. 619).



## **Siblings**

When children have a good relationship with their siblings, they have a good relationship with their parents and friends (Olivia, 2005). Although parent-child relationships are suggested to be more important in promoting the basis for relationships, sibling relationships enhance the relationship by increasing the quality and value (Kitzmann, 2002). Milvesky (2005) suggests when children lack a strong relationship with their parents, having a strong sibling relationship helps balance the void. Many times the siblings bridge the gap between school and home in families where the parents are less familiar with the curriculum, instructions, policy, and procedures (Williams & Gregory, 2001). Research suggests the relationships of siblings with respect to achievement outcomes are vital to the children's development of social skills (Milveskh, 2005).

Sibling relationships and peer relationships are similar; therefore, it is easy for siblings to apply the social skills they developed towards peer relationships (Milvesky, 2005). Children with siblings demonstrated more cooperative skills when playing with other people (Cutting & Dunn, 2006). In addition, middle born children have higher quality relationships with their friends in order to compensate for the lack of attention and support they receive from their siblings (Salmon, 2003). Middle born children are influenced more by their friends than family members (Salmon, 2003). In college, friendships are more important because friends are more accessible than siblings (Sherman, Lansford, & Volling, 2006). Having the experience with sibling relationships as a child allows children to have better social skills and closer relationships with other people (Updegraff et al., 2004).

Having older siblings who value academic efforts provide a powerful role model for younger siblings to identify with and emulate (Jacob & Bleeker, 2004). Bandura (2001) suggests social learning and modeling of behavior are a significant attribute by which older siblings influence the psychological and behavioral adjustment of their younger siblings. Likewise, the older siblings monitor experiences and provide support for their younger siblings with respect to day to day necessities (Conley, 2004). When younger siblings considered their own adolescent experiences, their expectations were consistent with what they perceived their older siblings' adolescent experiences to be (Whiteman & Buchanan, 2002). Tucker (2001) reported older siblings provided more academic relevant support to their younger siblings than younger siblings provide to their older siblings.

As the number of siblings increases, individual academic performance decreases (Downey, 2001). Evidence also suggests children receive less attention and less encouragement from parents as the number of siblings increases (Lawson & Mace, 2009). Children who have several siblings cannot receive as many parental resources which lead to lower educational attainment (Werum & Carter, 2002)

Conley (2004) suggests that among disadvantaged households, sibling disparities tend to increase because of limited opportunities and resources, thus requiring the older sibling to be the provider for the resources. In households where parenting strategies were lacking, but resources were sufficient, the parents often invested more heavily in the siblings having the worst chances for academic success and employment opportunities (Conley, 2004). Typically, low socio-economic families function effectively by investing more in the offspring for whom they expect higher return reinforcing sibling differences.

Ineffective average socio-economic families on the other hand invest more in children with lower expectations and lack academic success. This is usually done to bring more equity in the outcomes of offspring (Whiteman & Buchanan, 2002).

According to Milveskey (2005), children adjust more socially when they are supported by their siblings. Consequently, children with siblings have a better social understanding of others' feelings and emotions, perspectives, and self-control in school (Milvesky & Levitt, 2005). Research suggests that feeling support from siblings may be associated with children feeling more comfortable around others and may encourage them to be more socially involved and connected with their peers (Branje, van Lieshout, van Aken, & Haselager, 2004). Most importantly, children with more support portray less signs of depression or withdrawal and more signs of high self-esteem and happiness (Milvesky, 2005).

### **Summary**

Most research on African American males' success in high school portrays an unsuccessful journey in the educational world. The research presented in the literature reviewed factors associated with impacting the achievement gap between African American male and African American female siblings. These personal experiences with different factors expose African American males to adversities in high school. Therefore, how these factors operate in the lives of African American males from adverse circumstances is the focus and challenge for today's societies.

Many of the daunting challenges African American males face are because of consistent inequality in society. Although environmental and educational institutions will always be the most important factors in African American males' academic success, they

are at risk of educational failure because of negative environmental and educational factors within the community and schools. Many of the environmental and educational conditions have been a part of the African American males' lifestyle for so long until the conditions are now intergenerational. For example, African American males are inordinately at risk of poverty, unemployment, incarceration, parental neglect, and non-traditional family settings (Noguera, 2003). Despite the aforementioned challenges, communities can reform with policies and leadership guided by research and theory (Jordan et al., 2000). As a result, African American males in the community will be empowered by positive role models, parental support, and a nurturing school climate.

In order to change the perception and reality of schools, the community must be strengthened. The school is a remnant of the community; therefore, community building must become the heart of any school improvement effort (Thomas Sergiovanni, 2006).

On the contrary, educational policies, procedures, and expectations cause educators to pay little attention to the cultural background of African American male students. As the United States government offer incentive to increase African American male students' performance, institutions serving African American males must implement programs to decrease social regression and achievement gap between African American males and their peers. Schools across the United States are being held to a higher level of accountability for African American males' academic success. In order to keep African American students in school and motivate them to do their best, they must be disarmed of the negativity schools have placed on them. Every student should have at least one educator who is knowledgeable of their aspirations, strengths, and weaknesses. Educators regardless of their ethnicity must see the African American male as a student

who needs an education in order to survive in this global economy. Educators can't be afraid of African American males; instead, they must nurture them. Of course nurturing will take time, but African American males can respond and rise to the occasion.

The literature also acknowledged a positive relationship between parental education and educational aspirations of African American male students. Parents who had a high school diploma or a college degree valued education passed on the values to their children. Likewise, single parent families regardless of SES also held high expectations, aspirations, and standard for African American males. In spite of social hardships and barriers, parental beliefs and values encouraged the African American males to graduate from high school.

Parental involvement is significant in improving the achievement gap for African American males. When parents have a positive parent-child relations characterized by nurturance, support, respect, trust, and open communication, African American males' academic performance improve. Most successful African American males have parents who are more assertive, set high realistic expectations, and are aware of the students' academic progress. On the other hand, parents of African American males who are not successful are less assertive and involved in the students' education, set unrealistic and unclear expectations, and lack parenting skills.

Fortunately, many African American males thrive despite these social realities. The implementation of a nurturing school climate and positive cultural role models aims to counteract the negative influences and images associated with the achievement gap between African American male and female siblings. In the age of school reform and

accountability, schools and communities must provide support and resources to make a difference in African American males' academic achievement.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

It is not foreign for African American males and females to experience various factors that may adversely impact their vitality in many facets of the U. S. society. African American males are often viewed as aggressive, at-risk, and cognitively inferior in the United States society. These often unsubstantiated societal perceptions are coupled with the challenges of being subject to discrimination or racism. Regardless of the venue, context, and environment, the African American male population is disproportionately prone to negative experiences and risk factors in society. The presence of these risk or negative factors creates continuously challenging situations for African- American males. Therefore, the problems African American males face in greater society also hold true for the African American male in the high school environment. Despite efforts to improve ineffective schools and raise academic achievement, there is a well-documented, lingering achievement gap between affluent and poor students, as well as between African American male and African American female students (Jencks & Phillips, 1998).

#### **Research Questions**

Based on African American male and female sibling academic statistics in high school environments and research which verifies an achievement gap between African American male and African American female siblings, the following overarching question of the study was this: What accounts for the academic differences between African American male and female siblings within the same family? In addition, the following sub-questions guided the study:

- 1) How do African American male and female siblings explain the academic achievement gap between them?
- 2) How do the parents/guardians explain the academic achievement gap between African American male and African American female siblings?
- 3) How does the teacher explain the academic achievement gap between African American male and African American female siblings?
- 4) How does the administrator explain the academic achievement gap between African American male and African American female siblings?

### **Research Design**

This qualitative research study is significant because there is a dearth of the literature which has used a theoretical approach to study environmental factors which impact the achievement gap between male and female African American siblings. It is a well-known fact; disparity in achievement between African American males and females in America's public schools has become an alarming problem (Joseph, 2000). Data and research about African American male students who do not succeed academically are enormous, but minimal literature is known about African American males who succeed despite substantial barriers (Barbarin, 2002; Cook, 2000). To understand how factors impact the academic success for African American males, the researcher chose a qualitative approach because it reflects the "problematic and routine moments in individual lives" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 5).

In this qualitative study, it is important to describe and analyze the setting in which the participants in this study form their educational beliefs. McMillian & Schumacher (2006) state the qualitative researcher believes humans actions are strongly



influenced by the setting in which they occur. The researcher cannot understand human behavior without understanding the framework within which subjects interpret their thoughts, feelings, and actions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Hence, this qualitative research study and its potential results will impact a number of areas and address several different audiences. The results from this study may lead to changes in school policy, program modifications and implementations, more teacher preparation, and more teacher professional development.

Research suggests academic achievement is influenced by student attitudes which provide a justification for including the voices of African American students in future research in order to alleviate this epidemic (McCoach, 2002; Tatum, 2008). According to Fordham (2000), motivation is enhanced by students' active involvement and ownership of the learning process. Knowing the facts from this study, teachers, administrators, and stakeholders may become more responsive to students' needs and make policy changes in order for institutions to address factors pertaining to student motivation. After all, when African American males are provided adequate direction, support, and opportunities, they are better able to overcome many of the academic and social challenges which often hinder their development (Joseph, 2000).

Parents/guardians will be able to understand their children's willingness, need, desire, and compulsion to actively participate in the learning process. They will also be able to examine various aspects of their children's academic progress and achievements. Eamon (2005) found parental support and personal beliefs of optimism and persistence regardless of socioeconomic status were positively associated with academic success (Flowers, Zhang, Moore & Flowers, 2004). African American males' odds of succeeding

academically increase when parents use authoritative parenting, teach the children their cultural heritage, instill in them an attitude to achieve in spite of barriers, and are actively involved monitoring school work and limiting counterproductive time (Mandara, 2006).

To increase the academic achievement of African American males, their educational needs must be addressed. For example, “No Child Left Behind Act of 2001,” signed by President George W. Bush reflects a greater demand for accountability and standards within education towards the demonstration of students’ as well as teachers’ performance skills (U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2001). Underachievement contamination will defile not only the hopes of African American males; it will have a much greater implication on all Americans (Tatum, 2008). Therefore, given the growing disproportion in academic achievement between African American males and African American females, the need for a study investigating factors affecting how African American males experience the learning environment is transparent.

According to Maxwell (2005), qualitative research seeks to understand a given research problem or topic from the perspectives of the involved participants. Qualitative research is especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviors, and social contexts of particular populations (Maxwell, 2005). In addition, qualitative research is also effective in identifying intangible factors, such as social norms, socioeconomic status, gender roles, ethnicity, and religion. Therefore, Denzin and Lincoln (2003) believe humans will lean toward interviewing, observing, monitoring available documents and records, taking account of nonverbal cues, and interpreting inadvertent unobtrusive measures (p.199).

When making decisions about the participants, Creswell (2003) recommends the researcher involves the participants. Denzin & Lincoln (2003) stated the strength of qualitative research is its ability to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue. Therefore, the researcher provided information about the “human” side of an issue: contradictory behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals.

The researcher selected case study as the type of design for this qualitative study. According to Creswell (2010), case study research is “a qualitative approach in which the researcher explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection, involving multiple sources of information, and reports a case description and case-based-themes” (p. 73).

This investigation took a qualitative approach utilizing a collective case study. Case study was the specific approach used in this qualitative study. A case study involves the study of “a number of cases in order to investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition” (Stake, 2000). Case studies include the following key characteristics (a) the researcher’s purpose is to study a case (b) the researcher collects multiple forms of data (c) the researcher analyzes the data for description and themes and (d) the researcher reports description, themes, and lessons learned from the case (Clark & Creswell, 2011).

This research was conducted with former high school students, parents, teacher(s), and an administrator in order to hear stories through the voices of individuals who have experienced a variety of life experiences. The researcher evaluated occurrences in those circumstances that allowed the individuals to overcome their

obstacles. To help narrow the research focus, the researcher obtained documents of former students who graduated from a local high school. These documents included 8th grade Criterion Reference Competency Tests (CRCT) scores, End of Course Test (EOCT) results, and Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHSGT) results.

### **Participants**

The participants for this study were two administrators from the Southeast Georgia high school, three groups of African American male and female siblings (6 individuals), one African American single mother parent, one African American single father parent, African American mother and father-traditional parents, and three high school teachers.

Administrators and teachers who participated in the case study were faculty members of the Southeastern Georgia high school. The ethnicity of the administrators and teachers was White and African American. Although the administrators have been an administrator for at least ten years, all of the experience was not at the Southeast Georgia high school. On the other hand, the teachers were veteran teachers with more than twenty-five years of experience and over twenty years were at the Southeast Georgia high school.

All of the African American male and female siblings graduated from a Southeast Georgia high school and the siblings had at least two teachers who taught both of them at different times. One of the African American male and female siblings graduated the same year, but the other African American siblings graduated within two or three years of each other. The high school GPA for African American females ranged from 90.3 to 96.34 compared to the African American males' GPA which ranged from 73.73 to 80.85.

All of the African American female siblings were joint-enrolled with a post-secondary institution during their senior year of high school. They were also accepted in the work-study program at the Southeastern Georgia high school during their junior year of high school. Presently, all the female siblings are either in college or have completed their Bachelor of Science degree. One of the female siblings accepted an athletic scholarship from Georgia Tech University. She will graduate May 2012 with a degree in Elementary Education. The female sibling, who graduated in December 2011, is currently enrolled in the Graduate Studies Accountant Program at Georgia Southern University. The other female sibling is a junior at the University of Georgia majoring in chemistry. Her desire after graduation from the University of Georgia is to become a Pharmacist.

None of the male siblings were enrolled in a post-secondary school and they were not accepted in the work-study program during high school. Although all of the male siblings attended a post-secondary school after graduation, they all stopped attending the post-secondary school because of failing grades. Currently, one male sibling is enrolled at East Georgia College after dropping out of Georgia Southern University three times. The other two are working in retail sales and both of them have a desire to re-enroll in a post-secondary institution.

The parents of the African American male and female siblings still live in the Southeast Georgia region. The two parent household is educated individuals. The mother is a Registered Nurse and the father is a Minister, who attended seminary school for two years. The father is currently enrolled at Georgia Southern University with a major in Sociology. His expected graduation date is May 2013. The single mother works a full-time job at Georgia Southern in a sandwich shop and attends Georgia

Southern University as a full-time student. She has been a single mother since the birth of both children. The single father is a veteran of the United States Army. He is currently a full-time employee of Wal-Mart Distribution and works part-time at Advance Auto in the Southeast Georgia region. He has been a single father since the siblings were ages two and three.

In order to gain an understanding of the dynamics in the family process factors which shape the African American male and African American female siblings' achievement gap in high school completion rate, the researcher interviewed students, parents, teachers, and administrators from one school district who met the criteria for this study. Criterion-based sampling was used to identify the qualities of the parents, students, and school officials who were interviewed (Patton, 2002). The following information was criteria for each case study:

- Parents had a male and a female sibling who graduated from the same local high school within four years.
- Female participants modeled 3.5 or higher grade point average while the male sibling grade point average was 3.5 or below.
- Both male and female siblings lived in the same household with their parents/guardian as they were growing up.

The collective case study was comprised of three cases with each case including male and female siblings, parents/or guardian, at least one teacher, and a school administrator. An administrator of the Southeast Georgia region high school was asked by the researcher to use the student information system to identify cases that meet the criteria.

## **Instrument**

In this study, data was collected primarily through face-to-face interviews and document analysis (Creswell, 2003). Since the purpose of the study was to understand how factors impact African American male and African American female siblings' achievement gap in high school, the face-to-face interview process was the best method to use (Creswell, 2003). The interview questions were designed to allow all participants an opportunity to express their views based on five major themes of African American males' academic achievement success. (See Appendix A) These themes included social environment, family support, parenting, education, and siblings as well as other factors which hindered the academic success of African American males in high school. The interview questions were developed based on the researcher's review of the literature. Responses to open-ended questions allowed the participants to explain their obligations to the academic success of African American males. The research questions also allowed participants' responses to answer the research questions.

According to Patton (2002), the purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone else's mind." In addition, contemporary research indicates beliefs and interpretations of those being interviewed are just as important as the participants in the research (Creswell, 2003). Therefore, every effort was made to preserve the voices of the participants by using direct quotations when appropriate.

In addition, the researcher reviewed personal documents belonging to the male and female siblings. These documents included Georgia High School Graduation Test results, grades 8 and 11 Writing Test results, Eighth grade Criterion Reference

Competency Tests result, and other academic accolades. Based on those documents, the researcher wrote a narrative used as the instrument to help code themes.

### **Pilot Study**

To determine the validity and fidelity of the interview questions, a pilot study was conducted with a two parent African American family who had a male and female sibling. Questions were also asked of two teachers at a Southeastern Georgia Middle School and an administrator of the same middle school. The participants in the pilot study were not participants of the actual research, but were considered as an additional case for this study. However, the purpose of the pilot study participants was to participate in the interview process using the questions designed for the study. According to Glense (2006), the pilot participants should “be in a critical state of mind so they do not answer your questions, but more importantly reflect critically on the usability of your questions”. Glense (2006) also stated questions are the key to obtaining quality data. As a result, the researcher was able to modify and generate effective interview questions based on the pilot study participants’ responses to the interview questions.

### **Data Collections**

In accordance with research involving human subjects, the researcher obtained prior approval for research from the district’s superintendent. Once approval was granted from the Institutional Review Board at Georgia Southern University, the researcher contacted the participant by telephone, personal conference or email for voluntary participation in the study. After the participants agreed to participate in the study, an interview was scheduled. Each participant signed a consent form prior to participating in the interview process.



As previously mentioned, at least three cases were interviewed. The interviews lasted approximately 60 – 90 minutes per session. An interview protocol was used in all cases with flexibility to provide for participants' interests. The interview questions served as a guide to ensure all participants respond to the same issues. If themes emerged from the participants common experiences, the questions and probes changed as each interview progressed and new issues emerged. Different perspectives illuminated from similar circumstances. Interview protocols were reviewed and approved by a qualified research methodologist. In addition, a draft version of test protocols was piloted with a participant who met the selection criteria, but did not participate in the investigation.

Each interview was conducted in a private and neutral setting such as a library, school conference room, or the participant's home. These interviews were audio-taped, which was later transcribed verbatim by a third party. The third party was required to sign a confidentiality agreement form before transcription began. Each participant was identified by pseudonyms for confidentiality. At the conclusion of all the interviews, data were analyzed to answer research questions.

Although Patton's (1990) general interview guide approach suggested the same questions be asked of each participant, the order of the questions changed based on how the individual(s) responded to the questions. This allowed the interviewer to be more natural and responsive during the process (LeCompte, 2000).

### ***African American Parents Interviews***

The researcher contacted each parent via email or telephone explaining and asking for voluntary participation in the study. Each parent confirmed their participation in the study and asked if the researcher could do the interview in their home. The

researcher agreed to do the interviews in the parents' homes and an interview was scheduled at a time convenient for the parents. Prior to beginning the interview, the parents signed a consent form and the researcher briefly reviewed the purpose of the research. Parents were reassured by the researcher of confidentiality and participant's rights. The researcher interviewed each parent privately. During the interview sessions, the researcher occasionally re-phrased or repeated the questions for clarification. The interviews were transcribed by a third party and returned to the researcher after transcription. The data collected was stored on the researcher's laptop with a security code and saved on a flash drive for back up. The audiotapes from the interviews were securely stored in a locked filing cabinet. The data collected and audiotapes were not accessible to anyone other than the researcher.

#### ***Male and Female Siblings Interviews***

The researcher contacted each sibling who was identified as meeting the criteria for this study via telephone explaining and asking for voluntarily participation in the study. Each sibling confirmed their participation in the study and three individuals asked if the researcher could do the interview in their home. The other three individuals agreed to meet in the conference room at a local school after school hours. The researcher agreed to do the interviews in the requested locations and an interview was scheduled at a time convenient for the siblings. Prior to beginning the interview, the siblings signed a consent form and the researcher briefly reviewed the purpose of the research. Siblings were reassured by the researcher of confidentiality and participant's rights. The researcher interviewed each sibling privately. During the interview sessions, the researcher occasionally re-phrased or repeated the questions for clarification. The

interviews were transcribed by a third party and returned to the researcher after transcription. The data collected was stored on the researcher's laptop with a security code and saved on a flash drive for back up. The audiotapes from the interviews were securely stored in a locked filing cabinet. The data collected and audiotapes were not accessible to anyone other than the researcher.

### ***Administrators and Teachers Interviews***

The researcher contacted each educator via email or telephone explaining and asking for voluntary participation in the study. Each educator confirmed their participation in the study and asked if the researcher could do the interview in their classroom or office after school hours. The researcher agreed to do the interviews in the requested locations and an interview was scheduled at a time convenient for the educator. Prior to beginning the interview, the educators signed a consent form and the researcher briefly reviewed the purpose of the research. Educators were reassured by the researcher of confidentiality and participant's rights. The researcher interviewed each educator privately. During the interview sessions, the researcher occasionally re-phrased or repeated the questions for clarification. The interviews were transcribed by a third party and returned to the researcher after transcription. The data collected was stored on the researcher's laptop with a security code and saved on a flash drive for back up. The audiotapes from the interviews were securely stored in a locked filing cabinet. The data collected and audiotapes were not accessible to anyone other than the researcher.

### **Data Analysis**

Once the researcher received the interview transcriptions, each participant's interview was read to get a better understanding of the different factors in the family and

school process which influenced the achievement gap between African American males and African American females siblings from the perspectives of the students, parents, teacher(s), and an administrator. The researcher searched for similarities and differences in key words or phrases, times, relationships, feelings, and perceptions. The concepts were analyzed to understand the parents' perception about education as well as ensure that their children were receiving an exceptional education. The information was recoded and re-categorized as new concepts emerged. As themes emerged, the researcher interpreted the data and developed theories. The transcript copies were analyzed for recurring themes and trends. All interview documents were kept in a locked file cabinet and destroyed once the research process was completed.

According to Creswell (2003), theorizing is a formulized and structured method for playing with ideas and data. As the researcher analyzed the ideas and data to decide how it was to be used in relation to the initial research questions, the researcher continued to use the constant comparison method. Creswell (2003) stated, "This constant comparison of the incidents very soon starts to generate theoretical properties of the categories (p.186)."

### **Limitations**

Several limitations should be noted in this study. The nature of qualitative research does not necessarily allow for any generalization to a larger population. Conclusions were limited to the cases under investigation. The researcher immersed interviews to capture data from a number of parties; therefore, common trends were disclosed. In addition, the researcher reassured the process of data collection and analysis was transparent.

### **Delimitations**

Participants were purposively chosen due to the rich data that would be gained from their experiences.

### **Summary**

The case study was designed to explore different individual's views and roles as it related to the achievement gap between African American male and female siblings. No doubt, public high schools across the United States have been feuding with the achievement gap between African American male and African American female sibling for decades. In a Southeastern Georgia high school, the teachers' and administrators' focus is to close the achievement gap between for African American students.

Society believes the gap in achievement between African American students have a negative impact their success, school climate, home environment, teacher morale, and instructional strategies. African American high school students definitely experience factors such as lack of motivation, academic challenges, lack of resources, and lack of acceptance by educators which affect the students' academic progress. In addition, factors outside of school such as neighbors, lack of role models, and family structure also encumber the African American students' achievement, specifically in high school.

In order for the researcher to collect sufficient data to answer the research questions of the study, each participant was asked specific interview questions. The open-ended interview questions were designed for male and female siblings, parents, teachers, and administrators. Although the interview questions were the same for the different groups, additional questions were asked by the researcher for clarification and a better understanding of the personal experiences being discussed.

In order to have effective interview questions, a pilot study was administered. The pilot study was conducted with a two parent African American family who had a male and female sibling. Questions were also asked of two teachers at a Southeastern Georgia Middle School and an administrator of the same middle school. The participants in the pilot study were not part of the actual research, but were considered as an additional case for this study. Responses from the pilot study participants' assisted in the revision of the interview questions. As a result, the researcher was given the opportunity to collect competent data to answer the research questions in this study.

Once data had been collected, the researcher analyzed the results through the lens of the common domains of achievement gap between African American male and female siblings in the literature. The researcher reduced the information in the transcripts by coding descriptive phrases or common trends under specified domain. Based on phrases and common trends in the transcript, themes developed and were used to describe the participant's perspectives of the domain. As a result, the researcher analyzed the findings and determined factors that affect the achievement gap between African American male and African American female siblings.

## CHAPTER IV

### Report of Data and Data Analysis

The purpose of this case study was to examine factors that impact an achievement gap between African American male and female siblings who were former graduates of a Southeastern region of the United States. This study was designed to analyze factors such as social environment, family support, parenting, and education of siblings which contribute to a negative educational experience for high school African American males. Using a collective case study design, data were gathered through individual interviews of 3 -male and 3-female siblings, 3 groups of parents, 3-teachers, and 3-administrators and analysis of academic documents. The overarching question for this study was this: What accounts for the academic differences between African American male and female siblings within the same family? In addition, the following sub-questions guided the study:

- 1) How do African American male and female siblings explain the academic achievement gap between them?
- 2) How do the parents/guardians explain the academic achievement gap between African American male and African American female siblings?
- 3) How does the teacher explain the academic achievement gap between African American male and African American female siblings?
- 4) How does the administrator explain the academic achievement gap between African American male and African American female siblings?

## **Research Design**

The purpose of this chapter is to report the findings of the study through data analysis of interviews conducted with African American male and female siblings, parents of the African American male and female siblings, teachers of the African American male and female siblings, and administrators of the African American male and female siblings from a Southeastern Georgia high school. Data collected from the Southeastern Georgia high school district is presented in tables 1 - 6. The tables reveal African American students' academic progress from 2008-2011. The following information is included in Tables 1-6:

- African American Students Enrollment & Demographic Percentage
- Teacher Demographics
- Promotion Rate
- Adequate Yearly Progress Data
- Non-Completers/Withdrawals
- Georgia High School Graduation Test Results
- African American Male and Female End of Course Test Results



## 2008-2011 Southeastern Georgia High School Enrollment/Demographic Profiles

**Table 1.**  
*Percent Enrolled*

Academic Year	07-08	08-09	09-10	10-11
African American Male/Total Enrollment	343/1392	418/1588	378/1492	356/1369
African American Female/Total Enrollment	362/1392	412/1588	389/1492	387/1369
Total African American Students	705/1392	830/1588	767/1492	743/1369
Total African American Population	51%	52%	51%	54%
African American Educators	14%	17%	17%	15%
Caucasian & Other Ethnicity Educators	86%	83%	83%	85%

Table 1 shows the total African American students' enrollment, student population percentage by race, and teacher percentage by race in the Southeastern Georgia region of the United States. The data in table 1 reflects a decline in African American students' enrollment at the Southeastern Georgia high school over the past four years. Although the school's demographic for African American students is marginally above the school's total population, the number of African American educators is not equivalent to the school's student demographics.

**Table 2.**  
*Graduation Rates*

Graduation Rates	07-08	08-09	09-10	10-11
Black Female Graduates/Total Graduates	73/255	87/303	94/348	63/200
Black Male Graduates/Total Graduates	49/255	69/303	89/348	51/200

The graduation rates for African American students continue to be less than what is expected according to the Southeastern Georgia high school goals. This fluctuation is because of new criteria set by the state of Georgia and the high school's district policy on promotion. In addition, smaller learning communities were implemented at the Southeastern Georgia high school in 2003-2004 to increase promotion rates, increase standardized test scores, and increase graduation rates.

**Table 3.**  
*Adequate Yearly Progress*

Graduation Rate	07-08	08-09	09-10	10-11
African Americans	76.5%	75.8%	75.0%	61.5%
Adequate Yearly Progress (Y = Yes/N=No)	N	Y	Y	N

The Southeastern Georgia high school made adequate yearly progress (AYP) two consecutive years since 2007-2008, but failed to make AYP during the 2010-2011 academic school years.

**Table 4.**  
*Non-completers*

<b>Non-completer/ withdrawal</b>	<b>07</b>	<b>08</b>	<b>09</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>
Black Female/Total	19/73	9/48	10/53	14/41	30/92
Black Male/Total	24/73	13/48	13/53	15/41	35/92

This table shows data for non-completers and withdrawals of African American male and African American female students.

**Table 5.**  
*Georgia High School Graduation Test Results*

<b>Georgia High School Graduation Test Results by Subgroup</b>				
	07-08	08-09	09-10	10-11
<b>English</b>				
White	97.2%	94.9%	93.3%	94.5%
Black	88.3%	85.6%	79.8%	79.2%
<b>Writing</b>				
White	95.0%	95.0%	94.0%	95.0%
Black	76.0%	84.0%	81.0%	86.0%
<b>Math</b>				
White	93.8%	94.3%	89.5%	87.4%
Black	70.3%	70.8%	59.3%	61.0%
<b>Science</b>				
White	96.0%	96.0%	96.0%	96.9%
Black	83.0%	77.0%	78.0%	83.6%
<b>Social Studies</b>				
White	96.0%	94.0%	85.0%	87.6%
Black	72.0%	72.0%	62.0%	56.6%

This table shows the difference in graduation rates between African American students and White students in content areas.

**Table 6.**  
***African American Male and Female End of Course Test Results***

Course	Race/Gender	09-10		10-11	
		Number	% Fail	Number	% Fail
Ninth Grade English Literature Composition (NGLC)	Black Female	30/85	35	14/99	14
	Black Male	23/73	31	19/81	23
American Lit.		09-10		10-11	
		Number	% Fail	Number	% Fail
	Black Female	15/69	21	26/83	31
	Black Male	19/78	24	9/69	13
Math I		09-10		10-11	
		Number	% Fail	Number	% Fail
	Black Female	45/83	54	50/94	53
	Black Male	32/66	48	44/77	57
Math II		09-10		10-11	
		Number	% Fail	Number	% Fail
	Black Female	64/90	71	36/78	46
	Black Male	52/70	74	40/69	58
Biology		09-10		10-11	
		Number	% Fail	Number	% Fail
	Black Female	53/87	61	48/109	44
	Black Male	37/71	52	27/88	30
Phy. Science		09-10		10-11	
		Number	% Fail	Number	% Fail
	Black Female	19/98	19	21/70	30
	Black Male	25/83	30	16/64	25
US History		09-10		10-11	
		Number	% Fail	Number	% Fail
	Black Female	33/64	51	35/78	44
	Black Male	40/78	51	19/54	35
Economics		09-10		10-11	
		Number	% Fail	Number	% Fail
	Black Female	24/73	32	23/65	35
	Black Male	22/69	31	26/68	38

This table shows African American students' results on the state of Georgia end of course exams in grades 9-12.

## Participants Themes Overview

The information from the participants' interviews was organized by themes and patterns which emerged from the individual interview responses. The names of the African American male and African American female siblings, parents, teachers, and administrators interviewed for this study remained anonymous and were coded as indicated by Table 7.

**Table 7**  
*Participants Coding*

Name	Role	Gender	Race	Current Status
A1	Sibling	Female	B	Graduate student at Georgia Southern University
A2	Sibling	Male	B	Married and Retails Sales
A3a	Parent	Female	B	
A3b	Parent	Male	B	
A4	Teacher	Female	W	
A5	Administrator	Female	B	
B1	Sibling	Female	B	Junior student at University of Georgia
B2	Sibling	Male	B	Sophomore student at East Georgia College
B3a	Parent	Female	B	
B3b	NA (Not Applicable)			
B4	Teacher	Female	B	
B5	Administrator	Female	W	
C1	Sibling	Female	B	Senior student at Georgia Tech University
C2	Sibling	Male	B	Retail Sales
C3a	NA (Not Applicable)			
C3b	Parent	Male	B	
C4	Teacher	Male	B	
C5	Administrator	Male	W	

Within the description of each theme, quotes are documented by data sources and date. For example, (A1) represents a female sibling interview. Families for this case study were identified by pseudonyms A, B, or C. After the pseudonym A, B, or C, the numbers 1, 2, 3a, 3b, 4, or 5 followed. The numbers indicates one of the following: 1-female, 2-male, 3a-parent female, 3b-parent male, 4-teacher, or 5-administrator.

**Table 8**  
***Student Data***

<b>Student</b>	<b>A1</b>	<b>A2</b>	<b>B1</b>	<b>B2</b>	<b>C1</b>	<b>C2</b>
High School Graduation GPA	91.05	73.73	96.34	79.785	90.3	80.85
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade CRCT Writing	361	345	379	348	367	353
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade CRCT ELA	355	312	395	350	355	324
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade CRCT Reading	422	363	419	338	422	391
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade CRCT Math	329	320	376	367	367	313
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade CRCT Science	324	320	381	320	332	312
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade CRCT S. Studies	324	317	369	327	369	305
GHSGT Writing	533	517	544	523	533	531
GHSGT ELA	552	552	592	543	574	538
GHSGT Math	575	554	600	521	566	524
GHSGT Science	506	512	542	510	528	504
GHSGT S. Studies	523	516	546	508	553	502

This table reflects academic performance on 8<sup>th</sup> grade standardized and writing test results, as well as Georgia High School graduation requirements tests.

**Research Question 1: How do African American male and female siblings explain the academic achievement gap between them?**

According to the African American males in this study, they learn, and process information differently than their African American female siblings. Additionally, they stated their attention span during class is not long and they are not completely focused. B2 said most African American males are in classes with their friends and they distract each other during class instruction. He said this during the interview:

During football season, my friends and I slept in the math class rather than taking notes or participating in class discussion. During weight lifting class which was at the end of the day, my friend and I would go back to the teacher for a small group re-teaching session. The lack of attentiveness and participation in class impacted the grades I made in math.

The students claimed the teaching styles teachers use also contributes to the gap in African American male and African American female students. They declared teachers explain concepts one way and expect all students to learn the information from that method of teaching. According to B1, when teachers are questioned about their teaching styles and students are not successful in class, teachers become offended.

During the interview, B1 divulged:

When I didn't understand math concepts taught by my assigned teacher, I would find another math teacher to re-explain the concept. When my assigned teacher found out another teacher in the building was helping me, the teacher made sarcastic comments about students not applying themselves in class, but asked other teachers to re-explain the concepts. One day when the teacher made the sarcastic comment, I responded with an inappropriate comment about her teaching styles and her unwillingness to re-explain math concepts in class. I knew what I did was wrong, but teachers with that mentality should not be in a classroom. I was written up and punished for my comment. The teacher and I never really had anything to say to each other after that incident.

According to A1, she didn't think there was an academic difference. She believed the problem was different work ethics. During the interview she made this comment:

If I made lower than a B, I was like horrified, but him like I said, if he made a 70 - 69.5 he was happy. But I do know like with his handwriting, I did not understand what he was writing half of the time. I used to think that he was dyslexic but they said that he was just being lazy drawing.

A2 on the other hand acknowledged there was an academic difference between him and his sibling. He recalled how his female sibling was joint enrolled in a post-secondary institution her junior year of high school and graduated from college within three years. A2 could remember his sister studying all the time to make good grades. He continued to explain:

If I made a C, I was fine because I didn't study in high school. If I had homework, I did it on the bus or in homeroom when I got to school. I know I need a post- secondary degree to sufficiently provide for my family financially, but other things became a priority. What should have taken me four years to accomplish has turned into six years.

C1 explained how she really didn't study in middle or high school Because academics came easy for me. When concepts were difficult to understand, my friends who were also African American females in advance placement courses and I would work together on the assignments until they were completed. If we had to ask the teacher to meet with us in the public library or meet the teacher at 7 AM before school, we would do that. The support from my friends and the giftedness I had to retain knowledge made academic courses easy.

However, C2 had a difficult time in middle and high school with academic studies. During his freshman and sophomore high school years, he had to attend summer

school. His junior and senior years of high school, he took credit recovery classes to earn credits needed to graduate. C2 stated it this way:

At one point during my senior year, I didn't think I was going to graduate because I needed to complete and pass two courses in credit recovery which had EOCTs, two academic classes for the semester, and pass the science section of the Georgia High School Graduation Test. In middle and high school, I didn't study like I should have because my world was centered on fine arts activities and events. Although my dad and family expected more from me academically, I did the minimum to pass my class. As a high school graduate and two time withdrawal student from a local secondary institution, I wished I had taken education more serious.

The African American male and female siblings in this study indicated the perception of their parents' expectations exert greater influences on their career choices. Older siblings play a key role in African American households. C4 explained how the male sibling who was older by 8 years helped raise her.

When my mother had to work late hours or on the weekend, my brother would babysit me. Even throughout school, my brother would share stories with me about the teachers we had as siblings. In high school, my brother would give me advice as if he was my father. No doubt we argued among ourselves, but our love for each other goes beyond measure. Watching him during middle school and high school influenced my desire to do well.



The parents suggested the female sibling are usually more responsible and wants to do well to please the parents. The African American males on the other hand want to be a provider for the family. A2 explains it this way:

Knowing the sacrifices my father made for our family when I was a child really inspired me to be a provider for my family. My father always had two or three jobs so my mother could stay home with the children. Although my dad had many jobs during the day, we always ate supper as a family. Our parents had high expectations for my sibling and me because they were both educated beyond high school. However, I missed the main purpose which was getting a solid foundation so that job opportunities are unlimited. The degree my father wasn't important to me, but the money and different jobs were. In other words, I could only see dollar signs. Now that I'm older I realize an education will ensure job security and opportunities at different career levels.

**Research Question 2: How do the parents/guardians explain the academic achievement gap between African American male and African American female siblings?**

According to the parents' responses to the interview questions, females are attentive, competitive, responsible, and develop mentally at a rate quicker than most males. A3a described A1 as a hard worker and respectful individual who was very successful academically. A3a and A3b said this during the interview:

We didn't worry about A1's academic grades because she applied herself all the time during the school year. Now A2's grades, we worried about because he never had homework or studied for tests. We continually talked with A2 because he was not motivated to perform well academically like the African American

female. A3b stated although males are expected to be active with lots of energy in the classroom, teachers described the African American male students as lazy, not motivated, and disruptive in class. B3a said, when parents receive negative reports about their sibling(s), parents become inactive with their child's education. Additionally, she continued to explain the effects of parental involvement on their students' academic performance.

When I attended a parent conference, the teachers' comments about my son was different from my daughter in terms of how they learn, how they process information, their attitude about school, and their academic abilities. The teachers' comments about A1 were empowering and made me feel proud as a parent. However, the teachers' comments about A2 were humiliating and I perceived the comments as a personal attack on my parenting skills. When I left the meeting, I felt like I had neglected my duties as a parent.

B3a and C3b indicated the lack of support from the absent parent had an impact on the African American males' academic achievement. B3a said the absence of the father caused the African American male sibling to portray the role of father. C3b noted the absence of the mother caused the male sibling to be more needy than the female sibling.

Both parents in this research said the sibling relationship between B1 and B2 and C1 and C2 is very strong and they depend on each other for support, encouragement, and advice. The relationship as a family is irreplaceable.

Parent participants in this research reported the image males have to uphold with their peers also contributes to the academic differences between African American male

and African American female siblings. B3a recalled a situation when B2 was a junior in high school and he told one of his favorite teachers not to come see him play football Friday night.

The teacher took the comment personal and became emotional in class. Later that day when the teacher was on planning, she called to see if I could come to the school to meet with her and B2 about the problem they had in class. Of course, I took off from work and went to meet with the teacher and B2. Apparently B2 was acting out in class and the teacher reprimanded him. When the teacher reprimanded B2 in the presence of his peers, his response to her was to “save face”. During the meeting, the teacher said usually she don’t say anything to B2 and his friends, but today she re-directed him because she had a deadline to meet and B2 was distracting the other students in class. As the parent, I told my son and the teacher I would never uphold his inappropriate behaviors or comments, but the classroom expectations should have started day one for all students. B3a believes when teachers don’t address inappropriate behaviors, the inappropriate behaviors continue to escalate.

Likewise, parents in this study were convinced African American students are more motivated to learn when their teachers use interactions similar to the interactions used at home. C3 stated African American students feel cared for when they don’t have to give up their cultural integrity and a personal connection with their teachers beyond the classroom. C1 explained how her teachers continued to keep in touch with her even though she is in college for the fourth year.

Teachers from high school continue to send me care packages, cards, money, and travel to see me play basketball in college. On senior night at Georgia Tech, I had seven teachers to come see me play my last home game at Georgia Tech.

Continuous support from the high school staff encourages me to strive for success. Not only do I want to make my father proud, I want to represent the high school I graduated from and make the people there proud. In other words, I'm a product of the Southeast Georgia high school.

**Research Question 3: How does the teacher explain the academic achievement gap between African American male and African American female siblings?**

C4 stated a major facet that affects the achievement gap between African American male and African American female siblings is the demographics in the classroom. During the interviews, teachers complained about how African American males' were determined to be in academic classes with their friends. C4 stated this caused more classroom disruptions and less effort from other African American students.

The African American friends didn't inspire each other to make good grades, they wanted to be in the same class to have fun with each other, distract other students, or disrupt the class. Sometimes, African American males who could be in advance courses chose to be in classes with other African American students who they can relate to.

B4 challenged all teachers to encourage African American males who have the potential to enroll in advance courses in high school to take more challenging courses. Additionally, they need to explain why it is important to take more challenging courses.

In short, she said, “Ask the student what you, as the teacher, can do to make a difference in his or her life.”

Teachers believe work ethic and motivation are factors which cause an achievement gap between African American male and African American female siblings. Additionally, the competitiveness for grades for African American males phases out in middle school and being accepted by their peers is the main priority in high school. A4 said if learning different concepts is difficult, most African American students will not ask questions or make an effort to understand the concept. A4 explained it this way:

When I realized A1 and A2 were siblings, it was amazing to see the work ethic difference between them. From time to time, I would speak with A1 about her sibling’s work ethic in class and asked her if she would tutor A2. A2 really didn’t put forth a lot of effort in class and when he made low grades, he accepted the grades as if it really didn’t matter. I knew A2 was much more capable than what his grades reflected because of the debates we had and the questions he would ask in class. A1 was persistent about making good grades and did her very best every day in class. If she made below an 85 on an assignment, she would schedule a conference with me to review her test or assignment. In other words, she had high expectations for herself and did everything she could to ensure she made good grades.

Teachers suggested African American females who are successful academically, are self-motivated, dependable, smart, dedicated, and highly praised for their efforts, motivation, and integrity. Furthermore, C4 suggested African American females are more competitive academically with other females at the high school level. She

explained successful African American females are often involved in extra-curricular activities, athletics, chorus, band, academic clubs/teams, and active in the community.

During the interview, C4 stated:

African American female friends inspire each other to do their best. The friends typically have common goals and work hard every day to achieve those goals.

She noted all of C1's friends were honor graduates and they were all accepted into four year universities after high school.

Teachers in this research indicated the lack of African American male role models in the school also impacts the achievement gap for African American male students.

According to B4, African American male role models will be able to form a unique bond which will allow him to listen, empathize, and validate the African American male students' personal experiences. Consequently, the encouragement from the African American male role model will allow the African American male students the opportunity to be successful academically. B4 explained:

If we had more African American academic teachers as role models, African American males would see people of their culture who are in a successful career. At the Southeastern Georgia high school there are nine or ten African American female teachers, one African American male coach, and two African American guidance counselors in professional positions. I think if African American male students saw more educators who look like them in the professional world, they would do better in school and the community.

The teacher participants believe African American role models are an essential component in the success of African American students. C4 stated it this way:

Moreover, positive relationships between African American role models and African American males will allow the African American male students to create a new and positive understanding of the world around them. African American role models will also provide support structures for African American males.

**Research Question 4: How does the administrator explain the academic achievement gap between African American male and African American female siblings?**

Administrators believe all educators must know the African American students abilities, disabilities, cultures, socio-economic status, and experiences. Additionally, knowing the African American students for who they are had a positive effect on academic success. B5 declared:

Until teachers build relationships, differentiate instruction, and make the instructional lessons relevant and rigorous for African American males and African American females, the achievement gap between them will continue to be prevalent.

A5 suggested the demographic population of the school impacts the achievement gap between African American male and African American female students. She concluded, if you have a high population of African American students, the mirror image of the staff should equate to the African American population. She stated it this way:

If there is an equitable amount of certified staff members equivalent to the African American population that you have, then that would help your achievement gap. It is a culture thing.

The administrators of this study noted the achievement gap between African American male and African American female siblings is influenced by the lack of

parental support to push them and lack of parental involvement which negatively impacts academic success. C5 stated it is imperative for teachers, counselors, and administrators to know what kind of support is being administered to African American males in high school. Consequently, positive support factors contribute to academic success. He said it this way:

Even though we would like for all African American students to be smart and do their homework, it's not going to happen because they are not the same. There are differences. African American male students really want their teachers and other educators to accept them. Some teachers don't think so, but they really do. Once you have a teacher/student relationship with African American male students, they would do anything for you. The African American male is looking for a parent (a father and/or a mother) and they want the educator to say good things about them. In other words, African American males are looking for affection to encourage them and support them.

B5 believes as long as educators can't relate to the students and do not understand the students' cultural differences, the achievement gap will continue to grow between African American male and African American female students. According to the administrators in the study, cultural diversity programs must be implemented and training must be provided for educators and community members. A5 stated, although most African American educators are more apt to talk about topics which pertain to race, all educators must be aware of how culture and society influence learning for African American students. During the interview, B5 said:



African American students will excel when they are able to discuss real issues pertaining to their life in the classroom. Administrators must convince all teachers and students that all students can achieve. Likewise, parents and the community at large must be persuaded that higher expectations are in everyone's best interest.

**What accounts for the academic differences between African American male and female siblings within the same family?**

To understand how the factors impact African American males' academic success compared to their female sibling, the researcher analyzed personal academic documents and held private interview sessions for all participants. Five compelling themes related to African American males academic success emerged from analysis of the data:

(a) parental expectation, (b) peer acceptance, (c) school culture, (d) family relationships, and (e) teacher/student relationships. Each factor has an impact on the achievement of African American siblings.

**Parental Expectation**

According to the administration in this study, parental expectation is extremely motivating when the parents show interest, support, and involvement in their child's education. Additionally, parents who have high expectations for their child's education foster academic success. A5 said, when the child feels supported by the parent, the child is more likely to have better grades, put more effort into their school work, and value academics more. She explained:

A3a and A3b stress the importance of education to their children when they were very young. The father worked three jobs so the mother could stay home with the

children. Although the family has many relatives with college degrees and the need to obtain a post-secondary degree was instilled in their children, their male siblings didn't see the importance of a post-secondary degree until after he got married and had two children. A3 referred to the male sibling as someone who wants to make lots of money quickly, but do very little work.

C3 considered his parental structure to be very successful. He stated parental support does not necessarily mean the children must have a traditional family structure – two parents. Instead, a good relationship with at least one adult can help offset other risk factors. B3a stated she was a single parent, but her parents were like another set of parents for her children. B3a refers to the relationship with her children as a friendship. B3a remarked:

My children and I talk about everything. I gave them advice as a mother, but at the end of the day, I wanted us to have an open line of communication and trust each other. I could not attend school activities because of my job and lack of transportation. My children and I talked about school daily and I encouraged them to do well because I didn't want them to drop out of high school. I told my son and daughter both, getting a good education would lead to a successful career.

### **Peer Acceptance**

A3a and A3b stated peer acceptance has been found to have a positive and negative effect on the achievement of African American students. The African American male and African American female siblings in this study believed positive peers act as motivators and provide social and emotional support. Negative peers on the other had ridiculed each other for achieving to their full potential. For instance, A4 described the

female in this study as a student who was focused, dedicated, and determined to be successful. A4 also characterized the student as a teacher pleaser and a respectful young lady. In the interview, A4 said:

I knew the female sibling would be successful. The female sibling and her friends were all in advance placement courses in high school. That cluster of friends was together at school, extra-curricular activities, and in the community. When you saw one friend from the cluster, you knew the other three were close by.

According to the teachers in this study, when African American students are in classes with predominately white students, their African American peers make negative comments about them. According to C1, she recalls asking her father if he would remove her from the gifted class in 8th grade which was predominately white. When the father asked why, her response was “I’m the only African American student in the class.” To avoid negative comments or being singled out by her peers, she wanted to be in classes with her peers who were African American students. Her father explained:

Good grades can get her educational opportunities that I could not afford. In life she won’t always be with her friends so she needs to learn how to adjust to her surroundings and make new friends. Just because the people in her class was a different race, that doesn’t mean she can’t be successful.

The educators in this study noted that most African American male peers’ main focus is sports and spending time with friends. B2 elaborated on how he and his peers all played football and football was their purpose for going to school. He stated their conversations most of the time was about sports. He was a team leader for football, but he didn’t lead his friends academically. During the interview, he stated,

Although I had the potential to be an A student, I didn't apply myself because my peers didn't make A's and I didn't want to appear different. When we took standardized tests, my scores were great compared to my peers. Occasionally, my friends asked me to tutor them for tests. If I had applied myself during high school, my current lifestyle would be different.

### **School Culture**

In regards to school culture, role modeling, encouragement, advising, and motivation are all factors which educators in this study believe determine success of African American students. B5 stated if parental support is not available at home for African American students, feedback, advice, and a caring attitude should be given to the African American students from mentors and/or faculty and staff. She explained it this way:

Knowing the student's mother was diagnosed with an illness during her senior year of high school, several faculty and staff members made sure the male sibling had his cap and gown, senior pictures, invitations, and other items needed for graduation.

Teachers in the study believe when educators, parents, and students work together as a team, trust between teachers and students increases. Consequently, students who trust their teachers are more motivated and perform better in school. When C5 was the administrator for ninth grade academy, he said:

The expectations for the academy teachers were different from the teachers in grades 10-12. The teachers were purposely selected to help improve promotion

rates and decrease retention rates. The ninth grade academy promotion rates increased and retentions decreased which indicated success for the academy. I attribute the academy's success to the relationships formed by teachers and students.

Educators in this research suggested African American students' academic performance is affected by school culture. Additionally, African American students perform better in schools with caring teachers, challenging curricula, protective and supportive administrators, and highly qualified teachers and support staff. A3b said,

Before A2 transferred to the Southeastern Georgia high school, he was in advance placement courses which were predominately white. At the predominately white high school, everyone wore uniforms and the African American student population was very small. Because the number of African American students in the predominately white school was so insignificant, all the classes appeared to be diversified. When A2 came to the Southeastern Georgia high school with a demographic population of 52% African American students, he expected more African American students in advance placement courses. Even in the Southeastern Georgia high school, the students enrolled in an advance course were predominately white. Although there were more African American students in the Southeastern Georgia high school, the race of students taking advance courses in both high schools was predominately white.

Additionally, in the Southeastern Georgia high school, if an African American student took an advance courses, it was very obvious to other students and especially African American students. B2 could remember:

Other African American students making comments such as you talk like a white boy, you dress like a white boy, and you act white. Rather than dealing with the comments, I refused to take advance courses after my first year at the Southeastern Georgia high school. This is a prime example of African American peers teasing each other for striving to achieve academically.

Educators in this study believe if schools provide positive experiences and a safe environment, students are successful despite their family or neighborhood background. A4 made reference to a former graduate of the Southeastern Georgia high school who grew up in a poor neighborhood, was raised by his grandmother, but made excellent grades in high school. A4 said,

Despite the odds, I can remember him in high school and in the community telling people he would be a doctor one day. In the 1970s when he graduated, grandparents were older and had expectations for all children. Today, young people are grandparents with no goals and expectations.

Teachers strongly believe their expectations intensely impacted African American students achievement. Therefore, teachers who have a personal interest in African American students were not only academic instructors, but they were also confident and positive role models for personal identification. A1 discussed how she trusted her teacher enough to tell her she was doing something her mother did not approve. Although the teacher listened to A1, the teacher told A1 she had four days to share the information with her mother. If her mother didn't know after the fourth day, she would inform the mother. A1 and her mother went to the school to discuss the situation in the presence of

the teacher. A1 said, “More teachers need to have a caring attitude for students rather than judging students.” This will help students be more respectful of teachers.

In addition, teachers discussed the need for all teachers to have high expectations for all students and the expectation for all students to do well. As a result, all students including African American males will rise to the level of expectation. Yet, teachers who had lower expectations and expected less from African American students communicated a sense of inadequacy to the students. A2 explained the situation this way:

My teachers knew I was capable of taking advance courses at the Southeastern Georgia School, but nobody took the time to explain to me how the advance courses would make a difference in college. Throughout high school, I questioned why I had to take certain classes and complete certain assignments which caused teachers to have a different perception of me. In other words, I debated every assignment and my attitude about school and class assignments was disrespectful. My inappropriate behaviors and attitude caused teachers to overlook my academic abilities.

Administrators in this study suggested African American students learn best in an environment that is relational and personal, like an extended family. Moreover, when teachers dispel negative opinions about African American students and form relationships with them, students do well academically. B5 spoke about another administrator at the Southeastern Georgia high school who supported three African American males throughout high school.

If the administrator had not taken these males under her care, they would not have graduated from high school. The faculty and staff knew these students were like the administrator’s sons. Even today, those males still come to the school to visit

the administrator periodically. Whatever these males needed in high school, she would provide it for them. B5 referred to the administrator as the support system away from home for the three African American males.

### ***Family Relationship***

African American parents in this study believe the family relationship has a greater influence on African American males' achievement especially in terms of motivation and desire. B3a and C3b believe the family relationship is vital even if it is not comprised of the traditional members-both a mother and father. B3a stated she must bear the responsibilities and tasks of both the mother and father. During the interview, she said:

Despite the burdens of being a single parent, I emphasize the importance of educational attainment, hard work, and good moral values. Enrolling in college at the age of 39 was not my intentions upon graduating from high school. However, I wanted to prove to my children, even as a single mother, I can attend college, graduate from college, and begin a professional career. When my children who are both enrolled in a post- secondary institution complain about getting a college degree, I tell them, "If I can attend college and make good grades, so can you." I really think my college experience motivates my children to do their best.

Additionally, African American family values and encouragement are also relevant in influencing academic achievement for African American students. As a result, the family is most influential regarding African American students' long term educational plans. A3b noted when a close positive family relationship exists, the impact



the family has on achievement motivation is phenomenal. Consequently, the close relationship also helps avoid negative outcomes for African American students.

I still encourage A2 to finish his college degree, despite the many obstacles he's had the past two years. A2 is providing for his family now, working in sales, but he wouldn't have to work as hard if he graduated from college and started his dream job, accountant. When A2 and I see each other, we joke about who will finish college first. Although we are being competitive, it's really encouragement for each other.

Educators in the study stated parents who were committed to their children provided support and helped in achieving success. As a result, strong family ties are developed to help African American males realize they had some control of their personal experiences.

### ***Teacher/Student Relationship***

According to the educators in this research, teacher/student relationships play a vital role in the achievement of African American students. Additionally, teachers' conversations with students, motivation, and encouragement correlate with African American students' academic achievements. C2 indicated it was the encouragement, conversations, and concern from his chorus teacher which helped him graduate from high school. C2 stated,

Teachers who knew me and my sibling would ask me why I struggled academically when my sibling was in advance courses and doing well. So many times I wanted to quit school, but when my chorus teacher took the time to explain how my fine arts career was just as important as my sibling's athletic

career, a bright light came on for me. The chorus teacher stayed after school to help me prepare for the section of the high school graduation test that I failed three times. She also allows me to leave her class to complete assignments for other teachers. Because of this teachers' concern for me as a student, I was able to graduate.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to report the findings emerged from the data collected from African American male and female siblings, African American parents, teachers, and administrators. Through interviews and academic artifacts, the researcher obtained the perceptions of the selected African American male and female siblings who were former students of a Southeastern Georgia high school in the United States. The themes derived from multiple stages of data analysis have a common thread for African American male and African American female siblings. Analysis of the data revealed five themes associated with the achievement gap between African American male and female sibling which were common among all subjects. These factors were (1) parental expectation, (2) peer acceptance, (3) school culture, (4) family relationship, and (5) teacher/student relationship. African American males in this study believed their academic performance would have been better if these themes were identified and addressed during high school.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **Summary, Conclusions, and Implications**

Although No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 placed more accountability on school systems, the educational outcomes in high school for African American males continue to linger behind other race and/or gender. In order to curtail this issue for African American males, community and schools must develop social and/or cultural services that will encourage academic achievement. In addition, community groups, school systems, and children advocates across the United States must continue implementing new programs that will prepare African American males to successfully graduate from high school. Having a rigorous academic curriculum without developing strong social and cultural opportunities will result in the same negative outcomes for African American males.

In the Southeastern Georgia region where this study was done, there was an achievement gap between African American male and African American females. This study was designed to examine how African American male and African American female siblings, African American parents, teachers, and administrators perceive the achievement gap between African American male and female sibling in the Southeast Georgia region. Chapter V presents a discussion of research findings, conclusion, implications, and recommendations for further study.

### **Summary**

The issues of African American males lagging behind other subgroups in high school have been in existence for many years. Even though this is a prevalent issue, no one reason has been identified as the catalyst for this controversy in the Southeastern Georgia region. The impact of NCLB has helped to compress the achievements gaps

among subgroups, but the problems still exists. During elementary school grades K-2, the achievement ability for African American males are comparable to the other gender groups. However, as African American males are promoted to grades 3-5 the achievement gap becomes visible. In middle schools the gaps continue to amplify and most African American males are two or three grades academically behind African American females. During high school, the African American males' motivation, attendance, behavior, and social behaviors become issues that educators face as a result of the achievement gap.

This research was designed to collect in-depth knowledge of the experiences from African American male and African American female siblings, African American parents, teachers, and administrators on factors that impact the achievement gap between African American male and female siblings in a Southeastern Georgia school district. Using qualitative research method, the researcher interviewed African American male and African American female students, African American parents, teachers and administrators to get a better understanding from a personal point of view of the achievement gap between African American male and African American female students in a Southeastern Georgia high school. Other student documents such as 8<sup>th</sup> grade CRCT results, EOCT results, and other academic accolades were collected and analyzed in this research. In addition to student documents, data from the Southeastern Georgia high school which included student enrollment/demographics, promotion, AYP, non-completers /withdrawals, GHGT results, and EOCT failure results were used also. The findings from the interviews were used to draw conclusions and to consider implications for this study.

### **Analysis of Research Findings**

The researcher analyzed the data collected from the interviews to get a better understanding of how different factors impact the achievement gap between African American male and African American female siblings. In addition, state testing results for each student and data from the high school from 2007-2011 was also analyzed. Analysis of the data revealed five themes associated with the achievement gap between African American male and female sibling which were common among all subjects. These facets were (1) Parental Support, (2) Peer Acceptance, (3) School Culture, (4) Family Relationship, and (5) Teacher/Student Relationship.

### **Discussion of Research Findings**

The goal of this study was to understand how factors impact the achievement gap between African American male and African American female siblings in a Southeastern Georgia high school in the United States. The data from the interviews which focused on the achievement gap between African American male and African American female sibling provided a wealth of knowledge from the perspectives of African American males, African American females, African American parents, teachers, and administrators.

#### ***Parental Expectations***

An analysis of the findings indicated parents of all three cases worked hard to provide the necessary resources to impact the academic and social achievement of their African American male and African American female siblings. As a result, the parents and students believed there are multiple external and internal factors that impact the achievement gap between African American male and African American female siblings.

Sommer, Owens & Piliawsky (2008) noted a different parental expectation between African American male and African American female students' academic achievement. African American parents' in this study proclaimed they provide powerful influences for their children's' career choice. The African American male and African American female siblings in this study indicated the perception of their parents' expectations exert greater influences on their career choices. The research suggested when parents as well as teachers provide physical and emotional support to children; the children's' motivation, academic engagement, and performance improve.

### ***Peer Acceptance***

Overall, the female participants in this study agreed that peers were influential in their academic success. Peers were found to be influential in decision making and keeping each other motivated and focused on school academic and extra-curricular activities. Findings revealed that peers listened and encouraged each other, as well as served as study partner and mentors. Likewise, peers execute a positive role by exhibiting cooperation and trust in one another. C1 noted the importance of friends supporting each other and having confidence and trust in each other. In addition, A1 indicated friends motivated and encouraged each other to achieve academic success. The African American female participants stated, they can relate with their peers, will listen to their peers, and value their peers' opinion.

The researcher concluded African American males' identities to be closely associated with their peers. Toldson (2008) indicated African American females' peer relationships were positive and focused on academic achievement. African American males' peer relationships on the other hand main focus was social identity and

acceptance. According to the African American male participants, they want to be socially acceptable to their friends and social groups. A2 noted the impact peers have on each other could be far greater than the impact of a family member or a teacher. As a result, African American male students are more concerned about fitting into their social group than getting good grades. B2 expressed he didn't make A's although he had the potential because his friends didn't make A's. The male participants stated their lack of effort to make good grades in school was because they are perceived by their peers as "acting white" or "not cool."

The researcher's experiences as a mother of six African American males allowed her to relate to the lack of motivation by African American males to make A's and B's. C2 recalled when he needed to avoid the taunting comments from other African American male students; he would conform to what was accepted by his peers. As a result, African American males sacrifice their educational opportunities to be socially accepted by their peers.

### ***School Culture***

The male participants in this study acknowledged low teacher expectations contributed to the achievement gap between African American male and African American females. The researcher found African American males are frequently the victims of negative attitudes and lowered expectations from teachers, counselors and administrators. Even after going through multicultural training, educators often have lower expectations for African American males than African American females (Irvine, 2003). As a recipient of lower expectations, African American males don't feel

appreciated, respected, or safe. As a result, the academic performance for African America males decreases.

Based on the research, the research concludes regardless of the grade level, all African American students want to feel cared for, accepted for their differences, and heard. Since most students spend a significant portion of their waking hours at school, the coach, teachers, administrator, or counselor may be the father or mother figure missing in the student's life.

The findings indicated students, teachers, and educators believed a sense of belonging and ownership within the school community is developed and nurtured when students perceive their teachers as someone who cares. A1 and B1, female participants in this study, claimed the positive influence of a former teacher inspired them to attend college. The males in this study recalled unkind remarks or comments made by teachers that motivated them to overcome obstacles and be successful. C2 explained:

He was retained in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and his sister who was a year younger than him was in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade with him the next year. He knew he was not as smart as his sister and felt like people always compared him to his female sibling. I remember my 6<sup>th</sup> grade teachers asking me why my sister made As and I made low Ds? I never responded to the teachers, but being compared to my female sibling was humiliating.

The participants perceived a cultural environment recognizing academic achievement could encourage African American males to be successful in academics.



### ***Family Relationship***

As a result of this study, the family is the key to a students' life and the most important influence on student learning. Based on the research, family motivation and encouragement, parenting style, parental guidance and parental involvement promote academic achievement for African American siblings. In addition, parents and family member who took an active part in education made an impact on their academic success. African American male and African American female siblings reported doing better in school when they were motivated and encouraged by their parents. Findings from the research indicated the expectations from families can enhance or discourage African American siblings' performance better academically when their parents expect them to do well in school. Majoribanks (2005) revealed the father's education, but not mother's education, had a significant impact on the academic achievement of African American males. On the contrary, African American females have a stronger academic achievement when their mothers have post-secondary degree.

In the African American family, research suggested many times the family is extended to other relatives or community members. This study revealed the African American males, African American females, and African American parents participants from cases B and C who did well academically had parents and other relatives who valued and supported education. The researcher believed African American siblings who live in an environment with extended support and are associated with other high school graduates are more likely to succeed in high school.

### ***Teacher/Student Relationship***

An analysis of the findings indicates teachers play a vital role in the achievement of African American students. According to the researcher, teachers need to base their classroom ethics on open and safe communication, encouraging African American siblings to receive regular positive feedback. Despite the research which indicated students' who had positive teacher relationships demonstrated positive adaptation to school, regardless of their gender, teachers' foster more positive relationships with African American females than African American males (Baker, 2005).

In return, the African American siblings will feel as though they are a valuable part of the learning environment.

Base on this research, African American male and African American female learn best in an environment whose style is relational and personal, like an extended family. Additional, teachers' motivation and encouragement correlate with academic achievement of African American students. According to the African American male and African American female siblings in this study, teachers who took a personal interest in them were not just academic instructors, but also positive models for personal identification. In short, the researcher noted to build a rapport with African American males, educators must earn their trust first. All teacher regardless of the grade they teach, have the potential to either empower or disenfranchise students.

### **Conclusion**

From the finding of this study, the researcher concluded:

- It is imperative that all stakeholders involved in the lives for African American male and African American female siblings are aware of the factors that impact

the academic achievement gap between African American male and African American female siblings,

- It is critical for all stakeholders to analyze the influence peers have on African American males and African American female siblings.
- Communities and schools must implement support and programs to improve African American male academic achievement.
- Though there was still an achievement gap, parental support, expectations, and encouragement were influential in the academic success of African American male and female siblings.
- It is critical for all stakeholders to analyze the influence peers have on African American males and African American female siblings.
- Positive teacher/student relationships provide African American male and African American female siblings involvement in the learning process and strengthen their desire to learn.
- It is vital for school administrators to provide leadership, school level practices, and resources such as: academic minority teachers, mentor programs, and necessary to address these factors if the lived experiences of African American male and African American female siblings are to be positively impacted.
- Educators must understand the cultural environment of African American male and African American female and address the diversity in the curriculum in order for African American students to connect to the learning process.

## **Implications**

The researcher's purpose of this study was to understand how different factors impact the achievement gap between African American male and African American female sibling in a Southeastern Georgia school district in the United States. The findings of this study contributed to a deeper understanding of why the achievement gap prevail between African American male and African American females and propose possible solutions to reduce the achievement gap within the Southeastern Georgia school district. The implication of this study relates directly to school districts throughout the United States who have similar demographics and focus to improve the academic success for African American males. The Southeastern Georgia in the United States community would also benefit from this study as it prepare for the community's potential issues and solutions. Theses community issues and solutions include economic development, transportation, schools, housing projects, post-secondary institutions, populations, and community facilities.

The people who benefited most from the findings of this study were the participants. Each participate can envision their role as it impacts the achievement gap between African American male and African American female siblings within the Southeastern Georgia school district.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the experience gained from this study, the researcher offers three recommendations for administrators:

1. As this study focused on three cases in Southeastern Georgia, more research is needed to examine additional schools in the rural area with different demographics.
2. In order to analyze data from a large sample, a quantitative study over time could be used throughout the state Georgia to assess how schools throughout Georgia are closing the achievement gap between high schools African American males and African American females.
3. A replicate of this study comparing a different ethnic or gender group who influences AYP in a predominately white population is needed to see if the themes and findings are compatible to this study.

#### **Recommendation for Implementation**

1. Community members and educators need to collaborate with minority Pastors in the community to ensure positive role models for African American student.
2. School districts must make every effort to recruit minority educators so that African American students can see positive role models within the school.
3. Professional learning opportunities for educators for cultural diversity focusing specifically on African American students would make excellent meaningful professional development studies.
4. Mentorship programs that focus on academics for African American students could heighten awareness of the achievement gap between minority siblings and offer encouragement to close the gap.

### **Dissemination**

As an administrator in the Southeastern Georgia school district, the researcher plans to share the results of this study with other administrators and educators in the district. The researcher will use the study to guide administrators in the school district in which she works to understand how different factors impact African American males' academic achievement. In addition, the researcher plans to share this study at the National Youth-at-Risk conference. In order to meet the requirements of NCLB, Obama's push to improve the graduation rate for African American males, and the state of Georgia's passing score for AYP, the Southeastern Georgia school district should review and implement the data collected from this study. The study will be available through the database found on the Georgia Southern University Zach S. Henderson Library.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### Parents/Guardians Interview Questions

- 1) What is your relationship with your son? Your daughter?
- 2) How would you describe your son's academic progress in school? Your daughter's?
- 3) Do you think your son is reaching your expectations for education? For life? Your daughter? Elaborate.
- 4) How did you assess the level of effort of your son at school? Your daughter's?
- 5) Do you believe the environment influenced your son's academic performance? Your daughter's? Elaborate
- 6) What support did you provide to facilitate the achievement growth of your son? Your daughter?
- 7) What are you doing to promote academic success for your son? Your daughter? Why? How often?
- 8) Which child had higher grades? Why?
- 9) What factors contributed to your son's success in school? Your daughter?
- 10) Is there anything you feel that could have been done differently to support the academic success of your son? Your daughter?

## APPENDIX B

### Student Interview Questions

- 1) How do you describe the relationship between you and your parents?
- 2) How do you describe the relationship between you and your sibling?
- 3) Did your parents treat you differently growing up?
- 4) Did they have different expectations for you?
- 5) Explain your area of Giftedness.
- 6) Are there academic differences between you and your sibling? If so, why?
- 7) Did your teachers treat you differently based on your sibling's behavior or achievement?
- 8) What comments parents or teachers, if any, have been made to compare you to your sibling
- 9) Why were your grades higher than your siblings or vice versa?
- 10) Is there anything you feel that could have been done differently to support your academic success?

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Teacher/Educators Interview Questions**

- 1) In your opinion, what factors account for the academic differences between African American male and female siblings?
- 2) How did the African American male and female sibling react/interact with teachers?
- 3) What was the relationship of the African American male and female sibling at school or in the community?
- 4) What factors at school influenced differences among siblings?



## APPENDIX D



### DEPARTMENT OF LEADERSHIP, TECHNOLOGY, & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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Dear Participant,

My name is Evelyn Bonnette Gamble; I am pursuing my doctoral degree in Educational Administration at Georgia Southern University in Statesboro, Georgia. As the principal investigator, I am conducting research to examine factors that impact the achievement gap between African American male and female siblings in a Southeast Georgia high school. To understand the role, I need your help.

The primary intent of this research is to contribute to the understanding of how environmental, educational, and cultural factors influence the ways African American males perceive, interpret, and respond to education. I plan to contribute to the professional literature regarding the role of parents and school officials in creating and providing support systems for African American males. Ultimately, the proposed outcome of this research is to explain challenges and opportunities African American males face in their environment and school.

While your participation is not required, it is greatly valued, and I hope you will take time from your schedule to share your perspective through the interview process. The interview will be framed by questions or topics provided by the principal investigator at your work site. The interview may take approximately 60 – 90 minutes and the researcher, Evelyn Gamble, will use a tape recorder to record each interview session. Only minor risk of personal discomfort may occur while responding to the interview questions, but I will assure your anonymity by reporting outcomes of interviews by pseudonyms. You do not have to answer any interview questions that you do not want to answer. No schools or individuals will be named in the study. You may withdraw from the study at anytime without consequence by contacting Evelyn B. Gamble and declining to be interviewed or ask that your responses not be included in the final study. All responses will remain confidential, and individual respondents will not be personally identified; therefore, no data will be used for purposes other than the study as a result of your participation. Once tapes from the interview sessions are transcribed by the transcriptionist, the tapes will be returned to the researcher. The tapes will be placed in a box which will be locked in a file cabinet for three years and later destroyed after the completion of this dissertation. The principal investigator and the transcriptionist will be the only people with access to the file.

Parents, students, and school officials will benefit from this research in a broad sense as they become more responsive to African American male students' needs and make policy changes in order for educational institutions to ensure academic success. The principal investigator will provide you with access to the study by summarizing the findings upon request.

Participants have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. If you have questions about this study, please contact Evelyn B. Gamble at 912-587-2726 or 912-536-0647 [egamble@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:egamble@georgiasouthern.edu) or [egamble@bulloch.k12.ga.us](mailto:egamble@bulloch.k12.ga.us). You may contact Dr. Linda Arthur at 912-478-1428 [larthur@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:larthur@georgiasouthern.edu) also. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-478-0843. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records. Thank you in advance for your participation in the study. This project has been reviewed and approved by the GSU IRB under tracking number H12363.

Title of Project: Factors that Impact the Achievement Gap Between African American Male and Female Siblings.

Principal Investigator: Evelyn B. Gamble, 33 Pineneedle Lane, Statesboro, Ga. 30461, (912)587-2726, [egamble@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:egamble@georgiasouthern.edu)  
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Linda Arthur, P. O. Box 8131, Statesboro, Ga. 30460-8131, (912) 478-1428

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you consent to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature Date \_\_\_\_\_

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator Signature Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX E

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

**To:** Evelyn Gamble  
Dr. Linda Arthur

**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:** March 16, 2012

**Expiration Date:** April 30, 2012

**Subject:** Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

---

After a review of your proposed research project numbered **H12363** and titled "**Factors that Impact the Achievement Gap Between African American Male and African American Female Siblings**" 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.*

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 F



150 WILLIAMS ROAD, SUITE A  
STATESBORO, GA 30458

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912/764-6201

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912/764-8436

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March 6, 2012

To whom it may concern:

As superintendent of Bulloch County School, I authorize for Ms. Evelyn Gamble-Hilton to complete her dissertation at Georgia Southern University. I understand that she will be interviewing students that graduated from Statesboro High School during the 2008-2011 academic school years in order to better understand *Factors that impact the achievement gap between African American male and female siblings*.

If you have any questions, or if I may be of any further assistance, please feel free to contact me directly by dialing 912-212-8505.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lewis Holloway".

Lewis Holloway, Ed.D.  
Superintendent