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"Now You Know What You're Reaching For...On the Up and Up": An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Scholar Identity Development Among Black Male Achievers

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An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Scholar Identity Development Among Black Male Achievers

by

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Dedication

"'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'"

~Jeremiah 29:11

This project is dedicated to my Savior, Jesus Christ, who demonstrated the significance of life when He gave His own to secure a future for all of humanity. Thank you Lord for leading me to this research topic, working out the logistics, and seeing it through to its completion. Your love is what led me and it is what kept me. I didn't do it, we didn't do it…you did it! And just to think, this is only the beginning of what is to come… May it all be for your glory!

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Abstract

Common discourse concerning the educational trajectories of African American males consists of dismal future outcomes due to defective schooling experiences in kindergarten through twelfth grades. There has been a disregard of counter narratives of high academic achievement and overall school success coupled with a highlighting of failure through deficit-based research practices. Consequently, African American males are positioned as delayed or troubled, which serves to perpetuate educational inequity. This study attempts to increase the scarcity of literature by giving voice to the experiences of high achievement among African American adolescent males attending a school designed to support the achievement of impoverished youth of color. Interpretative phenomenological analysis was used to investigate the lifeworlds of nine African American males in seventh and eighth grade at a private, college preparatory middle school in southwestern Florida. Individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted regarding their experiences of academic success. The results indicate that these young men developed positive scholar identities through a process that included the cultivation of academic achievement, sacrificing to succeed, trailblazing, striving for the good life, and planning for success while simultaneously rejecting deficit-based and peril portrayals of Black males. Practical implications for school psychologists, educators, and parents are discussed.

Chapter One

Introduction

"When no one will listen to you, you lose respect in your own words."

~Bishop T.D. Jakes

To be both heard and understood are essential human desires, especially for young people, who have yet to solidify their personal identities. This solidification requires an opportunity for self-exploration, mentorship, and support (Smith, Shumow, & Heenan, 2006). To be ignored and misunderstood is an undesirable occurrence facing many youth, particularly children of color whose voices have been silenced by stereotypes characterizing them in a negative light (Venzant Chambers & McCready, 2011). Unfortunately, these same youth are often the subjects of statistics that shed light on disconcerting present conditions of school failure, school dropout, and juvenile delinquency, as well as dismal future conditions of unemployment, poverty, criminality, and imprisonment (Noguera, 2008).

Racial identity includes two components: personal identity and social identity. Personal identity refers to an individual's personality characteristics (e.g., introvert, extrovert, agreeable, emotional, etc.), while their social identity refers to the social aspect of human nature and how an individual relates to others and understands who they are in the context of a reference group. Because humans are social beings, the social identity is believed to be a greater contributor to one's self-concept (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). There is a link between strong, positive racial identity development and positive academic performance among youth that includes a prerequisite of understanding who they are, which is only achieved through direct interaction and

communication with supportive adult figures (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009). Delpit (2003) supported this belief by positing that as educators, "we must learn who the children are, and not focus on what we assume them to be", which includes "developing relationships with our students, and understanding their political, cultural, and intellectual legacy" (p. 18).

The importance of having a voice—being heard and understood—is also reflected in the lyrics of hip hop music, one of the predominant musical genres of choice selected by young people today. The fulfillment of such a yearning is boasted of in an excerpt of the song "Shot for Me" by rapper Drake, who proclaimed, "And the voice in your speaker now…that's me. And the voice in your ear now…that's me. Can't you see that I made it? Yeah I made it" (Graham, Shebib, & Tesfaye, 2011). He equates his voice being heard on the radio to having "made it"—arriving at the pinnacle of success. Hip hop as a musical genre, though popular among many of today's youth, has often been criticized for its misogynistic and violent lyrics. Yet, hip hop has given voice to many African American males. Though the lyrics *sometimes* reflect negative, exaggerated, and false depictions of African American males' realities, the lyrics *always* represent an opportunity for their voices to be heard on national and international platforms (McBride, 2007).

Interestingly, there is ample opportunity to give voice to content that reflects and confirms society's limited, yet predominate belief that the route to attainment of the American dream for African American males is supreme athleticism, skilled lyricism, or involvement in illegal activity. Unfortunately, this also contributes to the overshadowing of alternative African American male voices that reflect upstanding citizenship, education based priorities, respect for humanity, and positive plans for future attainment that may or may not include professional sports. This study explored these alternative voices, those of African American males who are

high achieving, academically successful, and positive contributors to their schools, homes, and communities.

Background of the Problem

African American males are commonly profiled, prejudged, and placed in a box that limits their interests, talents, plans, and life outcomes to those formulated by others. Such occurrences are so impactful that they often result in a self-fulfilling prophecy in which their realities become that which have been formulated for them by the preconceptions and limitations placed on them by others; people who have no true knowledge of their ability or potential due to the cyclical nature of such damaging stereotypes (Duncan, 2002). Even within school settings that purport to be location where academic, social, and emotional development of all students is fostered, African American males are frequently excluded from being fully accepted members due to widespread beliefs that dominating educational terrain is beyond their capacity (Graham & Anderson, 2008). Nevertheless, what may appear on the surface as the fulfillment of a self-fulfilling prophecy may actually be what Gayles (2005) termed "diminishing the significance of high academic achievement", in which high achievers camouflage their ability level by exhibiting behaviors (i.e., "clowning around" and "acting stupid") expected of under- and low-achieving students while simultaneously earning high grades (p. 255).

Conversely, some high achieving African American males embrace the experience of being among the limited number of academically successful Black males because it grants them the opportunity to disprove stereotypes and low expectations (Berry, Thunder, & McClain, 2011). Further, other researchers have identified the importance of academic achievement among African American males, who recognize that the emphasis is not on the letter grade but the value of knowledge acquisition and learning experiences that are directly correlated with future attainment (Graham & Anderson, 2008). The literature cites strong systems of support; enriched

early learning experiences'; recognition of abilities; spirituality; teacher support and high expectations; high parental expectations; and community resources, among others, as factors that play an influential role in high achievement among African American males (Berry, 2008; Maton, Hrabowski, & Grief, 1998; Michael- Chadwell, Bonner, & Louis, 2009). Although this information is readily available, a gap exists in the knowledge of how such factors equip this population with the ability to convert negative experiences of marginalization and "otherness" to missions of disproving stereotypes and defying predicted trajectories. Further, the inclusion of additional participants (i.e., parents and teachers) to provide insight into the experiences of high achieving African American males can be perceived as doubt in the youth participant's ability to accurately and coherently share their experiences and a need to corroborate the information they provide. Such practices negate the goal of giving voice to the voiceless. More studies are needed that only include the targeted student participants to allow for more accurate portrayals of their actual and personal experiences.

Also absent from the literature are answers to questions surrounding the experiences of African American males who attend schools designed to support their academic success by factoring in their specific needs and identifying resources to fulfill those needs. What happens when the need to camouflage one's academic success or amplify the importance of academic success to disprove stereotypes is removed? What happens when the conditions are modified to reflect a utopian academic community, where the academic achievement of students of color is fostered through the provision of opportunities akin to those of affluent, Caucasian students? What then are the motivating forces in the absence of the gratification that comes from successfully maneuvering between dichotomous terrains or blatantly contradicting the prejudgments of one's ecological systems ranging from the broad macrosystem (e.g., society) to

the narrow microsystem (e.g., school)? What are the experiences of high achieving African American male students who attend such institutions, designed to support their success? Are their academic settings alone responsible for their high academic achievement?

Statement of the Problem

According to the Nation's Report Card, efforts in closing the achievement gap among races have rendered some success, particularly in narrowing the reading performance gap between Black and white fourth grade students (Nord et al., 2011). Yet, disparities still exist as reported by the National Center for Education Statistics; 63.5 percent of African American (AA) males graduate from high school in comparison to 82 percent of Caucasian males. Further, 6.6 percent of African American males drop out of high school before earning a diploma, in contrast to the 2.7 percent of white males who drop out before earning a high school diploma (Stillwell, Sable, & Plotts, 2011). African American males also face disparities in terms of discipline; they experience the highest rates of suspensions, expulsions, grade retention, and special education placement of any other group of students (Garibaldi, 2007).

In addition to the achievement gap between African American and Caucasian males, there is also a gap between genders among African American students. The academic performance of African American female students surpasses that of their African American male counterparts, resulting in a gap that is most evident beginning in middle school (Mickelson & Greene, 2006). Research has suggested that African American female adolescents have greater intentions to complete school, less school suspensions, and higher GPAs than males (Williams, Davis, Cribbs, Saunders, & Williams, 2002). Yet, Garabaldi found that the majority of African American males expect to graduate high school. Further, of the over 2,250 African American males surveyed in the New Orleans school district, 95 percent expected to graduate, while 40 percent believed that their teachers did not set high enough goals

for them; and 60 percent indicated that their teachers should challenge them more. However, such challenges are rare as evidenced by the low number of Black males enrolled in gifted and talented academic programs.

African American males are the most underrepresented group of students in gifted and other accelerated learning programs (e.g., Advanced Placement[AP], Honors, International Baccalaureate [IB]), even among other underrepresented students (e.g., African American females, Latina/os, Native Americans)(U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Specifically, they are 2.5 times less likely than students of other racial backgrounds to be in gifted or other academically talented programs even when their performance suggests they have the ability to do well in such placements (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010). Further, most African American males (i.e., 27.7%) live and attend schools in urban environments where many of the schools are poverty stricken and have a limited number of textbooks, computers, qualified teachers, and courses available (Moore III, Henfield, & Owen, 2008; National Center for Education Statistics, 2004; Smedley & Jenkins, 2007). Thus, there is a need to increase the capacity of teachers working within urban environments to be able to identify and support gifted potential in African American males.

Purpose

Despite the myriad of societal, school, and home barriers facing African American male students, many demonstrate academic excellence by exceeding grade level expectations. However, their experiences are rarely voiced in the form of first person accounts. This prevents the normalization of African American male success and preserves the disparaging, dominant view. Qualitative studies related to the high achievement among African American males, have typically included adult males' retrospective viewpoints of kindergarten through

twelfth grade, experiences in higher education, or the inclusion of child participants only when parental and teacher accounts were also included (Allen, 2015; Allen, 2014; Brooks, Jones, & Latten, 2014; Datnow & Cooper, 1997; Harper, 2006; Maton, Hrabowski, & Greif, 1998; Reynolds, 2010; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). A limited number of qualitative studies have actually included child participants (Bettis, 1996; McGee & Pearman, 2014a; McGee & Pearman, 2014a; Sanders, 1997). The purpose of this study was to no longer talk about, but talk to the individuals experiencing the realities of the theories and stereotypes formed about them. It is believed that without the limitation of precontrived methodologies (e.g., quantitative questionnaires) to confirm suppositions, this study expands the existing body of literature by providing data in the form of the voiced realities of high achieving African American males. These voices provide viable information to those interested in identifying the experiences that support high academic achievement and its normalization among this population.

Significance of the Study

"He looks Black…He looks like he's up to no good, like he's on drugs or something. He's walking around in the rain looking at people's houses. He has his hands in his waistband and now he's looking at me." The preceding quote is a summarized excerpt from the telephone call placed to nonemergency dispatch on the evening of February 26, 2012 just moments before George Zimmerman shot and killed Trayvon Martin, a seventeen year old African American male, who was walking home from a convenience store. Several phone calls to 9-1-1 were placed subsequent to the initial nonemergency call in which loud cries for help could be heard in the background. The perpetrator of this crime alleged he was the one crying out for help, while the family of the slain teenager believed it to be the voice of their son. Many attribute this case

to racial profiling that resulted in the fatal shooting of an unarmed adolescent who was prejudged to be a suspect on the basis of his appearance. If indeed the young man was the one screaming for help, not only did the perpetrator take his life, he took his voice (Barry, Kovaleski, Robertson, & Alvarez, 2012; Botelho & Yan, 2013).

The young man described in this scenario, fell victim to society's portrayal of African American males as thugs, hoodlums, and suspects, more interested in fighting, doing drugs, and breaking into homes. Consequently, there was simply no way that Trayvon could have been an innocent kid taking a stroll to the "corner store" to purchase juice and candy and then leisurely walking back home, taking a moment to enjoy the beauty of creation, even on a rainy day. Some may argue the point that several homes in the area had been burglarized by individuals matching the victim's profile: Black and male. But one must question the number of Black males who had also frequented that neighborhood, those who never committed a crime in their life, who were positive contributors to this very community whether through creating the architectural blueprint of the homes, constructing the homes' interior and exterior, being a home owner, electrician, cable technician, lawn care technician, sanitation worker, or community service volunteer. Were their stories ever publicized? Were their voices ever heard? Were they given an opportunity to set the standard for the intentions of Black males in this neighborhood? No, because what was publicized and normalized in this community, as in countless others throughout this nation, were negative intentions and negative depictions of African American males.

This case attracted worldwide attention to the status and treatment of African American males in present-day America. It prompted the dialogue among leaders as to how to address the issues of injustice and inequality facing young African American males and how states can support them in overcoming them. President Barak Obama reacted to the ruling in this case by

highlighting his personal experience of being profiled and confirmed its existence and the negative impact it has on these young men. President Obama concluded his address with the question of:

> How are we doing a better job helping young African American men feel that they are a full part of this society and that they have got pathways and avenues to succeed? I think that would be a pretty good outcome from what was obviously a tragic situation. (CNN, July 19, 2013)

Some have argued that the solution to stereotyping, profiling and improving the treatment of young African American males in society is to teach them how to posture themselves to be a non-threat to the societal traditions and norms of acceptable appearance and behavior, which can be enacted through social skills training (Bell, 2009; Bell, 2010). Although it is important to teach African American males key skills such as code switching and proper etiquette, these do not eliminate societal expectations of subpar behaviors like failure and criminality nor does it eliminate the resulting adversity. The voices of those who face these hostile conditions yet have discovered the tools necessary to successfully maneuver through them must be heard if there is ever to be a revision of the African American male reputation or a voicing of the voids that exist between perceptions and realities. This study will investigate such successes based guided by the research questions that follow.

Research Questions

1. What are the experiences of African American middle school males who are meeting or exceeding grade level expectations at a school designed to support their success?
2. How do African American middle school males describe their successes and challenges related to academic achievement?

Theoretical Framework

The scholar identity model proposed by Whiting (2006b) was developed in response to the persistence of risk factors among Black males such as the Black-white achievement gap and under-identification in gifted and talented programs. The scholar identity model posits that "Black males who have a positive scholar identity view themselves as academicians, as studious, as competent and capable, and as intelligent or talented in school settings" (Whiting, 2006b, p. 224). Further, research has indicated that "the extent to which students view themselves as learners and intellectual beings plays a major role in how well they achieve and the confidence they have in academic settings" (Whiting, 2006b, p. 223). Thus, the scholar identity model urges for the development of positive scholar identities among African American males, commencing at an early age, as a means of resolving the complexities related to their underachievement (Whiting, 2006b).

The first and foundational characteristic of scholar identity development is self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is an individual's belief in their ability to accomplish what they set out to (Bandura, 1977). The essential factors involved in positive self-efficacy are resilience, rejection of negativity like stereotypes, and optimism despite obstacles. The second characteristic of a scholar identity is being willing to make sacrifice in order to achieve the goals an individual has set out to achieve. Sacrifices such as aspects of social life (e.g., "excessive time at play, television or video games, parties, dating, popularity, procrastination") are made in order to attain "self-defined and valued goals" (Whiting, 2006b, p. 225). The third characteristic is an internal locus of control where an individual's fate is controlled by the decisions they make and they take personal responsibility for outcomes.

Future oriented is the fourth characteristic of a scholar identity and involves a future focused orientation when approaching life, where one's aspirations for the future are the driving force in their daily decisions. The fifth characteristic is self-awareness, which represents an honest evaluation of one's own strengths and weaknesses and an identification of ways to strengthen any weaknesses. Sixthly, a scholar identity includes a student's need for achievement that is demonstrated through a desire to do well that is greater than their desire for affiliation. The seventh characteristic of a scholar identity is academic confidence, which is defined as "students' views of themselves in academic settings—their academic self-confidence—play a central role in their school achievement; students who believe they are intelligent and capable in school are more likely to persist" (Whiting, 2006b, p. 225). Racial identity is the eighth characteristic within a scholar identity that has been defined as "the significance and qualitative meaning that individuals attribute to being Black in their conceptualizations of self" (Sellers & Shelton, 2003, p.1080). Racial identity impacts the academic achievement and motivation of Black males, who are proud of their race and are not defined by the limitations placed on them by others (e.g., social injustices or statistical norms). The ninth and final scholar identity characteristic is masculinity, which focuses on Black males' rejection of academic achievement as being feminine. Instead, intelligence and achievement are viewed as an essential part of manhood (Whiting, 2006b).

The development of the characteristics that make up a scholar identify in Black males is guided by family, mentorship, school, and community. While parents and families lay the groundwork for identity development, the "village" plays an essential role in the continued development of a scholar identity. Mentors or role models provide guidance on skills necessary for lifelong success (e.g., leadership, manhood, forming positive relationships, learning

strategies and techniques, social skills, career development). The school setting contributes to the development of a scholar identity by extending the focus beyond typical intellectual and academic training to include multicultural education that provides them with the opportunity to "see themselves affirmed in the materials and content," academic related functions (e.g., "career days, the use of frequent and ongoing motivational speakers in classes and school wide assemblies, and leadership development workshops"); and social-emotional and vocational training addressed through individual and/or group multicultural counseling addressing their "needs, interests, and concerns" (Whiting, 2006b, p. 227). The community's role in scholar identity development is providing a source in which Black males can provide service to others through community outreach projects (e.g., mentors, tutors, and volunteers at youth programs, shelters, and/or senior citizen homes). Research has indicated that service learning participation increases learning and academic performance (Celio, Durlak, & Dymnicki, 2011).

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was chosen for this study in keeping with my goal of voicing high achievement among Black males. This methodology entailed that participants' provide detailed accounts of their experiences and that I, as the researcher, included direct quotations of these accounts within my analysis and written document (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009). IPA is described as epistemologically open in that "no single, a priori, theoretical" framework is assumed in order to fulfill the primary goal of gaining an "insider's perspective" on the phenomena being studied (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006, p. 114). Nevertheless, IPA does support the use of "theoretical concepts to assist in the development and elucidation of themes emerging from the research content" (Larkin et al., 2006, p. 116). The scholar identity model described in this section was used in this manner.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

It was assumed that participants were at a developmental age and intellectual level in which they could articulate their experiences in response to the questions I posed. It also was assumed that the participants would provide truthful and accurate responses based on their personal experiences. To ensure that participants gave honest answers, they were reminded of the confidentiality agreement of this study, which included not being identifiable by their given name or surname in any written documentation of the information they provided.

Though there are several strengths of qualitative research, which will be addressed in the methods section, there are also limitations. The first limitation is my intimate positioning, as the researcher, within this study, which would typically lead to questions of researcher bias due to misinterpretations, misrepresentations, or imposition of the researcher's own experiences on those of the participants. In recognition of this concern, I used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the qualitative methodology, which recognizes that the researcher's "fore- structures" (i.e., prior experiences, assumptions, and preconceptions) are essential, inevitable parts of the analysis process. Smith and colleagues (2009), described the process of fore- structure influence as, "the phenomenon, the thing itself, influences the interpretation which in turn can influence the fore-structure, which can then itself influence the interpretation" (p. 26).

My goal was not to bracket or reduce my 'fore-meanings', but rather to flexibly enter into the participants' lifeworlds, open and attentive to their experiences. Since IPA is interpretative in nature, my previous experiences are an unavoidable part of the process. My reflexivity statement is a formal acknowledgement of my interpretative role prior to conducting my study. However, I remained reflexive throughout the data collection and analysis process by journaling

my thoughts, feelings, and reactions to the participants' interviews and data. Further, I provided "a rich, transparent and contextualized analysis of [participant] accounts" as a part of the data analysis process (Smith et al., 2009, p. 29); this included the use of direct participant accounts to demonstrate the research findings.

The second limitation of this study is that the analysis process is non-prescriptive, so there are no pre-established procedures for conducting IPA research. The purpose of this aspect of IPA is adaptability and openness in terms of the focus of the research and to ensure that the philosophy behind IPA (i.e., phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography) is at the forefront of analysis. This was a limitation for me as a novice IPA researcher; however, Smith et al. (2009) included a set of guidelines for analysis for this purpose.

The third limitation is the exclusion of parent and teacher input to expound on what the participants revealed about their parents and/or teachers that they did not fully understand and to extend the parent and teachers understandings of the participants. For example, including the parents would provide an opportunity to gain clarity on Aaron's confusion about his parents' detachment and limited recognition of him. An example of a point to be clarified with the teachers would be the participants' concerns about the teachers' strictness related to assuming the participants' had been talking. However, this limitation could be overcome in the future research by conducting interviews of the participants' parents and/or teachers.

The participants were nine African American males in seventh and eighth grades at a private, college preparatory middle school located in the inner city of a town on the southwest coast of Florida that served fifth through eighth grade students. The participants earned grade point averages of 3.0 or higher on a 4.0 scale. The entire student body was on a financial needs based scholarship to attend the academy valued at $18,000 per student per school year. The

school incorporated methods of the nativity school program, a research-based design that has evidence of being effective in instructing impoverished students of color. Each participant participated in two interviews designed to gain insight into their experiences of academic achievement. The findings of this research study shed light on scholar identity development and experiences of high achieving African American males from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds with diverse previous school settings of private, charter, and public school enrollment.

Definition of Terms

The following are key terms and phrases that will be used throughout this study. Although they are common terms, it is necessary to define them as they fit within the context of this study.

African American. The terms African American and Black will be used interchangeably in reference to individuals of African descent born in and/or living in North America who identify with the culture of the United States (Stinson, 2013).

High academic achievement. The phrase high academic achievement and academic success will be used interchangeably in reference to students earning a grade point average of 3.0 or higher on a 4.0 scale, 75^{th} percentile or higher on the Stanford Achievement Test Series, Tenth Edition , and/or a 1900 or higher on the Secondary School Admission Test (A. Makaio, personal communication, June 24, 2013).

Voice. Voice is the expression of the individual and collective experiences of people of color that should be valued as a source of knowledge and truth (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005).

Summary

Despite the myriad of societal, school, and home barriers facing African American male students, many demonstrate academic excellence by exceeding grade level expectations. However, their experiences are rarely voiced, which prevents the normalization of African American male success and preserves the disparaging, dominant view. This chapter provides the background information necessary to frame the purpose of this study. The chapters that follow will detail the specifics related to the research study, beginning with chapter two that includes a review of the literature on previous research on high achieving African American males.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

"Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed."

~Booker T. Washington

The purpose of this review of literature is to explore the research related to the educational experiences of high achieving African American adolescent males. This review will begin by describing issues of marginalization and oppression. Next, descriptions of the portrayal of African American adolescent males in the literature and mainstream society will be examined. Then qualitative and quantitative studies investigating the experiences of high achieving African American adolescent males will be presented.

Marginalized populations are often viewed as strange; they are believed to "possess values and attitudes that require explication and clarification because they are fundamentally different from those of the rest of society" (Duncan, 2002, p.133). Moreover, they are perceived as having little to offer because of these differences, which maintains the status quo. When oppressed groups experience difficulty and/or disproportionate adversity, in contrast to the majority population, they are attributed to being organically derived. Consequently, because these issues are believed to be self-induced or natural consequences of being from a particular racial/ethnic background, their plight is of little importance (Duncan, 2002).

Here is fruit for the crows to pluck
For the rain to gather
For the wind to suck
For the sun to rot
For the trees to drop
Here is a strange and bitter crop

~Abel Meeropol (1937)

The preceding passage is an excerpt from the poem, *Strange Fruit*, written by Abel Meeropol , which was later developed into a song recorded by singer Billie Holiday in 1939 (Meeropol, 2006). *Strange Fruit* details the horrific yet common trend of lynching African Americans, mostly males, in the south during the late 18th century through the 1960s (Wood, 2009). The oppression of African Americans still exists, but in less blatant forms (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). Nevertheless, the toll that covert racism has on the physical, psychological, and emotional welfare of African Americans is just as detrimental. Cox (1945) defined lynching as:

An act of homicidal aggression committed by one people against another through mob action for the purpose of suppressing either some tendency in the latter to rise from an accommodated position of subordination or for subjugating them further to some lower social status. (p. 576)

Maintenance of the status quo, which positions European Americans at the top of the proverbial racial totem pole and African Americans at the bottom, would require either a suppression of the advancement of African Americans or subjugation to an even lower position so that progression is no longer an option (Bell, 1990). Education has always been a means to an end for African American physical, economical, and psychological liberation (Anderson, 1988). So if the dominant discourse centers on an inability to achieve as evidenced by educational failure due to some innate, biological feature or self-defeating choice, suppression and subjugation are natural consequences.

Extra! Extra! Read all about it! The Dominant Story Line

African American (AA) males, regardless of socioeconomic background, are often considered to be "at-risk" of poor educational outcomes as evidenced by high rates of school failure (e.g., poor grades, low standardized test scores, retention, dropout) and disproportionate presence in special education and gifted programs (Gutnam, Sameroff, & Eccles, 2002; McLoyd,1998; Smith, Schneider, & Ruck, 2005). In addition to facing academic problems, AA males experience disciplinary actions at a higher rate and in a harsher form (e.g., out-of-school suspension or expulsion) than their Caucasian counterparts for similar misbehaviors (Garibaldi, 2007). The combination of academic problems and extreme behavioral consequences increases the likelihood of school disengagement and consequently "falling off of the graduation path" (Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007).

African American males are rarely, if ever, associated with high academic performance and educational success. Instead they are portrayed in mainstream society as only being able to achieve success in fields like professional sports or entertainment (e.g., rappers). They are more commonly associated with negative outcomes such as engaging in criminality (e.g., drug dealers, gangbangers, etc.) and ending up incarcerated (Noguera, 2003). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2011), 63.5 percent of AA males graduate from high school in comparison to 82 percent of Caucasian males. Further, 6.6 percent of AA males dropout of high school before earning a diploma in comparison to the 2.7 percent of white males (Stillwell, Sable, & Plotts, 2011).

In addition to the Black-white achievement gap, closer analysis reveals yet another disparity —a gender gap. The academic performance of African American female students surpasses that of their AA male counterparts, resulting in a gap that is most evident beginning in

middle school (Mickelson & Greene, 2006). Researchers found that African American female adolescents have greater intentions to complete school, incur less school suspensions, and earn higher GPAs than males (Williams, Davis, Cribbs, Saunders, & Williams, 2002).

Gifted. African American males are the most underrepresented group of students in gifted and other accelerated learning programs (e.g., Advanced Placement[AP], Honors, International Baccalaureate [IB]), even among other underrepresented students (e.g., African American females, Latina/os, Native Americans)(U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Specifically, they are 2.5 times less likely to be in gifted or other academically talented programs even when their performance suggests they have the ability to do well in such placements (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010). Further, urban street culture has been found to have greater influence on AA males than AA females because AA males demonstrate greater sensitivity to neighborhood effects (Williams, et al., 2002). Because 27.7 percent live and attend schools in urban environments; many of which are poverty stricken and have a limited number of textbooks, computers, qualified teachers, and courses available (Moore III, Henfield & Owen, 2008; National Center for Education Statistics, 2004; Smedley & Jenkins, 2007), it is likely that AA males are adversely affected by such environmental influences.

A stereotype of criminality. Despite attempts by programs to train educators in areas of social justice, cultural responsiveness, and open-mindedness, educators live within a society that is bombarded by the media's destructive images and negative societal stereotypes of AA males (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Rable & Irizarry, 2010). Research has suggested that because common stereotypes depict AA males as troublemakers and the fact that teachers experience discomfort when working with this population, these students are often targeted in teacher surveillance and disproportionately subjected to punitive action (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Rable & Irizarry, 2010).

Such occurrences contribute to issues of identification and retention.

Skiba et al. (2000) controlled for socioeconomic status in reviewing discipline disproportionality among Black and white students and found that disproportionality still remained. Moreover, African American students had been referred more for minor infractions (e.g., disrespect and excessive noise). Archer (2009) and Kim (2009) reported that AA males received harsher punishments for engaging in similar behaviors as their white counterparts. Once students experience exclusionary disciplinary actions, they have great difficulty being readmitted into schools, which further exacerbates the dropout rate and the likelihood of involvement with the juvenile justice system (Fenning & Rose, 2007). The implication of these findings is that educators are susceptible to the stereotypes and widespread notion that most AA males are on developmental trajectories that will result in incarceration. Meiners (2007) reported that the institutional policies and practices of influential organizations such as the education system, legal system, and media "function to normalize an 'expectation' of incarceration" for AA males (p. 31).

The impact of statistics and stereotypes. The documentation of such statistical and demographic data sheds light on an important problem, yet simultaneously stigmatizes AA males and does little to remediate these concerns. In fact, AA males are often looked upon as societal anomalies in terms of their inability to meet the expectations of the United States' public education system. The disheartening statistics regarding the performance of AA males in schools in the U.S. fuel the common discourse surrounding AA male academic performance and depicts them as academic failures , a narrow depiction because not all fit this mold (Thompson & Lewis, 2005). Largely absent from the research literature are accounts of African American males who are not only meeting but exceeding grade level expectations. The relative absence of these

individuals in the literature suggests that little is known about this group of students in terms of the conditions and factors that support the emergence of academic success among them (Noguera, 2003).

A fatuous explanation would be that academically successful AA males are in fact anomalies. Previous studies documenting factors that extend individual traits of intelligence and motivation disprove such a simplistic answer and indicate factors external to the individual that support educational success (Abu-Hilal, 2000; Chin & Kameoka, 2002; Filozof, Albertin, Jones, Steme, Myers, & McDermott, 1998; Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Trotman, 2002; Ford & Whiting, 2010; Henfield, Moore, & Wood 2008; Levin, Belfield, Muennig, Rouse, Wolfe, & Teft, 2007; Neal-Barnett, 2001; Nichols, Kotchick, Barry, & Haskins, 2010; Stinson, 2008; Tyson, Darity, & Castellino, 2005). Research that voices the lived experiences of AA males who are successfully navigating the K-12 educational system in the U.S. would broaden the literature. In this vein, Matthews and Williams (2007) argued that "attention to how young African American men achieve success while overcoming the sociohistorical and institutional barriers—rather than cataloguing deficits associated with those who do not—can be more helpful in ultimately engineering effective and relevant schooling experiences for all children" (p. 187).

A better today for a better tomorrow. Early intervention and prevention occurring at the elementary level is the best solution to remediate such problematic occurrences (Davis, 2003). Though this may be a highly effective solution to effect change in future generations, those currently experiencing such dismal trajectories or at-risk of experiencing them, are in need of solutions as well. Further, if prevention and early intervention strategies do not take into account the needs of these students from their perspective, the potential for the continued use of the often ineffective, historical practices, which have successful sustained the below average academic

performance of this population for decades, is inevitable (Wiggans, 2007).

Unfortunately, the great steps towards equality and opportunity for all that have taken place in American society are often overshadowed by the ever-present overt and covert existence of institutional racism (e.g., social, economic, and political) and structural deficits (e.g., family, neighborhood, and school) that continue to negatively impact African Americans, especially males. Even more troubling is the fact that the successes of those who are able to overcome such negative influences are seldom celebrated, which denies them a sense of accomplishment and prevents their ability to serve as models for other AA males (Swanson et al., 2003).

Previous qualitative studies related to the state of educational statuses of African American males, have typically included adult males' retrospective viewpoints of kindergarten through twelfth grade and/or experiences in higher education, or parents of AA males as study participants (Datnow & Cooper, 1997; Harper, 2006; Maton, Hrabowski, & Greif, 1998; Reynolds, 2010; Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000). A limited number of qualitative studies have actually included child participants (Bettis, 1996; Sanders, 1997).

Academically Successful African American Males

The academic outcomes of AA males have been quantified by previous research studies and national statistical reports, as aforementioned. This data has provided districts nationwide with valuable information regarding specific deficits yet to be addressed and areas for targeted interventions. However, to rely solely on the outcome data of educational practices is to limit the breadth of information that qualitative inquiry can provide (Ungar, 2003). Further, outcome data (e.g., national educational statistics) provides partial information that can be enhanced by process data (e.g., observations, interviews) (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009). Process data provides detailed information on practices, occurrences, and experiences that have transpired in route to outcome.

Therefore, reviewing the *process* is a necessary element of determining the why behind outcomes.

Firsthand accounts of this *process* serve as valuable pieces of information because they can be used to structure inquiry into phenomena. The present study seeks to gain this information because as the literature suggests, the educational experiences of AA males are markedly different from that of European Americans or other people groups of color. These young men are frequently described in terms of their shortcomings to the point where the phrase Black male has become synonymous to failure (Duncan, 2002). Yet, there are a limited number of studies documenting such experiences, which underscores the need for and basis of this study. In the sections that follow I present studies that describe the experiences of AA males who met and exceeded academic expectations despite experiences of oppression (e.g., racism, discrimination, marginalization, stereotyping). I begin by reviewing some quantitative research studies pertaining to academically successful AA males and then I turn to relevant qualitative research studies.

Quantitative Research Studies on High Achieving African American Adolescent Males

The following sections present quantitative research studies on the factors related to or predictive of academic achievement among African American (AA) adolescent males in middle or high school settings. Some of the factors include racial pride, religiosity (i.e., importance of religious practices in daily experiences), educational aspirations, participation in an extra-curricular activity (i.e., debate team membership), parental factors such as educational level, academic self-efficacy (i.e., belief in one's own academic ability), community location (i.e., rural, suburban, or urban), and adopting alternative identities.

Racial pride, religiosity, and educational utility. Researchers investigated the positive development of AA adolescent males in efforts to present strength-based insight, a stark contrast of the traditional deficit-based practices often employed when researching this population (Butler-Barnes, Williams, & Chavous, 2012). Butler-Barnes and colleagues (2012) investigated the impact that racial pride (i.e., awareness of and pride in one's heritage and contribution to society), religiosity (i.e., the implementation of religious beliefs/values and practices in everyday life), and educational utility (i.e., value placed on education) have on the academic achievement of AA adolescent males. Participants of this study included 158 students in the 11th grade at a school district in Maryland. Both student participants and a parent were individually interviewed for an hour and completed a questionnaire that took approximately 45 minutes to complete.

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlational analyses, and hierarchical regression. The average participant grade point average (GPA) was 2.86 on a 4.0 scale. The correlational analyses suggested that demographic variables of age and household income were not significantly associated with GPA. There was a positive and significant correlation between educational utility and grade point average. However, religiosity (i.e., importance of religion and church attendance) and racial pride were not significantly associated with GPA.

An interaction effect was found between educational utility beliefs and racial pride in the prediction of academic performance. Participants with higher levels of racial pride demonstrated a stronger positive relationship between educational utility and academic achievement than those who had lower levels of racial pride. Yet, when participants had low educational utility levels, their academic performance was also low despite their level of racial pride.

This finding suggests that racial pride does not act as a buffer from poor academic performance when AA males have low educational utility beliefs.

Debating and achieving. A quantitative study conducted by Mezuk (2009) investigated how being a debate team member impacted the academic performance of AA male high school students in the Chicago Public School (CPS) district. The following research questions guided the study: "a) how are students who choose to participate in urban debate different from their peers who do not choose to participate? (b) What is the influence of debate participation on three scholastic outcomes: GPA, college readiness as measured by the ACT, and ultimate high school outcome (graduate or drop out)? A sample (*n*=2, 614) of AA males was selected from 39 high schools who were a part of the Chicago Debate League (CDL) between the academic years of 1997-1998 and 2006-2007. The researcher utilized CDL tournament records and CPS academic records (i.e., reading and mathematics scores on Illinois Standards Achievement Test, cumulative grade point average (GPA) for eighth and 12th grade, ACT benchmark score, and outcome of dropout or graduation) to determine the effects of debate team participation on academic achievement.

The data were analyzed utilizing multivariate regression, which provided an estimate of debate participation on the aforementioned factors. To better estimate the influence of debate team participation, the eighth grade academic performance provided a "pre-debate" depiction of participant achievement levels. The results indicated that the average participant GPA was higher in 12th grade than it was in eighth grade; the more debates that students participated in, the higher their GPAs. Specifically, the participants who debated at least 25 rounds had a 12th grade GPA that was approximately half a letter grade higher than students who debated five rounds or less. Accordingly, 73 percent of the sample who were on the debate team graduated from high school

in comparison to the only 43.7 percent graduation rate of non-debaters. Thus, greater involvement with the debate team (i.e., participating in more debates) was associated with a higher graduation rate and higher English, reading, and science ACT scores (Mezuk, 2009).

Academics and aspirations. In a study looking at the influence a school's location, either urban or suburban, has on the educational aspirations of AA males in high school, Strayhorn (2009) utilized Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as the theoretical framework to investigate this among eighth grade students. The data came from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS), which obtained a nationally representative sample of eight grade students. Only the data from AA male participants was used for analysis (n = 173,519). The data were analyzed utilizing descriptive statistics, exploratory correlations to determine relationships among variables of metropolitan status (e.g., urban, suburban, or rural), and hierarchical linear regression to measure influence of urbanicity on educational aspirations.

The results indicated most AA males in the sample, 53 percent, attended urban schools and had lower educational aspirations than those who attended suburban schools. Moreover, AA males from higher socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds demonstrated higher levels of educational aspiration. The next most influential factor impacting AA males' educational aspiration was academic achievement levels in mathematics and science. When holding constant all other variables (i.e., SES and metropolitan status—urban, suburban, rural), high achieving AA males had higher educational aspirations.

In a similar study looking at the educational and career aspirations of AA adolescent males, Lee, Lewis, Sly, Carmack, Roberts, and Basore (2011) investigated these factors among AA adolescents and also compared their aspirations to male adolescents of other ethnic/racial backgrounds. Participants of this study were recruited from a city in the Midwest. The sample

included 473 male between the ages of eight and 15 and in third, fifth, seventh, or ninth grade. Forty-five percent were African American, 22 percent were Caucasian, 13 percent were biracial, and 19 percent were of Asian, Hispanic, or Native American ethnic/racial backgrounds.

Participants completed a 17-item survey created by the second author that was read aloud to third grade participants and completed independently by students in the other grades. The survey included questions about participation in extracurricular activities, having role models, and future educational and career goals. Data analysis included frequencies and descriptive statistics. The results suggested that AA males sought careers in professional sports organizations (i.e., NBA and NFL) as their top two professions and becoming a physician as their third. Participants of non-African American endorsed becoming a doctor or an engineer as their top two and being in the NFL as their third choice. The results also indicated that AA males (74%) aspired to attend college at the same rate Caucasian males (74%) did and at a higher rate than males of other ethnicities (69%). Further, a higher percentage of AA adolescent males demonstrated strong beliefs in their ability
to become anything they wanted to (69%) and belief that the adults in their lives supported them (61%) in comparison to non-African Americans perceptions of ability to achieve (56.5%) and adult support (53.4%).

The authors concluded that AA adolescent males have high career and educational aspirations and high beliefs in their ability to attain these goals; yet, may not know how to effectively achieve these goals. This supports the need for interventions that teach AA males how to achieve such aspirations such as through mentoring and positive role models. Academic self-efficacy (i.e., assurance in one's capacity to achieve academically), school belonging (i.e., a student's sense of being a valued member within a school setting), and educational aspirations

(i.e., ideas surrounding the highest level of education one will attain) are positively associated with academic achievement (Uwah, McMahon, & Furlow, 2008). Students with high academic self-efficacy engage in behaviors that enable them to be academically successful, such as goal-setting, using time management strategies, and increasing effort to match academic demands. Uwah and colleagues (2008) investigated the relationship between school belonging, academic self-efficacy, and educational aspirations among AA males in 9th and 10th grade. Uwah and colleagues (2008) hypothesized that perceptions of school belonging would be positively correlated with students' academic self-efficacy.

A sample of 40 participants was taken from a predominately African American, title one high school in a large city in Southeastern North America. Participants completed three measures: a demographic questionnaire, the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (PSSM), and the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale. The demographic questionnaire asked seven questions pertaining to participants' grade, race, sex, age, year in school, socioeconomic status, mother's level of education, and students' educational aspirations (i.e., highest degree aspire to earn). The PSSM measured participants' perceptions of their sense of connectedness with the school. The Academic Self-Efficacy Scale measured students' self-appraisal of their academic ability.

The data were analyzed using frequencies, descriptive statistics, correlation coefficients, and multiple regression. The results indicated that the majority of the participants expected to earn a master's degree (60%) or doctoral degree (22.5%). Further, these students felt some sense of school connectedness and had moderately high levels of academic self-efficacy. The results also suggested that students' general perceptions of school connectedness were not significantly related to their academic self-efficacy. However, their perception of feeling encouraged was

significantly predictive of their academic self-efficacy. Thus, when these students' were directly invited to participate in school academic or extracurricular activities, they had higher levels of self-efficacy. Another finding was that there was significant relationship between educational aspirations and academic self-efficacy scores. In other words, the level of educational aspirations is predictive of their sense of academic ability.

A similar study looked at the future education orientation (FEO) (i.e., educational aspirations), self-efficacy, ethnic identity, perceived parental support, and the impact of gender on these factors among African American adolescents. Kerpelman, Eryigit, and Stephens (2008) hypothesized that females would have higher FEOs than males and higher achieving adolescents would have higher FEOs than lower achieving adolescents. Kerpelman et al. (2008) used a sample of 374 African American adolescents (152 male, 222 female) from a larger study looking at the risk and resilience of African American adolescents. Participants were from a rural school, in seventh through 12th grades, and ages ranged from 12 to 20.

Researchers administered questionnaires that included the *Future Education* scale, *Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM-R)*, *Self-Efficacy* Scale, and items measuring perceived parental support from the *Adolescent Family Process* measure. The questionnaire also included a section that asked about participants academic achievement (i.e., average grades) and demographic information (i.e., age, gender, family background—single- or two-parent home, and parent's educational level). Descriptive statistics, two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), and hierarchical multiple regression were employed.

The results indicated that participants had moderate to high levels of self-efficacy and ethnic identity, moderate levels of perceived parental support, and strong future education orientations (FEO). Results also indicated statistically significant differences between gender

and achievement. Female adolescents reported higher FEOs than males and high achieving students reported higher FEOs than lower achieving students. The results of the hierarchical multiple regression indicated a positive association between gender and grades. However, when self-efficacy, ethnic identity, and perceived parental support were factored in to the analysis, academic achievement (i.e., grades) was no longer statistically significant. Therefore, being a female with high levels of self-efficacy, ethnic identity, and perceived parental support positively contributes to having higher FEO.

Although female adolescents had higher FEO scores, ethnic identity and perceived parental support also positively contributed to higher FEOs among males. The authors concluded that internal beliefs of ethnic identity and self-efficacy, coupled with external factors of parental support, specifically maternal support positively impact the future education orientation of African American adolescents. They also suggested that particular effort should be made in supporting the future education orientation of AA adolescent males (Kerpelman et al., 2008).

Parental factors. In a study looking at the impact parental factors have on the academic achievement of AA males, Hines and Holcomb-McCoy (2013) sought to understand the best predictors of academic achievement among this population. They posed the following research questions: (1) what is the relationship between the perceived African American parenting style and the academic achievement of African American males? (2) which combination of factors (e.g., family structure, church attendance, parental communication, parent monitoring) best predicts African American male high school achievement?

Hines and Holcomb-McCoy (2013) recruited 153 AA males from two high schools in the northeastern United States. Participants were in 11th and 12th grade. Fifty-four percent lived in an urban community, 40 percent lived in a suburban community, and five percent live in a rural

community. The participants completed two measures: the Parenting Style Index and the Academic and Family Supplemental Questionnaire. The Parenting Style Index yielded information about parenting styles (i.e., authoritarian, authoritative, indulgent and neglectful) based on two subscales called My Parent, which measured participants' perception of their parents love, responsiveness, and involvement, and My Free Time, which assessed the degree of supervision/restriction the participants' experienced. The Academic and Family Supplemental Questionnaire gathered information on participants' background in terms of the community (e.g., involvement and type), school (e.g., grades, school involvement, parent's educational level, participation in advance placement courses), and family (e.g., communication style with parents).

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), and hierarchical regression. The results of descriptive statistical analysis suggested that the highest endorsed parenting style was authoritative and the lowest was authoritarian. The results of the one-way ANOVA suggested that there was no significant relationship between the four parenting styles and academic attainment (i.e., participants' enrollment in international baccalaureate, advanced placement, or honors courses). The hierarchical regression analysis resulted in no parenting style variables were found to be predictive of grade point average (GPA); father's educational level was a positive predictor of GPA; father's expectation was a negative predictor of GPA; and being from a two-parent household was a positive predictor of GPA. Further, significant correlations were found between the mothers' and fathers' educational level and participant GPA.

In another study looking at parental factors that support academic achievement among AA males, Dixon-Román (2012) utilized data from the University of Michigan's Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID). The PSID is a longitudinal data set of information about participating

families such as income, employment, and housing location and child participants' performance on the Woodcock Johnson-Revised (WJ-R) Achievement Test in broad reading and broad mathematics. The study only included data from the 636 AA male participants between the ages of 5 and 19 who were interviewed in 1997 and 2002.

The data were analyzed utilizing multilevel growth curve modeling that is described as a "flexible statistical method that enables the estimation of growth, change, or development over the repeated measures of an outcome" (Dixon-Román, 2012, p. 16). Growth in mathematics was measured from the age of three to 18 and growth in reading was measured from the age of six to 18. The results indicated that by 2002, there were AA males who scored on the highest attainable levels on both the reading and mathematics measures, often overlooked by reports that average overall AA male performance. The parent's occupational cultural capital (i.e., exposure to hegemonic social and cultural norms required by employment that differ according to type of work—professional, technical, managerial, administrative, and sales) was found to positively impact the students' reading and mathematics achievement levels. Additionally, family income levels also had a positive effect on student reading achievement.

The results also indicated that the externalized external social and cultural capital of intellectual stimulation and emotional support and parent school involvement (i.e., classroom observations and attendance at school events) had significant positive effects on academic achievement in both reading and mathematics. Conversely, parent-teacher conferencing was negatively associated with reading and mathematics achievement. This supports previous findings (Lareau & Horvat, 1999) that suggest African American parents are not as well received by schools than their white counterparts and are excluded from being able to effectively advocate for their children (Dixon-Román, 2012).

Adopting to achieve or simply cope. The notion of adopting a "raceless" identity (i.e., minimizing relationship racial/ethnic group) in order to attain academic success among African American (AA) adolescents was explored by Harris and Marsh (2010). These researchers drew a sample of AA adolescents (*n*= 629) from a larger, longitudinal study called the Maryland Adolescence Development in Context Study (MADICS). The MADICS data was collected in order to investigate "the psychological determinants of behavior and developmental trajectories during adolescence" (Harris & Marsh, 2010, p. 1250). Harris and Marsh (2010) hypothesized that AA with little to no feelings towards being AA (i.e., "racelessness") would have higher academic achievement levels and educational aspirations than those who did. They also hypothesized that AA adolescents with raceless orientations place more value on school and have a stronger sense of belonging than those who do not. Further, they also investigated whether or not AA who developed a "raceless" orientation had higher educational aspirations than those who did not.

The data were analyzed utilizing a linear fixed-effects regression model and the results indicated that the hypothesis of a raceless identity being an effective strategy for achieving academic success was not supported. In fact, participants who indicated feeling connected to those from their racial background and those who reported both feelings of similarity and dissimilarity to their race had higher academic achievement, educational aspirations, value school more, and felt more connected to school than those who held a racelessness perspective. Further, feelings of "shared fate" (i.e., "extent to which their success helps other Blacks and the success of other Blacks help them (Harris & Marsh, 2010, p. 1254) were positively associated with academic achievement, educational aspirations, and value attributed to schooling. However, the feeling of shared fate was negatively associated with school detachment.

Another study looked at the practice of adopting an alternative identity among AA adolescent males by investigating the relationship among bravado (i.e., "hypermasculine") identities, negative experiences, and perceptions of school support. The development of a bravado identity can lead to academic disengagement, which negatively impacts academic performance (Corprew & Cunningham, 2011). Corprew and Cunningham (2011) explored these factors among 126 AA adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18. Of the 126 participants, 68 were from a high school specializing in mathematics and science in a large, urban city. Fifty-eight of the participants attended a three week summer program at a university that emphasized academic and social development and transitioning into college for African American males.

Participants were administered three measures that were read aloud to them called the *Black Male Experience Measure*, the *School Support Scale*, and the *Hypermasculine Inventory Scale*. The *Black Male Experience Measure* assessed participants experiences with various social and community scenarios (e.g., being followed around a store or questioned by the police). The *School Support Scale* measured students' perceptions of school personnel support (i.e., whether or not school personnel wanted them be successful) and how important school personnel were to them. The *Hypermasculine Inventory Scale* included domains of "violence as manly, danger is exciting, and callous sex attitudes toward women" (Corprew & Cunningham, 2011, p. 578).

Data analysis included descriptive statistics, independent sample *t*-tests, and hierarchical regression. The results indicated that a significant number of participants perceived having faced many negative experiences related to their race including being questioned by the police while hanging out (55%), people locking their car doors as they walked past (46%), hateful looks from non-African Americans (52% from men, 46% from women), and not being hired due to race (40%) despite having attended schools that supported academic achievement. In terms of school

support, the participants endorsed moderately high levels of school support. Sixty-eight percent perceived that their teachers wanted them to be successful and 75 percent reporting their teachers wanted the best for them. Further, 58 percent felt their administrators wanted them to be successful and were important to them and 57 percent believed their administrators gave valuable advice.

A statistically significant interaction was found between negative experiences and perceived school support, which suggested that as negative experiences increased and school support increased, there was a decrease in bravado attitudes. However, as negative experiences increased and school support decreased, there was an increase in bravado attitudes. There was no finding that supported a direct link between perception of negative experiences and adopting a bravado attitude. Additionally, participants reported low levels of a bravado attitude. The authors concluded that support from school personnel who AA males perceive as being significant can serve as a buffer between negative experiences and adopting a bravado attitude.

Qualitative Studies of High Achieving AA Males

A critical race ethnography was conducted in order to gain insight into the lives (i.e., academic and social perspectives) of AA males at a highly acclaimed magnet high school in the Midwest known for its "rigorous curriculum, produc[tion] of first-rate students, and caring institutional culture" (Duncan, 2002, p.133). The school was located in a district where over 90 percent of the student population was African American. Approximately 300 students were enrolled in this school, 50 percent were African American and 50 percent were Caucasian. The researcher taught an ethics course at this high school in order to gain an insider's point of view while simultaneously providing a service.

Duncan (2002) conducted individual interviews, focus groups, observations, and collected school data (i.e., demographic information, standardized testing, attendance, graduation rates, and artifacts pertaining to the "historical, ideological, and programmatic features" of the school) (p. 134). The researcher also kept a reflective journal where he recorded his subjective thoughts and feelings throughout the research process. He arrived at several conclusions upon completion of this study including: Black male students are treated as if they are "beyond love" (i.e., barred from the full benefits of societal membership—economy, networks of support, and ultimately social involvement); AA males are believed to have values and attitudes that differ from other students and any marginalization or oppression is only a natural consequence of who they have chosen to be; AA males have limited opportunity to share their school experiences (academic and social), which contributes to experiences of oppression due to circumstances being defined by others (i.e., cultural imperialism); the school's reputation of being a caring environment precluded the possibility of oppression and need to examine its presence at this school; and the negative sentiments that populate the public statements of students and teachers about Black male students foster an inhospitable climate that has an impact on their academic achievement" (Duncan, 2002, p. 140).

A separate ethnographic study, following a narrative framework, looked at the meanings of academic achievement for three of the highest achieving AA male high school seniors by conducting unstructured, individual interviews (Gayles, 2005). The criteria for participant selection were: (1) AA male high school senior; (2) in the top 10 percent of graduating class; (3) attended the same high school for the past 4 years; (4) not in the magnet program; and (5) from a non-affluent home. In addition to demonstrating academic excellence, all three of the participants were quite dependent, worked between 20 to 40 hours per week, one purchased a car

and financed his trendy wardrobe, and one was making payments on an engagement ring and saving for future college room and board.

The interviews were participant driven in that the questions were extended to include additional topics of relevance introduced by participants. The researcher conducted weekly individual interviews that lasted 60 minutes throughout the last six months of the school year. The researcher transcribed the audio recorded interviews and identified two themes: *diminishing significance of academic achievement* and *utilitarian achievement.*

The participants each shared accounts of diminishing the significance of high academic achievement as a means of identification because they did not wish to be distinguished from their peers. In fact, they would consciously engage in behaviors to solidify their typicality, which they described as "I don't act like a smart person" and "[I act] stupid sometimes". They effectively camouflaged their academic success that was evident when their peers were in disbelief upon discovery of that they graduated with honors. The theme of utilitarian achievement describes the participants' view of academic achievement as a means to an end, a process that one must go through in order to get what they want in the future. Consequently, "the primary value of academic achievement…was its perceived future benefits" (Gayles, 2005).

An additional ethnographic study was conducted by Graham and Anderson (2008) who utilized a case study approach to research the relationship between academic and ethnic identity for three high achieving AA male seniors at a majority Black high school in North Carolina. This high school had a reputation within the community as producing leaders and was well supported by active parent participation and community involvement. However, according to state standards, it was a low achieving high school with 55 percent of the student body demonstrating significantly below average academic performance. Only 38 percent of African

American students were at or above grade level in comparison to 47 percent of Hispanic students and 57 percent of Caucasian students. The researchers employed a mixed methods approach to data collection, which included individual interviews, surveys, observations, and a review of artifacts. The specific research methods were as follows:

(1) three open-ended interviews with each participant; (2) one narrative interview with each participant; (3) one open-ended interview with a "significant other" whom the participant nominated; (4) three classroom observations; (5) one open-ended interview with the teacher of the classroom observed; (6) one interview with the twelfth grade guidance counselor; (7) an "Academic Identity" survey and the "Admiration Ladder" instrument; and (8) data collected from artifacts (Graham & Anderson, 2008, p. 480).

The data were analyzed using inductive analysis, which began with a transcription of all interviews. The transcriptions were reviewed by the participants during the member checking process to ensure they were error free and accurate representations of the participants' input. Researchers then used a three-phase approach to analyze the data. First, they identified keywords and phrases that repeatedly emerged and were related to the research questions. Next, the keywords were used to identify similarities amongst the other sources of data. Finally, all the themes that had emerged throughout the analysis process were grouped into broad domains of *school is serious to me, I'm real big into knowing your heritage,* and *without guidance, we'd all be heathens.*

The theme *school is serious to me* surfaced as a result of the participants' perception of school being essential component to make a difference in the world. They believe the purpose of school was learning and acquisition of knowledge as opposed to simply earning good grades. They endeavored to fulfill this purpose through hard work, planning, and being their personal

best. Further, the participants' had positive academic identities in terms of a belief in their own academic ability and perception that teachers viewed them as "successful" and "better than most".

The second theme, *I'm real big into knowing your heritage,* addressed the participants' pride in and respect for their African American heritage and knowledge that racism existed within their school, which "encouraged them to be invisible and silent rather than visible" (Graham & Anderson, 2008, p. 484). Nevertheless, they possessed strong ethnic identities that strengthened their academic identities because they believe academic mobility was necessary to "improve race relations while dispelling myths and destroying stereotypes" (Graham & Anderson, 2008, p. 484).

The final theme, *without guidance, we'd all be heathens*, is in reference to the impact that the participants' parents and "significant others" (e.g., pastors) and teachers had on them. Parents consistently reinforced a sense of pride in their heritage and the importance of educational attainment for African American men. The "significant others" imparted a sense of pride in the participants by sharing accounts of African American history. Both parents and significant others also promoted the importance of individuality and not conforming to the depictions of AA males in mainstream society. The participants enjoyed interacting with their classmates but maintained their individuality and respected those who also did not conform or copy others.

A phenomenological study employed two components of the theoretical framework *racialized forms of experience*: *conceptualization of race* and *conceptualization of learners.* Conceptualization of race highlights race and racism as a sociopolitical construction that is historically situated yet remains influential in present day (Martin, 2009). Conceptualizations of learners considers ethnic identify in an individual's learning context (e.g., mathematics). Berry,

Thunder, and McClain (2011) investigated how mathematically successful AA males constructed their mathematics identity and racial identity using video recorded focus group interviews that lasted approximately 45 minutes; mathematics autobiographies that documented their experiences, important mathematical achievements, and their self-perceptions as mathematics learners; review of school data (e.g., grades, test scores, teacher comments); and observations to gain an understanding of interactions with teachers and peers.

Participants of this study included 23 AA males either about to enter or already in middle school (i.e., entering grades six through eight) who demonstrated high pass rates on a state standardized measure of mathematics and above average performance in mathematics classes. After transcribing the video recordings of the interviews, these researchers used memoing codes that were explicitly defined so analysis of the data would be consistent throughout. The data were then reread and recoded for consistency and then organized by codes.

Next, the data were reread and recoded again to determine if further discrimination among the elements was needed. This process allowed for the following themes to emerge from the data related to the positive development of their mathematics identities: "(a) the development of computational fluency by third grade, (b) extrinsic recognition in the form of grades, standardized test scores, tracking, and gifted identification, (c) relational connections between teachers, families, and out-of-school activities, and (d) engagement with the unique qualities of mathematics (Berry et al., 2011, p. 15). Interestingly, most of the participants were the only AA males in their advanced mathematics classes and consequently experienced the sense of "otherness", yet recognized that they were defying others perceptions of them (i.e., "African Americans don't do well in math, don't achieve more" (Berry, et al., 2011, p. 19). Thus, they used this "otherness" as motivation to disprove the stereotypes and statistics.

In a similar study, Critical Race Theory (CRT) was used as the theoretical framework and phenomenology was used as the methodological framework to investigate the experiences of high mathematics performance among AA males. Participants of this study included eight AA males enrolled in an Algebra 1 course at a middle school in an urban school district, their parents, and Algebra 1 teachers. Berry (2008) audiotaped individual interviews (two structured and one unstructured follow-up) with student participants to gain a deeper understanding of their perceptions and experiences. I also had the students complete a questionnaire that inquired about their perceptions of school and mathematics in general, perceptions of their personal mathematics ability, and whether or not they considered themselves as being successful in math. Additionally, student participants completed a mathematics autobiography where they described mathematical milestones to prompt thoughts about their experiences with math. The parent and teacher participants also participated in audio recorded individual interviews in order to gain insight on their perceptions of the students' experiences with mathematics. Then, the researcher reviewed student records to gain an understanding of their mathematical history and confirm the data that had been collected. Finally, he conducted four weekly classroom observations to view participant's interactions with their teachers and peers.

Berry (2008) analyzed the data throughout the collection process in order to identify themes that needed further investigation. He employed the process of memoing of the raw data and used codes from the literature that were explicitly defined to ensure consistency. At the end of the data collection process, Berry (2008) reread and recoded the raw data and identified themes that needed to be further differentiated. As a result of this course, the following themes emerged related to these student's perceptions of and persistence with mathematics (a) early educational experiences, (b) recognition of abilities and how it was achieved, (c) support

systems, (d) positive mathematical and academic identity, and (e) alternative identities" (p. 477).

The theme of *early educational experiences* refers to the majority of the parents reporting that they exposed their sons to academically oriented materials (e.g., workbooks, flashcards, computers, educational videotapes) before enrolling them in school in efforts to avoid the academic obstacles they perceived their sons would face. The students' acknowledged that they mastered the mathematical curriculum at school with ease and cited specific examples of knowing multiplication tables before their peers, being grouped with the "smart" students, and an ability to complete higher grade level mathematics.

Recognition of abilities and how it was achieved pertains to the fact that five of the eight student participants were identified as academically gifted and placed on an advanced academic track. However, four of these five students were not identified by their teachers as being gifted but were recognized via parental advocacy, and in one case a Caucasian parent's advocacy, which resulted in gifted placement. Nevertheless, the students' placement in gifted did not come without resistance from the schools who viewed the students in terms of their behavior as opposed to their cognitive ability and academic potential. That is they did not believe the students were gifted because they misbehaved; this despite the research indicating that when gifted students are bored because the curriculum is below their developmental level, they may act out behaviorally (e.g., inattention, off-task, talking) (McGuffog, Feiring, & Lewis, 1987).

The theme *support system* refers to the essential role the students' parents played in providing them with the necessary supports to be academically successful. The parents' knowledge of the inequitable experiences facing AA males in general positioned them in terms of knowing how to best counter these obstacles. The parents served as "guardians of opportunities, standard setters, resources for mathematical knowledge, and models of success"

(Berry, 2008, p. 480). The parents were actively involved in the students scheduling by advocating for more advanced courses, they made their presence well-known at the school (e.g., joined committees, chaperoned fieldtrips, involved in fundraising), they reinforced the importance of education by setting expectations of high achievement and encouragement that their sons could achieve, and the parents served as models of success either by having being academically successful themselves (e.g., mathematics major) or they encouraged the child to persevere because they believed in their ability.

The student participants' development of a *positive mathematical and academic identity* was evident in the high expectations they held for themselves and the pride they took in being among the "smart students". Moreover, they were well aware of what it took to be successful and took responsibility for times they had fallen short of maintaining high achievement levels. The theme *alternative identities* refers to the various associations the young men made that lifted the "burden of acting white", which included the development of one or more of the following identities: co-curricular and special academic program identity (i.e., educational clubs/programs), religious identity (i.e., participation in church events), and athletic identity (i.e., participation in team sports). The student participants recognized that they had not exchanged their African American culture for European American culture but found solace in their ethnic identities and the conversations they had with their parents concerning race related experiences.

In another phenomenological study that investigated the schooling experiences of high achieving AA adolescent males, Michael-Chadwell, Bonner, & Louis (2009) employed qualitative methods of open-ended interviews. The six participants were recruited from two predominantly African American churches in San Antonio, Texas. The participants were either enrolled in advancement placement or identified as gifted and were asked to respond to 10 open

ended questions via telephone or email. The interview questions were developed as an extension of the three research questions: (1) how do African American high school males define giftedness or academic success, (2) what barriers, if any, do African American males perceive as factors in achieving academic success in school and after graduation, and (3) what role, if any, does spirituality play among African American high school male cohorts (Michael-Chadwell, Bonner, & Louis, 2009, p. 82).

Data analysis began with a transcription of the telephone interviews. The transcripts and written responses were reviewed and organized according to emerging themes. Michael-Chadwell and colleagues (2009) then employed the process of data reduction by identifying and grouping the emerging, related themes and discarding the extraneous data. The results suggested that participants view giftedness as being a hard worker who earns good grades (i.e., As and Bs) on school progress reports. Further, they viewed parents, teachers, and peers as instrumental in providing them with support (e.g., parental involvement, teacher encouragement and challenge, and peers encouragement) necessary to achieve high academic ratings.

In response to questions related to the barriers to academic success, most participants viewed teachers as supportive individuals who challenge them to succeed. Additionally, they did not believe that academic success was equated to "selling out" or "acting white", which corroborates with more recent findings that challenge the theory that AA males equate academic achievement to "acting white" (Michael-Chadwell, et al., 2009). Interestingly, although the participants could not identify personal school based barriers to their academic success, they recognized that barriers did exist for some African American students.

The results pertaining to the research question that addressed the role spirituality played in the participants' academic success indicated that the participants' viewed spirituality as a means of coping, self-regulating, and progressing academically.

In another study that included parental input pertaining to academically successful AA adolescent males, Maton, Hrabowski, and Grief (1998) explored the parental and contextual (i.e., (neighborhood, peer, school, societal) factors that may support high academic performance among AA males. The participants of this study were 62 high achieving (mean GPA= 3.5; mean SAT verbal =546; mean SAT math= 643) AA males and their parents (33 mothers, 24 fathers). The AA males had recently graduated high school, were enrolled at the University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC), and were a part of a six week summer support program for students pursuing careers in math, science, or engineering.

Maton et al. recruited and trained the support program's staff to conduct individual interviews with the parent and student participants that lasted between 2 and 4 hours. The program staff members were selected to conduct the interviews to enhance the trustworthiness of the data because they had already established a solid rapport with the participants. The young men participated in two individual interviews, the first inquired about experiences in high school and perspectives on being academically successful. During the second interview, the young men were asked to respond to the same questions that the parents were asked. The questions addressed the parents' role in their son's academic success, challenges the sons presented, and how these young men were academically successful when numerous other AA males were not. At the start of each parent interview, the parents completed questionnaires regarding demographic information and parenting. All interviews were tape recorded.

To analyze the data, the researchers began by transcribing the tape-recorded interviews. Next, they reviewed the transcripts to identify the challenges to academic success and factors that support academic success. From this process 20 categories were discovered, which fell within four broad domains, including: (1) determined and persistent academic engagement, (2) strict limit setting and discipline, (3) love, support, communication, and modeling, and (4) community connectedness and resources.

The theme of *determined and persistent academic engagement* was evident in the parents' emphasis on the importance of education and high academic performance, high expectations for achievement, provision of early childhood learning experiences, advocating for rigorous academic tracks, active involvement in school activities and organizations, frequent communication with teachers, providing sons with assistance completing homework assignments and projects, and enrolling their sons in summer educational enrichment programs. *Strict limit setting and discipline* was described by both parents and students as the parents' commitment to ensuring that their sons had a strong awareness of right and wrong that was established by clear, consistent rules and boundaries and sometimes enforced by the use of corporal punishment.

The theme of *love, support, communication, and modeling* emerged from accounts of love, support, and encouragement they received from parents, which provided the sons with a sense of confidence in their own abilities. Further, the sons reported being able to talk freely with their parents about anything—including difficult topics like sex, drugs, and criminality. Many sons cited their fathers as being their role models who provided them with explicit directions on how to approach life (e.g., not to back down from a challenge). The final theme *community connectedness and resources* refers to the importance of connections in addition to the immediate family that contributed to the student's academic success, which included

extended family members (e.g., grandmothers and aunts), church affiliations, extracurricular activities, positive peers, teachers.

A healthy racial-ethnic identity (HREI) is defined as "pride in in-group identification, confidence in one's academic abilities, competence in awareness of racism, and comfort with respect to self-presentation of racial-ethnic identity" (Wright, 2011, p. 612). HREI has been found to positively contribute to self-esteem and success (Spencer, Harpalani, Fegley, Dell'Angelo, & Seaton, 2002). Wright (2011) sought to better understand the role that HREI played in the schooling experiences of high achieving AA adolescent males. The participants of this study were five AA males in 11th and 12th grade at the same, predominantly Black and Latino, academy who demonstrated high academic achievement (i.e., the school's administration criteria for success, GPA= 3.0 or above, positive relationships with teachers and peers, involved in extracurricular activities, grandparents were born in the United States, and either a junior or senior of 17 or 18 years of age) and social success.

Wright (2011) employed a mixed methods design using a semi-structured interview, focus group interview, and a questionnaire to gain insight on the students' perspectives on "acting Black" and "acting white. First, the participants completed four individual interviews, next they participated in one focus group interview made up of all five participants, and then they complete a questionnaire based on a scale called the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) that assesses ethnic identity development. Finally, the researcher held follow-up sessions to review the content of the interviews and any comments made while completing the questionnaires.

The researcher organized the data according to the following themes: *what is "acting white" and "acting Black*", *"acting white" and "acting Black" in school*, and *to be cool,*

successful, or both. According to the *what is "acting white" and "acting Black"* theme, the students had a difficult time providing an explanation of what it means to act white or Black because they believed that individuals are simply being themselves and race is irrelevant. Yet, they still provided descriptions of "acting Black" as being "open to all races" because the Black culture has become such a major part of popular culture today. Further, the participants believed that "acting Black" represented strength. Interestingly, despite the literature that describes the "acting white" phenomenon as the act of AA males disguising their academic abilities to avoid accusations of "selling out" or "acting white" (Tyson et al., 2005), the participants of this study never defined "acting white" as being academically successful.

Although the participants resisted labeling popular cultural practices as racially based, they described times when they would use features of both "acting white" and "acting Black" or switch between "acting white" and "acting Black" when the setting called for it. For example, one participant described "acting white" as using standardized American English when going on a job interview but not needing to "act white" when at school. Yet, just as the participants were able to "act white" or "act Black", such cultural practices—such as using various vernaculars (e.g., slang, proper), listening to hip-hop music, wearing certain styles of clothes—are not limited to a particular race but open to all.

The theme *to be cool, successful, or both* encompasses the sociohistorical practice in which African American males would take on a "cool" persona as a means of coping in a society where they were oppressed and marginalized. Being cool also functioned as "a source of creative style that serves as a sign of belonging, stature, and pride" (Wright, 2011, p. 624). The participants of this study were able to maintain a "cool" pose while simultaneously achieving academically because their school's culture was accepting of them as both African American

males and academically successful. Results from the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) indicated that the participants were happy and proud to be of African American decent and were knowledgeable about their racial-ethnic group.

Studies of educational resiliency among AA males have often centered on deficit based theology fueled by Eurocentric ideologies that identify these students "at-risk" without take into account and being "responsive to their historical, political, economical, and social realities" (James, 2010, p. 171). James (2010) sought to resolve such fallacious practices by employing power-centered research practices in an investigation of academic excellence among AA males in the fifth grade at an all-boys academy located in a populous urban city. He conducted a case study that included individual interviews, focus groups, and observations with student, teacher, and parent participants. Eighty percent of the students enrolled in this academy qualified for free or reduced lunch. Nearly 50 percent of the 79 students had a history of underachievement, with 36 percent repeating the fifth grade. However, upon completion of one school year at this academy, the students exceeded the average performance of African American students in their state on the Stanford Achievement Test (10^{th} edition).

Two themes emerged from the data as a result of prolonged engagement and member checking: *promoting excellence* and the *instructional complexities in promoting excellence*. The academy focused on encouraging academic and social excellence among its students, which extended the conventional practice of equating academic success with scoring high on stated standardized tests. James (2010) described excellence at this academy as "as an on-going developmental process concerned with instilling key academic and social skills into African American males that are critical to their matriculation in a society that resists their achievement" (p. 176). The academy was responsive to the students' positive social development and used

difficult behaviors (e.g., fighting and bullying) as an opportunity to teach students the appropriate behaviors (e.g., anger management training for all students). The effectiveness of the expectation of academic excellence was demonstrated through significant improvements in academic performance and student participant reports of both high expectations the academy has for their present and future education and specific examples of how they foster student potential.

The *instructional complexities in promoting excellence* refers to the areas that the researcher identified as an opportunity to improve the promotion of social and academic excellence at the academy, which included: (1) *expectations dissonance*; (2) *disguised engagement*; (3) *differential engagement*; and (4) *expectations overload*. Expectations dissonance describes the dichotomy that exists between the high expectations professed by the academy and the teacher expectation of behavioral concerns prior to the start of certain classes. Disguised engagement refers to the students appearing to be engaged in the activity but upon closer observation, it is apparent that the student is off task (e.g., writing lyrics to a rap) or the student is only engaged while the teacher is looking (e.g., during whole group instruction).

Differential engagement is when students are actively engaged in one class but not another, which was found to be a function of social disengagement as opposed to academic disengagement. In other words, the students had mastered the material and understood the concepts in academic terms, but when they were not actively engaged with interactive activities (e.g., debates) or practical application of information, they would disengage. The expectations overload theme refers to the student's tendency to "give up" when faced with challenging academic tasks, which the researcher suggested occurred because this was the first time the students had to contend with high expectations for academic and behavioral performance and were experiencing "intellectual shock" (James, 2010). In spite of these complexities, the

academy demonstrated a tenacious spirit that was demonstrated in the following ways by teachers who discovered "(1) innovative ways to teach material; (2) to employ different strategies to promote behavioral excellence; (3) to seek students" advice on how to improve their classes; and (4) to possess optimism for continued success in the upcoming year" and students who demonstrated: "(1) a desire to achieve and meet Excel's academic and social standards; (2) a peer culture that encouraged the pursuit of academic and social excellence; and (3) a belief that teachers have their best interests at heart" (James, 2010, p.184).

Stinson (2008) employed an eclectic theoretical (i.e., poststructural theory, critical race theory, and critical [postmodern] theory) and a participative methodological approach to investigate the retrospective high school experiences of four mathematically successful AA males. The participants completed several activities including two surveys, one addressed demographic information and the other addressed schooling details. They also wrote an autobiography and mathematics autobiography and participated in four individual, semi-structured interviews. Two of the interviews were face-to-face interviews and two were held via telephone. Before the interviews the participants were asked to read, reflect on, and respond to three manuscripts pertaining to theoretical perspectives addressing the schooling experiences of African American children.

The results yielded various definitions of success from broad social positions to narrower, personal positions. Despite these differences, four determining factors regarding effort for success emerged across participants including: "(a) observing or knowing family or community members who had benefited from formal education by achieving financial and societal success; (b) experiencing encouraging and forceful family and community members who made the expectations of academic, and mathematics, success explicit; (c) encountering caring and

committed teachers and school personnel who established high academic expectations for students and developed relationships with students that reached beyond the school and academics; and (d) associating with high-achieving peer-group members who had similar goals and interests" (Stinson, 2008, p. 1002).

A transcendental phenomenological study was conducted to gain insight on the perceptions of interpersonal mattering (i.e., "being noticed and feeling special to others") for high-achieving AA adolescent males (Tucker, Dixon, & Dixon, 2010, p. 135). Tucker and colleagues (2010) held focus groups and individual interviews at a newly opened high school designed to improve the educational trajectories of at-risk students in a Midwestern city in the United States. The class sizes were small and upon completion of this program, students earned both a high school diploma and an associate's degree. Nine AA males who were in their junior year and met participation criteria of a minimum 2.0 grade point average and no record of disciplinary concerns participated in the study. The individual interviews were held first to facilitate discussion and ideas surrounding their perceptions and experiences of mattering at school, which were expounded on in the subsequent focus group session. Both the individual interviews and focus group sessions were audiotape recorded and transcribed.

The transcripts were reviewed by the participants to ensure accuracy. The transcendental phenomenological method of data analysis was utilized, which included the three processes of phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of meanings and essences. The data were reviewed for defining variables of the phenomenon and then definitions of the themes were identified from the data. The various themes and components of the data were combined and resulted in a single, definition of the phenomenon. The results yielded several key themes related to participants' perceptions of interpersonal mattering, which included: *extensive support*

at school, clear and high expectations from key adults, protection and nurturing at school, and *support and self-efficacy.*

The theme of *extensive support at school* stemmed from participants' reports of perceiving a marked difference in the amount of support they received from students and teachers at their current school in comparison to previous schools. The theme c*lear and high expectations from key adults* refers to participants' experiences of having parents and educators who belief in their ability to exceed and the prompts and reinforcement these key adults provided to ensure they were successful. *Independent motivation/future time orientation* refers to the participants' belief that maintaining a future oriented state of mind was the best way to stay on track and focused. *Protection and nurturing at school* represents the care and concern the faculty (i.e., teachers, counselor, and principal) demonstrated in their interactions with the participants. Further, the school provided students with independence and accountability. The final theme, *support and self-efficacy*, is in reference to the participants' perceptions of the importance having supportive people in their lives that provided them with encouragement. They acknowledged that although success required personal responsibility, having social support when facing challenges, makes it less challenging.

Conclusion

The societal narrative surrounding African American males suggests that they are "bad boys", troubled, have limited opportunities, face many negative factors such as incarceration, sexually transmitted diseases, low socioeconomic status (Noguera, 2008). However, I believe these individuals are intelligent and underestimated beings who must be explicitly taught how to navigate within institutions designed to oppress them. The assumptions, educational perspective, and power relations that underpin the societal narrative about them are that they possess low

level ability often sighting performance on high stakes tests. Further, they evidence other poor educational outcomes such as high rates of school dropout, low academic performance, special education statuses, and disciplinary problems (Noguera, 2008). They are functioning within educational structures designed for maintaining the status quo.

Through my research I wish to assert that African American males are driven, capable trailblazers who can achieve anything they put their minds to. They have faced oppression and marginalization, which has often limited their opportunity to rise as leaders. The societal and personal narratives about my participants will shape my research process and representation of findings. The negative societal views will drive me to seek information to disprove them by delving deeper than surface explanations that may support them; sensitivity to the participants will allow for additional complexities to emerge.

Chapter Three

Methodology

"…nothing is so damaging as ignorance. I don't know, you say! What reason is there for you not knowing – you have not looked, you have not searched. Study to be approved of the Great Creator. Be master of things…"

~George Washington Carver

The Qualitative Paradigm

In interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), the focus is to access an insider's perspective while simultaneously making sense of this perspective through interpretation. IPA is not a summation of what the participant said but rather a process of sense making that takes place between the participant and the researcher. It is idiographic in that the focus is on a single experience (e.g., high achievement) on a single group of people (e.g., African American males) obtained through individual interviews, focus groups, or journals/diaries. The role of the researcher is to amplify the 'voices' of the participant beyond a verbatim reiteration of information revealed during participant interviews in order to "explore, understand, and communicate the experiences and viewpoints" (Lark et al., 2006, p. 103). The two goals of IPA are to: (1) understand what an individual's lifeworld is like and (2) to provide an interpretative analysis of that situates the individuals' lifeworlds in a broader context (i.e., social, cultural, and theoretical) (Lark et al., 2006). These goals represent the underpinnings of IPA, which is phenomenology that will be described in the following section.

To begin, phenomenology describes truth as being based on individual experiences, redefining the fundamental definition of truth typically positioned within traditional forms of research, those that abide by the scientific method. Explanations of truth according to positivists and post-positivists measure the truth of a phenomenon on observables apparent in the external realities—though postpositivist acknowledge the impact of unobservables, which enables the discovery of an objective truth (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Applying scientific methodologies to human nature fails to factor in human interpretation of experiences, instead simple explanations of human nature are explained in robotic or mechanical terms, and the human experience is reduced to automatic responses to a collection of external stimuli (Husserl, 1952, 1980). Instead, phenomenology, positioned within the interprevist paradigm places emphasis on how individuals experience and understand their world (Schwandt, 1994).

Phenomenology is the study of the lived experiences of people or the life worlds of people, which encompass the realities as lived by the individuals of interest (van Manen, 1997). In order to understand one's lifeworld, the researcher must enter into the space that exists prior to forming judgments and conclusions and encounter those things that are often overlooked and most obvious (Husserl, 1970). This provides researchers with an entry point into the diverse, complex realities of people, where they are able to discover participants' lifeworlds through firsthand accounts of those experiencing particular phenomena (Lawthom & Tindall, 2011). Reality is viewed as part of the individual, not separate (Koch, 1995). So to gain a true sense of who a person is requires delving deep into their reality and intentionally exploring their experiences (Jones, 1975; Koch, 1995). This process requires the both the researcher and co-researchers (i.e., participants) to become consciously aware of the phenomena of interest by intentionally directing their attention to it. Ultimately, the structures of consciousness are brought

into awareness, which are essences that make the particular experience or phenomenon identifiable and exclusive to the individual experiencing them.

Larkin and colleagues (2006) suggested that "reality is better understood to mean something approximate to what is thought about things in general rather than how things really are when thought is removed" (p. 105). This idea is vital in studying the lived experiences of African American males because the negative, limiting nature in which they are objectified in American culture shackles their growth and mobility beyond such vile belief systems that limit not only the subject of the belief but the believer. The goal then is to provide alternative realities, alternative voices, alternative experiences to shed light on a new normal, high achievement and academic success among African American males. Moustakas (1994) describes the function of phenomenology as follows:

> …to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. From the individual descriptions general or universal meanings are derived, in other words the essences or structures of the experience. (p. 13)

While Husserl's goal of in phenomenological research was to identify the underlying essences that connected human experiences in a broader context, IPA was concerned with "particular experiences as experienced by particular people" (Smith et al, 2009, p. 16). The goal of this research study is to convey the educational experiences of high achieving African American adolescent males while simultaneously identifying the overlapping truths among the participants in order to provide key stakeholders with strength-based insight into the experiences of academic achievement among this population. As previously stated, although the aim is to relay lived experiences of the identified population, it is important to note that within a

phenomenological context, my presuppositions cannot be detached from the research experience (Hammersley, 2000). Participants' voiced experiences channeled through the research process are impacted by the researcher's understanding and interpretation (Lawthorn & Tindall, 2011). The researcher is a living, breathing, thinking being that "holds explicit beliefs" that inevitably influence the research process (Mouton & Marais, 1990, p. 12).

Reflexivity: The Role of the Researcher

Bracketing is described as suspending presuppositions about a phenomenon while studying it in order to gain authentic insight into its reality (Powers & Knapp, 1995). Yet, previous experiences and beliefs impede complete suspension of pre-understandings. So instead the researcher must open up to new interpretations and experiences (Finlay, 2008). Finlay (2003) describes this as a "process of continually reflecting upon our interpretations of both our experience and the phenomena being studied so as to move beyond the partiality of our previous understandings and our investment in particular research outcomes" (p. 108). Other researchers believe that by paying careful attention to the words shared by participants, bracketing of one's own preconceived notions will naturally occur (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Positioning of the researcher within the phenomenon being studied is explicitly expressed through the process of reflexivity. The researcher is the research instrument and primary analytical tool; thus, methods of data collection and interpretation are rooted in the researcher's beliefs (Alvesson, 2002; Fade, 2004). Further, because phenomenology embraces the view that the prerequisite of understanding is interpretation, "examining how the researcher and intersubjective elements impinge on, and even transform, research" is essential (Finlay, 2002, p. 210).

My reflexivity process included an initial statement that was written prior to the start of the data collection process, journaling throughout data collection, and journaling throughout data analysis. My journaling during the data collection phase included brief phrases that described the participants' physical appearance, countenance, mood, level of engagement, and reactions, contradictions, and any other noteworthy occurrences (e.g., interruptions). My journaling during this time also included questions or points of clarity I wanted to address with the participants at the end of the interview or during the next interview; my reactions (e.g., excitement, discomfort, sorrow, annoyance); and shifts (or maintenance of) in my understandings. During the data analysis phase, my journaling included noting my reservations towards revealing negative occurrences such as behavior incidents or conflicts; and the gestalt of each data set and overall.

Phenomenology necessitates both reducing researcher influence and "exploiting [this influence] as a source of insight; a process described as a dance between bracketing and reflexivity (Finlay, 2009, p. 1). My dance begins with an open dialogue of what compelled me to research African American males and if you listen carefully you will hear the lyrics of the funk tune "Say it Loud" providing the musical prelude—at least I did while writing it.

My parents are African Americans who were born during the civil rights era in America so I have been privy to firsthand accounts of the common experiences of racism and mistreatment they endured during school desegregation. I can recall my father singing the lyrics to the theme song of the Black pride movement of the late 60s and early70s performed by singer James Brown, "say it loud, I'm Black and I'm proud". This song resonated with me not because of its catchy tune, but because I truly believed and connected to the words— for I had much to be proud of.

I was a straight A student, benefited from the perks of being the only girl, participated in every extracurricular activity available, and as a pastor's kid, received an innumerable amount of attention and accolades.

I had no true knowledge of the current state of affairs for others like me because I had no reason to look outside of my experience, my reality, to see that life for others was not the same. It was not until I reached eighth grade and attended a magnet school in the inner city that I was able to see that not all African American children came from the same backgrounds nor experienced the same academic success that I did. Many were from single parent homes and struggled in school. My discovery of this phenomenon did not stop here. I attended a magnet school for high school, once again located in the inner city, directly across the street from housing projects. I found it unfair that they could build a school in the center of a community, yet restrict the students who live in that community from fully accessing all of the programs and activities offered under the guise of liberal arts (i.e., Black neighborhood students) and performing arts (i.e., bused in majority white students) programing.

Despite my ability to identify these systemic discriminatory practices, I was still unable to truly relate to these students' experiences. For example, I can recall the shame I felt when someone mistook me for living in the projects after my mother, who was running late to work one morning, dropped me off in a location that gave the appearance that I was coming from that direction. I remember going home that evening and sharing the horror of my experience with my parents hoping for sympathy and instead received a lecture on how blessed I was to be able to have a mother, a vehicle, and the luxury of being dropped off instead of riding the bus. Needless to say, every other morning thereafter somehow turned into an "I'm running late and won't have time to pull all the way to the front of the school." Lesson learned.

My journey to discovery did not end there, for I had yet to realize the embedment of the racism in American structures nor had I truly comprehended the injustices facing African American children. During my junior year of college, hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans, with the poorest, predominately Black neighborhoods experiencing the brunt. I remember seeing the horrific images of Black people stuck on roofs, Black bodies floating through waters that flooded neighborhood streets, and countless individuals hiking down the highway in search of relief. I remember footage of African Americans searching for food and being coined looters and refugees, while Whites were described as survivors.

But what was most life changing for me is the fact that I could not understand why they did not leave. I remember asking my parents over and over "why didn't they just leave", as their faces remained glued to the television in disbelief. Eventually my mother responded, "They couldn't just leave. They had no way out." I was silenced. I was ashamed. Ashamed that my middle class upbringing had caused me to "blame the victim," my brother, my sister for not being able to escape such an egregious atrocity.

The final situation that shaped my resolve for studying the phenomenon of high achieving African American males occurred while I was attending a school board meeting at a district in south Florida. I remember cringing in my seat as the FCAT reports were read and within each subject area, African American males scored the lowest. I went through a range of emotions after leaving that day, from shame linked to the fact that they were Black like me to sympathy because they were Black like me to anger because they were Black like me to determination because they were Black like me. As I reflected on the academic failure I had learned of that day, I was reminded of my mother's words following hurricane Katrina, "they couldn't just leave… they had no way out". Our African American males were stuck in a

catastrophe, an academic rut, with no way out.

As an African American woman, my interest in this population stems from my spiritual convictions that positions men as the head of the household and realization that many of the issues affecting African American women (e.g., high number single, female headed household; disproportionate HIV rate, declining marriage rate) are associated with the conditions of their male counterparts (Beal, 2008; Tsoi-A-Fatt, Johnson, & Pater, 2010). Tsoi-A-Fatt and colleagues (2010) described Black males as being "vital and important members of American society, especially in their communities. Black families suffer a great loss when Black men are unable to thrive" (Tsoi-A-Fatt et al., 2010, p. 3). Thus, in order for African American communities, families, and individuals to flourish, Black males must flourish as well.

In terms of the age specification, adolescence is a developmental time period in which children's mental capacity is more advanced than when they were younger , which suggests they may be more insightful while simultaneously still quite impressionable (Piaget, 2008). Therefore, by focusing research at this age, there is a possibility of gaining current, firsthand information through the voices of successful students, which can be used to inform the methods stakeholders use to intervene and change life trajectories (Howard, 2008; Matthews & Williams, 2007).

No matter how loud or how proud I am, I realize that being Black does not provide me with a supernatural ability to know their truth nor provide me with tools to intervene to improve the educational and ultimately life trajectories of Black males. However, I will spend the rest of my life seeking to better understand their realities, helping others to better understand their realities, and advocating on their behalf because I believe these individuals are intelligent and underestimated beings that must be explicitly taught how to navigate within institutions designed

to oppress them in order to maintain the status quo; one that positions Black males at the bottom of the educational (and economical) totem pole (Praeger, 2011; Hicks, 2010).

The section that follows will describe the setting and the participants who had the opportunity to give voice to their realities, their subjective experiences, which set the stage for deeper understandings of their worlds while "meet[ing] the demands of phenomenology" (Aspers, 2009, p. 4).

Setting

The present study explored the lived experiences of high achieving African American males who attend Scholar Preparatory School. Scholar Preparatory School is a private middle school with a mission to "inspire and empower" impoverished, inner-city youth. Students are challenged by a rigorous curriculum while concurrently receiving ongoing graduation support in the form of goal setting, action planning, and one-on-one academic advising intended to set the foundation for future community leadership. Nine of the highest performing seventh and eighth grade students at Scholar Preparatory School were invited to participate in this research study. All nine students accepted the invitation and with parent consent participated in both study sessions, with the exception of one student (James) who only participated in one of the two sessions. James only participated in one of the study sessions because he had to undergo hand surgery and would be absent for the duration of the approved time frame for the second interviews.

This study employed interpretative phenomenological analysis as the methodology for this research. I remained present with the interview data, becoming closely familiar with participant accounts through initial readings and multiple re-readings of the interview transcripts while simultaneously listening to the interview recordings, making note of all major reactions to

the data and identifying the gestalt of each interview. Further, I ensured that all emergent themes and superordinate themes were continuously connected to the original statements as presented by the participants.

Superordinate themes were derived from emergent themes created from each individual interview and across the dataset (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The interpretative framework of IPA includes creating a summary table of superordinate themes and emergent themes with direct quotes to illustrate these themes. This process enabled me to make connections between the essences of the participant's lived experiences and the broader meanings behind them while simultaneously providing research insight and explication of the data.

Scholar Preparatory School, Inc. is a nonprofit, organization with two private school campuses located in two separate inner cities of southwest Florida. Participants were recruited from the larger city's campus. Approximately 85 percent of the students at Scholar Preparatory School are of African American descent, with 100 percent of the student body on scholarship to attend this rigorous, resource rich college preparatory school for grades five through eight. Students eligible to attend Scholar Preparatory School qualified for the National School Lunch Program, which provides free or reduced lunch to students whose families demonstrate financial need.

Scholar Preparatory School is modeled after the Nativity Miguel Network of Schools, a program that has demonstrated effective academic training for impoverished middle school students of color. Nativity schools have typically been established by Catholic organizations, with the mission of providing economically disadvantaged students with the same academic opportunities as economically privileged students, such as small class size; rigorous curriculum; supplementary academic assistance from devoted educators; strong leadership; and student

advisors who closely monitor student progress (Fenzel & Monteith, 2008). Research has indicated that when comparing nativity schools to public urban middle schools with similar student demographic backgrounds, students attending nativity schools significantly outperform these students in terms of academic achievement and educational attainment (Fenzel & Patel, 2002; Fenzel & Monteith, 2008; Podsiadlo & Philliber, 2003).

Students at Scholar Preparatory School attend school 11 months a year, six days a week, and an upwards of 11 hours a day, which includes a mandatory hour of study hall after school for students falling below a 3.0 grade point average. Classes are made up of no more than 18 students of the same gender (i.e., all boys or all girls).

The performance data of students at Scholar Preparatory School yielded similar results to those of nativity schools. Of the 100percent of students who graduate from the academy and college preparatory high schools, most enter high school performing two or more grade levels above average in reading and mathematics. Further, ninety-seven percent of these students graduate high school on time. The graph below depicts Scholar Preparatory School's class of 2012 performance on the SAT 10 in comparison to national averages and the local school district averages.

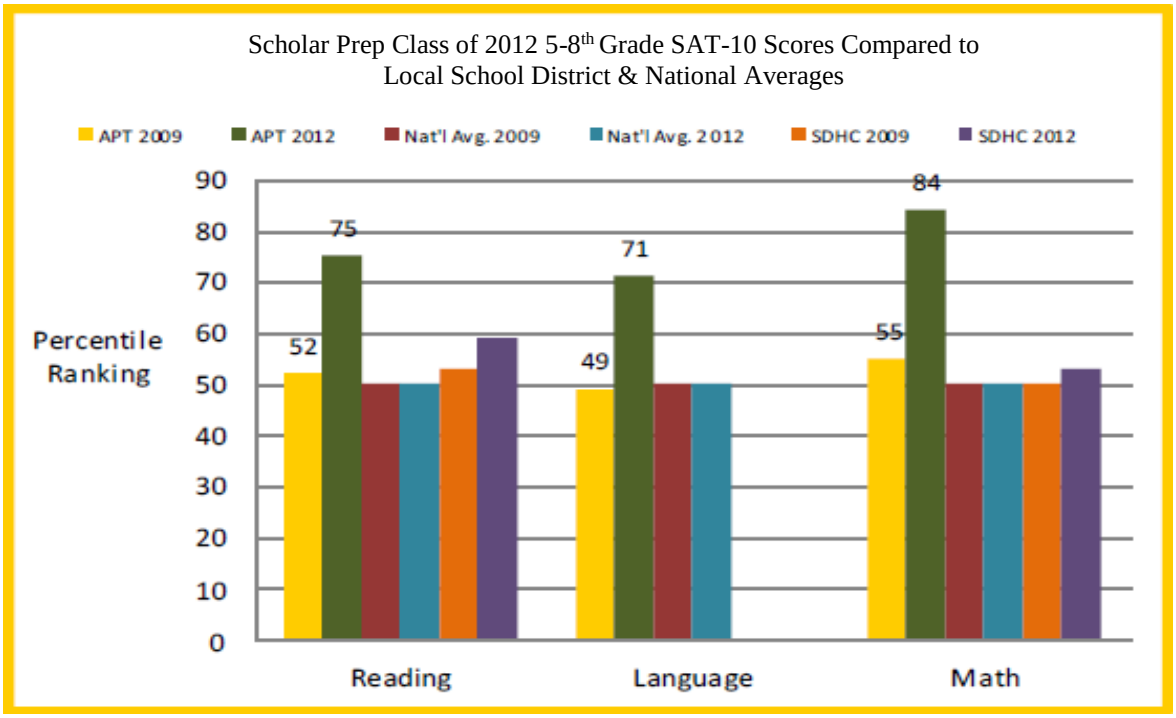

Figure 1. Bar Graph of Scholar Preparatory School SAT 10 Scores Comparison

Note. From *Scholar Preparatory School, June 2013*. Website.

Homogenous, purposeful sampling was employed in this study based on the research questions. Scholar Preparatory School was selected for participant recruitment because of its requirement that students maintain above satisfactory academic performance and the student body demographic includes a large population of African American adolescent males. Further, all of the students attending this school were from a low socioeconomic status, which is often cited as being a significant contributor to the achievement gap.

The participants were nine African American males: four seventh graders and five eighth graders. Their native language was English with the exception of one participant whose native language was Haitian Créole but spoke English fluently. All of the participants were considered high academic achievers.

This participation criterion was selected for several reasons. First, the literature indicates that an acceptable sample size for phenomenological research ranges from five to 25 participants (Creswell, 1998; Morse, 1994). Examples of recent phenomenological studies that include sample sizes in this range are: Haahr, Kirkevold, Hall, and Østergaard (2012) included 10 participants; Mitchell and Turton (2011) included four participants; Murdoch and Franck (2012) included nine participants; Snobohm, Friedrichsen, and Heiwe (2010) included 12 participants; and Nitta, Holley, and Wrobel (2010) included 23 participants. Further, Flowers et al. (2009) recommended a sample size of three for undergraduate and master level research projects and four to 10 interviews for doctoral research projects.

Second, an equal number of representatives from seventh and eighth grade were selected in order to ensure a balance of the information collected from the upperclassmen. An additional participant was recruited for piloting purposes; but because no revisions were made to the interview schedule, this interview data was also included. The seventh and eighth grade levels were selected because middle school entry often coincides with significant hormonal, socioemotional, and cognitive changes, so selecting upper grade levels enables time for these adjustments (Keating, 2004; Lerner & Steinberg, 2004). Further, students in sixth grade are adapting to the transition from elementary school to middle school that often calls for greater independence and responsibility (e.g., multiple teachers/changing classrooms and more curricular options) (Hill & Chao, 2009). This transition often coincides with a significant decrease in academic performance in the transition from elementary to middle school (Gutman & Midgley, 2000). By selecting students in higher grade levels, these factors were less likely to be of significance. Finally, due to the developmental milestones (e.g., higher order thinking, abstract thought) achieved by seventh grade (i.e., approximately 12 years old) (Piaget, 2008),

participants were able to provide more in-depth qualitative data.

Third, the criteria of speaking English as a first language was included to ensure that all correspondence (e.g., consent and assent forms) and interview questions were thoroughly understood. Further, individuals of African descent that have more recently arrived in America than those who are here as a result of the transatlantic slave trade often have differing worldviews and experiences (Thornton, Taylor, & Chatters, 2012). Although the native language of one of the participants' was Haitian-Creole, both the participant and his parents spoke English fluently. He also met all other criteria for participation so he was included in this study.

Fourth, high academic achievers were chosen for this study in order to provide a strength-based approach to research on African American males, which provides a contrast to how they are frequently represented in the literature, in terms of their failures (i.e., cultural deficit model) (Harry & Klingner, 2007). I met with the Head of School at Scholar Preparatory School, Mr. Makaio, to select students to invite to participate in this study. We began our meeting by reviewing our previous telephone conversation where I explained my study, including the grade levels, number of participants, and academic performance levels I was seeking to invite to participate. I asked him to define the criteria Scholar Preparatory uses to determine high academic achievement. I went with the academy's criteria rather than that established by previous research studies or by the local school district to stay as close as possible to the participants' lived experiences of high achievement as it was defined at Scholar Prep. High achievement was defined as earning a grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or higher on a 4.0 scale; 75^{th} percentile or higher on the Stanford Achievement Test Series, Tenth Edition (SAT-10); and/or a 1900 or higher on the Secondary School Admission Test (SSAT).

Mr. Makaio generated a list of the seventh and eighth grade African American male students at Scholar Prep that listed their GPA, SAT-10 reading and math percentiles, and their SSAT scores. We identified the top five eighth graders and the top four seventh graders with the highest performance in at least one of the three criteria. These nine students were invited to participate in this study. The section that follows, each participant's narrative will be presented to provide a holistic glimpse of their lifeworlds.

Participants

The nine participants had an average grade point average (GPA) of 3.6 and rated themselves 8.8 average self- rating of success on a scale of one to 10 with 10 being the highest. Table one details the participants numbers, pseudonyms, grade level, GPA, previous school experience, grade level they began at Scholar Prep, and their personal rating of success.

Table 1

Participant Descriptors

Participant Number	**Pseudonym**	**Grade**	**GPA**	**Previous School (public/private /charter)**	**Grade Level Entered Scholar Preparatory School**	**Personal Rating of Success** *(Scale of 1-10; 10 being the highest)*
1	KJ	8^{th}	3.3	Public	5	7
2	Bruce	8^{th}	3.3	Public	5	8.7
3	James	8^{th}	4.0	Public	5	10
4	Christopher	7^{th}	4.0	Private	5	7
5	Aaron	7^{th}	4.0	Charter	6	9.8
6	Ashton	7^{th}	3.3	Public	6	10
7	Bruce Willis (B.W.)	8^{th}	4.0	Public	5	9
8	Michael	7^{th}	3.0	Public	5	9.5
9	John Lucas	8^{th}	3.3	Public	5	8

Participant one, KJ. KJ was a 14-year-old eighth grader at Scholar Preparatory School. He lived at home with his father, mother, 8-year-old brother, and 4-year-old sister. The family emigrated to the U.S. from Haiti when KJ was 9 years old in pursuit of a better life. His father was a high school math professor in Haiti who graduated from college, while KJ's mother graduated high school. School in Haiti was hard for KJ because he was required to memorize large amounts of information and recite it to the teacher word-for-word. The family initially resided in a small city about an hour east of Scholar Preparatory School, but when KJ's father heard about the school, the family moved to the city where the school was located so KJ could have the opportunity to attend.

KJ spoke no English when he first came to the U.S; his first language is Haitian-Creole. He took the initiative to stay in from recess to get extra help from his elementary school teacher and practice acquiring the English language. KJ's father is an entrepreneur and his mother is a head chef at a chain restaurant. KJ is on a traveling basketball team, was a member of a well-known after-school program, and was an active participant in Scholar Preparatory School's community service projects. Although his parents worked a lot, they prioritized helping KJ with his homework, reminding him of how fortunate he was to have opportunities they did not, and attended his basketball games when they could. KJ described his future career goals as follows: In terms of my future I want to be an accountant when I grow up because I really like math. And if like that don't work out I want to get my MBA in business and try to do something there.

Physical description. KJ was tall and slender. His hair was cut in a low fade. During the first interview session, he wore a long john red shirt over his green polo style uniform shirt and Black slacks. For the second interview, KJ wore a white polo style short sleeved shirt and Black shorts. His shoes were well kept with no visible name brand emblem.

Description of temperament. KJ made good eye contact during our first meeting and maintained it throughout both interview sessions. He was noticeably polite and always included "ma'am" in his answers. Initially, he was fairly guarded in his openness to answer questions that appeared to be at least in part to having an introverted disposition. However, as rapport was established through discussions of topics he was interested in such as grades, scholarship to a distinguished, private high school, and basketball, KJ was visibly less guarded (i.e., shoulders relaxed and less rigid posture) and required fewer probes to provide detailed responses.

On the day of the second interview session, I ran into KJ signing out to get water before attending early study hall for upcoming exams. He appeared excited to see me; he smiled big and asked if he would be participating in an interview that day. When I explained that she was just about to call for him, he gladly accompanied her for the follow-up session. KJ was visibly more comfortable and open as he provided thorough answers with little to no probing with follow up questions.

Overview of participant's lifeworld. KJ maintained a future-oriented, driven outlook on life that focused on the positive aspects of a given situation. His ability to maintain this perspective appeared to be supported by the custom of identifying others' sacrifices for him. KJ's mother regularly reminded to be mindful of the sacrifices others had made for him. Further, he witnessed several examples of adults modeling sacrifice. This modeling and teaching of sacrifice enabled him to recognize the importance of delaying gratification by sacrificing now for later. Further, the modeling and teaching of sacrifice provided him with a sense of: 1) pride in knowing that others felt he was worthy of their sacrifice and 2) responsibility to fulfill the purpose of the sacrifices made for him.

Participant two, Bruce. Bruce was also 14 years old and in the eighth grade at Scholar Preparatory School. He lived with his mother and three-year-old brother. Bruce's father was from Barbados and returned there for a period of six to eight years after Bruce was born. Although Bruce's father was not physically present, he kept in contact with his son via telephone. Bruce recalled his father regularly telling him "I want you to do your best for me." Bruce knew his father loved him deeply and expected him to do well; this motivated Bruce to his very best at all times to make his father proud.

During the time of the interviews, Bruce's father was back in the U.S. and actively present in his son's life. Bruce spoke of his father having recently required him to spend time researching a topic he was interested in on the Internet and writing a paper on what he learned that he would share with the family. He gave Bruce this assignment because Bruce spent a lot of time on the family's laptop instead of spending time interacting with his family. So his father decided that if Bruce was going to spend excessive amounts of time surfing the web, he should be learning something. Initially, Bruce did not like this idea but his father explained the benefits of doing so—improved writing skills and increased knowledge. Neither of his parents completed high school, so they often stress the importance of education as a means to reduce difficulty in life and having to struggle to make ends meet. His parents had blue collar jobs and worked long hours: Bruce's mother had a supervisory position in retail and his father was an air conditioner technician.

Bruce is a member of a well-known youth organization that emphasizes character development and participation in outdoor activities and educational programs. He was also a member of Scholar Preparatory School's chess team and active participant in the academy's service learning projects. Bruce's plan for his future career was, "Well for my future I see myself

as being an architect, an accountant, a pediatrician, or playing for the New York Yankees in baseball".

Physical description. Bruce was of average height and stature. He had thick, groomed eyebrows and round bright eyes. He had a low faded haircut, braces, and a slight moustache. Bruce wore a gray hoodie over his white uniform shirt and long Black slacks with white sneakers during the first interview. The second interview took place during graduation week on a day where eighth grader students could wear their choice of clothing to school instead of the school uniform. Bruce wore a red, white, and blue plaid short sleeved button up shirt with blue jean pants and white sneakers.

Description of temperament. Bruce was extroverted with a warm personality and a great sense of humor. He demonstrated enthusiasm as he thought about and responded to the interview questions with a smile or laugh. Bruce was well-spoken, enunciated his words, and paused after he gave an introductory phrase before he responded. He frequently used advanced vocabulary as he opened up about his life world. During tough questions related to the challenge of being without his father, Bruce's voice would oscillate from passionate to solemn.

Overview of participant's lifeworld. Bruce believes that the way he thought or acted was due to the modeling or training provided by his parents. Yet despite this process of parent modeling, parent training, and participant exemplifying it, he believes that everyone controls their own destiny no matter what the situation. Bruce went on to explain that there is a purpose for everything that happens in life, even challenges such as an absentee father. Challenges are simply opportunities that can be used as motivation to overcome them by working hard and pressing forward. Even in the midst of challenges, there are good things taking place, such as the presence of a mother who personifies the importance of working hard for her children. For

Bruce, the possibility of being able to give back and support his family pushed him to take the necessary steps in the present to be successful in the future.

Participant three, James Carter. Like participant one, KJ, and participant two, Bruce, James was also 14 years old and in the eighth grade. He had the highest grades out of all the participants, straight As in all academic and elective subjects and had earned a 4.0 throughout his eighth grade year. He has a passion for mathematics that he first developed in first grade when he answered a math problem correctly that his classmates could not figure out. His teacher celebrated him for it and even recommended him to be evaluated for gifted. James did not have to study much to learn concepts; he studied the night before or period before when he had tests. He rarely if ever did his homework at home; he completed it on the bus. James attributed his success, which he rated as a 10 (on a scale of 1 to 10), to being a fast learner and fast worker.

James lived with his mother, mother's boyfriend who he referred to as his stepfather, and his younger brother and sister. His home life was an area of personal satisfaction because his mother was a great provider and his stepfather was relatable and provided positive guidance and life lessons that he learned from. James also has an older, adult sister who lived on her own. He identified her as an individual of support, noting that she called to congratulate him for each accomplishment he made.

James was involved in several extracurricular activities including football, basketball, choir, and bowling. Of the extracurricular activities he was involved in, he was most passionate about football. James developed an interest in as a toddler when his mom signed him up for flag football after observing him playing tackle football with older kids in his neighborhood where he was able to quickly run through them given his size. Religiosity is a strong force in the plans he makes for the future and his involvement in religious activities such as praying and attending

church is very important to him. James' described his plans for the future as:

I would have to finish high school and get a diploma and then go to the University of Florida. umm then I want to study law umm then I want to eventually become a lawyer umm when I finish up my studies I want to like get married and have children.

Physical description. James was thin in stature and of average height. His hair was cut low and he had a slight gap that he would sometimes attempt to hide by place his hand over his mouth when he laughed. James was dressed in a long sleeved gray shirt under a white short sleeved "Scholar Preparatory School Physical Education" uniform shirt and matching Black PE uniform shorts with slightly worn white and blue gym shoes. During the second interview, also on the eighth grade student's choice of attire day, he wore a short sleeved Black shirt and blue jeans with neat Black sneakers.

Description of temperament. James talked with his hands and tapped his feet softly throughout both interviews. He had a raspy voice and often said "like" or "umm" as he thought about his answer to interview questions. James was friendly, frequently laughed and smiled, and made good eye contact. He was somewhat reserved; he rarely provided spontaneous input or expounded without further probing. However, he was cooperative and unhesitatingly clarified details that I had misinterpreted. James had a humble disposition as he talked about his accomplishments (e.g., maintaining a 4.0 GPA and achieving goal of being accepted into an elite preparatory school) in a matter of fact, nonchalant manner. Nonetheless, he beamed when I pointed out the discrepancy in what he recommended others do to experience success (e.g., "study a lot") in contrast to what he does to experience success (e.g., "study the night before or period before a test").

Overview of participant's lifeworld. James believes that the support provided by others (i.e., parents, siblings, teachers, peers, and the head of school/principal) in the form of encouragement, advice, acknowledgement of his academic ability, high expectations for his performance, and competition amongst peers served to fuel his prioritization of education and the posturing necessary to attain success in the future. Moreover, James named his mother, stepfather, church, and teachers as key players in helping him experience success in the present and prepared him to experience success in the future. These key players served as role models, expressed a belief in his ability to achieve, and instilled morals and values that he trusted will enable him to avoid preventable barriers (e.g., teenage pregnancy) to the realization of his goals.

Participant four, Christopher. Christopher was 13 years old and in the seventh grade. He resided with his father, mother, 14-year-old sister and younger brother. His mother had a high school diploma and worked as a clerk at the county's administrative downtown office. His father also had a high school diploma and completed some college but was unemployed due to a physical disability. Christopher was involved in a variety of extracurricular activities that included being a musician for his church (i.e., played drums, piano and keyboard) basketball, baseball, and football.

Christopher enjoyed the rigor of Scholar Preparatory School and identified its challenging curriculum as the best thing about the school and that he would take advantage of gaining as much knowledge as he could while he had the opportunity to. Christopher was one of two students selected by faculty to represent Scholar Preparatory School during "success talks" with donors and potential donors based on their academic and behavioral performance. It is important to note that his selection as a representative was not indicative of academic or behavior *perfection*. In fact, Christopher identified a desire of wanting to "get into reading more" by first

figuring out what genres he likes. He doesn't do as well during the Scholar Preparatory School's summer session because it requires a great deal of reading. Christopher had two experiences of attending mandatory study hall for not maintaining a minimum 3.0 grade point average in academic courses. Even so, he saw this as an opportunity to get additional practice that he needed in a structured, quiet environment.

Such training routines helped him develop the practice of waiting to complete the homework he received on Fridays at home instead of using the class time teachers gave on Fridays to avoid students having homework over the weekend. He realized the advantage of waiting to do it over the weekend: more time to complete it and more time to study concepts he had not grasped due to the time constraints that were present during the week. Christopher used the phrase "we" when he described disciplinary practices he named as the worst thing about Scholar Preparatory School (e.g., silent lunches, lunch detentions, recess detention, writing lines during recess, and misbehaviors and corresponding consequences listed on transcripts). In spite of this, he did not fault teachers or administrators for implementing such consequences but placed responsibility on the students for making a choice to misbehave.

Physical description. Christopher was of average height and stature. He had a short afro that appeared to be freshly cut and a neatly edged hairline. Christopher had bright eyes reflective of an intense curiosity that extended beyond the interview sessions to the way in which he approached life. He had a pleasant expression on his face that indicated an openness to reveal his lifeworld. Yet, Christopher's intensely alert, inquisitive expression (e.g., raised eyebrows and widened eyes) upon meeting me and hearing once more what the interview questions would entail, also implied that he may have felt there was more to the interviews than what had been revealed and if that had been the case, he did not have ample time to prepare responses such as

was likely in preparation for "success talks" with donors and potential donors.

Description of temperament. Christopher was courteous and included "yes ma'am" and "no ma'am" in his responses. He was exceptionally optimistic and never shared a negative incident without identifying an associated lesson or opportunity. Christopher was well-spoken and provided examples of experiences that supported the broader statements he made. However, he was uncomfortable and hesitant to reveal his individual behavior challenges of the past and expressed that he could not remember details when probed further. This was suggestive of a conscientious nature that may have developed as a result of his experiences (e.g., "success talks" representative and rigorous curriculum and expected level of performance) at Scholar Preparatory School.

Overview of participant's lifeworld. Christopher had a pragmatic view of the future and success. He prioritized mental preparation and expectation of challenges. He believes that success requires hard work and an appreciation for challenges. Further, he noted that individuals must take responsibility for their lives, their choices, and their future by choosing to do the right thing because doing wrong places an individual at constant risk of permanently messing up his or her life. Conversely, when individuals make a conscious choice to do the right thing (i.e., having good intentions), even if mistakes were made or failure occurred, there would always be a chance to try it again.

Participant Five, Aaron. Aaron was 13 years old and in the seventh grade. His parents shared custody of him; he lived part time with his mother, her boyfriend, and her boyfriend's five-year-old son; he lived the other part of time with his father, stepmother, and eight-year-old half-brother and three-year-old half-sister. Aaron's mother was a hairstylist who had completed some college; his father had an advanced degree and was an undergraduate recruiter at a local

university. Aaron described himself as being "an automatic leader", which was once a source of pressure because teachers expected him to be the model student, an example for his peers. He got in trouble when he fell short of this expectation and felt that he was missing out because he was unable to engage in behaviors that were tolerated by other students. As Aaron matured, he became accustomed to this responsibility and was able to recognize in himself what others described as a "leader mentality".

Despite being held in high regard by his teachers and peers, Aaron lacked acknowledgement from his parents for his achievements. He attributed his insecurities to a lack of recognition from them. Although Aaron believes he appeared confident and secure externally, internally there was a void that persisted even when he received acknowledgement from other sources (e.g., teachers and stepmother). Aaron gave an example of his parents' lack of recognition when he routinely got straight As and his mother *seldom* said "good job" and his father *never* said "good job".

Aaron believes that his parents were good providers and ensured that he was in a safe, stable environment. However, he felt his mother was distant in terms of her support of him and interest in things of importance to him (e.g., complained about distance when dropping him off at school, not recognizing his academic achievements, spending free time on cell phone/social media, and telling him his chances of being a world famous singer were one in a million). He first felt his father's distance at the age of five when his half-brother was born and they were no longer inseparable like they had once been. Aaron was no longer the focus of his father's attention; he was replaced by his brother. He also noticed this pattern once his half-sister was born and she became the center of attention and his father no longer gave his half-brother as much attention.

Aaron was grateful that God had revealed the source of his insecurities, which prevented him from blaming himself, decreasing his self-esteem, and resorting to habitually engaging in negative behaviors to fill the void. When Aaron observed other children being recognized by their parents, it affirmed his belief that his parents should have done better. Further, it increased his confidence in his own insight and inspired him to want to become a psychologist.

In addition to the insecurities he faced related to his parents, Aaron's sexuality was frequently questioned by his peers beginning when he was in third grade. Aaron was initially bothered by the assumption that he was gay when people first met him, but he noticed a pattern of people assuming he was gay and then becoming his friend by the end of the day once they had gotten to know him. Some of his best friends and girlfriends made the same assumption upon first meeting him, which he determined to be caused by his big personality and rejection of the laidback persona exhibited by "most boys in the hood".

Aaron had a 4.0 GPA throughout this seventh grade year at Scholar Preparatory School. The strong "brotherly bonds" that are formed amongst Aaron and his peers at Scholar Preparatory School as a result of the school's structure (i.e., smaller class sizes, classes separated by gender, and students grouped in cohorts from entry in sixth grade to exit in eighth grade) were essential qualities that made his experience far more enjoyable than it had been at his previous school.

Physical description. Aaron was of average height and stature given his age. He was dressed in the school uniform: a green polo style shirt with the Scholar Preparatory School emblem, Black slacks, and beige and brown loafers the first day. During the second interview he wore a white polo style shirt with Black slacks and loafers. Aaron had dimples that were activated by his warm, big smile. His hair was cut short and had a well-defined wave pattern with tapered, well-defined edges.

Description of temperament. Aaron was very warm and outgoing, he frequently smiled and even described himself and I as having "kindred spirits" (i.e., shared a connective energy) that made rapport easy to establish and maintain throughout both interview sessions. He had a welcoming personality and was quite transparent. His talkative nature, coupled with honesty, resulted in him exuding an authenticity and willingness to be transparent and "keep it real". Aaron was careful to convey the importance of humility not only word but in action. For example, Aaron reduced his rating to ensure he was not coming across as conceited even though he wanted to rate himself higher.

Overview of participant's lifeworld. Brotherly bonds and relationships are essential components for success according to Aaron whose social nature allowed him to view the rigor of Scholar Preparatory School as a fun place where he could be with friends. In his experience, an individual's upbringing has the most significant influence on his or her life and poses a very strong threat to the acceptance of a competing existence. However, he believes that there is hope for individuals who are underachieving and/or misbehaving as a result of their background. This hope comes in the form of Mentors who work with such students on an individual basis to assist in creating detailed plans for the future. Aaron used the metaphor of a road map with a route to guide them out of their current situation to future success by predicting road blocks and planning detours. This is what he experienced at Scholar Preparatory School: detailed educational planning that consisted of step-by-step guidance towards high school, college, and career with insight on how to respond to challenges along the way.

Participant Six, Ashton. Ashton was 13 years old and in the seventh grade. He lived with his mother during the week and his father on the weekends. Ashton had an older brother, younger brother, and sister on his father's side. His father attended some college and was a fire sprinkler

technician. His mother had an advanced degree and was a prekindergarten teacher.

As his mother's only child, Ashton enjoyed being spoiled by her. Yet, he acknowledged that she was a single mother who did all she could for him and honored her for her devotion. She set high expectations for his behavior and he knew that falling short of her expectations meant he would have to face her wrath. She also established and routinely reminded him that she was "crazy", which essentially meant that she would not tolerate anything less than his best.

Ashton first learned of Scholar Preparatory School when recruiters came to his elementary school to share information about the academy. Ashton intended on going to a performing arts magnet school but his friends convinced him that he should attend Scholar Preparatory School and he conceded. The academy was a fun place for Ashton at times. He enjoyed the daily schedule that included recess and ended with enrichment classes (e.g., musical theater, gold, chess, and African dance). At other times the academy was not a fun place; particularly when Ashton was disciplined for the misbehavior of talking during class.

Disciplinary actions such as silent lunches, lunch detentions, and suspensions with the requirement of writing line were examples of the worst things about Scholar Preparatory School. At the time of the interviews, Ashton had been staying out of trouble because he wanted to get into a specific high school that would not be possible if his behavior had not improved.

Ashton had an average grade of B+ in his academic classers (English, science, math, and history). Ashton participated in numerous extracurricular activities including: football, basketball, baseball, and karate. He had future aspirations of becoming a doctor that derived from visits to the pediatricians as a young boy. Ashton was so fascinated by his doctor's stethoscope during each visit that his father purchased a stethoscope for him to listen to the heart and lungs of his siblings. Further, people often brought their problems to Ashton and he enjoyed

listening and providing advice. He felt that becoming a psychiatrist would be a combination of the two areas he had always been interested in.

Physical description. Ashton's hair was cut low and well-maintained. He had big, bright eyes that slightly drooped in the outer corners and made good eye contact. His teeth were exceptionally straight and white, evident with each smile and laugh he frequently shared throughout each interview. Ashton was dressed in the school uniform: a green polo style shirt with Scholar Preparatory School emblem and Black shorts. He wore Black socks pulled up to the top of his shin and Black name brand sneakers.

Description of temperament. Ashton had a pleasant disposition and a very warm smile. He bounced his left leg during both interview sessions. During the initial session, it was unclear if he was nervous, shy, or guarded in his replies because he wanted to ensure he said the "right' thing. As the interview progressed, it became apparent that Ashton was accustomed to allowing others to either speak for him or dependent on the words of others when he spoke, such as when he used a quote by the head of school but was unable to expound on its application to his life.

Ashton also demonstrated dependency during the interview when he would begin responding to a question and then pause and look to me for assistance to complete the answers. Further, when he described himself as "spoiled' by his mother, this also supported the notion that he may have been dependent on the guidance of others in knowing what to say or do. His sense of self has not yet developed to a position of independent functioning.

In comparison to the other participants, Ashton was limited in his ability to expound when responding to questions. He appeared to have difficulty putting his thoughts into words and sometimes had difficulty completing his statements. Although he was not as talkative as the other participants, he would expound on his answers when prompted with follow-up questions.

Overview of participant's lifeworld. Ashton had a behaviorally challenged past that he was able to overcome with the implementation of discipline at school and at home, the support of his parents who reflected on these situations with him, and the realization that his misbehaviors could prevent him from attending the high school he desired. Additionally, Ashton believes that getting a good education was a way out, the key to future happiness, and a way to avoid resulting to illegal means to earn a living. A good education represents his contribution to improving the reputation of African Americans.

Participant Seven, Bruce Willis. Bruce Willis (B.W.) was 14 years old and in the eighth grade at Scholar Preparatory School. He lived with his father, mother, and sister. His father had completed some high school and worked as a studio engineer; his mother was a college graduate who worked as a nutritionist. The family lived in a working class neighborhood, where a significant number of adults had not finished high school and very little had attended or complete high school. The neighborhood had a fair share of crime but B.W. never witnessed such activity. He never hung with or talked to the kids in his neighborhood. B.W. did, however, have a lot of friends in his cousin's neighborhood, a more affluent area. He never experienced criticism from his friends in his cousin's neighborhood or anyone else about attending Scholar Preparatory School.

Prior to attending Scholar Preparatory School, B.W.'s academic performance was good but his conduct was not. He would often distract his classmates by talking and making them laugh because he was bored. Moreover, B.W. did not have to do his homework because he was still able to earn good grades and he was not concerned with his conduct because he did not think it had an impact on his achievement. Although a family friend had previously attended Scholar Preparatory School, it was not until B.W.'s mother saw advertisements of the academy while

driving near the neighborhood the school was located in that she decided that this would be a good opportunity for Bruce to be academically challenged so he would no longer misbehave due to boredom.

School at Scholar Preparatory School was interesting and fun for B.W.'s because it left him with a sense of curiosity and anticipation of what he would learn the next day. It also gave him the opportunity to do fun things like service learning projects, go on fieldtrips, have picnics, and spend time with friends. At the time of the interview, he had recently enjoyed attending the eighth grade class trip to Washington, D.C. where they visited various monuments and museums; his personal favorite was the Museum of Natural History. For B.W., the best thing about Scholar Preparatory School was the wide variety of experiences offered such as chess, band, sports and drama. B.W. was also able to participate in Scholar Preparatory School's enrichment activities of basketball, Straz musical theater, and movie production.

Outside of school, B.W. was a member of a national organization that helped developed character through education and outdoor activities. Although the worst thing about the academy was the heavy workload, B.W. felt it prepared him for the rigor of the high school he had been accepted into. Scholar Preparatory School was a lot stricter than his elementary school. B.W. was held accountable for his actions because the academy held the philosophy that every little thing counts. For example, if a student was late multiple times the consequence was detention or silent lunch or if a student did not have a belt or their shirt was not tucked in, they would get a detention or silent lunch as well. B.W. was frequently tardy in elementary school and although uniforms were required, they were not enforced.

B.W. had to make significant adjustments in his behavior during school and for a while, he had difficulty meeting the behavior expectations of Scholar Preparatory School. B.W.'s father

admonished him to improve his behavior by explaining the importance of being known for doing the right thing not the wrong. Subsequently, B.W. realized that he had to satisfy his desire to talk and joke around at the appropriate time so he could avoid trouble and negatively impacting his conduct grade. B.W. had not yet figured out what he wanted his future career to be, so he was unsure what he would study in college. When asked about his career plans for the future, he responded:

Umm I want to be a…I don't know cause I pretty much like I want to be a lot of things I don't really have one career right now that I want to be like hands down. But I would like…it doesn't really…like I wouldn't mind like being like ... I like a lot of things so I don't know which thing I like…I like being in a position of a lawyer and having to come up with a case to present. And I like art and stuff like that so I wouldn't mind being an architect. I like business and also making money and starting my own business maybe or something like that.

Description of temperament. Bruce had a pleasant demeanor and frequently smiled and laughed. He spoke in a calm yet confident manner, carefully enunciated each of his words. B.W. held his chin with his index finger and thumb as he processed the interview questions and formulated answers. He remained even tempered even when sharing his challenges.

B.W.'s first interview session took place during the academy's spelling bee in which his cousin was participating. He initially seemed aggravated as evidenced by a withdrawn demeanor and limited to no eye contact. However, once I began asking details of the spelling bee and asked if he wanted to reschedule so he could watch the spelling bee, he promptly declined and warmed up stating that he would have other opportunities to attend the spelling bee. Thereafter, he made eye contact and enthusiastically responded to questions and expounded without prompting.

Physical description. B.W. was exceptionally tall for his age; he later revealed that he was 6'1". He was slim in stature. B.W. was dressed in the school uniform during both interview

sessions. He was a white polo style short sleeved shirt with a Scholar Preparatory School emblem and long Black pants with Black loafers. He wore a green short sleeved school uniform shirt and Black shorts with Black sneakers during the second session.

Over Overview of participant's lifeworld. B.W. reported that the increased rigor and expectations of Scholar Preparatory School led him to adopt a love for learning and an understanding of the importance of getting the little things right. B.W. believes that success is determined the choices an individual makes. When facing a choice, there exists an inner voice that distinguishes the difference between right and wrong and reminds a person to watch for signs (e.g., having to avoid getting caught). If a person listens to that voice, he or she would always make the better choice. B.W. also reported that positive friends and influences (e.g., teachers) within one's daily experience can help them make the best choices necessary to achieve their future goals.

Participant Eight: Michael. Michael was 13 years old and in the seventh grade at Scholar Preparatory School. He resided with his father, mother, sister, and brother. His father was a disabled veteran who had attended some college. His mother was a stay at home mom who was a former nurse and had attended some college. Michael had been involved in a variety of extracurricular activities throughout his life including: basketball, Tang Soo Do—a Korean martial art, chess, and occasionally golf. Michael began attending Scholar Preparatory School in fifth grade after his mother discovered the school and felt it would provide him the enrichment he needed to be academically successful.

Michael's feeling towards school was that it was a part of life; he voluntarily denied animosity towards school but explained that his feelings towards school varied depending on the day. Michael described his mother as pulling him from the magnet elementary school he had

attended since kindergarten after finding out about Scholar Preparatory School. As he went on to explain the application, entry exam, and acceptance process, he continued to use wording (e.g., "she took me out") that suggested it was not his choice to attend Scholar Preparatory School. Moreover, the 11 hour days at Scholar Preparatory School weighed on Michael and made it easier for him to identify the worse things about the academy than the best things about it. Michael acknowledged that school had been too easy before he went to Scholar Preparatory School, which is why his mother wanted him to transfer. Michael was given the opportunity to be academically accelerated (i.e., grade skipping) on four occasions but his mother did not want him to because he would miss out on prerequisite math skills that were essential for him to be successful later on.

When Michael first got to Scholar Preparatory School, he earned his first C+ but he was able to improve his grades and ended the semester with A's and a B+. At the time of the interviews, Michael's' grades had declined to mostly Bs and Cs because he had not been taking his academics as seriously and was not really putting forth much effort. He seemed to be stuck in a rut of identifying his need to do better, desiring to do better, planning to do better, but not doing better. This dichotomy of knowing but not doing seemed to exist due to the fact that in the early setting "doing" was not required for achievement.

Not only did the 11 hour school day and Michael's prior schooling that reinforced little effort needed for academic achievement take a toll on his perception of school and experience at Scholar Preparatory School; he was involved in an incident where a classmate he considered to be one of his best friends spread a rumor about him that became a major incident that included the involvement of lawyers and an investigation. Michael was hurt because he felt betrayed by a close friend, an experience that caused his grades to decline; nevertheless, Michael persevered

and was able to move on.

For Michael, academic achievement was necessary to prevent him from experiencing the notorious plight of the African American males who did not prioritize school and ended up selling drugs or involved in other illegal activity. Michael recognized that he was blessed and took his blessings for granted like when he talked back to his mother, a behavior he regretted and was endeavoring to improve. He identified his mother as being one the most supportive people in his life; she often told him that he could achieve anything he wanted and that she would be there to help him to achieve it. Michael also named his father as supporting him the most by "transforming" him and showing him how to become a good man who would be able to one day take care of his own family. His father encouraged him to read his bible and help others so that his life would be blessed. Michael has never experienced negative feedback for attending Scholar Preparatory School. In fact, some of the older children in Michael's neighborhood who did not finish school commended him for attending Scholar Preparatory School because it was an opportunity they never had and they advised him that it was vital that he take advantage of it. For Michael, the Academy was a temporary passageway that afforded him the opportunity to advance on to elite college preparatory high schools and then onward to topnotch universities.

Michael desired to get drafted to play professional baseball out of high school but recognized the importance of getting a college degree so he would always have an alternative route if that path included a detour. He described this decision-making process as follows:
It came to me over time because all I really ever wanted to do-- I used to really only want to play basketball a lot. Then I saw that it's not really a strong possibility because there are a lot of people in the world. So I just decided that I shouldn't focus all of my attention on basketball, so I should focus on something else. Michael modified his future plans to reflect: "My dreams of the future,

if I'm not able to achieve my sports dreams, I want to take part in law and resolve a lot of cases dealing with marriage. I just like nailing cases like that."

Physical description. Michael was of average height and stature. He had dreadlocks that fell just short of his shoulders. He had a clear complexion and an engaging smile. Michael wore a short sleeved green polo style shirt with the school's emblem, Black uniform pants, and all Black sneakers.

Description of temperament. Michael was articulate and spoke using advanced level vocabulary. He was well-mannered and had a calm demeanor. He frequently used "ma'am" when responding to the interview questions. Despite his laidback demeanor, Michael revealed glimpses of his emotional side when discussing issues he had faced. For example, the tone of Michael's voice fluctuated, his tone dropped and the speed slowed, and his eyes watered when he spoke of talking back to his mother. He demonstrated similar behaviors that suggested disappointment in self when he spoke of his grades and the inadequate effort he had put in to his academic performance.

Overview of participant's lifeworld. Michael had a history of easy school work. Due to the fact that school work was never a challenge, he could get by without putting forth much, if any, effort. When he was confronted with completing difficult school work at Scholar Preparatory School, he had the challenge of learning what it *meant* (i.e., thinking) to work hard and what was *required* (i.e., doing) to work hard. The essence of James' experience suggested that when students are not challenged, it teaches them that academic achievement can come without much effort. Nonetheless, they are likely to eventually face academic challenges in which they have to learn how to best respond in order to be successful.

Although these students knew that they needed to try harder and put forth more effort, they did not know how to because they were never taught to do so.

Fortunately for Michael, his belief that academic achievement would prevent the potential negative experiences facing young African American males (e.g., dropping out of school, selling drugs, homicide) preserved his desires to achieve academically. Further, he realized that achievement is connected to his goal of being financially solvent in order to take care of his future family. This value was imparted by his father who emphasized the importance of not only having a family but providing for them.

Participant Nine, John Lucas. John was 14 years old and in the 8th grade at Scholar Preparatory School. He lived with his father, mother, and two brothers and one sister. He had three additional siblings by his father, who lived separately with their mothers. John's father was unemployed and had attended some college; his mother worked in customer service answering phones for different businesses. John was spoiled by his parents who would give him anything he wanted and he developed a sense of entitlement. However, his mentality was forced to change upon the birth of his six siblings. John had a difficult time adjusting to no longer being able to get whatever he wanted and would often complain. He eventually realized that complaining did not change his situation so he began searching for the good within his circumstance. John was able to identify the benefits of having a lot of siblings (e.g., always having someone to talk to and shifted from a position of resentment to leadership. John took on the responsibility of leading the way for his brothers and sisters and ensuring that they would become better than him. He also helped out in caring for them by cooking and cleaning when he did not have homework.

John's mother heard about Scholar Preparatory School from a friend and after applying, passing the entry exam, and successfully completing the summer session, he was accepted. John

was fond of school because he enjoyed learning new things and understood that school was necessary to obtain employment in the future. Scholar Preparatory School provided John with unique learning experience that he never received at his previous school, a challenging curriculum and individual support to meet the challenge. John once put in little effort and would "slack off" but the rigor of the academy made him work harder. He realized that the harder he worked, the more he gained. He also learned that his competitive drive could be gratified with academic accomplishments. The best aspects of the academy were the enrichment courses and rewarding relationships with his peers. The worst aspects were the small portion sizes at lunch and although he likes the long days, they prevented him from being able to hang out with friends after school.

John received criticism from children in his former neighborhood who felt he was going to a "white school". However, he never experienced such criticism from the children in the neighborhood he moved to. Further, his father's friends commended him for attending Scholar Preparatory School because they viewed it as a great opportunity, one they did not have as children. With the support of his father, mother, and grandmother, who provided for him, encouraged him, and modeled perseverance, John discovered he was smart and more aware than his classmates, not only academically but generally. Despite this discovery, he felt he could improve in being more organized and remaining humble so he did not get comfortable and revert to slacking off. John's journey from slacking off to achieving taught him that, "You create your own path, no matter where you started; you have the power to change your own life." John's future plans were as follows:

> Well first, I want to get a degree. Since I'm good at baseball, like I want to get out of high school, get drafted and get my degree while I'm able, but if it doesn't go

that way, I blow my knee or our something, always have a college degree to fall back on so I can get a job. "Yes [I want to study sports management so I can one day own my own team]. Like future, I plan to get married and have kids, and just be a good man overall.

Physical description. John was slightly shorter than average given his age and thin. His hair was neatly groomed and cut in a short afro. He had thick eyebrows and wide, bright eyes. He was dressed in the school uniform: a white short sleeved polo style shirt with the Scholar Preparatory School emblem and Black shorts with white ankle socks and white sneakers on the first day of the interview. The second interview was on the day eighth grade students were free to wear their choice of attire. John wore a white graphic t-shirt with an abstract Black design and blue jean pants with Black sneakers.

Description of temperament. John was outgoing with a friendly disposition. He was optimistic and had a positive outlook on life. He was quite insightful as he provided his opinion on the state of the state of affairs that hinder the aspirations of a lot of people in his neighborhood. It was apparent that he routinely reflected on his past and present experiences and future plans. John listened intently throughout the interview discourse and seemed to absorb its content with the purpose of discovering the value this experience would add to his life and to attaining his goals. This was evidenced when the initial interview went beyond the school day; John did not want to end the session and attempted to persuade me that his father would wait.

Overview of participant's lifeworld. John Lucas expressed the importance of each generation getting better, a notion instilled in him by his father. He took on the mission of being better than his father and ensuring that his younger siblings and future children would be better than him. His father also modeled the concept of challenges being necessary for growth because if

something was too easy, there was a tendency to slack off. However, when faced with a challenge, there was no choice but to rise to the occasion. For John, a façade existed in mainstream society as proliferated through the media that placed limitations on the abilities of Black people, particularly those who lived or grew up in the "hood". This false notion glorified practices that were destructive to the Black community (e.g., promiscuity, absentee fathers). John believes that Black people must rise above such negativity by taking control of their minds and doing what it took to increase their skillset and "keep the edge over somebody".

The preceding section provided a description of the participants' physical appearance and temperament and an overview of their individual lifeworlds. The research questions driving the investigation of the participants were as follows.

Research Questions

1. What are the experiences of African American middle school males who are meeting or exceeding grade level expectations at a school designed to support their success?
2. How do African American middle school males describe their successes and challenges related to academic achievement?

The research questions were used to investigate two aspects of the participants' experiences: (1) experiences of academic success and (2) description of success and challenges related to achievement. The answers to these questions were obtained using the following procedures.

Procedures

First, a letter of support to conduct this research study at Scholar Preparatory School, a private middle school in Southwestern Florida, was obtained from the Head of School. Then approval to conduct this study was gained from the University of South Florida's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Next, I met with the Head of School, Mr. Makaio, to discuss criteria for selection of potential study participants. To ensure fidelity of the selection process in terms of securing authentic participant voices, prior to identifying potential participants, I: (a) reiterated the fact that pseudonyms would be used when referencing the school setting, faculty members, and participants; (b) explained doctoral committee's expectation of a detailed picture of the selection process such as any additional factors considered in selection other than grade point average (e.g., personality characteristics, prior interactions with the students, and knowledge of their opinion of school) to ensure the review the grade point averages of the seventh and eighth grade Black male students at Scholar Preparatory School. The selection of potential participants only included students with grade point averages of 3.0 or higher in academic courses (i.e., English, mathematics, science, and history). Mr. Makaio, described the selection process as follows:

> I chose nine students with grade point averages greater than 3.0 academically (i.e., English, math, science, history). I didn't consider at all the personality traits of the boys, and as you could see the nine boys provided quite a range in the engagement spectrum. And, to be frank, a number of these boys would not consider me at the top of their list for dinner guests to their homes. I care deeply for each young man, but I'm not easy on them. There really was no science or process to their selection other than all nine boys are doing well academically at Scholar Preparatory School. (A. Makaio, personal communication, July 7, 2014)

In order to gain informed parental consent and participant assent I provided nine copies of an introductory letter (*Appendix A*), the parent informed consent (*Appendix B*), and participant assent form (*Appendix C*) to the Head of School at Scholar Preparatory School. Potential student participants were then given these documents that explained the

study and included my telephone number on the letter of invitation and parental consent forms in the event that the parent had any questions or concerns. The request for participation was made on a Monday and the forms were asked to be returned by the Friday of the same the week. All invited student participants returned the consent and assent forms before the end of the week. Upon receipt of the consent and assent forms, the initial interviews were scheduled over a two week period, with each interview session given a 60 minute window. The initial interviews ranged from 55 minutes to 38 minutes. The follow-up interviews were scheduled two weeks following the initial interviews to allow for time for initial analysis and determination of saturation.

Pilot

I received permission to conduct this research, including the pilot phase, from the Institutional Review Board at the University of South Florida. Before beginning the interviews, I conducted a preliminary semi-structure interview that lasted approximately 45 minutes. The purpose of the pilot interview was to check for participant understanding of the questions and the questions' ability to elicit detailed responses. No revisions were necessary to the original questions including the order in which they were asked because the organization was such that flowed in accordance with the topics addressed on the interview schedule. Due to the fact that no revisions were made to the interview schedule, the pilot interview data was included in this study (Holloway, 1997).

Interviews

A semi-structured interview protocol consisting of a script and six guiding questions was used as the interview schedule (see appendix A). The guiding questions were organized according to the following categories: school, success, support, passion, challenges, and future. A digital audio recorder was also be used to record the interviews. A journal was used to take

observational notes (e.g., participants' appearance, body language and/or strong feelings/reactions of participants) and self-reflections. Observational notes were important because they provided me with an opportunity to note information that would not be captured by audio recording alone; information that was necessary in analyzing what was meant by a particular statement. The journaling of one's own reflections, concerns, and uncertainties during the study and referring to them when examining the data served as a means of continuously attending to the quality and validity of the study.

A total of 17 individual student interviews (i.e., eight participants completed two interviews each and one participant only completed one interview) were conducted in one of the teacher's lounges located in the main office. The lounge had two doors that remained closed throughout all of the interview sessions. The interviews were held during the 60 minute enrichment period at the end of the school day. Eight of the participants completed two interviews, an initial interview and a follow-up interview. One participant was not able to complete the second interview because he had to have an operation done on his hand and would not be in school during the remaining time allotted by Scholar Preparatory School for interview sessions.

Prior to the start of the first interview, the participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire (Appendix D) that collected information related to household family members, parental education occupation levels, future plans, and involvement in extracurricular activities (Appendix E). Next, the participants were asked to select a pseudonym that would be used in place of their name in order to protect their confidentiality. Then the interviews began, which followed the romantic conception of interviewing orientation, where the positioning of me within the research was recognized and celebrated (Douglas, 1985). I maintained a reflexive

nature where I openly shared her interest in and enthusiasm for the research topic. I also provided confirmation and encouragement throughout the interview sessions via verbal feedback such as “hmmm”, “that makes sense”, and “I bet” and nonverbal gestures of head nodding and widening eyes with eye brows raised (Roulston, 2010). This orientation required a good rapport between the participants and me in order to create a trusting environment in which interviewees felt comfortable opening up about their lifeworlds (Roulston, 2010).

Upon completion of the first interviews, I transcribed the interview recordings and conducted a preliminary analysis to determine the occurrence of within-student saturation and to identify ideas that prompted follow-up questions. Although much of the content from the initial interviews overlapped, there were several ideas that generated follow up questions because further explication was required to understand what the particular experience meant for the participants. Further, I needed to determine if the salient ideas were representative of participants who did not share the information. This preliminary analysis resulted in condensed summaries that were provided to each of the participants during the follow-up interviews as a part of the member checking process. The member checking process entailed me providing the participants with summaries of the interview transcripts that ranged from two to three pages depending on the length of the interviews. I used member checking as a method to ensure accuracy of the descriptions (Creswell, 1998), to increase credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and to ensure what was said and what was meant were correctly represented (Walter, 2006).

Then I asked each participant follow-up questions derived from their individual interview and the salient ideas across interviews and allow the participants to share any additional insight. Upon completion of the second interviews, I reviewed the new data and determined that saturation had occurred. So, I proceeded with the data analysis process.

Data Analysis

First, all data from the observations and interviews were transcribed verbatim, which included every utterance will be included on the transcriptions. The purpose of including all verbalizations or sounds is to fulfill the requirement of IPA, which emphasizes the importance of the participants' voice. So to exclude any utterance, would mean removing the authenticity of the dialogue and risking the possibility of excluding important subtleties.

Atlas.ti software was used as the data management system during the data analysis process. Atlas.ti is a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) compatible with different file types include plain text files, rich text files, and excel files that adheres to recognized methods of qualitative data analysis (Scales, 2013). According to Sheon (2006) the Atlas.ti software is an easier system to manage qualitative data in comparison other qualitative data management systems like Transana. Atlas.ti enables easy coding of data and reports are generated in rtf format which can be edited in word, unlike Transana whose reports are in JPEG format that cannot be edited.

The analysis process began with me reading the first interview while simultaneously listening to the respective recorded interview. The purpose of this step was to encode the participant's voice within my consciousness in order to establish the participant as the center of analysis and ensure that the participant's voice remained at the focus during consecutive readings (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). I then read the interview an additional time before proceeding to initial notations.

The second step began with me reading the data again but on this occasion noting all reactions and ideas that came to mind, which resulted in a broad collection of notes. The notations made

fell into the categories of descriptive, linguistic, conceptual, and deconstruction (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The descriptive comments were descriptions of what the participant said—"the key objects, events, experiences in the participant's lifeworld" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 84). The linguistic comments evaluated the participant's use of language to relay the experiences within their lifeworlds (e.g., use of metaphors, changes in tone or volume, pauses, shifts in pronouns, shift from personal to general or general to personal).

Conceptual comments included a questioning of the thought provoking elements of the data and forming concepts based on what is revealed. The deconstruction comments consisted of segmented statements within the data. During this de- contextualization process of commenting, participant's accounts were removed from the context (i.e., paragraphs or sentences) in order to get as close as possible to the meaning behind the participant's words so as to not rely only on a basic understanding of what was read, but to discover deeper and variant meanings .

The third step involved developing emergent themes by condensing the detail of the transcripts and the initial commenting while simultaneously preserving the meaning and connected intricacy of the data. I also made sure to keep in mind the ideas discovered during the commenting process. Smith et al. (2009) described this process as a manifestation of the hermeneutic circle. The original whole of the interview becomes a set of parts as you conduct your analysis, but these then come together in another new whole at the end of the analysis in the write-up (p.91).

The fourth step of analysis required that I look for connections across the emergent themes. The emergent themes were in the chronological order as they first appeared in the transcripts. During this stage of analysis, the emergent themes were repositioned as I focused on the associations amongst them in order to create a collection of the most significant elements of

the participant's accounts. I generated a list of all the emergent themes in chronological order and repositioned the themes according to similarities that would naturally connect to a superordinate theme, (i.e., abstraction). The repositioning also included the shifting of some emergent themes to the position of superordinate theme because they encompassed the relationship amid related themes (i.e., subsumption). This step included the creation of a summary table of themes that included the following categories: superordinate theme, sub-themes, and example of an illustrative quote. The purpose of this table was to demonstrate the connections found among the preliminary themes, merge themes as appropriate, and illustrate a direct link back to the transcript.

Smith and Osborne (2007) recommended that data analysis in IPA follow an idiographic approach: beginning with a case by case examination of the transcripts for studies that included multiple participants. The fifth step involved moving on to the next interview. I was careful to bracket the ideas obtained from the previous interview as she worked through the analysis process of the subsequent interview. This was done by viewing the new data set as if it were the first set being analyzed, allowing new themes to emerge.

Steps one through four were repeated for each of the individual interviews. The sixth step involved looking for patterns across participant interviews. I assembled the summary table of themes for each dataset and looked across them to identify connections, the most potent themes, and themes in one set that could elucidate themes in another. While I completed this sixth step for each data set and its corresponding summary table, I wrote down my ideas, feelings, and opinions with the purposes of being reflexive and ensuring that reflexivity remained at the forefront of this analysis process. Upon completion of the analysis process, six superordinate themes surfaced with the first serving as the principal concept in which the remaining five

themes exemplified.

Summary

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) provided me with the structures necessary to: (1) obtain detailed accounts of the participants' lifeworlds and (2) conduct a rich, in-depth analysis of the resultant data. IPA is idiographic so I was able to focus on the particular instead of the universal. My focus was on the single, lived experience of high achievement among a single group of people— African American males. Five superordinate themes emerged as a result of this analysis process that will be detailed in the chapter that follows.

Chapter Four

Research Findings

"There is in this world no such force as the person determined to rise.

The human soul cannot be permanently chained."

~W.E.B. Dubois

The research findings presented in this chapter were a result repeated readings of participant interview transcripts while simultaneously listening to the interview recordings to ensure the participants' voice was prioritized throughout theme development. The data was investigated in search of answers to the research question questions: (1) *What are the experiences of African American middle school males who are meeting or exceeding grade level expectations at a school designed to support their success?* and (2) *How do African American middle school males describe their successes and challenges related to academic achievement?* An external reviewer reviewed the master theme list that included superordinate themes, subthemes, and sub-sub themes, provided feedback for clarity of theme names, interconnections among superordinate and subthemes, verifying the connections I identified.

Six superordinate themes surfaced during the analysis process. Table two on page 112 depicts each of these themes organized according to their link to the research questions and participants who addressed each theme and the participant number of those whose data exemplified the theme. Each theme included a de-contextualized quote from one of the participants that illustrated the essence of the theme.

The first theme was *"Always reaching to be better": The Cultivation of Academic Achievement*. This theme included a progression from the participants' parents and/or loved ones seeking out opportunities for upward mobility via college preparatory schooling to the participants' internalizing school as an essential part of their lives as a result of being given the option to succeed. "Always reaching to be better" also included details on the strategies and structures that existed within the schooling opportunity that created an optimal environment for achieving academic success. This theme then proceeded to the identification of systems of support required for the journey to success and concluded with the emergence of participants' confidence in self to complete the journey.

The second superordinate theme was *Sacrificing to Succeed: 'My ancestors worked hard, so I should work hard...it won't be in vain'.* This theme included internal sacrifices (i.e., things that the participants had to give up or put on hold in order to achieve) and external sacrifices (i.e., things that the participants' family and/or educators gave up or put on hold in order for participants to achieve) were necessary to be academically successful.

The third theme, *Trailblazing: 'I'm leading the Way for them',* encompassed the participants' mission to be trailblazers for their younger siblings and future children and named the requirements, considerations, and challenges necessary to be an effective leader.

The fourth superordinate theme: *Striving for the Good Life: "I Just Want to Be a Good Man Overall".* This theme was comprised of the participants' desires to be a good men and what it meant to be a good man. The fifth and final superordinate theme was *Planning for Success: "That's how I study"* that addressed the participants' study routines, homework completion, and strategies they implement as they prepare for the future.

Table 2

Summary of Superordinate Themes and Sub-themes

Research Question	Superordinate Theme & Subtheme	# of Participants Addressed Theme
What are the experiences of African American middle school males who are meeting or exceeding grade level expectations at a school designed to support their success?	1. "Always reaching to be better": The Cultivation of Academic Achievement	
	A. Lack of Educational Rigor Stimulates Desire to Pursue and Obtain Opportunities for Rigor	A. 9 (1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9)
	B. Strategies and Structures that Create an Optimal Environment for Achieving Academic Success	B. 9 (1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9)
	C. System of Support Required for the	C. 7 (1,2,3,5,6,7,8)
	D. Journey to Success	D. 6 (1,2,3,5,6,8)
	E. D. Emergence of Confidence in Self on the Journey	
	2. Sacrificing to Succeed: "My Ancestors Worked Hard, So I Should Work Hard...It Won't Be In Vain"	
	A. External Sacrifices	A. 5 (1,2,4,6,8)
	B. Internal Sacrifices	B. 5 (1,2,4,6,9)
	C. Delayed Gratification	C. 3 (4,5,9)
How do African American middle school males describe their successes and challenges related to academic success?	3. Trailblazing: "I'm Leading the Way for Them"	
	A. Aim High	
	B. Calculated Maneuvers are Necessary	A. 6 (1,2,3,4,7,9)
	C. Anticipate Challenges	B. 9 (1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9)
		C. 7 (2,3,4,5,6,7,8)
	4. Striving for the Good Life: "I Just Want to Be a Good Man Overall"	
	A. Passion for Being a Good Person	
	B. Marriage, Commitment, Future and Family	A. 4 (2,3,4,9)
		B. 6 (3,4,5,6,7,9)
	5. Planning for Success: "That's How I Study"	
	A. Use Time Wisely by Identifying and Implementing Study Methods that Work	A. 7 (3,4,5,6,7,8,9)
	B. Connect Future Career Aspirations to Present Interests/Personality	B. 2 (4,7)

Theme one: "Always reaching to be better": The Cultivation of Academic Achievement

Each participant expressed a desire to be successful that included the following factors: going to the city's top high schools; attending Ivy League universities; becoming entrepreneurs, doctors, lawyers, and professional athletes; getting married and having children and being financially solvent enough to provide for them. They believed that academic achievement would position them for lifelong success.

Lack of educational rigor stimulates desire to pursue and obtain opportunities for rigor. The participants in this research study did not have parents who attended top high schools in the city or went to Ivy League universities. In fact, two of the participants' parents had not finished high school, and only two finished college. Their parents did not have white collar jobs but blue collar ones. Five of the participants lived with both their mother and father; four primarily lived with their mother. Despite being raised in environments that did not reflect their dreams of success, these environments did however nurture their dreams of success. The participants' had a fundamental belief that school was important.

For Participant two, Bruce, the importance of school was captured in his initial statement "To me school is very important. That's what I really focus on most of the time because for me, my parents they really didn't finish high school and they stress that on me because they've shown me like how life is and how they have to work hard in order to just keep on moving in life so they want me to get a really good education so I don't have to be as much struggle as they are." Bruce's parents had impressed upon him the importance of school in preventing the need to work extremely hard, yet still experiencing financial hardship. The importance of school reinforced James' ability to exercise self-control when faced with trying situations; he noted, "'Cause I know that school is like more important than getting kicked out

of school and going to a bad school." Further, school is where he developed a passion for math after his teacher identified and celebrated him for being good in math.

Participant five, Ashton, expressed a belief that school was a means for upward mobility, such as when he shared advice he would give to a student experiencing peer pressure to do wrong, "Well from your example, they should just ignore what others say and get an education. Go to high school, go to college, graduate and live a happy life." His belief was that school would lead to a happy life. Ashton continued to demonstrate this belief about school in his final statement summing up who he was and wished to be presented to the world "Well I'm an African American who wishes to succeed in life and I want to be a doctor, I want to succeed and be a doctor and go to medical school and get a master's degree. A PhD and all those degrees." Ashton's thoughts about his future children focused solely on their success in school, which further demonstrates the importance he placed on school, "My thought is that my wife and children will be smart and I [don't] want them to be like the other Black male, how they are now, not succeeding in school." Participant five, Aaron, shared the belief that education achieved through schooling could be life changing in that it had the possibility of changing the dominant negative view of Black people. Aaron explained this by saying, "When somebody sees an educated Black person, if a white person who usually thinks Blacks are uneducated or don't know how to behave themselves, see an educated person, an African-American who can behave themselves that can kind of put a better thought about Black people into their minds."

The importance of school was evident in Participant two's, Bruce's, plans for the future; he first recognized the subject areas he performed the best in and then identified the careers linked to these subjects to determine his future career plans, the following quotation reveals this:

> And for me the way I decided that because I looked throughout my periods and classes at my grades because the strongest parts of my grades would have to be science and math and then that all adds up with accountant, pediatrician, or architect. Because to be a pediatrician you have to know about the medicine and how it affects the body and also to work with chemicals and then for architect you have to know what type of material to use and how much the length is and for accountant that's just pure math and baseball is just my passion.

School was synonymous to education for Participant four, Christopher, and education was the precursor to becoming financially solvent. He believed that students should "…try to get an education in what you like and whatever you may do, at least get to the point where you're financially solvent so you can support your wife, your kids." He also believed that school provided him the opportunity to fulfill his belief that "I think it's best to get as much knowledge as you can, while you can."

The seeking for the advancement of their offspring was evident in the nature of the participant's loved ones. The participants learned about Scholar Preparatory School from parents, family friends, and teachers. Some were encouraged to attend by friends at their former schools. Students experienced a rigorous educational program that established academic excellence as the norm. John believed that the academic rigor he experienced at the academy taught him how to rise to a challenge and ultimately overcome it. John believed "the good thing is that it's a rigorous academic program so it teaches you to fight through it".

Participant seven, B.W., provided examples of the academy setting high expectations and teaching discipline through consequences and rewards, "…this school it teaches us that every little thing counts so you always have to do things like turn in homework and in turning

in homework you can't get a good grade without doing that here. You have to be like on time or if you're late five times in a grading period then you start getting silent lunches and detentions for that." He also described the high expectations for student's appearance, "And we also have to always keep our shirts tucked in and keep a belt on you can get a silent lunch for that too for not wearing a belt. You need to dress out for P.E.".

The participants' accepted school as an essential part of life even for Participant eight, Michael, who did not readily express his enthusiasm towards school at Scholar Preparatory School because the school day was 11 hours. His response to the question of how he felt about school was, "It really depends on the day, but most of the time, I'm not mad to go to school, just like it's another day." John's response to the same question conveyed more enthusiasm towards Scholar Preparatory School when he stated "I think you need school and I like school because I like learning new things. If you don't have school you basically can't get into any job that you want to." While differences existed in the participants' sentiment, essentially they both were saying the same thing that school is a necessary part of life.

School was such an essential part of life it was the determining factor in their ratings of personal success. Participant two, Bruce, demonstrated this by saying, "Well first I was thinking about my grades which I will put on half of the scale like that would be like five like that and then you also get to think about how you act in school your personality type with everyone the teachers and then there are other factors to determine so I'm mainly had those two to determine". Similarly Bruce reported, "Academically I'm satisfied umm like at home I'm satisfied." According to Participant four, Christopher, he thought about "school, at home, extra things that I do and what I wish to do with them" in his ratings of personal success. Participant eight, Michael, did not mention the academic aspect of school but he

did consider the social aspect when he said, "Like an 8 or a 9 and a half. Because I have a lot of friends that care about me and we socialize a lot. And we do a lot of things outside of school like go to the movies together, we plan movie nights. But it's usually just the 7th grade; we don't like the other grades with us. Yeah, about a 9 and a half. And in the house, I'm loved by my whole family so I'll put a 10 for that."

For those who had earned good grades since they first began elementary school, academic achievement was the norm. Participant three, James, caught on to the concepts during elementary school and felt he had a good academic experience; he described this saying "Cause I like got the work then I umm and that like taught me a lot. Then the teachers were good." Participant four, Christopher, upheld a standard of high academic performance; it was the external manifestation of an internal resolve to maintain a position of distinction from his peers. He revealed, "I know this might seem not normal for what other people would say but I usually got good grades in school so I just kind of said that I need to get good grades because it's what I do. It's my standard…" Participant nine, John, shared a similar resolve to maintain a position of distinction but revealed why this distinction was important with the following statement:

> If you're better than the other person, they are going to choose you 99% of the time because you're better than the other person. So I say do what you need to do to keep that edge over somebody. So no matter what your skin color is, there is no doubt that they can choose you.

The notion of academic rigor was not a new for Participant four, Christopher, and Participant six, Ashton, who had previous exposure to challenging curriculum before going to Scholar Preparatory School. Ashton explained the similarities between Scholar Preparatory

School and his elementary school by saying, "Well, they are about the same because both schools they had—they were both performing schools and nothing changed. Both wear uniforms. Mainly kind of the same consequences, same teaching ways." Although Christopher did not classify his previous school as difficult, it did require that he study a significant amount of time in order to achieve. He described this notion saying, "Before I came here, school wasn't really difficult. The only thing that kept me off the honor roll was behavioral grades that counted towards honor roll at my older school. If that didn't count toward it, then I would have had honor roll every year. I went to public school once. It wasn't really challenging. It wasn't just a walk through; I had to put in a lot of extra time to study." Yet he continued by comparing Scholar Preparatory School to his previous private elementary school "I believe that this curriculum still would have been-- If Scholar Preparatory School was an elementary school or A+ Academy was a middle school, I think the curriculum here would have been harder because it wasn't really challenging." Thus, although his elementary school was not as difficult as the academy, it prepared him to endure the rigor.

According to Participant one, KJ, school has immediate (e.g., learning social circle) and delayed (e.g., achieve life goals) rewards; he explained, "Umm I really like it. Like it's a place to learn and also you can have friends there with you. You will like…I think it's fun like getting an education so you can be someone like better when you grow up so you can be what you want to be and achieve what you want to achieve in life."

The participants were each given an opportunity and an option to succeed academically and they each accepted it. The participants gave a personal account of the educational opportunities they had been afforded. For some, these opportunities existed long before they were accepted into Scholar Preparatory School and for others the opportunities for

academic success began when they first learned about the academy. KJ's experience gave him the perception that everyone had a chance to succeed but as he vocalized this belief, his perspective oscillated from a position of privilege when he said "Everybody has a chance to succeed… if they don't take the opportunity to do their work it's their fault" to a position of pleading, "…so like you just gotta give it to him if they get it…if they like actually do what they need to do umm you should give them a chance to succeed." This shift between the two positions indicated that KJ realized he was *given* an opportunity to succeed which leaves the possibility that others may have been *denied* an opportunity to succeed. So he was appreciative of his opportunity and was going to take full advantage of it, as evidenced in His statement of "I don't feel like I have succeeded anything that I want to succeed right now. Because like this, this is just the beginning I think. Yeh, I'm just tryna achieve."

Christopher felt that academic achievement was not an option or an opportunity for children born with cognitive deficits; however, there were children who had the ability, option, and opportunity to achieve but rejected it. He described his belief when he said, "My thought is that some children are born that way. They can't obtain the knowledge no matter how hard they study; it's just not an easy thing to grasp. But also some children, they can do better but they just choose not to."

The antithesis of Scholar Preparatory School would be a lax academic program that reinforced academic failure. B.W. provided an example of such, "I didn't really have to do my homework to get good grades so of course like I didn't do it because I just didn't think I needed to if I could still get good grades." Michael shared a similar experience, "I thought I could get by with not putting forth a full effort so I just got used to not putting in all the work that I could have been putting into achieving the grades that I want." "…it was easier at

my former school it was easier grades wise. But at this school they teach us things... Oh yeh at my other school I was also late a lot." Not only was the school work easier, the expectations for behaviors related to academic success were lax, which positively reinforced poor self-discipline. "The only thing that kept me off the honor roll was behavioral grades that counted towards honor roll at my older school. If that didn't count toward it, then I would have had honor roll every year." Christopher's experience contrasted this being that his former school considered behavioral grades in determining honor roll. He explained this as. "The only thing that kept me off the honor roll was behavioral grades that counted towards honor roll at my older school. If that didn't count toward it, then I would have had honor roll every year."

Further, some participants were taught that academic achievement did not require effort. This reasoning was reinforced by being awarded with "good grades" as opposed to earning them. Consequently, when the work was harder and required effort, the likely response was similar to Michael's: "I'm not really trying, so I should probably try harder." Michael knew that he should try harder but he did not. At the surface level this statement would appear to be a confession of indolence; however, in Michael's experience he was reinforced over a period of five years (i.e., kindergarten through fifth grade) for not putting forth any effort in school. So what is underlying his "not really trying" is likely to be an ambiguity in knowing what the process of "trying" or "trying harder" actually require. Further, because "the performance of males tends to respond more positively to an increase in competition"; the ladder is likely to be true. The absence of competition, whether internal (e.g., challenging material requiring effort to master) or external (e.g., classmates competing for highest score), is likely to result in decreased performance (Niederle & Vesterlund, 2011, p. 601). James's explained the motivating quality of competition in this way: "Like my class we're like a competitive class so

we always try to do better than each other and that motivates me to do better than others."

Participant nine, John, expressed a differing perspective in response to the same situation of not being challenged; he did not realize his intellectual ability. He described this experience as follows:

> In elementary school I didn't think I was going to be smart, because I didn't really care where I was going. But now I actually care about where I'm going and back then I was laid-back but now I go out and get it if I want.

But for John, he was a self-proclaimed "slack-off kid" until he was challenged by Scholar Preparatory School's curriculum and then said "I see the stuff here is harder. It's like you have to work harder and the harder you work, the more you shall receive." John continued by saying, "If it's too easy...like with me I'm very competitive like my Dad. So I won't let anything beat me and if I see it's hard, I keep going at it. But if it's easy I'm just like, just do it and it's just too easy." So although John desired a challenge, when he was not challenged he would still put forth effort. Therefore the transition from a position of slackness to rigorousness was not as out of reach.

Participant two's, Bruce, experience with patterns established in elementary school translating into issues at Scholar Preparatory School was different. He faced the challenge of learning how to ask for help because he was never taught to ask for assistance due to the fact that it was not available. He described his experience of being faced with the academic rigor at Scholar Preparatory School having never asked for help before as follows:

> Whenever I had trouble I really didn't ask for help I just tried to figure it out on my own because my mom didn't finish high school so she didn't know about the work we were doing so sometime she would get confused… so when I came

> here one of my biggest challenges was asking for help when needed and then one way how I did that was because I noticed my grades were coming down I knew I had to ask for help no matter what.

Bruce's courage to ask for help changed the outlook of his success at the academy from dismal to bright. He discovered a marked difference in the ability to access help at Scholar Preparatory School in comparison to his previous school. Bruce provided insight on this experience as follows:

> The best things I would have to say is that like even though you might be struggles in classes, teachers always have time to go around and help individual students which in some schools you don't see that a lot. Like you'll see like a teacher get one, two, or three students and then the other kids who need help don't get help and then the next thing you know they go home and don't have any help there either 'cause probably their parents didn't finish high school.so they don't know the work you're going through.

Strategies and structures that create an optimal environment for achieving academic success. This subtheme includes factors essential for creating an ideal environment that supports academic success. These factors include: a rigorous educational program that establishes standards for success and normalizes academic success; faculty demonstrate a genuine concern for educational upward mobility (i.e., strict teachers uphold expectation of excellence, open availability, serve a role models, and foster love for given subjects); learning is made fun (e.g., hands-on learning experiences, enrichment activities, relevant social issues addressed); and customized classroom makeup (i.e., gender based classrooms and small class sizes).

When the students arrived to Scholar Preparatory School each day, they attended morning convocation that commenced with a reciting of the school pledge: "Standing in this room are the greatest, most committed, most responsible people this world has ever known. If it is to be, it is up to me. Yes I can. Yes I will. Yes we can. Yes we will. I am, we are, the greatest, the greatest, the greatest!" From the onset of each the school day, students at the academy were empowered and challenged to rise to meet an expectation of greatness. Even before students were accepted into the academy, they had to satisfy the rigorous entrance requirements. The admission process required that students pass an admissions test covering grade level reading, vocabulary, spelling, and math with a minimum of 60 percent.

Students who pass the admissions test are mailed an application that is reviewed by the acceptance committee. The committee selects candidates who demonstrate the "strongest potential" and they are invited to attend a required three week summer session that includes academic coursework and educational activities and recreational activities both indoors and outdoors. The summer session is the final step in the application process in which the faculty and staff at Scholar Preparatory School observe the students and assess their "desire to learn" and ability to "comport themselves in a manner that is respectful to their peers and their teachers. Students who successfully complete the summer school session and "excel academically and behaviorally" are accepted into Scholar Preparatory School for the upcoming school year (Admissions Process, 2013).

Six of the nine participants shared their experience with this process, which served as a source of pride and distinction for the participants as evidenced in their word choice and intonation. According to James "we took a test to see if like we were like able to like retain the information while taking a test then if you like scored good on that then you come to the

summer session then I'll like if your behavior is good and you also like get a progress report". Bruce shared "…my mom had applied then I took the test. And then we have the three weeks of summer school and then that determines whether you'll stay or not and like now I'm here and I passed." Christopher noted, "So my parents saw that I was making good grades at other schools and they wanted a more challenging curriculum for my sister and I so she brought me here and I did the entrance test. And I made it in the summer session and school."

Aaron's experience was "I had to take a test to see how smart or what I had to do to get into the school then after my school year ended at my old school we had to do a three-week summer session and we had grades and behavior, stuff like—everything in the school year just in three weeks." According to Michael the admissions process involved, "she [my mom] took me out during the summer and then brought me for the summer session here for 5th grade and the entrance test." John explained the process as "Well first you had to come here and take a test to get it before they would even look at you so I took it. I passed the test and then chose, well they brought all the people who passed the test into a summer session and then you compete for a seat during the summer session. And I got my seat in." The rigorous application process alerted them in advance as to what would be expected of them once they became students at the academy. Their successful completion of the process and invitation to attend provided them with evidence that they could rise to the challenge and experience academic success during their tenure at the academy.

Scholar Preparatory School classes have a maximum of 19 students. This increases the teachers' ability to provide students with more individual attention and support than would be possible with a larger number of students. Aaron spoke of the benefits of the small class sizes and shared his take as follows:

> I like the idea of a small school, like a private school, so you have more time to work one on one with the students so you find—so you can find the way that they connect to the lesson, or find ways that you can find techniques that teachers can do to teach the child better because if you're doing those things, it's better for them to learn, but if they're not, then it's just like you're wasting your breath or not teaching the same percentage of the class.

James highlighted the benefit of teachers getting to know their students on an individual basis in order to discover how they learn best and identify their interests in order to incorporate them into the content of the course for the best outcomes.

The classes at Scholar Preparatory School were separated by gender. Research on effects of single-gender classrooms on student performance have not confirmed the belief that students' academic performance is better when they are in classes with only students of the same gender (Bracey, 2006). Some studies have suggested that low-income, male students of color do perform better in single-gender classrooms (Riordan, 2002). Noguera (2012) contended that "While some of the schools that are successfully educating Black and Latino males are single- sex, others are not (p. 12)". Only two of the participants provided input on their experience of being in single-gender classrooms. Similar to the ambiguity present in the literature on this topic, Bruce and Aaron differed in their opinion of it being beneficial for them. Bruce believed an all-boys setting would "keep my focus there and like I think it will be fun." He went on to say:

> I came to this conclusion because like sometimes around girls I act very different, compared the way I act to, with boys. Because with other guys, you really don't care. You could ask a question that you raised your hand up real quick if you're

> around other guys, they don't care if you get it wrong. They just laugh and let it go. But like with girls, it's totally different. You get it wrong, they're like "Psst." they judge you right away and say something, stuff like that.

When asked how he knew this to be the case he explained:

> Just by like, just by like paying attention and just like looking at what others do, I could see it right away. Like you get something wrong in class, the girls will most likely laugh and then snicker about it, and just talk to other girls about it. And like they think something bad about you. Like "He's not smart." But with the guys, you can just say anything, like nothing will affect it because like they're guys.

Aaron did not feel the same way about being separated from his female counterparts. In fact, he classified this as a "lack of freedom", which he believed was the worst thing about Scholar Preparatory School. Aaron explained this when he said:

> They separate us for snack so we're not really allowed to talk during that. Our academic classes are separated and I heard they're going to separate lunch next year. It's not a fact but the teachers said more than likely they are…We're together but certain teachers try to keep us kind of separated. So we just get to see each other in lunch and enrichment, which is our last class. I'm a very social person. I don't have a problem playing basketball and stuff with the boys but it would also be nice to have girls to talk to too.

School is fun. I like coming here" were James' sentiments about attending school at Scholar Preparatory School. This was also the general description that participants gave; they described it as a fun and interesting place because it exposed them to experiences they may not

have otherwise had like traveling out of state and a variety of extracurricular activities called enrichment classes like chess, musical theater, technology, African dance, and others. Christopher named enrichment as one of the things he loved about Scholar Preparatory School; he pointed out the fact that "We have more enrichment opportunities than other schools like band, extra-murals…" John also identified the enrichment classes as an attribute of the academy when he said, "The enrichments here, because they have a football team here and I like football."

Participant seven, B.W., recalled the recent eighth grade fieldtrip, "We saw... we road everywhere in the subway or walked. And we saw different monuments and the Washington Memorial. Uhh we went to the Vietnam War Memorial, to the two Smithsonians. I think it was the Space, Air, and Flight Museum and the Museum of Natural History." James shared similar examples of Scholar Preparatory School being a fun place in his statement of "Like we still have recess and like umm and we're going like to Washington D.C. then we also have like field trips every month and other schools don't have fieldtrips that often."

School was also a joyous occasion for Participant two, Bruce, where he had the opportunity to learn with friends. He described school as "a fun day that I can enjoy throughout the whole week." He also made statements such as, "I just love being with my friends. Always having a good time and learning something ne… we'll work in groups and make jokes and be us basically." James also enjoyed learning while working with friends, when he reflected on which class he thought was most fun, "I just think that all of them (i.e., classes) are fun because we're with friends laughing and having a good time even though it is work but you could still like have fun doing it." Aaron acknowledged that he came to school to learn but also came to interact with his friends. The one word Aaron used to describe his feelings about school was "happy". He went on to say "I laugh a lot at school because this is where a lot of my mainstream friends are. I

look forward to coming and having a good time with my friends and stuff not only to learn but to have fun with my friends."

The class projects not only provided students with an opportunity to learn the content area, but provided with practical life skills, such as the Spanish project B.W. described as "I have a Spanish project I have to plan this trip to Venezuela and then I don't really know how to plan trips so she's like okay first son you have to go look on Travelocity for plane tickets and things." Participants believed that the academic rigor at Scholar Preparatory School was preparing them to handle the rigor of high school. B.W. concluded, "…we do get a lot of work here but in high school you'll be getting more well with the high schools that we're going to well be getting more work so everyone is preparing us for that."

Participant two, also named Bruce, provided a contrast to the rigor at Scholar Preparatory School when he reflected on his previous school, "Well at my old school Bass Lake elementary I really wasn't getting any real hard work because at school whatever the work the teacher would give us I would probably, let's say we had 15 minutes to do it, I would finish it up in probably seven minutes and then homework I would finish that in 30 minutes in all of my subjects". He went on to describe how he has to approach school work differently, "so now here I have much harder work that really trying to push me in order to prepare me for high school so basically I'm working a grade level higher and at my old school they said it was a great level higher but once I noticed that the fifth-grade work that I was doing it really didn't match up to what they were teaching in six grade here so I had a little problem with that". Participant four, Christopher, shared this same sentiment when he said, "Before I came here, school wasn't really difficult." Participant eight, Michael, also expressed that "school before coming here was too easy."

Several of the participants mentioned the strict nature of the teachers at Scholar Preparatory School, including the expectations of maintaining high grades and the hasty manner in which they provide discipline that is sometimes based on faulty assumptions. Ashton described his experience of the Scholar Preparatory School faculty admonishing him to improve his grades when in his opinion they were acceptable. The difference of opinion was evidenced in the hesitancy in his voice and his word choice specifying "they". He demonstrated this when he said, "I need to improve in my grades now, 'cause they say my grades are starting to drop. But they're still decent grades, but they're starting to drop from all A's to B's. Well, A's and some B+'s."

Participant one, KJ, agreed that the teachers at Scholar Preparatory School were strict, in fact he described them as "very strict"; however, he felt that it was good because it provided him with the structure and guidelines necessary for establishing lifelong success. Participant two, Bruce, described the strictness related to being separated by gender as previously described. He commented that "We're together but certain teachers try to keep us kind of separated. So we just get to see each other in lunch and enrichment, which is our last class". Participant three, James, described a situation where his teacher assumed he was misbehaving:

> If I didn't do something umm then they'll like blame me for it then I'll like I'll have like a look on my face and I'll then not want to talk to them or anything because I'm mad at them…like a teacher one time like we were supposed to be quiet in line and somebody had like somebody started talking and he thought it was me. umm so I act like outside of lunch and I tried to explain that it wasn't me but he like really didn't care so I just started to be quiet and I didn't talk to no one for a while.

Participant seven, B.W., had a similar experience where his teacher accused him of talking when he was not. He attempted to figure out why assumptions about misbehavior are made. He described it saying:

> I guess they don't want to be wrong or something but then when you tell them like that you weren't talking or something they'll be like well you're talking now and then we'll still get in trouble.

Michael described teachers showing favoritism as it pertains to discipline as the being the worse thing about Scholar Preparatory School, "The worse thing about being here is I have to say silent lunches and detentions. Because sometimes, they're given for no reason to certain students. There's a little favoritism." His experience of disciplined mirrored that of the other participants in that he too had experienced being falsely accused of misbehaving and disciplined for something he had not done.

Christopher's reaction to teachers' discipline was "I don't think I deserve it. And sometimes I don't think the teachers know exactly what's going on." Christopher did not like the forms of discipline used at the academy, which included:

> Silent lunches, lunch detentions. When we get out of hand, we have to sit out recess. Detention. We have to write lines at recess. It goes on our transcripts to other high schools and can potentially be the difference between us going to a top notch high school and us going to our local high school. Study hall. We stay her 'till 5 o'clock and if you maintain a 3.0 GPA or higher, academic GPA not overall, or if you don't get anything less than a C+, so if you get a D+ or an F on your progress report card you have to stay here for an hour and 5 minutes more each day so basically 6:05.

However, participants are receptive to their discipline even when they do not fully understand why they are receiving discipline. This is because the teachers have established trusting relationships with their students in general that helps students trust their discipline. Christopher explained this in the following statement:

> So I've given time to think about and think what have I possibly done for this teacher to issue a silent lunch or lunch detention. Some I come to the realization of why, sometimes I don't know, but I do understand they just have our best interests at heart.

Christopher went on to explain how teachers enforcing discipline has positively influenced his life. He explained how "they have impacted my life indeed. Some good ways...most good ways, some bad ways. Silent lunches of course are the bad ways but they don't just give them out, you have to earn them, so apparently I've done something wrong… it teaches me what to do, what not to do, how to stay disciplined, how to stay focused".

He continued by explaining the benefits of discipline, "it teaches me more work ethic. If you're done with something, do something else in another subject if you don't have to study for that class. That's how it's impacted you in a good way." Christopher relayed an acceptance of teacher's discipline and the fact that it had to be earned in order to be received. However, in the following statement he shifted from speaking in first person to second person and then to third person. This change is an indication that he was separating himself from what he was saying and revealing that he (a) did not feel he deserved the discipline, (b) he was attempting to convince himself of what he was saying, or (c) he was saying what he thought I wanted to hear.

The statement he made was:

> Because of their actions. They don't just give silent lunches and detentions out. You have to earn them. Sometimes the teacher might have a short fuse with you but it's all just teaching you discipline. When you fall of the short fuse of a teacher, and you get a silent lunch, you have to just sit there in total silence and do whatever you're supposed to be doing in the first place. So that's how I view it.

Despite trusting his teachers' decision to implement discipline and accepting it as being necessary, Christopher offered the following advice for his teachers ""Well they can sit down and talk with the student. Are you ok? What's going on? Do you have any reason you're doing this? How can I flat out recognize this and not just give you a silent lunch?" This confirms that he inwardly he rejected their discipline because he felt he did not deserve it. Yet, because of the pre-established trust, he was hopeful that it would be for the best. The teachers at Scholar Preparatory School demonstrated concern about their students' educational futures by preparing them for their future school environments that will require independence and self-advocacy. Teachers also stayed on top of the students and stressed the importance of completing their assignments. B.W. described this by saying:

> They always get on us about stuff. They tell us how high school is going to be. Like if we don't do our homework they'll get on us and tell us in high school it won't be like this. If you're not doing well, the teachers won't really care as much as they do here.

As research has shown, discipline is most effective when it is "responsive and demanding, confrontive and autonomy supportive, affectionate and power assertive" (Larzelere, Morris, & Harrist, 2013, p. 13). Youth who experience this type of discipline exhibit "self-reliance,

achievement motivation, prosocial behavior, self-control, cheerfulness, and social confidence" (Stenburg, 2001, p.13).Thus, despite the participants' criticisms about the disciplinary actions they had experienced at Scholar Preparatory School, they provided examples of how their teachers demonstrated a genuine concern for them through examples of support and dependability.

Ashton described his teachers' words as a source of encouragement. This exemplified their concern for him and helped build a trusting relationship. He provided the following example:

> Well they've impacted my life by telling me, and teaching me to get the little things right. And that my grades matter—my grades matter to get into the high schools I really want to get into, and so does my behavior, so we have to tighten up here so at the other high schools, we can be all ready.

Participant two, Bruce, shared a similar experience of teacher support explaining that the "…best thing is that the teacher is always there to help you and you're always able to progress further and further" and that "teachers always have time to go around and help individual students, which in some schools you don't see that a lot". He continued to describe teachers as reliable sources of help in the following way, "Say if I had a problem in math I'm not really understanding I would ask Ms. Goldberg and she would ask to come over and show me a couple of ways how she did it".

Christopher provided an example of his teacher who makes herself available both in school and after school hours through various methods of contact. This represented a genuine concern about the participant himself and his education. He explained this in the following:

> But our teacher, she takes the time to sit down with us if we need help or we're doing classwork, or we can email them and talk over the phone and that shows how much they care about us and our education.

Christopher was appreciative of his teacher's dedication to his education because he knew that it was a privilege that others did not necessarily have. As he shared "I really do appreciate that because, if you go to public school, I don't know but I really don't think you'll be able to do that in public school. I thank them for that." Because Christopher's teacher modeled the effort and dedication necessary to be academically successful and prioritized his needs, it reinforced his belief that he mattered and his education mattered. This further solidified the belief that he too should prioritize his education by putting forth the effort and dedication required to achieve.

Aaron's fifth grade elementary school teacher had formed a similar bond with her students that spanned three years because she moved with her class each year from third grade through fifth grade. She is the one who told him about Scholar Preparatory School and advocated for him to attend after she learned about it. He shared this experience with this teacher in the following:

> My 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade teacher (all the same teacher because she had done so well with us in the FCAT) she actually found the school and was actually trying to send a lot of the students from there to this school because she heard about it.

Aaron trusted his teacher's recommendation to attend the academy to such a great extent that he said, "I begged my Mom to let me come here. So now we're here."

Teachers were not the only employees at Scholar Preparatory School who made themselves available to support the participants. KJ described the support provided by the head of school at Scholar Preparatory School, "Like Mr. Makaio. He's always here, like late at night

after school hours sacrificing to help us, and especially with a scholarship." Bruce shared his experiences of receiving coaching from the head of school who exhorts the students to do well academically in preparation for future success. He described:

> Mr. Makaio because he pushes, pushes everyone to do their best because he really wants to see us go off to great high schools and then later on to great colleges and say if you're doing bad in grades or in school, he will come talk to you personally and then he will make sure that you learned what you have to do in order to be successful and just to keep moving forward.

The participants' teachers also demonstrated a concern for the participant's educational progress by serving ass as role models. Aaron's previous teacher taught him that teachers are individuals in whom you can depend on. So despite his experiences of his parents falling short of his expectations of parenthood, he remained open to building a relationship with his teachers at Scholar Preparatory School because of what had been modeled by his elementary teacher. Aaron acknowledged this by saying, "Teachers are a strong influence on me…" Aaron's examples of his teacher's support and influence were not based upon what they had done in the physical sense like giving extra help or even words of encouragement. His examples were based on how they embodied a "good man", an intelligent and responsible person; an exemplar of whom he desired to be in the future. He described this in the following way:

> My teacher Mr. Beasley, I like how he is as a man. And how he used, I like his intelligence level and I can see myself leading a life like his as an adult. It seems like he has everything together that an adult should have, and he just seems like a man you can look up to. Just the way he talks about his family and his kids and

> he handles his banking things, because he's history, so he gives interesting examples to relate to topics that we talk about in class, so just the way he talks about the things he does and the processes he takes to do the things that he does in his life is just a good thing for a man to have so, his student can look up to him.

The function teachers perform extended beyond being supportive and dependable role models, they also effectively instilled a passion for learning within the participants and a belief that other teachers could do the same. Some of the participants offered their take on how teachers *could* inspire their passion for a particular subject. Other participants shared examples of how their teachers *had* inspired their passion for a particular subject. Ashton described his teacher going in-depth on a particular topic in the following:

> In the 5th grade, my Science teacher Mr. Vanguard, a lot of students put in their farewell speech would get off topic or deep into the subject. In the 2nd semester we had astronomy and we would talk about it so much, whatever we were on we could go so deep into it and that's how 2 of my best friends in the 5th grade we said we wanted to be astronomers because we found it to be so interesting when we were studying it in the 5th grade that we wanted to actually go into the field.

John emphasized the importance of teachers moving beyond the prescriptive nature of the curriculum, connecting to students' interests, and demonstrating an enthusiasm for what they are teaching. The following statement demonstrated this:

> Yes, I think every teacher...it's not always like...in school you think it's always books, books, books. But it doesn't always have to be books, books, books. You can go into topics where--Like you may not really go into this topic like in a regular

> school but like you can go into a topic this time and it really interests the students and make it like a game for them to like where so if you're winning...you're not really winning, make it fun and don't make it boring. I see kids get discouraged and bored when they're just sitting in the class all day, watching a video or just reading straight from the book. And also, a teacher needs to be more energetic than just saying read Chapter 1 to 3 by yourself while he goes and just sits in the back.

Aaron shared a similar belief in that connecting class lessons to students' interests would foster a love for learning a given subject. He explained this process in the following way:

> So like I said about the smaller schools, if the teacher worked one on one with the student and tried to find out their interests and things like that then that's how they can make connections with the subject that will keep the student interested.

John believed that teachers could inspire their students to develop a love for learning a particular subject by including the students' interests such as musical preferences:

> With stuff people actually like. The kids I know, we like rap, so if you initiate your main connection with rap into English, then you'll really start getting the best out of kids. In History, if you just talk about World War II it's going to be boring, but if you talk about how World War II could prevent another war from happening.

Ashton shared that teachers could instill a love for learning in their students by including fun activities like games. He described this saying, "Well teachers they can do like more fun activities. And cause many—a lot of people like fun, having fun and games, and if they put more of their learning activities into games then students may love their classes…"

Christopher and Aaron provided specific examples of actions there teachers had

performed that inspired them to love for a particular subject. Christopher shared the following example:

> In the fifth grade, my Science teacher Mr. Randall, a lot of students put in their farewell speech, would get off topic or deep into the subject. In the second semester we had astronomy and we would talk about it so much, whatever we were on we could go so deep into it and that's how two of my best friends in the fifth grade, we said we wanted to be astronomers because we found it to be so interesting when we were studying it in the fifth grade that we wanted to actually go into the field.

Aaron explained a memorable action his history teacher had taken that inspired his interest in history as follows:

> Okay, you know how everybody likes food right? So Mr. Beasley, my history teacher, whenever he teaches and gives examples about how something happened, then he'll use food as an example because it keeps them tuned and he's moving around and he's energetic, asking questions, so we're actually interested in what he's saying. So finding things that interests the certain student is way that teachers can help them be more connected with the subject.

The key methods the participants' teachers used to instill a love for an academic subject area included: demonstrating a passion for subject (e.g., body language, movement, engaged students with questions); finding commonalities among students' interest (e.g., food) and implementing them into a lesson; breaking down ideas from abstract to concrete things students can visualize and relate to; finding out students' interests in order to make connections that keep student interested; and identification of methods to connect students to subjects.

Prior to attending Scholar Preparatory School, James and Michael had a common experience that helped instill in them a love for a particular subject: teachers who acknowledged their academic ability in a given area *early* (i.e., primary elementary) in their schooling experience. James described his experience of a teacher acknowledging his academic ability as follows:

> When I was in first grade we were like doing math as a class then a teacher called on me and I just gave the answer fast and she told the guidance counselor I was very good in math so then I thought that I was very good in math and that's when I started liking it…I was happy like I told my mom everything when I got home.

Michael's explanation was:

> My academic teachers from long ago in 2nd grade. Her name was Miss Nichols and she pushed me, because she was my English teacher, and she had made it where I am getting successful grades in English a lot back to back. I used to not be able to spell really well and now I'm probably the top speller in my class and grammar and other English techniques. She just pushed me harder than the other kids because she saw that I goofed off but I had a lot of potential. A lot of the kids in my class in 2nd grade just goofed off too much and probably aren't academically successful right now.

A common occurrence among the participants was that their teachers acknowledged their academic ability in a given area early in their schooling experience. The early acknowledgment of their ability established a secure foundation of academic confidence that these participants were able to build on. It also advised them of the journey ahead and gave them fuel to endure. Ultimately, this foundation prevented them from falling off the course of

attaining academic success. Scholar Preparatory School continued to nurture the participant's academic confidence by celebrating student achievement. Students who demonstrate mastery of the academically rigorous program at the academy are chosen to represent the school during "Success Talks".

"Success Talks" are bimonthly informational sessions that provide members of the community an opportunity to learn about Scholar Preparatory School and its mission to "inspire and empower" impoverished youth to become future leaders of their community. Success Talks are an opportunity for potential sponsors and partners to gain further insight into the program. Christopher explained that the selection of "Success Talks" representatives is based on "the students who are doing really good academically and behaviorally, they do get to do prep talks." Students meet with current donors to share their experiences at the academy. This was a rewarding experience for Christopher who shared his experience talking to donors as "me and another girl were asked questions and we had to answer them and had to talk about the school. I find that really interesting and fun."

Scholar Preparatory School provided participants with additional educational experiences beyond academic and enrichment courses. They offered a course that addresses relationship issues and sex education called Impact that met on a weekly basis. Impact provided the participants with guidance on the social, relational aspect of student's life. B.W. and John felt the class was influential in solidifying their beliefs in the benefit of a commitment in a relationship. Bruce W. attributed his desire to have a wife and children to Impact class. He recognized that in his experience the minimization of monogamy and glorification of being a womanizer is a common theme in his society. However, Impact provided him with insight into the fallacy of such behaviors. He explained:

> But yeah in classes like in Impact they teach us that a good man can keep a wife. They just have multiple women to show their insecurity and what you should try to do is be with one girl in your life like I don't know—it's hard to explain.

Bruce W.'s ending comment that "it's hard to explain" represented an internalized understanding and consensus of the ideals imparted by Impact. For this participant, the course had fulfilled the function of its name, it made an impact. John described Impact as "a sex education class that we take and it teaches us about the dangers of sex". John's use of the word danger suggested that he too has internalized the instruction of Impact. His acceptance of the ideals of Impact formulated an association of sex at this stage in his life with danger. Coupled with the example of his father having multiple women who mothered his children, it is likely that sex for John is a threat in direct opposition to the attainment of his goals. Further, he described a powerful life lesson conveyed by Impact, as follows:

> Well like in our Impact class, they said a strong man has one woman because he can control well not control her but he can...is strong enough to have one woman but a man who has multiple women is not strong enough because he needs more to control the others.

Scholar Preparatory School laid the groundwork for students to advance onward to leading college preparatory high schools and beyond. As Ashton explained, "Many graduates here who graduated from those schools, they became very successful, and I want to be like those alumni students from Scholar Preparatory School." Ashton had a close example of the future trajectory of the academy's graduates, he explained that his "cousin she used to go here and she's nearly graduating at the College Preparatory Day School". Scholar Prep had an established reputation of yielding high achieving students who could compete with leading applicants

because of the many alumni who went on to attend and successfully graduate from these high schools. As a result, the participants had their pick among the top high schools in the city. John shared his thinking process in selecting which high school he would attend after being accepted into more than one, in the following statement:

> [I selected St. Ignatius of Loyola] Because overall I think it's a better school. And Brighton is kind of like a private school, kind of like a public school, so kind of like a lottery system so any kid can get in there. So I chose Jesuit 'cause it's like a private school. And they send most of their kids off to colleges, good colleges.

The participants' ability to achieve academically was also supported by the fact that educational rigor doesn't end when the bell rings. The participants were required to complete homework outside of school and spent anywhere from 30 minutes to two hours doing so. Some also studied to prepare for tests and others spent time on the weekend reviewing concepts they did not completely understand during class. Christopher explained, "On academics outside of the school day? I spend maybe two hours." Aaron explained his process of spending time on academics outside of the school day as follows:

> Well about every day I have at least two hours of homework. So that's at least two hours of academic. And then after that I'm pretty much over academics for the day 'cause we've been here for 10 hours and you go home for two more hours to do homework. So I feel like I can do what I want to do as long as it's appropriate.

Aaron's demonstrated a need to justify that he merited doing what he desired after dedicating 12 hours to school and academics. As previously mentioned, Aaron felt he had a "lack of freedom" at Scholar Preparatory School. His ability to endure this experience appeared

to be fueled at least in part by knowing that when he got home he would be able to have the "freedom" he did not the previous 12 hours. Like Christopher and Aaron, Michael also spent approximately two hours per evening completing homework. He described his homework routine as:

> On an average day, I usually spend 2 hours at home getting all of my homework done depending if we have homework in all 4 subjects and maybe an extra subject or 2. Like English II or possibly Music, because there are some homework assignments in those. So I would say maybe 2 hours or 1 hour and 45 minutes. If we have a test, I would study for it. Mainly an hour since we get out so late… And then an extra 30 minutes for homework.

KJ spent more time completing homework than the other participants, dedicating about an hour to each of his core classes. He explained this process as, "outside of the school…umm most of the time I spend like four hours. One hour in English, one hour in history, one hour in math, and one hour in science." The four hours of homework were not completed in one session. KJ went to an afterschool program where he would "spend like two hours working on my homework and one hour playing." He would complete the remaining two hours of homework once he arrived home from the afterschool program.

Bruce spent no more than two hours completing academic homework. He had an additional weekly assignment from his father; although, he did not specify how long it took, he did say it was time consuming. He described this in the statement that follows:

> Let's see about an hour to two. Cause my dad well now he's doing this where every week I have to find something I'm interested in and do research on it and he wants me to write like a paper on what I learned. So that takes a while and also read a little.

James had a different experience completing homework than his fellow participants. He explained that "I don't like tend to do that much work outside of school" because "I can get most of it done in school so I just finish what I need to finish outside of school". And by outside of school James meant during his 20 minute ride home on the school bus. He went on to explain that he was able to complete his homework in this manner, having a sufficient amount of time because "like I work fast". James had a 4.0 GPA. So although he worked fast, he worked efficiently.

Ashton's experience completing work outside of school was similar to James. He explained that "Outside of the school day, I kind of don't spend time with academics 'cause it's like mainly the weekends is the time to relax and have fun." During the weekday, Ashton explained that he would "study like two nights before and then the night before. And I do my homework the day I get it assigned to me… at home and sometimes during my free time like at recess or student time." He would use his spare time at school to complete his homework "because sometimes I want to get my work done so I can do like practice for basketball, play games, and have like play my sports".

Bruce W. reported that he spent about an hour or two on homework but on most occasions, "I like to get homework done at school and stuff like yeah but sometimes we do have to study and sometimes we have a project so an hour or two."

He also explained that he would sometimes have the opportunity to complete homework in class when he finished his work early. He further expounded saying the following:

> …or if you want to do it during recess or like you shouldn't do this but like if you didn't do your homework last night and you want you get it done with your friends in the morning or something.

Although the participants presented varying durations and methods of completing academics outside of school, they all desired and believed they deserved freedom from the academic rigor they experienced for an upwards of 11 hours a day.

The 11 hour days served to be one of two chief complaints about Scholar Preparatory School, with the first being the aforementioned issues with teachers' inaccurate assumptions. James believed the long hours were the worst thing about the academy because they left him exhausted by the end of the day; he described this saying "Being here like from 7 to 5 it's kind of a long time so I'm sleepy when I get home." The mention of being sleepy when he got home indicated that there were things he desired to do when he got home that he did not have the energy to do. This explained why he felt so strongly about reserving his weekends for relaxation.

Unlike James, the fatigue did not occur at the end of the day for Michael, it took place before he even got out of bed. He explained this feeling as, "Just some days I wake up and I just don't feel like getting up and coming for 11 hours." Like James, John felt the long days deprived him from being able to do what he desired to after school. He specified this, "And the length of the day, I mean, I like it but when I get off of school I want to hang out with my friends but they have to be in the house by the time I get off." This inability to spend time with friends outside of school was likely to take a toll on those relationships; thus, making his relationships at Scholar Preparatory School all the more important.

Even KJ, who was typically enthusiastic about demanding experiences, named the long days as a criticism about Scholar Preparatory School. He indicated this by saying, "the long days 'cause we come here 'til like 7 to 5." Although Bruce was hesitant to provide negative feedback about the academy, he was unable silence his sentiments towards the hours. He stated: And the bad things I really would have to say there aren't any except for like its 11 hours a day. And that's long and tiring because at the end of the day you just want to relax a little.

The participants in this study had been students at Scholar Preparatory School for two to three years. Although they experienced fatigue, they were not faint; they had an end goal in mind and they refused to stop until they attained it.

Systems of support are required for the journey. All of the participants provided examples of people who were their systems of support. These individuals included parents, siblings, immediate and extended family members, friends, and community members and organizations, among others. Each individual provided support in various forms including challenging the participants to grow through competition and discipline, modeling behaviors of what to do and what not to do, providing words of wisdom and encouragement, and stability.

The structure of Scholar Preparatory School is such that it induced the forming of brotherly bonds. Aaron explained this process as follows:

> The difference between my other schools I've gone to and this one is that I have more fun here with my social circle because here they really create brotherly bonds. I'm with my class most of the time and so the brotherly bond that I have with my classmates is not something I've had in the past at other schools. Well we had bonds but they weren't as strong as they are here. One of the students just got expelled so everybody was sad, everybody cried from the brotherly bond that we created being with each other all day and

> if anybody would have gotten expelled at my other schools, unless they were really close, which was nobody, then I would have cried. I never would have cried if anybody had gotten expelled at those other schools because we really didn't have that bond.

John's friendships at Scholar Preparatory School represented stable relationships that would last a lifetime. He explained that "the friends you make here are worthwhile because those friends you will know forever". As previously suggested, the limited time he had for friends outside of school caused his friendships at school to be stronger. Bruce's school friends were provided him with both academic motivation and academic relief. He described this in the following statement:

> Well for us we mostly, well once we get our assignment all of us really don't want to have to do it during for homework at home so we really want to get our work done as fast as possible so we do our work. And then if it's like a joke that someone will be like "aye, dadada" we laugh and then we'll go back and then someone will still be talking about it at the same time.

Bruce's friends were able to explain concepts he did not understand even with the teachers assistance, in a way that he could; he explained this as "if she explained it and I really don't understand I will just ask a peer for help and then they would explain it in simpler terms". Bruce's friends were instrumental in his success with mastering the rigorous curriculum at the academy. Parents, such as Bruce's, desired that their children to build a positive peer network and ensured that this was the case by placing restrictions on which the participants could form relationships with. Bruce described his parents view on friendships as follows:

> Like I don't know any kids that's in my neighborhood because my parents did want me being in an environment around kids who really see school as something

> important. So the only times I like get to see kids around me is either at school or doing the weekends when I go over to my friends' house. The kids that I know their parents are very strict about what they do and usually whenever progress report or report cards come out here I would ask them like how they did and it's always good news.

Like James, some participants were faced with barriers to building a positive peer network. For James, he experienced this challenge particularly when he attended his neighborhood school where it was common for students to misbehave and get into trouble frequently. Consequently, hanging with the wrong crowd became the biggest challenge he had to overcome. The structure of the academy supported participants like James in forming relationships with likeminded individuals, youth of similar views in terms of prioritizing education and seeking academic opportunities. Consequently, most of the participants never received any backlash as a result of attending Scholar Preparatory School. Some of Ashton's friends had also joined him at the academy and were responsible for persuading him to apply. The friends from his former school who did not attend Scholar Preparatory School were also supportive of Ashton attending because they had wanted to go too.

Ashton responded to the question of what his peers thought about him attending the academy by saying, "Nothing because they were also about to go here but I think their parents said they can't, they have to go to the nearest school near their house. "The participants' ability to form relationships with individuals on one accord was taught by the modeling of their parents who too had formed relationships with likeminded, driven people. In B.W.' case, a family friend had attended Scholar Preparatory School prior to him applying and being accepted. Bruce W. also identified an alternative means for forming friendships outside of school due to the fact that

his parents did not allow him to “hang out”. He explained his experience of having friends in his cousin's neighborhood because the structure was more conducive to associating with neighbors as follows:

> In my cousin’s neighborhood I have a lot of friends there because they have the type of neighborhood where everyone lives by each other pretty much but they don't really is not really like a problem or anything like that we still all get along and have fun.

Bruce W.’s implications were that within his own neighborhood he could not form such friendships due to the potential disagreements that could lead to greater problems, which his parents were attempting to shelter him from. Michael described his friends at school as being a supportive, tight knit, social circle both in and outside of school. He provided the following details of this:

> I have a lot of friends that care about me and we socialize a lot. And we do a lot of things outside of school like go to the movies together, we plan movie nights. But it's usually just the 7th grade, we don't like the other grades with us.

He also shared that the older children in his neighborhood were supportive of him. He described this saying, “Other kids in my neighborhood, they say, because I live around a few older kids who didn't really have the chance to go to school, so they say it's a good opportunity and that I should take it”.

Similarly, John believed that his true friends respected the fact that he goes to a good school because he was getting a good education. He explained this saying, “I feel like the friends that care if I get a good education are your true friends because they really care about you.”

Several of the participants had siblings who they described as being some of the most

supportive people in their lives. From providing advice, to encouraging or celebrating their successes, to holding participants accountable for their actions because they were watching them; siblings were effective systems of support. The support James' siblings provided was their consistent presence that gave him the security of knowing that no matter what he would face in life his siblings would be by his side. "Umm whenever we do something [my siblings] they're just like there. I'm always with them so…" "Yeh they used to [come to my games] when I played and yes [they cheered for me]." James had difficulty describing the support provided by his siblings in response to an open-ended question, so I followed up with closed ended questions to elicit a response. Although he readily named his siblings as individuals who have supported him the most, he was limited in his description of their support.

This is not to say that James' siblings were not supportive, instead they're support was difficult for him to put into words because the support was not always given in words but in actions. For the actions that were demonstrated in verbal form, he was able to express the experiences. James described the advice his 18-year-old brother gave him saying, "It's like… it's just like if a subject comes up then [my brother] he'll say something but it's not like out of the blue." Similarly, he was able to describe his older sister's support without follow-up questioning; he shared saying, "Yes she's 22 whenever she hears that I've done something good she'll call and congratulate me and tell me to keep up the good work."

Like James, Ashton equated the presence of his 15-year-old brother at various events he was a part meant that he was one of the most supportive people in James' life. He described his brother's support as follows:

> My older brother, since he's the only brother – the only sibling that lives down here in Tampa, he also supports me for my games, my showcases. And he supports

me in the same stuff that my dad do. It's mainly my mom, my dad, and my brother.

Ashton's brother was as a reliable source as his mother and father when it came to demonstrating interest in Ashton's life and support in his endeavors. While James and Ashton provided examples of how others supported them through their acts, Bruce's example of sibling support was based on his actions. Bruce identified his three- year-old brother as one of the individuals who has supported him the most. He described this as follows:

> Then for my baby brother like I want to show like I want to be the role model for him so he supports me because for me I just want to support him and just show him like what to do and be the big brother that he wants to look up to someone who he could either be as good as or even better.

Bruce's desire to be a role model to his younger brother was likely inspired by his own experience of his father's absence for a period of time during his early years. He explained the longing he had for his father's physical presence and how much his father meant to him even in his absence in the following way, "I used to miss him a lot because even when I would call him at the end of the call I would usually start to cry because I really love my dad". So Bruce endeavored to do everything in his strength to ensure that his younger brother had a constant example of manhood.

The role of parents in supporting the participants' experiences of academic achievement was evidenced first and foremost through their provisions of stable home environments that were safe, reliable respites for the family despite financial status or community locale. The participants all named their mothers as someone who had supported them most, often citing the fact that she "provides for me and my brother and sister", "she's always around there and she's always there for me", and "because my mom, since she's a single parent, she does what she can for me" as

examples of her support." The participants cited examples of their parents providing for them beyond fundamental necessities to include funding their hobbies and extracurricular activities, such as musical instruments, sports equipment like John noted "my Mom supports me when I need something for baseball or something else, she'll get it for me", and as Ashton described:

> When I was younger, I used to, when I used to go to the doctor, the stethoscope, that was a pretty cool tool to me. And one time, my dad had bought it and I used to listen to my heart and lungs, and my brother's and my sister's, and my brother's heart.

Most parents "always [had] to work" to secure these provisions; however, the participants respected their parents' strong work ethic and the example they provided. And as KJ explained, "my parents taught me how to work hard and to be who I want to be." Some parents also used the necessity to spend so much time working as an example of why furthering their education was important so they would not have to work so hard "just to make ends meet". This is similar to the common practice of the participants' parents who were open about the mistakes they made in their lives and shared them with the participants as "life lessons". The parents also demonstrated patience and understanding when the participant's made mistakes, James gave an example of her support; "whenever like I get in trouble like she's just like tells me not to let it happen again; she was understanding of what happened".

The participants' parents were their sons biggest advocates and sought out better educational opportunities for them. Of the parents who did not actively enforce that their son attended Scholar Preparatory School, they had obliged to their attendance because they knew that it was an opportunity that would prepare them for lifelong success. Furthermore, their ancestors were not typically afforded such opportunities for success; for this reason the participants'

parents taught their sons about African American history. For example, Michael shared, "my Mom and my Dad tell me a lot of things dealing with African-American history" and B.W. explained, "Well [I learned about African American] from my dad because he's a person who really knows about it so anytime he'll see something happening he always talks about it."

Allowing their sons to attend the academy was a commitment on their behalf as well due to the fact that many of the parents transported their sons to and from school and all parents were required to complete 25 hours of service at the school each year. Consequently, they had an active presence at the school. Most parents took a proactive role in "pushing" their children to meet the expectations of excellence prescribed by Scholar Preparatory School and/or through parent assigned projects. B.W.' passion for learning was revealed when "…my mom she had me, when around third or second grade she started making me read a lot and then when I started learning different stuff." Moreover, the parents often explained the importance of tasks and future benefits. Examples of this kind of support are presented in the following excerpts from each of the nine participant interviews:

KJ

> Umm my dad pushes me not like pushes me but he helps me when I need help with everything he's the one. Like if I need help with like math he'll be there umm like he's always there he helps me like last night he came to one of my games. Umm like he's always helpful. Umm, he'll make me do my homework. Like if I put it down he'll tell me to put it back up and I'm not going to go to sleep until I finish it. So he's always there to like enforce me to work.
>
> My mom is always there for me. Like she pushes me to do my work she pushes me to do what I want. Like she always tells me about her past and how she didn't

have a chance to do that. How I'm lucky that I have them to help me 'cause like when she was growing up her mom moved to America and her dad while she was staying in Haiti. So she tells me how I'm lucky and how I need to work to get where I want to be. Like sometimes she just gives me a look and I already know what she means. So I'll just like do it.

Bruce

I'm usually on my laptop and [my father] he says I spend a little too much time and I need to spend more time like probably being around the family and talking more. So then in order for him to like make me do something useful with the time I'm on the laptop he gives me this assignment…my dad well now he's doing this where every week I have to find something I'm interested research on it and he wants me to write like a paper on what I learned.

Well one major thing is having the parents I have right now they really look out for me and they push me in order to get the best in order to be the best that I can and they always teach me like say if I get in trouble my dad he will always talk to me and tell me like why this was wrong and show me like further in life where actually doing the right thing could actually save you or even help you out.

To me school is very important. That's what I really focus on most of the time because for me, my parents they really didn't finish high school and they stress that on me because they've shown me like how life is and how they have to work hard in order to just keep on moving in life so they want me to get a really good education so I don't have to be as much struggle as they are.

James

My step dad umm he's like a good influence like he's teaching me lessons…'cause he was pretty much like me when he was younger. Umm because he also like grew up here so he tries to like get me to learn from his mistakes. Whenever he introduces me to like someone he always calls me like a genius then that like motivates me like to do better. Because he was like real good at baseball. He had scouts watching him. So when he was17 he had a child so then that dream went away. He had to care of the child. Umm like it helped me like understand better.

If you're like getting in trouble he'll like call us in the room then he'll like talk to us like he did everything that we did so we can't be sneaky or anything like that he already lived it before.

Christopher

"My Dad comes to school and he does things like the Parent/Teacher conferences, he donates things (my Mom does too) but more so my Dad. And he gets involved with my school more than my Mom because she works."

Well my Mom cares about my grades and she'll help me if I need it. She cares enough that...My parents, they hold me to a high standard, so when I did get those C pluses on my report card, I got punished for it. Because they know I can do better.

My parents saw that I was making good grades at other schools and they wanted a more challenging curriculum for my sister and I so she brought me here and I did the entrance test. And I made it in the summer session and school.

Well my parents bought me a drum set at the age of 4. And I've always had

and have always been playing on it. They always told me that I just kind of picked up my sticks and started playing.

Aaron

So my Mom didn't want to take me out at first, she wanted to keep me at our neighborhood middle school, because we live all the way in another city. Every day she brings me here. The school's McDonald. And my stepmom and Dad and rest of my family members didn't want me to go there so I begged my Mom to let me come here. So now we're here.

'Cause even though they don't do that, they still keep me in a good environment. There's nowhere I can really see to go in a bad way. Those things have never really came to mind or I never really thought about doing anything bad. I don't know how "I got away from them; I guess my environment and not having any other opportunities to."

Ashton

I do think about my behavior more now because when I was younger my mom she used to tell me that school—even though you have good grades, if your behavior is not so good, these schools are not going to accept you. And so now I understand that more and I stay out of more trouble and I learned my lesson.

For example, one day, I had made – we had made each other upset, one morning, and she was very upset with me. Then later, she had – I don't know what she had bought me, but I think it was for Christmas. She had bought me some new pairs of shoes, and she was apologizing, I was apologizing to her. She spoils me. She spoils me.

Ashton continued:

> My mom, she says she's borderline crazy, and for every little thing I get in trouble for, it gets her mad, and I know I have to not do that to like, be good. And be on her good side.
>
> I had gotten a bad grade, and it brought me down to a C+. My mom was saying we don't do C+'s, and so I had to study hard for the next test, and I had got like a 96 on that test. She started telling me to get my act together last year, when I started attending here. But every morning my mom drops me off to school. Yes. My mom, she's the main one who taught about it [school work] being important.

B.W.

> Because umm…my father he always is talking to me anytime he sees that I might be slipping or I might be going on the wrong…he always wants to try and help me out to get back on the right path. And my mom she always uhh supports me. And my dad he's always working and if he can't make it she makes sure she's always there like whatever I'm doing. And my mom she will like help also with any projects you need help on, any homework. Umm she does that with like pretty much anyone in the family. It's kind of funny cause like everyone knows she's pretty good at math. So my cousins and stuff they will always be going to her asking her to help them with their homework and stuff.
>
> But before coming to Scholar Preparatory School in the middle my dad he made this analogy but it was kind of like funny but at the same time it was kind of true. Basically he said that umm he said that umm "everyone knows Joker but at the same time everyone knows Superman". I mean "knows Batman", my mistake. But

what he's basically saying is that they know Joker for doing bad and they Batman for doing good and you want to be the person that they know for doing good and be funny at the right times and stuff like that.

It was mainly because I was getting bored and my mom saw that so when she found out about Scholar Preparatory School she decided that if I went here I would really get challenged and wouldn't be bored as much.

My mom helps me with stuff like Spanish projects, like right now I have a Spanish project I have to plan this trip to Venezuela and then I don't really know how to plan trips so she's like okay first son you have to go look on Travelocity for plane tickets and things.

Michael

My Mom really helped me a lot with this because that used to be her motto. If you can believe it, you can achieve it. She supports me because she says anything that I want to do I can do it and she'll help me achieve it.

My Mom found out and then she pulled me from my other school and had me come here. That's why my Mom made me come here because I had the opportunity to be skipped 4 times but she said no because she wanted me to have the full math experience. She says math is important.

My Dad helps me by transforming me and helping me to become a man so one day I can take care of my family. And he says whatever I want to do with my life I should be able to do it if I want to.

John

> Like he [my father] wants me to be better than him and so he's the foundation and the person that I want to be like so I have that line where this is what it is and this is how it is, but you want to be better than him.
>
> What clicked was that I started to--when you first start doing good. My Mom said she was going to get me something if I start doing good. So at least you have that motivation to go get it, then you'll go get it. It's like someone throwing $100 in your face on a fishing pole and tell you to go get it. You're going to try all day.

Two of the participants revealed a vulnerability induced by their parents' shortcomings: Bruce and Aaron. For Bruce, his father's absence for a substantial amount of time during his formative years was impactful, he shared "I spent probably like say about six or eight years without my dad."; however, he still had contact with him via telephone and visits where his father gave him the charge of "doing good for me". So even in his absence, Bruce felt connected to his father when he would fulfill this charge to do good. Bruce revealed:

> Well for me I actually try to work harder just to like because I was always a person who wanted to please my parents so for me when my dad came for me expectation was raised so for me I had to work harder and that just pushed me even more.

"What I really look for is recognition from them," Aaron described his desires of receiving recognition from his parents, acknowledgement for being academically successful.

As a result he felt insecure because he did not feel he had the support of his parents in achieving lifelong success, such as when he described:

> I do have insecurities and sometimes it holds me back from doing certain stuff. I might seem like a person with a whole bunch of confidence but inside sometimes I feel insecurities. And I think that comes from a lack of gratitude. Like when somebody says good job or showing that you did something good. Throughout my life my Mom she wasn't really the type of person to say oh good job, etc. My Dad is not much of a talker so he never say oh good job, etc. And I'm not really around anyone else. And my stepmom she's always done that for me, but I feel that part of it comes from not getting it from my blood parents.

Aaron recalled an experience where he was seeking affirmation that he could achieve his dreams of becoming a musical icon and the response he received from his mother did not reflect his concept of how a mother should respond. He shared:

> I said, Mom do you think I can make it? I remember this day like it was yesterday. I was in 4th grade and we were watching the Grammy's. I don't know why, don't judge me, I've always had this thing for Beyoncé. And I forgot what she was doing on the TV but I said, Mom you think I can make it? Just seeing her success made me ask my Mom. And she said, it's one-in-a-million. A parent isn't supposed to say that. That's what was going through my mind at first. A parent is never supposed to say the chances are one in a million. You're supposed to say I know you can do it. She said, it's one in a million, but I still think you can make it.

Yet Aaron was able to recognize that she was being supportive "in her own little way".

Despite his mother's shortcomings he knew that she cared about him and believed in his ability to achieve as suggested by his statement of "but even though she doesn't give me that confirmation and stuff I still know that's what she wants from me and she still mentions how she believes in me and how I can do anything I want to do."

Aaron interpreted his parents' lack of recognition to mean that his parents believed he was independent enough to stand on his own and did not need to be recognized for doing what he had already proven to be capable of. He expressed his uncertainty as to why his parents did not show him recognition or the sources of their lack of recognition as follows:

> And I don't know if that's why my Dad does that or well I would assume. But I don't know my Mom does the same thing, even though I'm her only child. She thinks I'm more independent. But I still need that recognition. I don't know where that comes from with her. I got to find out.

As the interview progressed and I honed in on the meaning behind this experience for Aaron, it was evident that he respected the fact that his parents were careful to shelter him from potential negative societal pressures and opportunities to fall off course, a factor that supported his ability to achieve. Yet he wanted to make it clear that it was unacceptable. He described this as follows:

> 'Cause even though they don't do that, they still keep me in a good environment. There's nowhere I can really see to go in a bad way. Those things have never really came to mind or I never really thought about doing anything bad. I don't know how I got away from them, I guess my environment and not having any other opportunities to.

Due to the fact that Aaron had always fulfilled their expectations of him academically

and behaviorally, his achievement was assumed and not celebrated. Aaron recognized his parents' approach but rejected it when he said, "That's the thing, they know and expect it but you're still supposed to show recognition." Aaron came to this conclusion after observing the achievements of his peers celebrated by their parents. He could not recall his father ever saying "good job" and although his mom said good job, Aaron's phrasing and tone he spoke in when describing her congratulations suggested that he believed it was either disingenuous or spoken as afterthought. He also described her actions that indicated he was not the focus of her attention despite his desire for her to be. Aaron's mom was physically present and emotionally absent. He described this experience in the following way:

> I mean, my Mom, she's the type of person— I don't know what type of person she is She's always on her phone and Instagram, etc. She's a good Mom, she'll feed me, take care of me, make sure I'm ok, but that's not the only thing that I need. When I get straight A's, most kids their parents do something for them. The most I got when I got straight As was my Mom doing this, Oh good job. And my Dad didn't say anything.

Aaron also described his mother's egocentric behavior of complaining about transporting him to Scholar Preparatory School and initially not wanting him to attend the academy at all due to the distance. This also contributed to his experience of not being recognized. Scholar Preparatory School was Aaron's life; it represented his current academic achievement and his future achievements. He described his mother's experience as follows:

> [My mom used to work closer to Scholar Preparatory School] which was harder for her to go there and then come back home, because she doesn't go to work until around 9 or 10. She does hair. That was harder for her I guess, but now that she

> works [closer to where we live] it's easier. She wanted me to be over there so she wouldn't have to take that drive period. Honestly I feel like parents should want the best thing for their children no matter what you have to go through. So even that drive everyday she shouldn't be complaining about, because that's the best thing for my education.

However, he also demonstrated hope in his mother's unspoken sentiments when he said, "they know it's a good things for my education but my mom still sometimes complains about the drive or whatever. Hopefully she knows it's the best thing for her to do."

Aaron discovered a pattern and a source of his father's lack of recognition; his own childhood upbringing was plagued with absenteeism of both his parents for a number of years. Aaron described the feeling of being replaced by his younger brother as his father's sidekick. But when he observed his younger sister replacing his younger brother, he was able to recognize the pattern and figure out the source. Aaron described:

> I know. I feel like maybe at one point, when I can't remember, they used to say oh good job and be happy about everything. But my mom said, my Dad, I noticed, my mom said when I was a kid, like he still does this every time somebody says my name he smiles...any of his kids he smiles or whatever. When I was little, I always used to be with my Dad, whenever you saw my dad, I was always with him. But the thing is, if you're going to be like that, do it when I can remember. Because I can't remember when I'm 1, 2, and 3. Or 4 and 5. She said it happened, she said he did it until I was 5 and then he had another son. But that was with my stepmom and I guess he thought since I was older and independent because he grew up without his mother. His grandma raised him until he was about 9 or 10

and then that's when his Mom started raising him.

Although the disappointment remained, Aaron's ability to find the source of his father's parenting limitations gave him confidence that he would be able to be a better father to his future children. He depicted his aspirations for fatherhood:

> I'm going to be open with my kids, silly so they can say anything they have to say to me. Give them their support or recognition so they can be confident and just the type of parent where you can come to me if you have any problems or that type of stuff.

Aaron's unfulfilled desires to receive parent recognition resulted in him seeking recognition from external sources. He was one of the only participants to identify and give specific examples of injustices related to being Black and male. This was possibly the case because while he was seeking external recognition he discovered that it is likely that he may never receive it from external sources being a Black male in America. He revealed this as follows:

> Every day on the news you see this person shot that Black person. This person no matter what race. You never see on the news, oh this Black person did something good. This Black person went out to the community and donated this and did this. What they're creating as an image or commercializing as an image of us is bad. And they don't really talk about when-- I'm not going to say don't talk about it, but they don't really commercialize it when a white person does something. I can't think of an example right now but--If a white person does that, oh they're crazy and that's the end of the story. If a Black person does something, oh they're so horrible. It's on Nancy Grace and it's on MSNBC. Whenever a Black person does something, it's there, but

> whenever a white person oh they're crazy. It might be a little piece on Nancy Grace but she ain't going to talk about it for 5 days, how she usually does when somebody Black does something bad.

Aaron's description of the negative depictions of African Americans in the media revealed similar sentiments as did his criticism of his parents' parenting approaches: lack of recognition for accomplishments (i.e., positive contributions to society). Yet Aaron continued to dream, persevere, and achieve. His resolve to accomplish what he set out to accomplish was inspired by what he lacked (i.e., recognition) and fueled by what he desired (i.e., parent recognition).

Several of the participants' fathers were also their sons' role models. Demonstrating examples of manhood that included: providing for their families, creating a cooperative family dynamic, modeling competitive nature, setting expectations that their son would be better than him, and being the foundation and a starting point that they could grow from. The participants' fathers as role models was captured by a statement made by John, ""…my Dad he's my role model because he's everything I want to be but better."

Although Ashton's mother and father were not together, he still had an example of a "stable family" unit. His father remarried and had two additional children. Ashton's father provided him with a prototype of how he desired his future family to be: cooperative. He attributed his desire to have a wife and kids to his father, "Well, that came from my dad. He had a stable—he had a stable family with my stepmom and my brothers and sisters and they cooperated how I would want my wife and kids to cooperate." Ashton was certain he would be a husband and a father, as was evident in his statement, "My thought is that my wife and children *will* be smart…" This was belief was derived from the example his father provided.

Although Ashton did not live with his father on a daily basis but visited him on the weekends, his father still made an effort to be involved. His father attended his performances and games and found a way to make him feel better during time of disappointment. He described these examples as:

> And my dad, since he has my two brothers and my sister, he tries, he tries to make it to stuff I have – what's it called. Like, shows and like, basketball games, and my football games. He tries to make it to them. "And sometimes, my dad, if my brother can't come, my dad, he'd say that he's not coming, and he'd surprise me.

Ashton empathized with his father's various responsibilities and was appreciative of the attempts he made to be present, even if they were not always successful. For Ashton, it truly was the thought that counted.

Like Ashton, John's father also provided an example of having a family, being actively present in their lives, and providing the emotional and financial security they needed. John provided the following description of his objective of having a family of his own:

> You always reaching to be better and like if your dad is great, you want to be greater. So your kids want to be greater than you. And when that happens in each family, they must be doing good, on the up and up.

John's conviction to do better than his father was connected to the notion that each generation should be in a continuous state of progress. He described his transition from being an only child, who was self-centered and accustomed to routinely having his way, to it being "all about them". John explained:

> I actually care about where they go and stuff like that. So I might get on my brother about something, but I do it because I want him to be better than me. I know that

he's going to make it somewhere.

The belief of generational progress was such a motivating force that John had already begun to ponder aspirations of progress for his unborn children, "me and my dad have these talks, where he said he did this in high school, so I'm going to do that 10 times better at my high school just to show you. Hopefully my kids, will have the same motivation to do better than what I did."

Like John's father, Michael's father also taught and demonstrated the importance of love and togetherness of family. This inspired Michael's desires to one day have a family of his own and to be financially secure in order to provide for them. He described this goal as follows:

> Because I want to be able to take care of my family. I want to be able to have a beautiful family and be able to support them without having to worry about if something's going to be paid on time or any other things.

This was modeled through the family's nightly practice of sharing expressions of gratitude praying together, which translated into Michael frequently praying independently. He described this process as, "I pray on my own a lot. Me and my family we gather nightfall and we pray together and we say what we're thankful for throughout the day." He also attributed his spiritual growth to his father, stating:

> He helps me by telling to read the Bible more and to help those in need because that's how I get my blessings. So he tells me a lot, if I get my blessings, good things can happen to me in the future.

Michael's father taught him the importance of prayer, reading the Bible, and blessing others as a means of securing future stability. He accepted this spiritual guidance and ranked spiritual activities such as prayer and attending church significant importance in his life. Michael's experience had been that his "God-given talents" are what had carried him thus far and he had no

doubt that they would carry him to his end goal of lifelong success.

Two of the participants, KJ and Bruce, shared examples of their fathers in the role of coach. A coach "teaches and trains the members of a sports team and makes decisions about how the team plays during games" (Merriam-Webster, 2015). These fathers prepared their sons for the game of life by "pushing" them, helping them, addressing the participant's shortcomings while reiterating their expectations, and supporting them in their extracurricular endeavors. Bruce described his father's role as coach as follows:

> My dad because he just pushes me even if I get in trouble he never ignores the fact if I mess up on one little thing like even say if I don't hear what someone gets right and I don't hear something he'll talk to me and say make sure.

KJ's father required that he stretch beyond his optimal level of productivity by requiring that he complete his homework even after an 11 hour day of school and 2 hours of extracurricular activity. His coaching did not only occur at the sidelines observing and commenting on his performance, his father was an active player in the game, providing assistance when necessary. KJ explained the role of his father as coach as:

> Umm my dad pushes me not like pushes me but he helps me when I need help with everything he's the one. Like if I need help with like math he'll be there umm like he's always there he helps me like last night he came to one of my games. Umm like he's always helpful. Umm, he'll make me do my homework. Like if I put it down he'll tell me to put it back up and I'm not going to go to sleep until I finish it. So he's always there to like enforce me to work.

The previous highlighting of the participants' father's support is not to suggest that the mothers' roles in supporting their academic achievement was not of equal or even greater

importance, in the cases of the participant's raised by single mothers. In fact, each of the participants noted the instrumental role their mother played in their lives and her active presence in allowing them to experience academic achievement. During the first interview, B.W. described his father as helping him "stay on the right track" so during the second interview he was asked to quantify the percentage he attributed to his father for staying on the right track, he initially said 40% and his mom 20% but when I repeated the percentages to check for clarity, he changed it saying "No, I guess my dad and my mom are both 30 and 30". This shift upon hearing that different rates suggested that Bruce W. did not want to minimize her involvement because she was less vocal in terms of her feedback—father gave him advice and mother was action oriented—seeking out better schooling opportunities and attending his basketball games.

From seeking out better educational opportunities for them, to working long hours to provide for their needs and wants, to supporting them by providing assistance with homework or projects and ensuring that they completed their work. The mothers of these participants took an active role in their son's academic success. As James professed, ""I wouldn't even like be here like if it wasn't for her". He also attributed his ability to withstand the pervasiveness of the dismal trajectories of African American males to his mother, "umm well I listen like but I listen but I'm not like into it umm because my mom raised me better so…"

In addition to the support provided by loved ones, the presence of a community organization or community culture that helped the participant develop a passion. Some research studies have suggested that involvement in extracurricular activities is positively correlated with academic achievement (Darling 2005; Durlak and Weissberg 2007; Fredricks and Eccles 2006b; Mahoney et al. 2005). All of the participants of this study were actively involved in enrichment activities at school and most were involved in activities outside of school including sports

teams, community organizations, and music activities such as band and chorus. This provided them with an opportunity to develop a passion for a given hobby, which exercised character traits of self- discipline, commitment, and confidence. Ashton included his involvement in sports as a determining factor of self-satisfaction, he shared, "I'm most satisfied with myself in my academics and the sports I play. "Because sports, they teach me to be disciplined, and to build character."

James' passion for football began developing when he was a toddler and his mom signed him up for a flag football team and then signed him up for the next level of tackle football when he became of age. His passion for this sport was further fostered through playing football with the older children in his community. He enthusiastically described this experience, with a smile and laughter, as follows:

> Like in my neighborhood we used to play flag football every day, like we used to play tackle in the grass with the big kids too. I was like 5 or 6. Umm 'cause I would like get the ball and everybody would try to tackle me and I would just slide right through them because I was so small.

It was evident that this was meaningful memory that fueled his confidence in his ability to face perceived complex obstacles. Christopher was a musician who played the drums at piano for his church. He described the confidence building experience of playing instruments since he had a natural act for doing so. He explained this experience as follows:

> I feel most satisfied because, the way I am, I pick up things easily and I learn how to play them. And I feel that the more things I hear, the more things I pick up, the more things I play, the more things I implement into my regular playing. And people tend to say that I'm a good musician so that makes me feel good about

myself.

KJ's hobby was basketball. He became passionate about it when he first came to the U.S. and started playing with an older cousin and then began playing at community centers. He recognized that he was improving, which built his confidence to try out for a competitive team. For KJ, basketball presented a challenge that he rose to each time he picked up the ball and with each game he won; it reinforced his ability to rise to the occasion and also helped him develop an appreciation for challenges. KJ described this experience as:

> So when I came to America my cousin, like right now he's at HCC getting ready to transfer to USF. Umm he was like 16 and he helped me like he was the one that taught me how to play and everything. And that's when yeh I think in like 6th grade I started going to the place called Vision Center, it's right there, and started playing. Like it was fun. I like being challenged. And that's when I seen that I was getting better and better I tried out for an AAU team and that's how I met my coach. And that's when like I just like loved it for like the beginning since when I started playing.

KJ provided further insight into the positive impact that his involvement in extracurricular activities had in his description of the support his AAU basketball coach provided:

> He helps me a lot. Like he's always there. Like I'm always at the boys and girls club. He's always there. Um like with Spanish especially this year since he's Spanish. He helped me with Spanish homework and everything. He even changed our plays to Spanish plays so that when we call out plays it's in Spanish. Umm he's like he like helps me. He pays for like he pays since my mom and dad

> wouldn't be able to go with me sometimes he pays for the hotels for me and he's like very helpful.

The participants' experiences of success beyond the academic domain contributed to the confidence they had in their ability to be holistically triumphant. Consequently, they approach every area of their lived experience with an assurance that they would prosper.

Some of the participants learned to identify and embrace alternative forms of support in order to achieve. The commonly used African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child" rang true for the participants. These participants identified individuals beyond their parents who supported them in their ability to exceed expectations. For James, "the teachers, friends, the principal…they are willing to help if you need help" was the best thing about Scholar Preparatory School because he had the support needed to master the rigorous curriculum. Christopher proudly described a family member who was readily available to provide him with academic in the following excerpt:

> My Aunt's a professor at Missouri State University, and she will give me help any time I need it. Whatever it is, I can call her and ask her what it is that I'm having trouble with and she will help me on the spot if she's not too busy with work.

Aaron's aunt's presence in the academia and her active role in providing him with assistance as he took on the rigor of the academy, made him with all the more assured that he too would one day attain the same level of achievement.

Aaron found refuge in his stepmother and mother's boyfriend who served as surrogate parents only for the specific role of providing the attention and recognition he was missing from his parents. He described his surrogate father as, "Erim, that's my Mom's boyfriend. He's very supportive. He's like the type of parent that I say I'm going to be". He described his surrogate

mother in the following manner:

> Then it would be my stepmom next because she's the same way as my Mom's boyfriend and she's just very nice. People always say how I seem more like her son than her kids are to them because we're more kindred spirits. (I just like those vocabulary words) But my stepmom always supports me and I can always talk to her about anything. It's just the bond we have.

Aaron received additional support from his aunt who stepped in to transport him to and from the academy when it became too much for his mother, "…towards the middle of 7th my Aunt started picking me up to take me home because she lives [near us]." Aaron also looked to other sources for the attention he was missing from his parents. He described this process by saying, "And I was never really the jealous type. I still got my attention from other people because I'm my Mom's only child and my grandma, I'm her oldest so I'm always going to get that attention". The fact that he highlighted not being the jealous type may be an indication that in fact he was jealous of the attention his father provided to his younger siblings and the time his mother spent on social media outlets instead of with him.

Yet, Aaron did not remain in a dormant state of wallowing in jealous, but recognized that he had alternative sources of the very thing he was envious of and looked to the sources to fulfill his need, even though they did not resolve his need, they satisfied it. Like Aaron, Ashton "the village" stepped in to transport him to school, "I get to and from school by my mom and sometimes by my friend. My friend's dad or mom sometimes he has to drop me off to my mom's job if she has to work late". Individuals also stepped in to provide support beyond emotion and transportation, they also provided financial support and encouragement. B.W. described his great grandmother's assistance in the following excerpt:

> Yeh she's always been really supportive with me. She always like…if I have a chess tournament. She'll always be like you better just flat out destroy all of them or something. Or even before the D.C. trip she gave me money or any time I get straight As she always is like the happiest one out of like everyone, well it seems like.

John also described the financial support provided by his grandmother related to his obligations at Scholar Preparatory School and extracurricular involvement, ""Grandma, like if I need something for a bake sale or something we have here, she'll go and get it for me… [She] gets me things for baseball". The participants' examples of support from "the village' fell on a broad spectrum, which corroborates with the proverb's notion of the involvement of multiple people to being required (i.e., "takes") for a child's nurturing.

The words of wisdom provided by the adults in their lives did not fall upon deaf ears; the participants not only listened in the moment but committed these words to memory. They later retrieved them during times of difficulty and used them as sources of motivation. In addition to words of wisdom, the participants gained inspiration from other sources such as documentaries and from the successes and mistakes of self and others.

These words of wisdom and experiences are described in the following experts for the named participants:

Michael

"My Mom really helped me a lot with this because that used to be her motto. If you can believe it, you can achieve it"

It was one day where I was just thinking about it and then I was watching this documentary and it was based on a true story and there was this lawyer and he was working on a lot of things

dealing with the law, but not divorce cases. And then he ended up killing a person, he didn't mean to, but it was a hit-and-run. And at the end he ended up depending on drugs and alcohol for the rest of his life and he ended up dying.

KJ:

"That's why my parents always say start now and finish strong."

"Just like my principal always tells us to get the little things right so when the bigger things come it will be easier for you to get them right."

"…like our principal always tells us to finish harder than you started."

James:

"Like get the little things right umm because like once you get the little things right then the bigger things will come easier for you…our principal he says it like often umm that like stuck with me."

Ashton:

I learned to get little things right, because if you get the little things right, they'll open bigger things for you. Like, in your path or in your future. Our former eighth graders, when they gave a speech at convocation, saying that getting the little things right will open bigger opportunities for you in the future.

B.W.:

"When you're second guessing yourself whether something is right or not then you probably shouldn't be doing it."

"Just as Mr. Makaio always tells us 'get the little things right 'cause once you get the little things right it's almost like a trickle effect and the big things come easier'"

Basically he said that umm he said that umm "everyone knows Joker but at the same time everyone

knows Superman". I mean "knows Batman", my mistake. But what he's basically saying is that they know Joker for doing bad and they Batman for doing good and you want to be the person that they know for doing good and be funny at the right times and stuff like that.

John:

> If you believe it, you can achieve it [means] that they should never give up and never let other people get into their head. In spite of what other people say, if you believe, you can achieve what you want.

The majority of these excerpts were in the form of words of wisdom imparted upon them by the adults in their lives. The content of each quote inspired growth by providing insight on the methods to achieve success such as getting the little things right, believing in one's ability to achieve, and finishing strong. James gave the following example of getting the little things right, "Like ...during when I'm doing the homework cause like once you do the homework then the tests with be like easier once you start doing it and seeing it." KJ provided an example of finishing harder than you start ""The way I'm trying to say like umm sometimes like you just try to take a break from the work because you've been working hard and you think you deserve a break but like now like our principal always tells us to finish harder than you started. So like you can't get lazy you gotta finish harder than you started." The participants were able to identify experiences where the words of wisdom were actualized in their own lives, which suggested that these words were effective in inspiring them.

The participants embodied an inclination to learn as reflected by their conscious efforts to learn from successes and mistakes, not only their own but that of others. Christopher had developed a practice of identifying individuals who were successful and content through legal means and patterning himself after them. As he suggested, "look at people who are happy and

doing it within the law or doing it without struggling". James also indicated the importance of having a model when he offered the suggestion for African American males who were underachieving, "I think they need like a role model to be there for them". While Christopher learned from the successes of others, Ashton learned from their mistakes. He described an experience at Scholar Preparatory School that he learned from that was based on the mistakes of others, "two [friends] who got expelled recently, which—yeah…That's teaching me a lesson to not—that I need to get my act together, focus more, get better grades and stay out of trouble." Bruce also learned from the mistakes of others. His description of this experience was as follows:

> Well for me I actually try to work harder just to like because I was always a person who wanted to please my parents so for me when my dad came for me expectation was raised so for me I had to work harder and that just pushed me even more.

Instead of harboring resentment towards his father or rejecting his delayed presence, he allowed allowing his absent father's return to motivate him to try even harder than he had while he was gone.

Emergence of Confidence in Self on the Journey. Through all of their experiences as they journeyed "up and up", the participants' continued to gain confidence in their abilities. Bruce captured the essence of this experience in the following quote:

> Who I am. That would have to be one because for me I wouldn't change who I am right now at all not even a bit because me I see myself as someone who just keeps wanting to progress just become a better me in all.

It was not only successes such as earning good grades, being accepted into their desired college preparatory schools, or even the presence a strong support system, it was the participants'

will to progress that allowed the emergence of the confidence necessary to succeed. James identified his strength to comprehend information more quickly than his peers even at an academically rigorous academy. He demonstrated humility in his response and his body language of slightly hunching over and holding back a smile as he said, “like I work fast…Like I don't really know, like I just like get the information faster than others.” This suggested that although he was academically swift in the present he was careful to refrain from being overly confident as if he had “arrived” since this was only the beginning of his journey to success as he had plans to become a lawyer. Aaron also demonstrated confidence in his academic performance; he explained that he was most satisfied with himself related to his grades, “grades are easy for me and grades are important so I'm very satisfied with my grades”.

For Aaron, the term easy meant that it did not require effort above and beyond what he was capable of giving. In his experience, “anybody can make straight A's it's just the amount of effort you put in. So just put in effort and you can do anything that you want to do.” Yet earning good grades served to build his confidence because in Aaron’s experience grades were important.

It was essential for the participant’s to acknowledge their personal growth and success for continued motivation on their journey to success. Each of the following participants provided examples of their experiences of progress that ranged from self-ratings of attractiveness, to academics, to improved performance in extracurricular activities. At the core of these experiences was the notion of only looking back to see how far you have come. Aaron demonstrated this idea when he described looking at pictures from when he was younger, “I'll look at some pictures sometimes and be like what was I thinking? In the present when I look at myself, I'm very satisfied with my features.”

KJ acknowledged the growth he made related to language acquisition, I'm proud of accomplishing like the way I'm speaking now. The dialect and like the way I'm speaking English now." He also provided the example of improvement in his ability to maintain the level of attention necessary to complete his classwork, in the following excerpt:

> I'm proud because at first like I couldn't keep focus in the classroom and I'm proud of that like now I'm more focused and I can do my work. Umm I'm proud of like making the basketball team here like I'm proud of mostly everything I do 'cause I work hard to do it so I have to be like proud of myself.

James acknowledged his growth by reflecting on the fact that he had set a goal and achieved it. He shared the process involved in achieving his goal to attend a private, college preparatory school. His description was as follows:

> I like wanted to go to Berkley prep which is like a private school like so I had to like maintain a good GPA and I had a 4.0 throughout my whole eighth grade year so far. Umm so I got into the school I wanted to get into.

B.W.' acknowledgement of growth was also related to goals achieved, he described improving his grades to all As and one B, making the basketball team, and going "from a low rating to a high rating in chess". Bruce W.'s achievement was related to having adopted a method of trying his hardest on every occasion. He described how he applied this method to chess:

> You have to like try hard even in the games that just…don't just say…don't just play the game and then say I'll try my hardest at a tournament or something you have to try your hardest at each time or every chance you get.

By acknowledging their growth participants were able to recognize that they were moving in the right direction, closer to fulfilling their aspirations. This provided them with an aerial

perspective of their lifeworlds; an optimum viewpoint to determine their present location by charting their journey thus far and ensuring that they were navigating in right direction to achieve their future plans of success. As John described:

> It's a good thing because now you know, you know what you're reaching for. Like because you always reaching to be better and like if your dad is great, you want to be greater. So your kids want to be greater than you. And when that happens in each family, they must be doing good on the up and up.

According to Ashton, his knowledge of Black history, "impacts me like not to do anything like not to go out there and do anything bad. So like umm so nobody will prejudge me as thinking me like thinking that I am a bad person or anything."

The aerial perspective also enabled them to identify that they represented a larger body than themselves; they were the descendants of a great people who had suffered yet survived combatting lethal terrain and paving a way for their beneficiaries to march through. KJ's explanation of how his knowledge of Black History "impacts me like not to do anything like not to go out there and do anything bad. So like umm so nobody will prejudge me as thinking me like thinking that I am a bad person or anything" demonstrated his knowledge that he did not only represent himself, Ashton explained that, "Some of my thoughts is, what they had to do for us to be here where we are now… It causes me to do better, and try my hardest on everything I do". B.W. described, "I like feel proud to be Black like when you hear about the stuff all that Black people have done and what they have survived and went through just so I could be here where I am." The participants recognized that their ancestors sacrificed so that they could succeed.

Theme Two: Sacrificing to Succeed: "My Ancestors Worked Hard...It Won't Be in Vain"

Although the 11 hour school day sometimes felt like too much, the participants sometimes felt that they were missing out on free time to hang out with friends or simply relax, they knew that their education as Scholar Preparatory School was for their good. Eleven hour days spent receiving a quality education that would set them up for even greater opportunities in the future, was of no consequence when compared to the sunrise to sunset "work" experiences of their ancestors who were prohibited from basic educational experiences.

External sacrifices. Michael's statement addressing the impact his knowledge of Black History had on his life explicitly described his understanding of the foundational sacrifices that had been made for him, "It has shown me that my ancestors worked hard and that I should work hard to not have them die doing what they did in vain." The participants acknowledged and appreciated the sacrifices and achievements others made for them used it as an additional source of motivation. James described his sentiments towards his history, "Like I think that it's like umm amazing like how Martin Luther King he got like a lot of people like to listen to him and even though he was put to jail he didn't stop umm and there were also like a umm a lot of inventors that were African American…anything is possible I like to think."

KJ shared advice he would give to a Haitian male student just immigrating to America pondering giving up, "I would tell him to like why would your parents want you to do. Like why did they came here, why did they want you to come here? To be somebody. That's what I would tell him." He first reminded the individual of his parents' sacrifice and then he reminded the individual of his purpose. Bruce was aware of the many sacrifices his parents made for him and was motivated to perform well, he described this saying:

> Well for school work my mom and dad they really put out and try to give me the best and just seeing them how they are it really makes me want to do good so later on my I can be able to support them and that's just them in my brother I just want to do the best so I can help all of them out.

Ashton took a similar approach in identifying his parents' sacrifices and then empathizing with their circumstances:

> My mom, my dad, and my older brother. And because my mom, since she's a single parent, she does what she can for me. And my dad, since he has my two brothers and my sister, he tries, he tries to make it to stuff I have – what's it called. Like, shows and like, basketball games, and my football games. He tries to make it to them.

Ashton acknowledged that his mother was a single parent and that his father had multiple children, so any contribution (e.g., time/presence, money) to his endeavors was a sacrifice.

Christopher identified and valued the sacrifice of his teachers at Scholar Preparatory School. After identifying the specific sacrifices his teachers made, he explained, ""I really do appreciate that because, if you go to public school, I don't know but I really don't think you'll be able to do that in public school. I thank them for that." For this participant, identification of sacrifices made for him by his parents coupled with appreciation supported the notion of sacrificing his own wants and needs to prioritize those of his family.

Internal sacrifices. These participants embraced a mentality of expecting and accepting that they would have make sacrifices, just as others made sacrifices for them. Christopher's described what his life would be like in the future, one that epitomized success, in the following manner:

> I would just like to become someone in the world, who's not just surviving. I want to become known even if it's just in the [local area]. I want to be a person who you can say do you know who this is? And you go yes and have a conversation about it because I made such an impact on the community. I want to be a person who gives back and also supports my family and loves my jobs and overall loves my life.

Christopher's description of success or being "someone in the world" did not include financial prosperity, it did however include sacrifice; a desire to make "an impact on the community" by giving back and supporting his family. His word choice of "giving back" indicated that he identified that he had been given and expected, accepted, and desired the opportunity to sacrifice.

Delayed gratification. Sacrifice included the requirement of delaying gratification, such as in KJ's delaying of rest to complete homework going to "sleep around like 10". Ashton's description eagerly completing assignments prior to engaging in extracurricular activities, "Because sometimes I want to get my work done so I can do like practice for basketball, play games, and have like play my sports." KJ described his routine once of spending most of his time during his after school program completing homework assignments, "I'll spend like two hours working on my homework and one hour playing." He continued his explanation with the following description:

> And when I get in there umm there's like a place where you can just sit there and do your homework and I do my work and then like if I have time at the end I go play. Like cause they have a basketball court there.

KJ also described the sacrifice he made in order to become fluent in the English

language, "I started doing more extra work staying in at recess and doing work with Ms. Bulker, our English teacher, so I could catch back up." As a child trying to become acculturated in a new country, recess was likely his only chance for relief during the school day from the emotionally draining process of acculturation. Yet he was willing to delay this recreational opportunity because as he explained, "So I will just sacrifice my recess time to work on learning English, because I think recess is not going to make me learn English like staying in class and getting help will." He expounded on his decision to give up recess in exchange for additional time to practice:

> I just know that like if I didn't get better at speaking and grammar and everything that I wouldn't be here right now I would've probably been kicked out of school because my English grade would've been bad. So if I didn't do that. So I just said I'm just going to stay in from recess and just do some work with her.

John's example of internal sacrifices related to his role of being the eldest child. He took pride in his progression from being self-centered to self-sacrificing; as he explained "I always have to look out for them". A self-seeking position left no room for anyone besides himself, so John progressed to a position that allowed for him to take on the responsibility of leading his siblings and fulfilling his convictions of "each generation being on the up and up". John described his progression as: "I used to be a spoiled kid but now I'm getting away from that and being a humble kid, because since I have a lot of brothers and sisters I always have to look out for them. " John went on to describe the responsibility he has to guide them as he transitioned from life being all about him to being all about them. He described his position as follows:

> Sometimes if my mom has to go somewhere, I have to watch the little ones, like I got to—not do everything for them, but teach them and show them all

about them. I actually care about where they go and stuff like that. So I might get on my brother about something, but I do it because I want him to be better than me. I know that he's going to make it somewhere.

Sacrifice was necessary for success just as it was necessary for trailblazing. The participants accepted their role as a trailblazer, leading the way for his younger siblings, future children, and generations to come just as those before him had led the way for him.

Theme Three: Trailblazing: "I'm Leading The Way For Them"

This theme included participants in naturally occurring positions of leadership and responsibility due to having younger siblings who looked up to them and parent expectation of modeling upright behavior or peers who naturally looked up to them. Participant five, Aaron, described his role as a trailblazer that he initially rejected due to the pressure and expectation for him to be a model student when he did not want to be. He described his role as, "I feel my vibe is an automatic leader, everybody leans towards me and that kind of stuff." He expounded on this by giving further detailed into what that experience looked like for him:

> Everybody feels like I run the class, everybody listens to me. If one person says something it's lame, but if I say the same thing the exact same way then it's funny it's cool. So I feel that honestly most of the people wouldn't tell me because most of the stuff that I do is automatically cool.

KJ's role as a trailblazer began at home with his younger siblings who looked to him for an exemplar to pattern themselves after. KJ took pride in being his siblings' role model and accepted his parent's expectations that he live upright before them. He described this experience as follows:

> I have to be like the leader, and everybody follows me. Everyone will follow what I do, and they just imitate me. They do that a lot. And sometimes it really gets annoying, but I like have to do the right thing, because like I know they're going to try to do what I do.

Aim high. KJ provided insight in to the idea of becoming better by challenging someone more advanced. He explained, "You have to challenge yourself. You can't go against people who are weaker than you. You have to go against people stronger then you or at least at your level." As a member of the Chess team, KJ is constantly looking to play someone more skilled than he is, as he described:

> I always try to challenge myself to like be better I always like I don't want to like stick with somebody I know I can beat. I like want to play somebody I know I can't beat so I could get better by doing that. You have to like try hard even in the games that just…don't just say…don't just play the game and then say I'll try my hardest at a tournament or something you have to try your hardest at each time or every chance you get.

Participant one's, KJ's, inclusion of "or something" indicated that he not only applied this concept to chess, but he took this approach to every area he was involved in. In Participant two's, Bruce's, case, the someone better than him, was not a person who knew or had contact with or who existed at all; it was a prototype of a student who would be accepted into an Ivy League school (or new ivy); "so far I have three on my mind Harvard, Yale, and NYU". This idea of attending an Ivy League school contributed to his desire to increase his study time in the present to secure As on tests. He described this desire as follows:

> Well for me I need to improve on studying and focusing more in class because sometimes if me and my friends are joking around I might just like drift off from work and go and just keep fooling around but then I come back a little while later so for me it's just to focus a little bit more and then also what was the second thing I was saying focusing and studying and I can put more time into studying for my test to make sure I get an A in every one of them.

The participants' pursued a lifestyle of striving for the best in every area of their life. By challenging someone more advanced than they were in a given area, they were apt to rise to the occasion and evidence improved performance. However, improvements required adjustments to the participants previous of way of operating, which required mental work as they had to develop a mindset for success. This included mentally prepared for future challenges by moving beyond the behavior challenges of their past.

Bruce also set his sights high when planning for his future career, he described his selections as "Well my future I see myself as being an architect, an accountant, a pediatrician, or playing for the New York Yankees in baseball". Each of these career options would require a substantial increase in Bruce's discipline and focus. He identified that he needed to increase his study time, increase his focus, and reduce the time spent "joking around". His aim was high but his effort was not as high, which resulted in a less than desirable performance. It is important to note that goals are a work in progress so although Bruce was falling short of his goal at the time of the interviews, he had in mind key behavioral changes he could have made to improve his behavior. John described this notion of goals being in progress in the following excerpt:

> Success, I feel like an 8 because I haven't fulfilled everything I want to fulfill and everybody has that goal...you have to like...time, as time goes by you have to like

> And everybody has time to reach that goal. I feel pretty successful but I haven't reached all the goals I want to reach.

Although goals may be in process, Aaron explained the importance of not being complacent and the commonality of the just "just get by" syndrome but excel because success was inevitable when the participants gave their all. Aaron shared his belief on everyone having an ability to succeed but not everyone putting forth the effort necessary to do so as follows:

> A lot of people here and a lot people other places, they can do better, they just don't try. They want to do enough for themselves so they get by. For example, people here. They can be making straight A's if they wanted to, but they're just trying to get by and not get a Study Hall. But if everybody tries their best and try to achieve to their highest ability, then everybody will be--Anybody can make straight A's it's just the amount of effort you put in. So just put in effort and you can do anything that you want to do.

This is what separates those who will achieve lifelong success from those who are content with "just getting by"; those who succeed increased their input (i.e., effort) to receive increased output (i.e., achievement).

KJ expounded on this idea when he said, "So like if I didn't get good grades now and I started late it's not going to be helpful at all. Cause they're going to look at like everything that you've done". Yet he acknowledged that experiences of hardship were inevitable and it was crucial to persevere, his explanation was:

There's going to be a lot of adversity through your life. You just got to keep on trying, like keep on moving, and just try your best at everything you do. Don't quit. Quitting is like, to me, it was never an option.

KJ's initial assertion suggested that there was no room for errors because every little thing would count. But he added a disclaimer that quitting for him was never an option. This reflected the idea of aiming high, in KJ's case he was aiming for perfection (i.e., no errors); yet it was equally important for him to always maintain a sense of hope despite the circumstance so he modified this idea to include a safeguard against giving up before attaining his goals (i.e., failure).

Improvements are necessary for success because improvements are indicators of progress. James described the improvement that resulted from wanting different and then doing different, ""Well it's like it was like in school so like were like getting in trouble so I realized like we keep getting in trouble I might as well find some other friends". He also indicated his current areas he needed improvement in "my attitude… [I could] walk away." Bruce also shared improvements he made and growth still needed:

Even though I have to admit it has gotten better well even though my conduct has gotten better than from my former school. It's still not perfect so I would want to improve on that. I would have to umm I have to gain more self-control over talking 'cause sometimes I still do talk. But at times I do like…but now it's more like if you just, if I talk I have to stop myself from talking.

Christopher noted, "I need to improve on my consistency with my grades." John described his areas of improvement as "Being organized and staying on top. Like sometimes, when I feel like I've made it, I'll kind of slack off, not that much, but I'll kind of slack off. I just need to stay humble." He expounded by explaining the main source of his disorganization:

My locker I'm trying to keep clean now but when you have stuff piled up on top of stuff. You don't really care about your locker because you're worried about this homework assignment or that test that's coming up next period and I figured if you stay organized, that

homework assignment you always have it.

Calculated maneuvers are necessary. The participants implemented deliberate practices to develop a mindset for success that included both mental and physical maneuvers; mental maneuvering involved thought processes of analyzing and planning and physical maneuvering involved actions taken. The participants' also adopted the practice of separating others' beliefs about them from their beliefs about themselves. KJ believed that everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but their opinion is just that—theirs. So for him, other people's opinions of him did not matter if that is not what he thought, "Like let them speak their mind that's their, that's what they think". KJ consciously separated the negative views of other's from what he believes about himself and his choices, as evidenced by the fact that he upheld his views of attending:

Umm some think like it's crazy like they wouldn't come here just because of the long hours because they heard that and they said it's too strict and stuff like that. But what I say is like umm this school is going to help you or whoever comes here to be somebody when they grow up.

The participants implemented a practice of intentionally finding motivation to succeed by reflecting on past successes; if they did it before, they could do it again. Christopher provided an example of this: One day I looked at my report card and I found one of my former report cards. It was my report card from my last quarter at public school. I always had all A's and 1 B plus for 3 quarters. I had Principal's Honor Roll for the last quarter and I said I can do this again. This was a very reinforcing experience because participants received automatic reinforces of knowing they had achieve what they set out to. Christopher experienced this reinforcement in his musical abilities, so each time he learned a song quickly/easily, he felt more confident to try another one.

He described this experience as follows:

> I feel most satisfied because, the way I am, I pick up things easily and I learn how to play them. And I feel that the more things I hear, the more things I pick up, the more things I play, the more things I implement into my regular playing.

The estimated crime index for the neighborhood most of the participants resided in was 43% higher than the city's average across all categories of crime (i.e., general, violent, or property) (Neighborhood, City, FL Crime Rates & Statistics, 2015). Yet only one participant indicated that they had witnessed any negative neighborhood experiences. Bruce shared an incident where his dad's property was stolen and on multiple occasions having seen police and sirens. He shared, "Well when I was smaller someone had stole my dad's bike when he was coming home from our house and it caused this whole big thing disputes and I just know like other things probably like shootouts, fights." He also mentioned, "I've seen a lot of police, I've seen a lot of sirens." Bruce was not affected by witnessing negative neighborhood, as he explained, because he did not know his neighbors he was not emotionally impacted:

> So for me since I don't know anyone really around the neighborhood except for my next door neighbors I really don't feel like it's necessary for me to worry "…like if you see people in a fight mostly and you really don't know them you really don't have an attachment to the event.

Over half of the participants made some indication of living within protected boundaries. So although they live in this neighborhood, they do not spend time outside and they do not have friends in their neighbor. Bruce described his experience:

> Well for me in my neighborhood I don't really go outside because there's really

> not positive influence kids. Like I don't know any kids that's in my neighborhood because my parents did want me being in an environment around kids who really see school as something important. So the only times I like get to see kids around me is either at school or doing the weekends when I go over to my friends' house.

Bruce acknowledged that things would have been different for him had he been allowed to hang out with kids in his neighborhood and he expressed his gratitude for living within protected boundaries, he explained:

> For me, I'm kind of grateful because I could be getting into a lot of more trouble and the way how I am at home I'm pretty happy at how I'm situated even though not every day I'm going out hanging with a couple of friends doing some dumb, stupid things that kids would do.

Aaron described an identical experience of living within the protected boundaries of his home in a neighborhood where he does not associate with the people in his neighborhood, when he said, "Well I don't talk to anybody in my neighborhood. I hang with kids in my Dad's neighborhood sometimes, but they don't really know about the school. We don't talk about school…most of the time, the kids I do meet, if I tell them what school I go to they don't know what it is."

Ashton also described living within protected boundaries in that he does not associate with people in his neighborhood, "I don't usually communicate with a lot of people outside in my neighborhood." However, he noted that "my neighborhood isn't bad but it's like, it's mainly older people. There used to be someone my age but he moved and I just don't go outside anymore."

Bruce also lived in a sheltered state of existence as evidenced by his description of "I don't really talk to the kids in my neighborhood I actually just moved…My old neighborhood, not so much not so much yeah I didn't talk to them either". This protected state of existence likely reduced pressure to conform to peer or societal pressures. Bruce explained that "in some places it's not really all that cool to get good grades. For me, that's never really been a problem. My friends never treated me differently because my grades were always good and things like that." He did however, identify conformity as the challenge facing many African Americans in the following excerpt:

> African-Americans facing challenges like a lot of things your friends are doing or whatever they'll do to like with the sagging the pants I never really got...like just showing, showing your butt to everybody around you and things like that. And getting all these tattoos and stuff which you're going to have to cover up with a long sleeve or something when you're in a job interview and things like that and their friends they might not be on the right path and they might just go with it too and things like that.

John's experience in his old neighborhood (he had recently moved) was in the "hood" where he feels they didn't care about education so they made fun of him for attending AP. Although John lived in this neighborhood, he did not hold the same views as the neighborhood in general and recognized a difference existed in the importance of education between those who lived in his old neighborhood and himself. His new neighborhood was different, John explained this in the as following statement:

> Well, in my old neighborhood, it's kind of in the "hood", so called say. So they didn't really care about education as much as I do. Initially in the

> neighborhood, we had just moved there, so I didn't really know anybody, but the people that do know respect the fact that I go to a good school and getting a good education. I feel like the friends that care I get a good education are your true friends because they really care about you.

John's new neighborhood seemed to be more supportive of his educational and future endeavors and he had already identified that those demonstrated genuine concern about him getting a good education.

Some of the participant shared examples that are considered be deliberate disengagement from the typical activities and practices of youth their age. Bruce described two interests of adolescents that he had no interest in: console games and playing pranks. Bruce explained his boredom with playing console games being due to his skill in being able to master each level and beat the game. Bruce shared, "I'm a person who really doesn't like playing console games mostly because I get bored of it 'cause ever since I was a little kid I beat like every one of them like five times each." He pointed out that this had been the case since he was younger, an indication that this fact was a source of pride and confidence related to his ability to achieve anything he sought after. While he could understand why youth played pranks, he felt it was immature, his explanation was:

> I can understand how kids get the joy out of it because it is having fun. And then when you see like the after event it's funny and you'll laugh at it but other than that it's basically kind of childish when you think about it.

There were three trends among youth B.W.' age that he did not understand the purpose of: being involved with multiple girls (i.e., womanizing), "housing" or sagging pants that revealed underwear/boxers, and getting tattoos. He named the sagging pants and tattoos as challenges

African Americans faced, expressed in the following statement:

> I mean it kind it is well that is kind of true because like with African-Americans facing challenges like a lot of things your friends are doing or whatever they'll do to like with the sagging the pants I never really got...like just showing, showing your butt to everybody around you and things like that. And getting all these tattoos and stuff which you're going to have to cover up with a long sleeve or something when you're in a job interview and things like that and their friends they might not be on the right path and they might just go with it too and things like that.

B.W.'s feedback related to promiscuity was, "There's no point for you to be with multiple women, having kids and not looking after them." His observations related to the tattoos was "you're going to have to cover up with a long sleeve or something when you're in a job interview and things like that and their friends they might not be on the right path and they might just go with it too and things like that". Both focused on the long-term consequences of these choices. Bruce W. considered the consequences of choices, not simply the choice when determining if it would be a choice he would make.

Each of the participants went through a process that facilitated their developing a mindset for success. John's process included a shift in his thinking as it applied to school. He changed from doing good work because had to, to doing good work because he was passionate about it. "Well I'm passionate about, my passion is just to me. To do what I can do to give 100% whether it's a test, a game, anything, keep giving 100. And I know if I keep giving 100, I should receive 100 back." He explained the process of shifting his mindset in the following excerpt:

> Well, I feel that they should, don't do it cause you have to do it, cause you want

> to. Like if you do it because you have to you're not going to put 100% into it. But if you do it because you want to, you always get that—you'll always do 100% because you want a good education and you want to have a good job, you want to be able to say you did that. You want to be able to say you've been places that people thought you couldn't go. You shift your mindset because if you see stuff's going good, you want to keep making it go good. And it's like if you do it because you want you're going to see that you're going to keep failing because you're not really passionate about the work you do. But like if you become passionate about the work you do then you'll do it because you want to.

John's mind work also included developing a conscious awareness of the detriment that resulted by focusing on the limitations that result due to societal injustices and atrocities. He cited the fear that plagued the Black community following the murder of Trayvon Martin as an example of a limiting mindset:

It plays a role in my daily life because I know I'm Black. People tell me I'm Black so if you always go around thinking like I'm Black and I can't do certain things, you always hold yourself back from what you possibly can do. When people say that I'm Black and they see what they can do, they'll hold back because they don't want to see if I'll try it. If you don't think that, start to just get that out of your head. Say I can do it because I'm me and because of my skill set I can do it, no matter what my skin color is. Especially with Trayvon Martin, you hear people say all Black kids can't even walk on the street with a soda and Skittles without being stalked or shot or something like that. If you live your life by saying that this might happen to me, you might never walk on the street again and that's going to hold you back 'cause you won't get a job thinking like that.

The excerpt concluded with the phrase "that's going to hold you back 'cause you won't get a job

thinking like that, which indicated that John maintained a sense of forward momentum because he realized that his role as a trailblazer left no room for doubt or limitation. He continued by asserting, "So I say do what you need to do to keep that edge over somebody. So no matter what your skin color is, there is no doubt that they can choose you." KJ shared similar sentiments, "I really never thought about it. I just think that's what other people think. I don't think about it like that. I think about anybody can be successful if they work hard. That's what I think."

James discussed the mind work that would need to take place in an individual before academic achievement could transpire, especially if academic performance was low. He described the "want" that should ideally be a natural response to earning a poor grade. This "want" represented a mindset where they desired to improve performance. His recommendation for underperforming students was, "Study a lot. They have to pay attention in class. Umm well if they have like a bad grade then they should want to get it up." Although James had not experienced low performance, he had already mentally prepared what it would take for him to return to a place of achieving if he ever experienced low performance. Ashton made recommendations for behaviorally underperforming students that included developing a mindset where doing wrong is not an option because doing the right thing now would result in a content life later, evidenced when he said "they should just ignore what others say and get an education. Go to high school, go to college, graduate and live a happy life". As previously mentioned, Ashton needed to improve his behavior at school; thus, his advice to others was based on personal experience.

Ashton believed that staying on the right track would help individuals avoid not succeeding and resorting to a life of crime (e.g., doing that stuff maybe on the streets, not succeeding, selling drugs to get money, stuff like that) to earn a living. Staying on the right track

as opposed to resorting to illegal activity would require a conscious decision to do so. Christopher also described the importance of staying "above the law" and earning money legitimately to avoid the anxieties related to doing things illegally. His comment ends with a focus on the future, providing for family, supporting self in retirement, which suggests that even in the immediate, here-and-now he keeps his future goals at the forefront of his decision making process as demonstrated in the following excerpt:

> I feel that you should choose to do better because other ways, illegal ways--It's better to do things the legal way than the illegal way because if you do things the illegal way you get rich off of it, but finally you get caught. All of your money is gone when you get out. The legal way, there's nothing to get caught for, you have plenty of money and when you retire you have all of this money in the bank so you can support yourself, your children, your grandchildren so they can go to school and have nice clothes, nice hairdos.

He believed that individuals could "give in to pressure to do the right thing by just doing the right." Although the term "just" has implications that it would be simple or easy to do the right thing, Ashton's usage of just indicated that an individual had an understanding what the right thing was and knew how to carry out the behavior of doing the right thing; both of which required mental work. Ashton had an understanding of what the right thing was and knew how to carry out the behavior of doing the right thing, as evidenced in the following excerpt:

> My response was, I need to stop getting in trouble. I need to stop getting in trouble, and I really need to improve so I can get into the good high schools I want to get into… I've been out of trouble because there's a certain high school that I want to go to and I want to improve my behavior.

Bruce extended Ashton's idea of doing the right thing by identifying the important role of the human conscience. He believed that it's always going to be best to listen to your conscience because everyone has the knowledge of the difference between right and wrong and they should allow their inner voice to guide them to and they would be certain to make the right choice. He explained:

> I mean like if--say you're doing something wrong and you know you're doing it wrong, and like you gotta make sure you're not like getting caught and you're doing something that's wrong, then you probably shouldn't do it because it's pretty much your self- conscience saying like telling you it's wrong.

Bruce also shared the personal account of "whenever someone said I can't sure I complained to my mom about it once but after that I just learned that no one can tell me that I can't do anything I set my mind to they don't determine my future I do". This powerful message represented his resolve to take hold of his future despite background noise (i.e., ("what anyone said"), he was the only who could be held accountable for his progress and ultimate attainment of his goals were.

B.W.' mind work involved learning to listen to his conscience and learning to watch for signs of wrongdoing in order to avoid it altogether, such as taking measures to avoid being caught. B.W. also wanted to improve in the area of procrastination so the mind work process he experienced included recognizing how not doing homework impacted his grade and identifying the purpose of homework which led him to embrace it. Bruce W. described his procrastination as follows:

> I know I'll have homework but I might want to put it off like especially like weekend homework I might like want to watch my like I might like want to

> go to my cousins house or something and leave my stuff behind knowing I'm about to leave it because I already know I'm not about to do it there. Or instead of just doing it like that Friday or something I'll just wait till like Sunday or something like that.

B.W. discovered that homework is "what really prepares you for the test" and Scholar Preparatory School "teaches us that every little thing counts so you always have to do things like turn in homework and in turning in homework you can't get a good grade without doing that here". B.W. maintained a positive, driven mindset even when speaking of potential setbacks, such as becoming a parent at an early age, as evidenced by his word choice of "harder" as opposed to impossible, "If you're not ready for it, it can put a dent and make it harder for you to achieve your goals in life." B.W. kept the his goals in mind even when faced with situations that would complicate his journey to success, which indicated that he was mentally preparing for the inevitable challenges ahead. Christopher also discussed mentally preparing for challenges ahead after conversations with his father:

> My Dad gives me lectures about how college is and whatnot, so I need to keep myself up so that when I do hit those times I don't just give up and quit. I develop a work ethic and keep going so I can finally get it.

Christopher's mind work was inspired by his father who demonstrated an expectation of higher education and stimulated his son's preparation for the future and its inevitable challenges.

The participants took charge of their lives and their destinies; they demonstrated self- determination and accepted responsibility for their choices. Bruce provided the

following description of what self-determination meant for him:

> Because after a while usually whenever a kid like just from experience will say like he made me or she made me laugh I be like how can they make you do something you're in control of yourself and after hearing that a couple of times I noticed that I set my future I determine what I could do or not do.

After Bruce emphasized his position that he was the only one who determined his future and wanted others to know that they too are in control of themselves. Bruce shared following insight:

> Don't ever let anyone tell you that you can't do anything because in the world today as long as you set your mind to do it and you put in the work you can do anything you want and achieve anything you want to do.

John expressed this same idea that an individual creates their own path, their own luck, so the starting position does not determine the ending one. He explained this in the following way:

> And another thing, like you create your own path so like you can start—I've seen people start from the bottom and like go up there with the rich people, cause not everybody starts off with having the nicest things, having everything, so you can create your own luck.

Christopher's stance was personalized as he explained that the curriculum at Scholar Preparatory School was more challenging than any of the previous schools he had attended. At one point he fell into what he termed an "academic slump" where he was earning Cs and one day he grew tired of and "" said it's time to come out of my slump and I'm just going to try my very hardest to get all As and so far I have all A's and one B+". Despite the challenging academic curriculum at the academy, Christopher he did not complain or express a desire to return to a

school with a simpler curriculum. Christopher expressed this as follows:

> At times it can be frustrating but overall I think I'm doing really good and I just have to keep working hard because it's not as easy and more challenging than other schools I've been to, so I have to keep up the hard work.

Aaron provided insight on the importance learners have in finding ways to connect with academic content and place the responsibility back on the learner:

> Just find a way to interest yourself within the topics. Like, it might not be borderline, like it might not be at the surface of what you're learning, but if you think about it deeper and find something that interests you about the topic, then you'll stay—you'll pay more attention in class because you'll want to learn about it.

Christopher shared similar resolve in the area of behavior he accepted responsibility for the consequences he received for his choices. He explained that "it's not the teacher's fault, it's our choices that get us in those situations so if we never make bad choices, we never get bad consequences." He provided other examples of self-determination in his response to the question of African Americans facing unique challenges, "Some do, some don't. Some face financial challenges, some face family challenges, but I believe if we all work really hard at it, we all can be successful". Further, he also believed that just because success (e.g., upward mobility, higher education) was not modeled in an individual's environment that does not mean it is not an option for them, "Look at all the figures, people who are rich-- Well not rich necessarily because you don't have to be to be successful. You define success yourself."

Ashton believed that boredom was not an excuse to act out behaviorally and that it had the potential of impeding future goals, such as being accepted into high school. The following

excerpt is an example of this:

> I would tell them to get their act together, or tighten up because doors will close right in your face and they will not open for you, ‘ cause schools don’t want to see that bad behavior and those bad grades.

He spoke in the second person whenever topics of behavior came up or provided shortened responses when talking in first person (i.e., admitting that he was the “you” he spoke of) and much of the content reflected an experience he was going through (e.g., grades declining, received behavioral consequences, and trying to attend a specific high school) that suggested that he was likely reflecting on his own behaviors.

Anticipate challenges. Challenges were inevitable, as Christopher predicted, “I remember thinking to myself one day-- One day in the future it might not be as easy”, but the participants’ responses to the challenges were variable and included embracing them and seeking the benefit within them. Many of the participants had colorful school histories in the area of behavior. The frequently cited the cause as due to being bored in class because the school work was too easy and they finished their classwork early. An excerpt from Christopher’s interview:

> I guess I got kind of bored sometimes and I would just finding other things to do and when I finally ran out of things to do--I remember one time specifically I couldn't find anything to do after I was done with my work and I just sat there.

Christopher was uncomfortable talking about behavior challenges in his past as evidenced by the way he dragged out his response of “Yes Ma’am” and when asked what were some of his misbehaviors he responded, “I honestly don't remember much from those days…“I remember getting in trouble here and there but I don't remember the exact reasons that led up to me not getting honor roll because of my behavior.” Yet, as the interview progressed, Christopher

spontaneously provided examples of his misbehaviors, “Before, I would kind of bother students, asking them if they were done, if they needed any help and I would get caught.”

Upon revealing these behaviors it was evident that Christopher was academically talented and was seeking opportunities to feed the positive aspects of his character like helping others. He learned several things from this experience: (1) he discovered a pattern in his behavior that he described as “A lot of times I'm finished with my work and that's why I get silent lunches because I start bothering other people”, (2) reading is an attention grabbing alternative to acting out when bored and according to Christopher “reading is one thing that can really grab your attention and don't read excessively to the point that you do get in trouble for reading, but if you're just in class and all of your classwork is done”, and (3) there are options other than acting out, he explained this as “The advice I would give to them is study. If you understand every concept. Get a book, read it. There's always something for you to do if you're bored.”

B.W. ‘s social nature included enjoying talking to his classmates and making them laugh that distracted, as he described, “I’m somewhat laidback but yeh I like to talk I like to make everyone laugh”. These behaviors were more problematic in elementary school because he had not yet realized the impact that behavior had on his future. He described this as follows:

> I wasn’t all that worried about conduct because I didn’t know how much it really affects you and like how it can affect you in the future like if you want to get a job like in high school or in well in high school cause I was going to middle school. I thought about it and I realized that talking in class what it really did was just get me in trouble. And like yeh sure my friends laughed, yeh we were having a good time. But at the same time it wasn’t going to be good for me conduct wise.

B.W. learned from experience several strategies that were effective in intervening with him when he was acting out. The first strategy is to complete extra homework may help students who are bored stay out of trouble; Bruce provided the example of ““I would bring extra homework to do in that class so then at least you're not getting in trouble.”

The second strategy is to engage the student in a tougher curriculum. Bruce W. recommended teachers, “If you see someone like that bored in class, then maybe the answer would be to give them a tougher curriculum”. The third strategy was look for a pattern of good academics and bad behavior; Bruce provided the example of : “If you see a kid, if they're doing well academically but not so well with conduct, maybe the teachers should look into that and see what the problem is.” The fourth and final strategy was teachers should take into consideration test scores, which he explained as ““I guess like it depends on test scores and stuff. I guess they could take a test for it.”

Ashton also shared his experience getting in trouble in school and the consequences he faced at home and at school, “The challenge I have faced in my life was – I think it was when I had got in trouble at school, and I had to face some consequences. Like, it was like, three detentions and two weeks or three weeks, and I had to face the consequences from my mom. And a little from my dad, but we just talked about it.”

Even though the participants and their peers attended a private school with a rigorous academic curriculum, they were not above misbehaviors and getting into trouble for those misbehaviors. In fact, Ashton shared that “ two [friends] who got expelled recently, which— yeah…That’s teaching me a lesson to not—that I need to get my act together, focus more, get better grades and stay out of trouble.” Despite having engaged in misbehaviors in the past and even more recently, the participants each identified that they either wanted to

improve their behavior or already had improved their behavior. For those whose behavior improved in terms of no longer earning consequences, they still found ways to fulfill the function of their original misbehaviors. One participant, Bruce, shared that he had learned that there is a time and place for socializing; "now it's more just do it at the right time."

The participants pondered on the idea of giving in to the right thing as opposed to the wrong thing and their responses suggested that they believed that it was easier to do the wrong thing than it was to do the right thing; however, doing the wrong thing was taking the easy way out and these young men did not "do" easy. They were trailblazing, future-oriented, driven youth on the "up and up" and easy was far from appealing. Aaron commented:

> It's very easy to give into doing the wrong thing, so you just have to have that strength and that will to be able to know and not even just know, but to be able to do that right thing. So I think it all depends on the strength of the person.

When I queried how this strength could be built or taught or if it could be Aaron responded:

> It can be because of the way you were, once again, brought up and where you brought up, so if somebody—if you were raised in the hood, or the projects or whatever you want to say, and you saw your cousins, dad, selling drugs all the time, that's a bad thing. But then your uncle comes from out of town and he's very smart. And he's into books and stuff. If your dad or your cousins or whoever come to you reading books... and selling drugs and stuff would be easier than it is to go and get an education. So if the uncle said, do you want to come with me, live with me, get your education, work hard, and if the dad said, or can I give you this and you sell it, give it to this person, this person, this person, and just don't

> get caught, and give me a certain amount of money, of course selling the drugs will be easier. So since he was brought up seeing his dad, cousins, brothers, all that do the drugs then he's going to lean more toward the drugs because that's what he was brought up seeing.

Aaron believed that the environment an individual is reared in has the strongest pull on their decision making, so even if they are given an opportunity for a "better" environment, they will still lean towards being in the environment they were raised in or one that is most similar to it because that is what is familiar; a change in environments is taking a risk into the unfamiliar. Further, if an individual does not have an alternative picture of reality, they will model themselves after what is presented. Aaron explained this occurrence and why he, unlike numerous other young African American males, mimic what they hear in hip hop lyrics and see in hip hop music videos. He shared:

> I maintain my focus on the right things because I wasn't raised that way. And the community I lived in or where I grew up is not like that, like the rap music I hear. The music I'm hearing is just music to me, it doesn't connect to me like it would connect maybe to other kids and that's why they go down the route they're talking about. The music about growing up in that situation and stuff like that, it doesn't connect to me so the other things they're saying aren't going to connect to me either. I'm not a very leadable person. I've always been the type to go my own way so, it all depends on the person.

As aforementioned, the parents of the participants created protected boundaries for their children to flourish. So although the location of their physical residence was in the "hood", the spiritual nature of their residence was a safe haven, a utopian environment that was not

reflective of the "commercialized", negative depiction of Black males, so the destructive lyrics don't connect to them because they were not raised that way.

Some of the participants have experienced the challenge of receiving negative feedback for attending the academy, others have experienced having a rumor spread about him and being told they couldn't achieve because they were Black, and others have heard the negative reports about Black males through media outlets; although the means of transferring a message of doubt to the participants varied, they each served the purpose of threatening the participants' confidence in achieving their goals. James shared an experience he had with children in his former neighborhood who expressed their disapproval of him attending Scholar Preparatory School. "When I was living somewhere over here umm like the people were telling me like I should've went to their school, like the hours are too long for them to like be here so." This experience was memorable for James, as he recalled it a significant amount of time later. He was required to withstand the questioning and then ostracism of individuals in his neighborhood. Yet, he did not allow their words to lead him to question his decision to attend the academy nor did he get upset or become defend the academy, his response was never even vocalized. James reaction was "Like I was thinking that it's not like all like work 'cause we still have fun here". James did not feel the need to respond to them, only the need to reassure himself of the benefits of attending Scholar Preparatory School.

Although Michael's experience of his close friend spreading rumors about him was hurtful and for a period of time negatively impacted his academic performance, he was determined to stay on track to fulfill his plans of future success. Michael described how he stayed motivated during this time was as follows:

What kept me motivated was just knowing that the allegation was false, I

> just kept moving on and worried about myself and no matter what people said to me, and no matter what he kept saying, I just began progressing and gradually my grades improved.

Like James, Michael focused inwardly, encouraging himself with the truth, tending to his own needs and ignoring what others had to say. By focusing inwardly these participants were able to stay the course, sometimes bending but never folding.

When anticipating challenges, the participants identified race related experiences as another layer to endure. Michael stated, “I've had a lot people telling me that I can't do this. And I don't know if they were kidding or not but it just made me want to strive harder.” The doubt of others motivated him to press onward to that which he was called because he knew that he had also equipped to achieve it. Michael knew this to be fact because his belief in God provided him with an assurance that he would be victorious in all things.

Michael explained that when he was in the third or fourth grade, “a child told me I can't achieve what I want because I'm Black”. Michael’s response to this situation was:

> I knew it wasn't true because I knew that if I wanted to do something, I knew that I could depend on my God-given talents to carry me all the way in my religious beliefs. That if I believed in God, he can carry me all the way to victory.

From these experiences, Michael gained valuable insight that he could share with others, such as “never give up and never let other people get into their head. In spite of what other people say, if you believe, you can achieve what you want.

The majority of the participants were understandably protective of their ethnic/racial background when responding to the idea that some people might say that African American individuals face particular challenges. Their first response was to generalize challenges, like

James did in saying “everyone faces challenges”. Then some of the participants continued by identifying challenges that were not necessarily unique to African Americans, but may have been prevalent among African Americans. Bruce stated:

> For me, I would say just cause the race is the same it don't mean that they face like a single challenge maybe like discrimination because when if you look at most people they will be like not to be racist or anything but if they look at a white kid straight away compared to a Black kid I bet that like more than 65% of them would say oh that white kid must be more successful than the Black that's probably like the only thing I would see but other than that I don't think you should really look at someone just to tell you should get to know someone first.

Bruce was able to identify indicators that racial prejudice and discrimination continued to exist. Yet, because he rejected such ideologies, he did not move beyond the surface level of identification of these ideologies to address more in-depth concerns of causation and eradication. Aaron took a different approach in responding to the idea of African Americans face particular challenges. He first agreed and he next generalized problems to all people regardless of race. Then Aaron explained the why challenges are often so salient among African Americans: a purposeful positioning within a problematic state of existence. He explained:

> They do. But I thought all people face challenges, it's just that--I thought about this too. People have been planted in certain areas and no matter who leaves, where they go, when they leave, the people that have been planted there are going to stay there. More people are going to be born there and raised there no matter who leaves. And I'm assuming most Black people have--And it's not our culture, it probably originated as something that is similar to what it is now, we've just changed it and

> it just has developed to what people call "ghetto" or "hood" or whatever. And they do face specific challenges because the world puts each other in those positions. White people or any other race face those problems, it's just Blacks are what we see the most. Maybe we've been commercialized to have problems so much that-- It might even be true that we have more problems than everybody else but everybody has problems. We've just been commercialized because we're just a larger percentage of the problems that we have.

The final two sentences of this excerpt reveal a conflicted sense of knowing. On one hand, Aaron believed the notion that Black people face particular challenges was a commercialized ideology created and reinforced by society to position racial groups for domination. On the other hand, Aaron conceded and bought into this ideology as evidenced by his use of the phrases "It might even be true that we have more problems than everybody else" and "we're just a larger percentage of the problems that we have". But even within those phrases, Aaron retained a measure of his original belief as suggested by the use of "might" and "but everybody has problems"; an indication that he had *not* bought into challenges of any sort being particular to African Americans. However, Michael did. He stated, "Most like financial challenges because if you look around, you see a lot of African-Americans either selling drugs, doing drugs, addicted to a drug, or addicted to alcohol." Michael also presented a contrasting representation of Caucasian people. He added:

> But Caucasian people, you see that most of them have their life together and they don't really have to deal a lot with drugs or alcoholism, whereas African-American people end up with their whole body and life messed us because of what they did as young people.

In Michael's lifeworld the majority of African Americans had messed up their lives due to financial or addiction problems while Caucasian people had their lives together. It appeared that Michael had bought into the "commercialized", negative depiction of African American males that Aaron was referring to. Bruce demonstrated a similar pattern of acceptance of and generalization to all African Americans based on images flashed repeatedly over media outlets.

> Well some reports that I've been seeing it's like African-American kids who be in neighborhoods that really doesn't regard stuff like they'll do whatever like walk across the road without even looking because lately I've been hearing a lot of accidents happen on the Road and what they're going to do in like 16 months they're going to have like a walkway put up there but what's it called they just need to follow the rules basically like cross where you're supposed to because then that will calls list incidents and accidents.

Bruce indicated that he had "been seeing" such reports of African American children causing accidents because "they'll do whatever like walk across the road without even looking". In spite of the city recognizing the fundamental issue of creating a safe walkway at a busy intersection and deciding to create a walkway, the emphasis of Bruce's excerpt was on the problematic behavior of the children, their lack of discipline, and poor knowledge of road safety. This became the focus because what he had likely "been seeing" was a news story that showed extended coverage of African American children running and engaging in horseplay on the street where the accidents had occurred, several interviews of people in the community who had been concerned about their lack of supervision, footage of funeral programs and hospital rooms, and quick blurb of the city's plans to make a walkway.

Ashton's position on the proverbial particular challenges facing African Americans was

““…we do face challenges, but all isn't just a challenge…it’s an opportunity to succeed and have the opportunities to be where I'm at now in life.” Ashton acknowledged the challenges faced by African Americans but he did not remain there for long, he immediately moved into a position of ownership and responsibility. Challenges for Ashton were opportunities to overcome and excel. He denied that his race was ever something he thought about in his daily life and he had never experienced any known experiences of racism or prejudice. Ashton stated that “Because I believe that everyone is equally the same. No one is no different.” This phrase indicates that even if Ashton had experienced racism, his position of everyone being the same was likely to overshadow his interpreting situations of covert racism or microaggressions as directly linked to him being African American.

The participants also identified lazy moments as a challenge that they have faced because lazy *moments exist on the journey to success*. KJ described his experiences of getting lazy as limiting his ability to do more. He stated:

> I need to improve on like doing my homework. Like just like I said before sometimes I’m like I just don’t feel like doing it and like put it down. Like sometimes I know I can spend some more time studying or something but I don’t. Sometimes I feel like I can be doing more of this like for school or anything. But I just get lazy and don’t do it.

KJ was running from the lazy moments in attempts to escape the desire for them. However, the more he tried to escape them, the more he desired them. He believed that the *desire* to take a break was normal, but the actual taking a break, he saw as lazy. This was most likely the case because of the guilt associated with the breaks he was taking when he could’ve been doing more. “Like it’s hard here especially and to succeed is really hard here. It’s just that I think I can do, I feel like I can do more. I just don’t do it sometimes I just get lazy.” Yet he realizes that his desire

to take a break is a normal feeling I don't feel pressure from it. It's just that sometimes like I know everybody has like their times when they don't feel like doing it so sometimes that just happens.

Aaron described similar feelings of getting lazy and wanting a break as KJ. The difference between the two participants was that Aaron embraced taking breaks; he allowed himself to take a break but placed limitations on the breaks. He described this process as follows:

> And sometimes I do get lazy. Like everybody gets lazy and wants to take a break. I will admit sometimes I do get lazy and feel I don't have to do that, or I don't want to do that I have an A in this class, but still that will be the only thing I'll do that quarter. Like in my mind, if I already have taken a resting break and failed a test, I'm not going to fail no more tests. That's what I think I should do. If you fail one test that semester and you just say I don't feel like passing that test or studying for that test and you fail it, then just one time. Because humans aren't perfect. But my system is one time each quarter, just one time, one day I can say I don't feel like studying. And if another test comes where I don't feel like studying for it and I've already did the flunk test or whatever well too bad then I'm going to study for it.

By embracing breaks (e.g., resting breaks, study breaks, homework breaks) instead of attempting to escape them, Aaron gained control over his desires for them. He allowed himself to be imperfectly human yet still disciplined by setting limits of one resting break, one failed test, one time per quarter, and one day without studying.

The participants evidenced several different responses to the challenges they

faced: Embraced challenges because they were necessary for success, mistakes are inevitable, challenges are opportunities to overcome and succeed. In Bruce's experience, not being challenged inhibited his progress:

> When I came here one of my biggest challenges was asking for help when needed. Well [my challenge of not asking for help] it developed because I really wasn't challenged in school work that much so everything I would just do on my own. So then when the time came I just tried to figure it out on my own. And then one way how I did that was because I noticed my grades were coming down I knew I had to ask for help no matter what.

The participants were high academic achievers and they were also imperfect. They had positive experiences and they had negative ones. The participants make great decisions and sometimes they made mistakes. Bruce described a negative experience that took place in fifth grade Mistakes are inevitable but mistakes should be coupled with reflection on ways to repair what has been broken.

> "Only one bad thing that happen and it was in fifth-grade but it really wasn't like a major situation I understand what had happened now because my friend he had ADHD and what's it called he just got mad one day and threw his backpack at me and then that was the first time I experienced getting real mad at someone and accidentally out of rage just hit him and I really didn't...I wasn't thinking about what I was doing and I regret ever doing that because he was really close friends with me but after that we settled it out and everything is good"

Bruce provided another example of the role mistakes play in learning. Mistakes are allowed because everyone has a bad day.

> I would ask them like how they did and it's always good news but like if they had one bad grade I can understand like you probably were doing good and then one day you had a bad day you bombed a test and that could've just bring down your grade by a lot.

John had two younger siblings from outside relationships. He had pondered the idea of not accepting or loving his "outside" siblings. Further, he questioned the paternity of his two outside siblings; his use of the word "so-called" when talking about the baby mommas. The following excerpt revealed this:

> Well it's not really that big because my dad he has two, so-called baby mommas and two of them came from her. I wouldn't trade them in for nothing, because I love them all equally. It's not really that bad having a full house. Because there's always somebody to talk to like play with, so you never get bored.

Despite the aforementioned challenges these participants faced, they demonstrated high academic achievement. Aaron believed that students who are not academically successful could experience success by having a mentor. He believed that the cycle of underachievement could be broken through the use of mentors or role models who worked with the student to develop an individualized, detailed, life planning session. Mentors would be assigned to work with students in a one-on-one basis providing insight and explaining alternative choices to negative options. He described this in the following excerpts:

> …people come to schools and give speeches and everything about oh I did this and you should do it too, but if there someone, a mentor and they had to be one on one with them, and really going into detail on the things they could do and how they could do it, then

> I'm pretty sure they would change more lives than just giving a speech in front of a whole bunch of kids who are more than likely not listening at the time.
>
> …but if someone took the time to explain to them that of course it's going to take hard work, then you can get the money and the clothes and all that kind of stuff, through education, and not just through selling drugs or whatever it is that their doing in that area or community.

Theme Four: Striving For The Good Life: "I Just Want To Be A Good Man Overall"

Each of the participants' expressed a desire to experience the "good life" which often meant being a good man who sets high goals and attains them, who provides for his family and gives back to his community. A good man has a passion for being a good person.

Passion for being a good person. Bruce was passionate about being a good person, which meant being trustworthy, reliable, and someone who others could open up with. He described this as:

> I'm passionate about being a good person in this world that we have because to me being a good person is just everything you want to be. You want to be that trustful person someone can rely on someone can come to you and ask you for anything and you will be able to do it for them.

Being a good person is an essential character trait according to KJ, who abided by the philosophy of treat others how you want to be treated. He described being a good person as:

> Well a good person also came with the passion to well like to help out my parents and stuff because in order for me to do good further on in life and just to help out my family one main thing that you always have to be is just a good person always to be able to treat someone like how you want to be treated just being there

trustworthy and just being an overall a good friend.

James enjoyed helping others and serving his community. He described feeling great after spending time serving the community as "I felt like I was giving back to my community.

Scholar Preparatory School organizes service projects for students and their families. James detailed the most recent service project they completed:

> Eighth grade it's all about like helping people out so like something that we did earlier this year was kind of fun like we had went to an elderly lady's house then we had like cleaned the outside cause she wasn't able to because she was like elderly. So we like lawn mowed we got all the trash out of the yard. We picked weeds and stuff.

James enthusiastically detailed the tasks he partook in that day, suggesting that this was a very rewarding experience for James and it is likely that he will take on future community service projects.

Marriage, commitment, future and family. Each of the participants noted plans of becoming a husband and father after establishing themselves so that they would be able to provide for their family's financial wants and needs. For Aaron, having children fulfills the purpose of one's existence which is to change the earth and repopulate it. He also noted the essential role of a wife to provide companionship, and to hold someone accountable for maintaining high expectations of the husband. Aaron's explanation of why he desired to be married was as follows:

> It's something I want to do because you—I feel like you could always use someone to

> go back home to and talk to, tell about your day. Someone there that is going to support you at all times and I feel like you should have kids because you're on the earth kind of to change it, but you are also here to repopulate it so—and kids are good thing to have, it's just someone that's there to look up to you so, I feel like having a wife and kids is a good thing.

Aaron continued to detail the benefits of having a wife that included companionship, conversation, and constant support, "…I feel like you could always use someone to go back home to and talk to, tell about your day. Someone there that is going to support you at all times…" B.W. highlighted the importance of being established before getting married and having children when he said:

> I guess I want to get married and have kids when I graduate from college and I'm on my feet and have a job and things like that. I would want to have a family, like the kids and wife and things like that, when I get older.

John believed that being in a committed is a smart choice because it demonstrates that an individual cares about his or her life. He continued by explaining that a relationship can be all that you make it out to be. The following is an excerpt of his belief in commitment:

> And I also say that your relationship is what you make it. If you want to be a person who is a so-called "player" and go out there and have so many baby mommas, you go ahead and do that. But if you want to be smart and care about your life, then you'll follow up with having one wife and kids.

The participants identified benefits to commitment in relationships including companionship, security, building of mutual respect, loyalty and trust. There were also negative consequences related to non-commitment in relationships. B.W. explained them as:

> If you have a kid at a young age or have multiple kids and have to pay child support and stuff like that, it can really affect your career. Some kids can even drop out of high school or something. If you're not ready for it, it can put a dent and make it harder for you to achieve your goals in life.

Christopher identified loyalty as a good virtue to have when thinking about future relationships. Loyalty is at the source of many of the issues that result in individuals being left with nothing. "A second one is staying in a relationship, being loyal is a thing that's really--I think most people encourage being loyal but some people just want to do whatever with themselves." Christopher explained this as, "Something happens and your wife finds out, well you didn't tell me you had her. All of these different issues that can leave you with nothing." Christopher discussed the importance of loyalty:

> But I think being loyal is a good virtue to have even if you don't stay together, at least you know you only had one wife at the time and you don't have to go through I had her and she was on the side. You don't have to go through all of this.

Christopher's desire for a family likely stems from his upbringing. His parents are married and work together to raise their three children. He was motivated to get married to start a family of his own, avoid child support and fathering children with multiple women, and an opportunity to demonstrate loyalty. He described his ideal family makeup as follows, "I just want 2 kids, that's all. And hopefully a career I like and it will balance my family and my job…" James' spiritual convictions included practicing abstinence until marriage. He also noted the importance of having a wife and children one day and He said, "[This belief came from] church…Well you have to get married before you have sex or whatever." James also attributes his church to preventing him from adopting a "player" trend popular among young

males.

The participants viewed education as the channel through which they would become financially solvent. Christopher recommended, "…try to get an education in what you like and whatever you may do, at least get to the point where you're financially solvent so you can support your wife, your kids." He went on to explain that having the resources necessary to provide family with resources and experiences will set them up to be successful. Christopher stated:

> If they need some money you can give it to them. Like if your child says I need $5.00 for school, you don't say I don't have it right now. You can just reach in your wallet and give it to them because you have everything you need and you have extra money to spend on other things, go on vacations annually, go out of the country, go on airplanes instead of driving from New York to Tampa, things like that.

Christopher seemed to reveal some of his personal experiences in that he frequently focused on the need to become financially solvent. He desired to fill in the financial gaps that existed in his upbringing with his future wife and children to ensure that his future generations would be prosperous.

Theme Five: Planning For Success: "That's How I Study"

The participants followed study routines and patterns based upon what worked best for them and helped them attain their academic goals, which for the majority was a 4.0 GPA. The time spent studying and completing homework each night ranged from none to an upwards of 3 hours. The participants who did not have to complete homework and study at home had already done so either after finishing classwork early and using the spare time to work on it in class,

during lunch or recess, at an afterschool program, or on the bus ride home. Those who completed their homework at home required more time to pick review concepts taught in class and ensure that they were completing the homework correctly.

Use time wisely by identifying and implementing study methods that work. James adjusted his study habits according to his mastery and comfort of the subject:

> Yes, umm like because science I feel is like my most difficult subject so like when our midterms come like I'll like study the night before umm so that's like one of the main subjects that I have to study for.

However, he most often used the strategy of studying right before the test to do well, "…but I do like study right before the test so it's like fresh in my mind". James described his homework routine as follows: "Like I can get most of it done in school so I just finish what I need to finish outside of school…Like in school then like on the bus cause I like take the bus home". Ashton also used his spare time to complete homework, he described his routine as "And I do my homework the day I get it assigned to me…At home and sometimes during my free time like at recess or student time." But he required additional time to study and utilized the study strategy of having his mom quiz him. He described his study method as:

> Like I'll study like two nights before and then the night before. I study all the questions that we get on our review. I make sure I get quizzed by my mom so I know the questions that will be on the test. That's how I study.

B.W. followed a similar pattern of making the best use of his time; when he finished his work early he would work on his homework and used recess or breakfast time to complete his homework. He described his process as:

> Yes if you get done with your work early in class or if you want to do it during recess or like you shouldn't do this but like if you didn't do your homework last night and you want you get it done with your friends in the morning or something. A lot of times, I like to get homework done at school and stuff like yeah but sometimes we do have to study and sometimes we have a project so an hour or two.

Michael was the only participant who followed a more traditional homework and study routine, he described as "I usually go home, eat, take my shower and then get on my homework, and then have free time afterwards." He also had the lowest grade point average of all of the participants. This suggests that the use of spare moments throughout the day couple with an eagerness to complete the assignment and its connection to their future goals, worked in concert to boost achievement beyond traditional routines of doing homework at home.

Connect future career aspirations to present interests/personality. The participants identified their areas of interest, personal strengths, and personality characteristics and then linked them to careers that would likely be a good match for them. KJ explained this process as he experienced it:

> I looked throughout my periods and classes my grades because my strongest parts of my grades would have to be science and math and then that all adds up with accountant pediatrician or architect. because for pediatrician you have to know about the medicine and how it affects the body and also to work with chemicals and then for architect you have to know what type of material to use how much the length and for accountant that's just pure math and baseball is just my passion.

KJ identified a range of career options that directly linked back to his passions and areas of interest. This was a strategy he used to ensure that he would identify a career that would maintain his interest and focus, which as aforementioned, had been an issue for KJ in the classroom. Christopher enjoyed coming up with arguments and identifying evidence to support his argument. He explained his connecting this interest to a potential career, "I like making arguments, supporting them and bringing evidence to the table to show you why my argument is. That's kind of why I want to go into Law right now". Ashton's future career aspirations were aligned with his aspects of his personality such as being a good listener and being a problem solver. He described this as:

> Well, I try to like, solve people's problems, and when people are sad or upset or mad, some people, like, they come to me and talk to me. I [also] see myself being – becoming a doctor, saving people's lives…[a] psychiatrist…Because, well, it was when I was younger, I used to, when I used to go to the doctor, the stethoscope, that was a pretty cool tool to me. And one time, my dad had bought it and I used to listen to my heart and lungs, and my brother's and my sister's, and my brother's heart.

Bruce made the connection between his desired future career and his present interest. He described this in the following excerpt:

> I did mock trial or whatever I like being in a position of a lawyer and having to come up with a case to present. And I like art and stuff like that so I wouldn't mind being an architect. I like business and also making money and starting my own business maybe or something like that.

Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that the participant's experiences of academic success were possible because they were given an opportunity to thrive. Not because they came from financially prosperous backgrounds, but optimistically prosperous ones. They were the sons, grandsons, and nephews of individuals who believed in their ability to achieve success to the greatest extent possible. The participants' parents wanted more for their sons than they had and sought opportunities to ensure that they did. For those who did not even realize what they were seeking but were open to the opportunity for advancement when it presented itself, despite numerous sacrifices required of them, they allowed their sons to partake.

This opportunity was Scholar Preparatory School, a school physically located in an impoverished neighborhood where less than 50% of the adult residents had a high school diploma. Yet the spiritual and cultural nature of this school provided the participants with a safe haven, a utopian environment that rejected the "commercialized", negative depiction of Black males. Instead Black males were depicted as intelligent, talented beings capable of mastering rigorous educational programs, outperforming students of all races on high stakes tests, earning seats at the city's top high schools, and being well-prepared to endure the journey to lifelong success.

The parents of these participants sought better educational opportunities for their sons and in their seeking found a school with a shared vision to inspire and empower youth to become academically successful, future community leaders. The focus on community leadership was to equip the students with the resources necessary to eventually return to their communities and impact change. The participants' academic success appeared to be due to a combination of: parents and surrogate parents awareness of their child's needs and pursuit of

opportunities for the participants to reach their full potential; the continuous involvement and the active role the faculty of Scholar Preparatory School that included coaching and empowering the participants, 24 hour access to teacher support with the provision of high expectations for their academic and behavioral performance and consistent follow-through, which all worked in concert to support the development of young men who were committed to and believed in their ability to achieve in every area of their lives.

The academic performance and outcomes of African American males is often assessed from a deficit-based approach, one that focuses on the problems they are facing as opposed to the successes they have achieved. This approach presents an incomplete picture that restricts the trajectory for Black males to dismal futures. Holzman and Jackson (2015) admonished traditional research methods and presented an alternative approach in the following statement:

> We must ensure that the nation is aware of the true contributions and progress that they are making as much as they are aware of the problems they face. Our nation's charge is not to keep our brothers invisible, but to be the keepers of the flame that exists in each of them, and through it allow them to operate and be seen as the positive lights that they are in our communities, states and country. (p. 23)

The participants of this research study have actively contributed to the improvement of their community through their active participation in service learning projects throughout each school year for the past several years. Further, the educational experiences of the participants of this research study are examples of the contributions they have made in disproving notions that academic success is unattainable for Black males or is an exception to the norm. In fact in their experience, their realities, academic achievement among Black males is the norm.

Chapter Five

Discussion

"We wouldn't ask why a rose that grew from the concrete had damaged petals, in turn, we would all celebrate its tenacity, we would all love its will to reach the sun. Well, we are the roses, this is the concrete and these are my damaged petals, don't ask me why, thank God, and ask me how."

~Tupac Shakur

This chapter begins with a discussion of the research findings presented in Chapter Four and proceeds with an application of the findings to each of the research questions and connections to the Scholar Identity Model theoretical framework. My experiences as a researcher, school psychologist, wife, and mother will be shared throughout this discussion to demonstrate how this research study impacted my thinking. Next, practical implications for educators, school psychologists, and parents will be discussed. Then implications for research will be examined followed by limitations. Finally, this chapter concludes with a discussion of future directions for research.

Findings and Interpretations

African American Males Meeting or Exceeding Grade-Level Expectations

The nine young men in this study were "on the up n up". Essentially, they had come to the realization that they were imperfect beings that still had growing and learning to do. They broke the rules sometimes, which usually resulted in school disciplinary actions of afterschool detention, silent lunches, and writing lines. They experienced 'life isn't fair' moments that led to frustration and conclusions that their teachers showed favoritism. They had "lazy" moments where they did

not feel like doing homework and did not do homework or they procrastinated on homework, projects, and delayed study time. The participants talked during class when they should have been paying attention. At home, they sometimes talked back to their parents, felt they deserved more recognition from their parents, and complained about the nine hours or longer school day.

However, because they had developed positive scholar identities they identified these shortcomings and made plans to improve them. In my experiences as a school psychologist, I have had many opportunities to work with middle school students in general and African American males in middle school in particular. While the young men I work with are able to identify their shortcomings, they do not typically volunteer their plans to improve or strengthen their shortcomings. This is not to say they do not have plans; however, they do not voluntarily share these plans with others. Further, the young men in this study remained steadfast in their goals to be educationally successful because it was the means through which they planned to achieve lifelong success. This success included obtaining careers as physicians, psychologists, attorneys, entrepreneurs, and professional athletes. These career aspirations were similar to the participants in study by Lee and colleagues (2011) where participants aspired to become professional athletes (i.e., NFL and NBA) or physicians as the leading choices for future careers.

According to the Lee et al. (2011) Black males have high career and educational aspirations and high belief in their ability to attain these goals but lack the knowledge of the route to their attainment. On the contrary, participants in the current study detailed their life plans that included attending specific high schools and a selection of colleges with a connection to career goals that also included backup plans (i.e., "plan B") in the event that their preferred plan (i.e., plan A) was not attainable. Participants in the current study also aspired to get married and have children after becoming financially established so that they would be able to provide for their family.

On their journey to success, these participants faced obstacles such as absent fathers; disappointment in parents' lack of attention and recognition; being falsely accused; exposure to the plight of the Black male propaganda; misbehaving at school due to boredom and/or negative peer influences; limited free time due to long school days; and having "lazy" moments, among others. Nevertheless, they were highly motivated to achieve academically because they believed education was the key to attaining their long-term goals and, ultimately, lifelong success. They possessed both self-efficacy and with a positive scholar identity. Further, they were mindful of the sacrifices others made for them and were committed to delaying of gratification in order to achieve their goals.

In my daily work experiences, this concept of delaying gratification is not evident. The students with whom I typically work are those who have been brought to my attention by parents, teachers/administration, problem-solving teams, and student self-referrals due to academic, behavioral, and/or socioemotional concerns. The students are sometimes in an active state of distress when I meet them. Those who I am evaluating related to academic or behavioral concerns typically have had a long history of academic failure or getting into trouble, so they have sometimes already begun to disengage, accepting their current state of failure or position as problem child. As such, they require coaching and guidance to identify ways in which they can improve their circumstances (e.g., grades, behavioral performance) by first taking responsibility for their actions; becoming aware of the sacrifices they will be required to make; developing a plan of action; and identifying resources and barriers to carrying out the plan. Delayed gratification is generally a part of this discussion after I bring it to their attention and provide them with specific examples of how prioritizing the improvement of their areas of weakness will require putting things on hold temporarily or indefinitely.

The students are generally not too enthused by this idea but are usually willing to listen to the benefits of doing so and work with me to develop a plan of action.

As a mother of a one-year-old daughter and a three-year-old daughter, I have to consciously search for opportunities to train my children to delay gratification because the behaviors (i.e., screaming/crying/tantruming/ whining/pleading) they engage in to receive immediate gratification are quite effective. However, I am aware that the sooner they learn that they will not always get what they want when they want it and that life sometimes 'throws you lemons' so you have to 'make lemonade,' the more prepared they will be to independently and effectively handle the inevitable challenges. Operant conditioning is likely to explain the difficulty some students experience with delaying gratification. These students are likely to have been reinforced with the immediate or expeditious removal (i.e., negative reinforcement) or addition (i.e., positive reinforcement) of something, which fulfilled their wants or needs. Repeated occurrences reinforced the notion that having wants or needs met must occur immediately.

"Always Reaching To Be better": The Cultivation Of Academic Achievement

Always reaching to be better represents participants' parents seeking opportunities for upward mobility through college preparatory schooling and participants internalizing doing well in school as an essential part of life. The Scholar Identity Model emphasizes the foundational role that families play in laying the groundwork necessary for the development of a positive scholar identity, which is apparent in this theme (Whiting, 2006b). Parents seeking opportunities for the upward educational mobility of their children was also indicated by Maton and colleagues (1998) who found that parents of academically successful African American adolescent males were active in their emphasis of the importance of education. These researchers found that parents emphasized the importance of education and high academic performance; high expectations for achievement; provision of early childhood learning experiences; advocating for

rigorous academic tracks, active involvement in school activities and organizations; frequent communication with teachers, providing sons with assistance completing homework assignments and projects; and enrolling their sons in summer educational enrichment programs. In terms of the participant internalizing doing well in school as an essential part of life, Graham and Anderson (2008) found a similar theme of "school is serious to me" among high achieving African American adolescents who felt school was the means to acquire knowledge and make a difference in the world. These young men endeavored to fulfill this purpose through hard work, planning, and being their personal best. Further, the participants had positive academic identities in terms of a belief in their own academic ability and perception that teachers viewed them as "successful" and "better than most" (Graham & Anderson, 2008).

The promotion and nurturing of a scholar identity has been suggested as the means in which to eliminate the "at-risk" factors facing a high percentage of Black males (Whiting, 2006). As described in chapter one, a scholar identity is "one in which culturally diverse males view themselves as academicians, as studious, as competent and capable, and as intelligent or talented in school settings (Whiting, 2006a, p.48). The research findings supported the concept that nurturing or cultivating a scholar identity resulted in academic achievement.

The participants of this study were from working class families of low socioeconomic statuses; some were being raised by single mothers and others were being raised by parents who had not completed high school. Although each of these elements have been indicated among the risk-factors for school dropout (i.e., single parent households, limited parental education, and limited family income), dropout was not an option for these young men who were not only meeting expectations but exceeding them (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Although the majority of the participants' parents had not experienced educational rigor, they were still able to identify its importance and sought opportunities to ensure that their sons had the schooling opportunities they

did not have. This finding contrasts with the result by Stinson (2008) that "observing or knowing family or community members who had benefited from formal education by achieving financial and societal success" was linked achievement among African American adolescent males.

In addition to seeking out better educational opportunities, these parents sought groups outside of school for their sons to join. Participants' self-efficacy was nurtured as a result of having opportunities for success through involvement in sports activities, church activities (e.g., Sunday school, choir, musicians), and community organizations (e.g., Boys and Girls Club of America©, Boy Scouts of America®, and little league basketball). Participants' beliefs in their ability to learn and achieve in areas outside of academics supported beliefs in their ability to learn and achieve within academics. Parents of the participants in the current study demonstrated support and encouraged the development of positive self-efficacy, the foundational characteristic of scholar identity development (Whiting, 2006b). A study by Kerpelman et al. (2008) identified the benefits of developing positive self-efficacy; these researchers found self-efficacy and parental support to be among the factors that strengthened the future education orientations of African American adolescent males.

The current findings suggest several strategies and structures that create an optimal learning environment for the development of scholar identities and certainty of academic achievement. Scholar Preparatory School captured the essential qualities, in the form of structures and strategies, necessary to support achievement, and it became the exemplar by which participants gauged the effectiveness of previous schooling experiences and the educational potential of future school settings. These structures included: being accepted into and attending a school with rigorous entrance requirements; exposure to a rigorous educational curriculum that requires development of study skills and routines in and outside of school in order to be successful; classroom compositions reflective of research-based practices said to improve

academic performance such as gender based classrooms, extended school hours, and small class sizes; acknowledgement of student achievement; and relationships with local college preparatory high schools that enabled participants to shadow and gain insight into what school would be like at a given high school. The Scholar Identity Model also identifies school as a contributing factor to the continued development of a scholar identity. This was evident in the current study in that Scholar Prep appeared to play a large role in participants' academic achievement (Whiting, 2006b).

At Scholar Prep, the strategies that created an optimal environment for academic achievement included participant exposure to novel activities beyond the core academic course load to those such as enrichment classes (e.g., movie productions, African dance, and golf); hands-on learning experiences (e.g., as community service learning projects and fieldtrips to U.S. capitol); and teachers who (1) enforced an expectation of excellence by holding students accountable for their decisions and the commitment they made to achieve, (2) served as role models, and (3) instilled a love for learning in their students. Further, the teachers who incorporated practical, relevant examples from their own lives (i.e., self-disclosure) within the academic content helped students connect deeper with the curriculum and stimulated their interested in a particular subject. These structures and strategies include the factors *mentor/role model* and *community* that contribute to the continued development of the characteristics of positive scholar identity development (Whiting, 2006b).

Similar findings were yielded in a study conducted by James (2010) who found that academic excellence among African American males in the fifth grade at an all-boys academy was increased by the academy's practices of *promoting excellence* and the *instructional complexities in promoting excellence*. Specifically, James' (2010) study found that the teachers implemented:

> (1) innovative ways to teach material; (2) different strategies to promote behavioral excellence; (3) procedures of gaining students advice on how to improve their classes; and (4) optimism for continued success in the upcoming year" and students demonstrated: "(1) a desire to achieve and meet Excel's academic and social standards; (2) a peer culture that encouraged the pursuit of academic and social excellence; and (3) a belief that teachers have their best interests at heart. (p.184)

Likewise, Stinson (2008) found that "encountering caring and committed teachers and school personnel who established high academic expectations for students and developed relationships with students that reached beyond the school and academics" supported the academic achievement of African American males.

The systems of support among the participants of the present study also included fellow male peers within their cohort. These relationships were termed "brotherly bonds" by Participant 5, Aaron, because they described the tightknit brotherhood they had formed both inside and outside of school. The significance of this brotherhood was evident in the example provided of several of the students brought to tears upon hearing of the expulsion of their fellow "brother". The brotherly bonds were formed with students who have shared values which contrasted with several of the participants' previous schooling experiences where hanging with the wrong crowd was a challenge because the children in their neighborhood school would misbehave and got in to trouble frequently. This served as a barrier to building a positive peer network. A similar factor was indicated by Stinson (2008) who found that "associating with high-achieving peer- group members who had similar goals and interests" contributed to achievement among African American adolescent males (p. 1002).

The cultivation of academic achievement required a system of support beyond that provided solely through the structures and strategies present at school. Families also served as a system of support and included parents, stepparents, siblings, and extended family members like aunts, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers. The traditional forms of support the parents gave were financial, stable home environment, character development in the form of "home training", homework help, educational advocacy, and spiritual guidance (e.g., praying together and encouraging participant to read the Bible). Similar results were yielded by Berry (2008) who identified the theme *support system* in reference to the essential role participants' parents played in helping them be academically successful (e.g., advocated for more advanced courses; joined committees, chaperoned fieldtrips, got involved in fundraising; and reinforced the importance of education by setting expectations of high achievement, providing encouragement, and belief that they could achieve.

Participants in the current study also described nontraditional types of parent support including: a desire to please one's parents that encouraged positive decision making; a desire to receive recognition from parents that provided insight on how to be a better parent; and a father's physical absence yet verbal contact with reminders to "do good for me" as motivation to "do good." Further, participant six, Ashton, celebrated his father making an effort to be involved, so even on days when his father was not available, he was not disappointed. Similarly, Ashton's father remarried and started another family with two young children. Instead of being jealous, he looked to his father's new family as a model of stability. These are two examples of the optimistic nature the participants demonstrated; they considered obstacles to be opportunities for learning and progress.

Organizations within the community (e.g., Boy Scouts, Boys and Girls Club, and little league teams) served as additional forms of support for the participants that extended beyond the organization's focus to include interest in their academic performance as well. Participant one, KJ, shared how when he was having difficulty in his Spanish class, his little league basketball coach, who spoke Spanish fluently, began practicing the language with him. The coach even gave all the basketball plays during practice and games in Spanish. Community support also existed informally through the children in the neighborhood playing sports together because the community culture was favorable of such interactions. For participants like James, this informal "team" was the basis for the development of his passion for football, which translated into his confidence in his ability to excel in other areas. He enthusiastically described this as:

> Like in my neighborhood we used to play flag football every day, like we used to play tackle in the grass with the big kids too. Umm 'cause I would like get the ball and everybody would try to tackle me and I would just slide right through them because I was so small.

Maton and colleagues (1998) found a similar theme among academically successful African American adolescent males, which they called *community connectedness and resources*. This theme refers to the importance of connections in addition to the immediate family that contributed to the participants' academic success (e.g., extended family members, church affiliations, extracurricular activities, positive peers, and teachers).

As previously noted, the participants' desire to advance set the stage for the emergence of the confidence required to succeed. This desire to achieve has been described in the literature as a condition of the "need to achieve" theory as first described in the seminal study by McClelland (1961). Essentially, some individuals are highly motivated by the challenge and competition

involved in goal setting and goal attainment. Thus, these individuals are likely to receive gratification from setting and attaining challenging, yet realistic goals, which translates into motivation to continue goal setting and goal attainment (McClelland, 1961).

Sacrificing to Succeed: "My Ancestors Worked Hard, So I Should Work Hard...It Won't Be In Vain"

Participants' desires to advance were connected to the aerial perspective they had taken, which enabled them to view the pathways pioneered by their ancestors and the pathways they planned to blaze for future generations. They took pride in the fact that they represented their ancestors and those who shared their same racial background. Participants believed it was their responsibility to attain the goals their forefathers had given their lives for and to conduct themselves in a manner that would positively represent their people. This is similar to the research findings of Harris and Marsh (2010), which suggested that African American adolescents who felt connected to those from their racial background had higher academic achievement, higher educational aspirations, valued school more, and felt more connected to school than those who held a "raceless" orientation.

Graham and Anderson (2008) shared similar findings related to race and achievement with the theme, *I'm real big into knowing your heritage*, which encapsulated the participants' strong ethnic identities, which strengthened their academic identities due to their belief that academic mobility was necessary to "improve race relations while dispelling myths and destroying stereotypes" Graham & Anderson, 2008, p. 484).

Participants in the current study identified sacrifices that others made for them and sacrifices that they made for themselves in the form of delay of gratification. Bembenutty (2011, p. 55) defined academic delay of gratification as "students' postponement of immediately

available opportunities to satisfy impulses in favor of pursuing important academic rewards or goals that are temporally remote but ostensibly more valuable." Scholar Prep is replete with organizational factors requiring sacrifice in the form of delay of gratification, such as the extended school day (i.e., 7am-5pm or 6pm for study hall). Each participant named the long hours when asked about the worst thing about the academy; yet, many provided a disclaimer before or after explaining that the long hours were beneficial.

Although originally thought to be an inherent personality trait that could not be developed, research has indicated that individuals can be trained to delay gratification (Bembenutty, 2011). An example of such training is evident in participant number one, KJ, whose parents often *highlighted* the sacrifices that had been made for him and how blessed he was because they did not have the opportunities he did. His parents also *demonstrated* sacrifices in the actions of moving from Haiti to America and then relocating from a city north of Scholar Prep to the city the school was located in just so KJ could attend. The importance of acknowledging external sacrifices—those made by others—were evident in each of the participants' identification of these sacrifices ranging from accounts of Black history to examples of sacrifices made by parents and educators. The willingness to make sacrifices in order to attain academic goals is another characteristic that contributes to positive scholar identity development (Whiting, 2006b).

Trailblazing: "I'm Leading The Way For Them"

Each participant had been, was currently, or planned to be in a position of leadership in the near future. Leadership positions ranged from being the oldest child to being a leader among peers to being captain of a sport's team to being a Scholar Prep spokesperson during sponsorship events to future careers as physicians, attorneys, psychologists, and business owners. These young men were leaders who described their successes in terms of their academic performance, involvement in extracurricular activities, performance during

extracurricular activities, relationships with friends and parents, and the challenges they had previously faced and overcame.

Aiming high was a natural occurrence in their daily lives where they challenged themselves to be better by not settling with "just getting by" but excelling. KJ adopted a motto of challenging someone better than himself in order to become better and warned against going up against someone who was not better than him. He used his chess team involvement to illustrate this philosophy. A similar theoretical notion resulted from a study by Mezuk (2009) , who found that greater involvement with the debate team (i.e., participating in more debates) among African American adolescent males was associated with a higher graduation rate and higher English, reading, and science ACT scores (Mezuk, 2009). This finding fits with the idea of being challenged and competing, as Mezuk described, "competitive policy debate motivates learning because students participate in competitions that tangibly reward hard work (i.e., through trophies and recognition by school officials) (p. 302).

Participants described their challenges related to academic success as having what they described as "lazy moments". During such occasions participants did not feel like attending to school for upwards of 11 hours or they did not feel like completing homework assignments after being at school for 11 hours. Sometimes they just wanted a break and sometimes they just took it. Aaron described the process he used related to taking a break:

> And sometimes I do get lazy. Like everybody gets lazy and wants to take a break. I will admit sometimes I do get lazy and feel I don't have to do that, or I don't want to do that I have an A in this class, but still that will be the only thing I'll do that quarter. Like in my mind, if I already have taken a resting break and failed a test, I'm not going to fail no more tests. That's what I think I should do. If you fail one test that semester and you just say I don't feel like passing that test or

> studying for that test and you fail it, then just one time. Because humans aren't perfect. But my system is one time each quarter, just one time, one day I can say I don't feel like studying. And if another test comes where I don't feel like studying for it and I've already did the flunk test or whatever well too bad then I'm going to study for it.

The participants responded to these challenges by consciously developing a mindset for success involving both mental (i.e., thought processes of analyzing and planning) and physical maneuvers (i.e., actions taken). The mental processes involved consciously separating their beliefs about themselves from other people's beliefs about them. Instead they found motivation by looking internally and reflecting on past successes because they had proven once before they were capable of success. An example of the physical processes involved in maneuvering was the notion of living within protected boundaries. This protection occurred due to the participants' parents prohibiting them from spending time outside or them choosing not to on their own which resulted in them not having friends in their neighborhoods. Parents' reasoning for restricting their sons' access outside was to protect their time (e.g., ensure they had ample time after school to get homework done and fulfill other responsibilities like chores and caring for younger siblings), and this protected state of existence likely reduced pressure to conform to peer or societal pressures.

Parents modeled anticipation of challenges by proactively responding by protecting the boundaries in which the participants lived. Participants anticipated challenges by reflecting on their past challenges and identifying strategies to prevent the challenges from reoccurring. For example, Bruce recalled times in which he misbehaved because he was bored and finished with his work. He offered examples of completing extra homework or classwork, teachers providing student with a tougher curriculum, and teachers looking for a pattern of good academics and bad behavior.

This identification of challenges and ways to overcome them is reflective of self- awareness, which is a characteristic of the Scholar Identity Model (Whiting, 2006b).

Striving for the Good Life: "I Just Want To Be A Good Man Overall"

Each of the participants expressed a desire to be a good man by giving back to their community in service; becoming a physician in order to heal people; becoming a family law attorney to help resolve familial discord; becoming a psychologist to help relieve mental health issues; and getting married and providing for a family, all of which would be obtained through high educational attainment. This belief reflected the characteristic of masculinity within the Scholar Identity Model, which posits that intelligence and academic achievement are essential parts of manhood (Whiting, 2006b). The young men in this study rejected any ideologies that were counterproductive to the achievement of their goals or misrepresented who they were and were they were going. One participant rejected the stereotypical notions of "coolness" he observed being promoted within the Black community like "sagging pants" and tattoos because they were asinine to him. He did not understand why someone would want their undergarments showing or get tattoos that would have to be covered up when working in a professional job setting.

The participants also rejected the "player" ideology that appeared to be normalized within the Black community that praised promiscuity, lack of commitment, and broken families. While they rejected this destructive ideology, they embraced the alternative, constructive ideology presented by the Impact class at Scholar Prep. Two of the participants, John and B.W., referenced a topic they discussed during this class about a strong man being faithful to one woman and a test of manhood was not being with multiple women but demonstrating self-control and loyalty by being with one. James shared the same belief about commitment to one woman, but his

convictions were spiritually based and in keeping with biblical principles of abstinence until marriage, which he indicated prevented him from succumbing to societal pressures to have sex outside of marriage.

James also specified a direct connection between spirituality and academic achievement when he discussed spiritually in the context of self-regulation. Michael also directly addressed the role of spirituality in his academic performance when he said "…I knew that I could depend on my God-given talents to carry me all the way in my religious beliefs. That if I believed in God, he can carry me all the way to victory." The function of spirituality in academic achievement was addressed by Michael-Chadwell et al. (2009) who found that African American males view spirituality as a means of coping, self-regulating, and progressing academically.

Planning for Success: "That's How I Study"

The participants followed specific study routines in preparation for exams and adjusted their study habits in accordance with their level of mastery of the subject or topic area. Some participants were able to study the night before a test and do well while others required longer preparation times like several days prior to, the night before, and sometimes the morning of as well, that included being quizzed by a parent. Similar patterns were demonstrated in homework completion routines, where some participants worked on their homework shortly after it was assigned; during free moments throughout the school day like during recess or lunch; and on the bus ride home to minimize the amount of time needed to complete homework once they get home from school.

This contradicts the finding from Gayles (2005) suggesting that some African American adolescent males diminished the significance of high academic achievement as a means of identification because they did not wish to be distinguished from their peers and would

deliberately engage in behaviors to solidify normalcy. Further, the participants were exhibiting the characteristic of scholar identity development that posited the need for achievement is greater than the need for affiliation (Whiting, 2006b). So although the participants were not diminishing the significance of achievement when they openly completed academic activities during free time, they were prioritizing achievement over social interactions.

Participants in this study had career aspirations in mind that were linked to their talents, areas of interest, and/or personality traits. For example, KJ noted science and mathematics as his strongest subjects and identified careers linked to science (i.e., pediatrician) and mathematics (i.e., accountant or architect). Christopher expressed interest in law based on him enjoying coming up with arguments and evidence to support his claims. Ashton was a good listener who like helping solve other people's problems so he wanted to be a psychiatrist. These young men were able to identify their successes and challenges and describe them in terms of their connection to the future. The participants planned for success by identifying their personal strengths and areas of interest to ensure longevity and commitment to the fields of study they would pursue careers. This finding is similar to the theme utilitarian achievement identified by Gayles (2005), which describes academically successful African American adolescents' view of academic achievement as a means to an end; "the primary value of academic achievement [is its] perceived future benefits" (Gayles, 2005).

Practical Implications for School Psychologists

School psychologists are leaders within school settings. We are frequently consulted for our expertise in a variety of areas. We provide services to the entire school including students and teachers. We are perceived as resources and often have the highest levels of educational training, knowledge of school law, and knowledge of evidence-based practices. Due to the fact that we are

able to work with students individually or in small groups, we are in a prime position to work with our school's leadership team, parents, and students to provide increased and strategic support to marginalized populations like African American males.

School psychologists can support schools in the development of action plans to increase academic achievement among African American males by facilitating the problem-solving process among key stakeholders, such as the school's problem-solving leadership team by first identifying the problem (e.g., underrepresentation in gifted/talented courses, overrepresentation in special education, discipline disproportionality, academic achievement gap) and then identifying barriers and resources to address those barriers. School psychology preparation programs can prepare future school psychologists for this role by first, gauging the trainees beliefs concerning the condition s of academic attainment among Black males and then identify their beliefs as to why the conditions are this way. This will provide instructors with information on the starting point of training. For example, if a school psychologist trainee believes that the reason for the Black-white academic achievement gap is because Black males are underachievers who are lazy, then instructors know that significant foundational work must be done to educate (e.g., via literature, books, first person accounts) this trainee on the many factors associated with the achievement gap beyond deficit based, simplistic explanations.

Once all trainees are able to provide optimistic outlooks on achievement among African American males and no longer show signs of resistance (e.g., "why is there such a focus on Black males"), instructors will be able to begin training them in systematic ways to identify strengths among Black males and how to use those strengths to improve their academic performance. Instructors can implement role plays so trainees can receive feedback and coaching from the instructors. The instructors should explain that this strength identification would take place during individual or small group sessions that include the use of multicultural counseling techniques.

Follow-up sessions would be for coaching and future planning. The information gathered during these sessions can be shared with teachers. School psychologists would then support teachers in the development of the factors that were found to support the high achievement of Black males discussed in the following section.

Practical Implications for Educators

Prioritize rigor, relevance, and relationships. The academically rigorous program at Scholar Prep was most commonly cited as being the best thing about the school. The participants embraced the challenge knowing that it would prepare them to continue to advance educationally. The teachers also embraced the rigorousness of Scholar Prep, upholding high academic and behavioral expectations for student performance. One of the participants cited the positive impact his teacher's self-disclosure had on him. Aaron described, "I like his intelligence level and I can see myself leading a life like his as an adult." The teacher self-disclosed details about how he takes care of his family and handles his finances. This history teacher would also provide:

> interesting examples to relate to topics that we talk about in class, so just the way he talks about the things he does and the processes he takes to do the things that he does in his life is just a good thing for a man to have so, his student can look up to him.

As previously stated, teachers can build positive relationships with their students and help them connect with learning across the curriculum by demonstrating a passion for the subject (e.g., body language, movement, engaged students with questions); finding commonalities among students' interest (e.g., food) and implementing them into a lesson; breaking down ideas from abstract to concrete things students can visualize and relate to; finding out students' interests in order to make connections that keep student interested; and identifying way to connect students to subjects.

Proactively identify and celebrate the strengths. Several participants discovered Scholar Preparatory School after being encouraged to attend by their public school elementary teachers. These teachers recognized the existence of the participant's academic talents even in the midst of engaging in misbehaviors. They did not become engrossed in the student's behavior and "interpret the behaviors as aggressive, disrespectful, defiant, and intimidating" a common occurrence among teachers of Black males (Allen, 2014, p.211). Instead these teachers identified and celebrated the academic strengths of the participants. Seven years later, one of the participants, James, readily recalled this event and credited this teacher for helping him develop a passion for This celebration came in the form of praise, boasting of the academic talents to others (e.g., parents, administration, guidance), and recommending student to be screened for potential giftedness.

Build trusting relationships and enforce an expectation of excellence. Educational researchers have noted the vital role teachers play in student achievement, saying, "the common denominator in school improvement and student success *is* the teacher" (Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011, p. 351). Teachers are in a primary position to either enhance or diminish students' perceptions of school and perceptions of themselves as a learner capable of achieving (e.g., self-efficacy and academic confidence) (Howard, 2010). A critical element involved in securing African American male academic success is the building of positive teacher-student relationships (Barbarin, Chinn, & Wright, 2014). Similarly, Uwah et al. (2008) found that African American males' perceptions of feeling encouraged were significantly predictive of their academic self-efficacy. When these students' were directly invited to participate in school academic or extracurricular activities, they had higher levels of self-efficacy.

When examining teacher expectations of the school performance of Black males, it has been found to be negatively impacted by racist suppositions related to their intellectual and academic abilities. Such stereotypes serve to weaken the possibility for the development of a

positive teacher-student relationship. Further, this low expectation for Black male performance serves to perpetuate the educational inequities of overrepresentation in special education programs and underrepresentation in gifted and talented programs (Allen, 2014).

In this study, participants' teachers enforced an expectation of excellence, which the young men interpreted as strict and sometimes accusatory. Yet, when they carefully reflected on their teachers having reinforced consequences to rules they had violated, the participants readily accepted responsibility for their actions and acknowledged that if the teacher had given a consequence it was because they had earned it. The participants' acceptance of teacher criticism was due to the fact that the teachers had built trusting relationships with their students through demonstrating a genuine concern about their educational trajectories. For example, teachers were readily available to provide additional support in and out of school (e.g., teachers gave students their cell phone numbers for assistance outside of school), they placed emphasis on "getting the little things right", and they provided unlimited assistance and multiple examples of how to complete assignments. Allen (2014) also found that teachers demonstrating a genuine concern about student academic success evidenced by being readily available (i.e., before and after school) to provide assistance had a positive impact on Black male students.

The teachers of academically successful African American males "demonstrated agency through suspended judgment, advocacy for Black males, and challenging student resistance perceived as self-defeating" (Allen, 2015, p. 75). This finding fits with the behaviors of teachers in the present study who upheld high expectations for their students' academic and behavioral performance through advocacy in the form of readily available academic assistance and challenging students' behaviors that fell short of their expectations of excellence via the implementation of strict disciplinary practices.

Practical Implications for Parents

Active involvement at school. Parent involvement is an essential factor in academic achievement; parental involvement is related to high educational outcomes. However, parent involvement in secondary schools is not as commonplace as it is in middle school despite its link to high achievement (Jeynes, 2012). Scholar Prep required 25 hours of parent involvement per school year in the form of volunteering for campus activities (e.g., fundraising events and showcases) and community service projects, in addition to required parent-teacher conferences.

Active involvement at home. As children grow in stature and mature, parents grant them more independence. However, it is vital for parents to recognize that adolescents require time and focused attention just as they did when they were babies, toddlers, and children. Further, significant, metabolic changes take place (e.g., puberty) during these times that strain the parent-adolescent relationship (Johnson & Galambos, 2014). High achieving Black male adolescents need to spend quality time with their parents and families. Parents may want to consider incorporating an activity to encourage the adolescent to interact with the family on a regular basis. For example, a research project like Bruce's father who wanted Bruce to spend more time with the family than on the computer so he required him to research a topic of interest and share it with the family. These young men need to be recognized for every good grade and good performance; achievement should not be assumed but recognized and celebrated. They should be reminded of their parents' love and belief in them often and encouraged that they 'can do it' when they fall short of meeting their fullest potential. They need guidance as they plan for the future to ensure that they have a plan b (and maybe even plan c).

Create protected boundaries. The participants lived within an inner city neighborhood with a fairly high crime rate index. However, only one participant reported experiencing a crime

(i.e., father's bike was stolen) and hearing police sirens and seeing fighting. The limited to no exposure to violence or crime was likely due in part to the protected boundaries the parents had formed for their families. This protection occurred due to the participants' parents prohibiting them from spending time outside or them choosing not to on their own which resulted in them not having friends in their neighborhoods.

The parents' reasoning for restricting their sons' access outside was to protect their time (e.g., ensure they had ample time after school to get homework done and fulfill other responsibilities like chores and caring for younger siblings) and this protected state of existence likely reduced pressure to conform to peer or societal pressures. The parents' modeled anticipation of challenges by proactively and preventively responding by protecting the boundaries in which the participants lived.

Implications for Research

Student accounts provide valuable, direct insight into their lifeworlds and experiences that would not be captured in conversation with teachers or parents or in observation. The themes discussed in chapter four resulted from the detailed accounts of participants' life experiences related to academic achievement. I regarded the participants as experts on their lifeworlds. Thus, the experiences brought into the participant's conscious awareness and shared with me were viewed as legitimate.

I conducted a rich, in-depth analysis of the data that included identifying direct links back to the participants' accounts. I was able to access the participants' lifeworlds through their firsthand accounts and because people are persons-in-context accessing an individual's lifeworld is possible. Heidegger's phenomenological approach described this possibility as, "our lifeworlds are not primarily mental, or hidden inside, because the very nature of our being is to be there out

in the world located and observable in our relatedness to some meaningful context" (Larkin et al., 2006, p. 108). The participants were exceptionally insightful and revealed that they incorporated a process of self-reflecting on the challenges they faced.
This process motivated them to persevere through challenges and to explore the lessons that emerged as a result of these challenges.

African American males are the experts on their lives and should be the primary voice of future investigations. Although the majority of the participants were able to acknowledge the racialized challenges facing Black males, they maintained a posture that everyone faces challenges regardless of race and refused to buy into Black male plight ideology because it did not apply to them. CRT promotes the identification of the relevance of race and the institutional posture of racism in America (Crenshaw, 2011). Further, race and racism are addressed in relation to sociohistorical presence (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). CRT is frequently used as the methodology to investigate the experiences of people of color by challenging dominant, racist systems of oppression.

One of the most recent studies on high achieving Blacks in a secondary school setting endorsed the use of CRT because it "challenges dominant ideologies and popular assumptions about people of color" (Allen, 2014, p. 215). However, it cannot be the only framework used to study this population because of its emphasis on identifying the relevance of race and the effects racism has on the educational experiences of this population (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The participants rejected the notion that race played a role in their educational experiences and certainly would not impede their ability to succeed. One participant, James, noted that he ignored racialized experiences because they did not apply to him. He explained this in the following excerpt:

Researcher: And so your thoughts on this are you know everybody has challenges any other thoughts? Like how do you feel knowing that knowing that African American males or African Americans in general face these challenges and their talked about a lot I don't know if you hear it on the news in the media newspapers internet? What do you think about that?

James: Well I just like ignore it umm because I know that I'm not going to end up like most of the stuff that they talk about.

Researcher: Okay, so why is it that you ignore it?

James: Umm well I listen like but I listen but I'm not like into it umm because my mom raised me better so…

Further, with the exception of one participant, Aaron, most of the participants who acknowledged the unique challenges facing African Americans emphasized internal challenges (e.g., drug addiction, alcoholism, thug appeal—sagging pants, tattoos, breaking rules) as opposed to external (e.g., institutional racism, overt racism) ones. The general impression in response to the race related challenges was, "…but I believe if we all work really hard at it, we all can be successful", which would be more appropriately framed within a scholar identity model.

This study differed from previous studies investigating the experiences of high achieving Black males because it remained true to the goal of voicing the experiences of high achieving Black males. The literature contains studies on high achieving African American males that include adult males' retrospective viewpoints of primary and secondary schooling, adult males' experiences in higher education, parental accounts of African American males' experiences (Datnow & Cooper, 1997; Harper, 2006; Maton, Hrabowski, & Greif, 1998; Reynolds, 2010; Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000), firsthand accounts of high achieving males along with teacher

and parent input (Allen, 2014). However, my study approached understanding this population from a different vantage point by only including the targeted student participants. This resulted in more accurate portrayals of *their* actual and personal experiences resulting from firsthand accounts.

Adult participants including retrospective accounts, parent input, teacher input, and classroom observations of student behavior were intentionally excluded to ensure that this study reflected an authentic voicing of participant experiences. The inclusion of additional participants (i.e., parents and teachers) to provide insight into the experiences of high achieving African American males can be perceived as doubt in the youth participant's ability to accurately and coherently share their experiences and a need to corroborate the information they provide. This study also investigated the experiences of African American males attending a school designed to support their academic success by factoring in their specific needs (e.g., need for academic rigor, financial) and identifying resources (i.e., academically rigorous program, need-based scholarships) to fulfill those needs, such as Scholar Preparatory School.

Limitations

There were several limitations within this study. First, the use of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as the basis for investigation required a small sample size, homogenous sample, and a non-prescriptive analysis process. The sample size of this study was nine participants who were Black males attending Scholar Prep; four participants were in seventh grade and five were in eighth grade. Although a sample size of nine would be considered small for quantitative studies and some qualitative studies, IPA requires in-depth, rich detailed analysis that would be limited by larger sample sizes. Typically, IPA studies include three to eight participants or four to 10 interviews (Smith et al, 2009). While the in-depth analysis may also be viewed as a

limitation due to broadening of the meaning behind the participants' initial meanings, the emphasis of IPA is "go beyond" the surface meanings, yet remaining close to the participant meanings by including direct quotations to support theme development and analysis (Smith et al., 2009).

A purposeful, homogenous sample was selected for this study in keeping with research questions and the recommendations of Smith et al. (2009) to "find a fairly homogenous sample" (p. 49). The goal of IPA is not generalizability but transferability, and transferability can be judged on the basis of the rich, in-depth details of analysis included in the study and the inclusion of other research studies to support the findings (Smith et al., 2009). Although Smith et al. (2009) emphasized the non-prescriptive nature of IPA and openness for experienced researchers to code across data sets as opposed to coding each data set in completion before moving on. However, he explained that "the rigor of systematically following the steps outlined should ensure that there is scope for …new themes to emerge with each case". I "systematically follow[ed] the steps outline[d]" that included "bracketing the ideas emerging from the analysis of the first case while working on the second" and so forth. (Smith et al. 2009, p.100)

The second limitation is the exclusion of parent and teacher input to expound on what the participants revealed about their parents and/or teachers that they did not fully understand and to extend the parent and teachers understandings of the participants. For example, including the parents would provide an opportunity to gain clarity on Aaron's confusion about his parents' detachment and limited recognition of him. An example of a point to be clarified with the teachers would be the participants' concerns about the teachers' strictness related to assuming the participants' had been talking. However, this limitation could be overcome in the future research by conducting interviews of the participant's parents and/or teachers.

Future Directions

Future studies may wish to explore the generalizability and maintenance of the skills and supports afforded the participants at Scholar Prep. Particularly in the early stages of transition from this predominantly African American school (i.e., 85%) to predominantly white, affluent all-male college preparatory high schools. Longitudinal statistics indicate a 94% high graduation rate of former Scholar Prep students and an 83% college enrollment.

Future research may also explore the approaches taken by the participants' former public school teachers who first acknowledged their academic talent and/or encouraged them to attend Scholar Prep. The study would investigate the approaches these teachers take in overcoming teacher bias and the origins of their motivation to overcome teacher bias. The results of such a study could provide valuable information may be beneficial in understanding the conditions necessary to support the development of this motivation among other teachers.

A third direction for future research would be to investigate the experiences of the parents high achieving Black males in terms of what their sons' educational attainment means for the parents as individuals and for the family as a whole. Many of the parents had completed some high school and only one set of parents had completed college. Yet each of the participants planned to go to college and then to graduate school or medical school. What are the experiences of parents with limited education raising high achieving sons? What systems of support are necessary for parents to support their sons learning outside of school?

Summary and Conclusion

My current school assignments are a predominantly Latino, Title One elementary school four days a week and a predominantly African American, middle magnet school one day a week. Despite the differences in the predominant racial/ethnicity of the schools, I have had the opportunity to work with Black males at both schools who had the intellectual aptitude but their

academic and/or social/emotional/behavioral performances indicated underachievement. These cases were brought to me by teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators who shared deficit-based accounts of their functioning. Yet, in my one-on-one sessions with these students, they presented as polar opposites: intelligent, articulate, insightful, and respectful young men who shared stories of resilience and revealed details of tragedies they had recently experienced that the school was unaware of.

Most of these students had future plans of becoming entrepreneurs, biochemists (who would find the cure for cancer and Alzheimer's), and the fifth Black president of the United States ("because by then there would have been others"), among other careers. However, their teachers did not know this, nor did the other faculty members who first shared these cases and attributed it to a need for medication or discipline. Upon sharing the information I gained from one of the sessions with a teacher, she still doubted that this student had more to offer than the behavioral problems he was displaying. I requested that she take 30 seconds just to say hello and ask him about his day. The following week she came to me with uncontainable excitement and said that she had the opportunity to talk with him and in that brief interaction she saw his potential and now desired to do whatever she could to help him. In order for there to be an increase in the incidence of high academic achievement among African American males, their voices must be heard, their realities must be shared. School faculty members must view all students from a strength-based versus deficit-based perspective and seek to find the good in all students. This seeking process will require training within school psychology graduate school programs, teacher preparation programs, educational leadership program, and ongoing coaching and feedback within the field.

This interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) explored the educational experiences of nine academically success African American male students in the seventh and eighth grades at a private, college preparatory middle school. The scholar identity development model proposes

that an individual's belief in their own ability to achieve academically and accomplish the goals they set out to accomplish determines to what degree they will achieve. Students with a positive scholar identity view themselves as "academicians, as studious, as competent and capable, and as intelligent or talented in school settings" (Whiting, 2006b, p. 224). Further, research has indicated that "the extent to which students view themselves as learners and intellectual beings plays a major role in how well they achieve and the confidence they have in academic settings" (Whiting, 2006b, p. 224).

The literature indicated early experiences of academic success, support systems, embracing one's heritage and positive racial identity development, code switching between 'acting white' and 'acting Black', taking pride in being labeled as gifted even if it was attributed to 'acting white' because it distinguished them from peers, camouflaging achievement in attempts to blend in with peers, academic self-efficacy, utilitarian achievement, and future mindset as factors that positively contributed to high academic achievement among African American males. While the themes within the literature were on a broad spectrum ranging from opposite sides of the spectrum to overlapping at the same position, they included the idea of future and academic achievement in the present as a means to get to a desired future; these themes corroborate with the findings of the current study.

In conclusion, the research findings generated five themes that illustrated a forward thinking, driven perspective of nine African American male high achievers who developed scholar identities while journeying "on the up and up". The themes were as follows: a) "always reaching to be better": the cultivation of academic achievement, b) sacrificing to succeed: "my ancestors worked hard, so I should work hard...it won't be in vain", c) trailblazing: "I'm leading the way for them", d) striving for the good life: "I just want to be a good man overall", and e) planning for success: "that's how I study". These young men rejected all concepts of African

American males that positioned them anywhere but on top and only looked back to see how far they had come. As John explained, "It is good to know about where you came from and how you came here because now you know what you're reaching for."

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Appendix A

April 7, 2014

Dear Parent/Guardian,

A research study called *"Voicing Voids, Revising Reputations, and Framing Phenomenon: A Look into the Schooling Experiences of High Achieving African American Males at a Private Middle School through Critical Race Lens"* will soon be conducted at Scholar Preparatory School. The purpose of this study is to find out the experiences of high achieving African American adolescent males who are academically successful in spite of a variety of barriers that impede the academic success of a significant number of youth of the same race and gender.

As an academically talented and successful student, your son meets the criteria for participating in this study. Students participating in this study will be asked a series of questions pertaining to their study habits, participation in extracurricular activities, future career aspirations, systems of support, ethnic identity, and other relevant factors that contribute to their academic success.

Much of the research on African American males investigates their experiences in terms of their failures and overlooks those who are academically successful. Participants in this study will help to contribute to the field of educational research by presenting an alternative picture of success and strength.

We are asking you to allow your son to be a participant in this study. The research is being conducted by Coretta Dennie, a doctoral candidate in the School Psychology Program within the Department of Education at the University of South Florida. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Linda Raffaele Mendez. If you decide to allow your son to participate in this research, he will be asked to do the following: participate in approximately three one-on-one interviews, conducted by Ms. Dennie, lasting approximately 60 minutes.

The consent to be a research participant is strictly voluntary. You may decline to allow your child to participate or terminate your child's participation at any time during the study. If you do so, there will be no adverse effects for you or your child. There are no risks in participating in this study. Although there are no direct benefits to your child, his participation in this study may help our understanding of how the educational experiences and outcomes of African American males can be improved.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study or your child's participation in the study, you may contact me, Coretta Dennie at (813) 279-4349. Formal parental consent and child assent letters will be given to you a week or two prior to beginning the study. The study is slated to take place from April 2014 through May 2014. Thank you for your consideration.

Kind regards,

Coretta A. Dennie, SSP, NCSP

Appendix B

Parental Permission to Participate in Research Involving Minimal Risk

Information for parents to consider before allowing their child to take part in this research study

IRB Study # Pro00012012

The following information is being presented to help you and your child decide whether or not your child wishes to be a part of a research study. Please read this information carefully. If you have any questions or if you do not understand the information, we encourage you to ask the researcher.

We are asking you to allow your child to take part in a research study called: Voicing Voids, Revising Reputations, and Framing Phenomenon: A Look into the Schooling Experiences of High Achieving African American Males at a Private Middle School through Critical Race Lens.

The person who is in charge of this research study is Coretta Dennie**.** This person is called the Principal Investigator. However, other research staff may be involved and can act on behalf of the person in charge. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Linda Raffaele Mendez.

The research will be conducted at your child's school, Scholar Preparatory School.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this study is to find out the firsthand experiences of high achieving African American males, a population of students not commonly researched, in order to provide a strength-based perspective of African American males for educational research literature.

Why is your child being asked to take part?

We are asking your child to take part in this research study because he is an African American male in seventh or eighth grade who is demonstrates high academic achievement.

Should your child take part in this study?

This informed consent form tells you about this research study. You can decide if you want your

child to take part in it. This form explains:

- Why this study is being done.
- What will happen during this study and what your child will need to do.
- Whether there is any chance your child might experience potential benefits from being in the study.
- The risks of having problems because your child is in this study.

Before you decide:

Read this form.

Have a friend or family member read it.

Talk about this study with the person in charge of the study or the person explaining the study. You can have someone with you when you talk about the study.

Talk it over with someone you trust.

Find out what the study is about.

You may have questions this form does not answer. You do not have to guess at things you don't understand. If you have questions, ask the person in charge of the study or study staff as you go along. Ask them to explain things in a way you can understand.

Take your time to think about it.

The decision to provide permission to allow your child to participate in the research study is up to you. If you choose to let your child be in the study, then you should sign this form. If you do not want your child to take part in this study, you should not sign the form.

What will happen during this study?

Your child will be asked to spend about three months in this study. Although the study will take place over a course of three months, the participants will only meet with the researcher on three occasions, for approximately one hour each session, for a total of three hours. These three meetings will include your child engaging in a dialogue with the researcher that will be guided by six open-ended interview questions. The questions are based on the themes of school, success, support, passion/motivation, challenges, and future plans. The interviews will be audiotaped. However, only the researcher and her committee will hear the recordings.

Your child's name and other identifying information will be kept confidential. Your child will be asked to select a fictitious name, which will be used to identify him in any written documents. Your child will also be asked to complete a demographic form that will provide the researcher with background information, such as family structure and participation in extracurricular activities. This information will assist the researcher in providing clear, accurate descriptions of the participants in her final research document (dissertation).

A study visit is one your child will have with the person in charge of the study. Your child will need to participate in <u>three</u> study visits in all. Most study visits will take about one hour. Some study visits may be longer or shorter. The first study session will include the researcher introducing herself, stating the purpose for studying the participants, a reminder of participants' rights, and a dialogue based on the interview questions. The second session will include a review of the previous session, including interview questions and participant responses, followed by an opportunity for participants to expound on or change any of the previously provided information.

The third session will include participants reviewing a summary of the audio recorded interview content in written form. The participants will once again be given the opportunity to address any of their previous input and confirm the validity of the interview content. Table one on the following page represents what will occur during each session.

Table 1

Schedule of Participation

Month	Content	Duration
Month 1	Introductions/interview	1 hour
Month 2	Review/revise interview responses	1 hour
Month 3	Review/revise interview content	1 hour

How many other people will take part?

A total of eight individuals will participate in the study at Scholar Preparatory School.

What other choices do you have if you decide not to let your child to take part?

If you decide not to let your child take part in this study, that is okay.

Will your child be compensated for taking part in this study?

You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

What will it cost you to let your child take part in this study?

It will not cost you anything to let your child take part in the study.

What are the potential benefits to your child if you let him / her take part in this study?

The potential benefits to your child include:

The self-gratification of being given the opportunity to voice their experiences and views.

Being acknowledged for their academic success by being invited to participate in a study on high achievement.

We do not know if this study will help modify the depictions of African American males in research and mainstream society, that is why we are doing this study. By volunteering you are helping us learn more about the experiences of high achieving African American males and the conditions that support their achievement. We hope to learn more about what helps or does not help these individuals excel. What we learn may help others in the future.

What are the risks if your child takes part in this study?

The risks for participating in this study are very minimal. Due to the fact that the research study

will include questions related to whether or not participants have experienced any challenges in their lives, the following risks may occur:

Psychological discomfort due to recalling challenges he has experienced.

The researcher will be sure to address and appropriately respond to participants' reactions if they occur at any point during the study sessions. Responses will include consoling the participants and seeking additional support from the school guidance counselor.

If your child experiences this outside of the study session, tell the person in charge of this study or study staff at your child's next visit**.** If these side effects bother or worry you, or if your child has other problems, call the person in charge of this study at (813) 279-4349.

Your Rights:

You can refuse to sign this form. If you do not sign this form your child will not be able to take part in this research study.

Privacy and Confidentiality

We will keep your child's study records private and confidential. Certain people may need to see your child's study records. By law, anyone who looks at your child's records must keep them completely confidential. The only people who will be allowed to see these records are:

The research team, including the Principal Investigator, study coordinator, and dissertation committee members**.**

Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study. For example, individuals who provide oversight on this study may need to look at your records. This is done to make sure that we are doing the study in the right way. They also need to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety.

The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and its related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, staff in the USF Office of Research and Innovation, USF Division of Research Integrity and Compliance, and other USF offices who oversee this research.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your child's name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who your child is.

What happens if you decide not to let your child take part in this study?

You should only let your child take part in this study if both of you want to. You or child should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study to please the study investigator or the research staff.

If you decide not to let your child take part:

Your child will not be in trouble or lose any rights he would normally have.

You child will still get the same services he would normally have.

You can decide after signing this informed consent form that you no longer want your child

to take part in this study. We will keep you informed of any new developments which might affect your willingness to allow your child to continue to participate in the study. However, you can decide you want your child to stop taking part in the study for any reason at any time. If you decide you want your child to stop taking part in the study, tell the study staff as soon as you can.

Even if you want your child to stay in the study, there may be reasons we will need to withdraw him from the study. For example, your child may be taken out of this study if your child is not coming for the study visits when scheduled. We will let you know the reason for withdrawing your child's participation in this study.

You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints.

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, call Coretta Dennie at (813) 279-4349.

If you have questions about your child's rights, general questions, complaints, or issues as a person taking part in this study, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638.

Consent for My Child to Participate in this Research Study

It is up to you to decide whether you want your child to take part in this study. If you want your child to take part, please read the statements below and sign the form if the statements are true.

I freely give my consent to let my child take part in this study and authorize that my child's health information as agreed above, be collected/disclosed in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to let my child take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

_____ _____

Signature of Parent of Child Taking Part in Study Date

_____

Printed Name of Parent of Child Taking Part in Study

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully explained to the parent of the child taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their child's participation. I hereby certify that when this person signs this form, to the best of my knowledge, he/ she understands:

- What the study is about;
- What procedures/interventions/investigational drugs or devices will be used;
- What the potential benefits might be; and
- What the known risks might be.

I can confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in the appropriate language. Additionally, this subject

reads well enough to understand this document or, if not, this person is able to hear and understand when the form is read to him or her. The parent signing this form does not have a medical/psychological problem that would compromise comprehension and therefore makes it hard to understand what is being explained and can, therefore, give legally effective informed consent. The parent signing this form is not under any type of anesthesia or analgesic that may cloud their judgment or make it hard to understand what is being explained and, therefore, can be considered competent to give permission to allow their child to participate in this research study.

_____ _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent Date

_____

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

Appendix C

Assent to Participate in Research

Information for Persons under the Age of 18 Who Are Being Asked To Take Part in Research

IRB Study # Pro00012012

Title of study: Voicing Voids, Revising Reputations, and Framing Phenomenon: A Look into the Schooling Experiences of High Achieving African American Males at a Private Middle School through Critical Race Lens

Why am I being asked to take part in this research?

You are being asked to take part in a research study about African American boys who do really well in school. You are being asked to take part in this research study because you do so well in school. If you take part in this study, you will be one of about eight students participating in this study.

Who is doing this study?

The person in charge of this study is Coretta Dennie. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Linda Raffaele Mendez.

What is the purpose of this study?

By doing this study, we hope to learn about the experiences of high achieving African American boys in middle school.

Where is the study going to take place and how long will it last?

The study will be take place at your school, Scholar Preparatory School. You will be asked to participate in three visits that will take about 1 hour. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is 3 hours over the next three months.

What will you be asked to do?

- You will be asked to have a conversation with the primary investigator who will ask you six main questions that may lead to follow up questions.
- You will be asked questions about your experiences related to school, success, support, passion/motivation, challenges, and future.
- You will have the opportunity to ask questions as well.
- You will also be asked to complete a short demographic form that will include questions related to your family structure and involvement in activities outside of school.
- Your identity will be kept private. You will make up a name to be referred to in future written documentation of the results of the research study.
- Only you and one individual, the primary investigator or another study staff, will be present.
- All conversations will be audio recorded so that the researchers can later review and write up the content of the interviews.

What things might happen if you participate?

The study will include questions related to whether or not you have experienced any challenges in your life. So as a result, you may experience emotional discomfort while recalling this information. The discomfort you may experience could include having feelings of anger or sorrow related to any challenges you have experienced.

Although we have made every effort to try and make sure this doesn't happen, you may find some questions we ask upsetting. If so, we will tell you and your parents or guardian about other people who may be able to help you with these feelings.

Is there benefit to me for participating?

We cannot promise that you will receive benefit from taking part in this research study. However, some people may experience a positive inward feeling related to having the opportunity to voice their experiences and views. You may also experience a positive inward feeling because you have been invited to participate in this study, which is an acknowledgment of your academic success.

What other choices do I have if I do not participate?

You have the alternative to choose not to participate in this research study.

Do I have to take part in this study?

You should talk with your parents or guardian and others about taking part in this research study. If you do not want to take part in the study, that is your decision. You should take part in this study because you want to volunteer.

Will I receive any compensation for taking part in this study?

You will not receive any compensation for taking part in this study.

Who will see the information about me?

You will select a made up name that will be used to refer to you in any written documentation. Further, your information will be added to the information from other people taking part in the study so no one will know who you are.

Can I change my mind and quit?

If you decide to take part in the study you still have the right to change your mind later. No one will think badly of you if you decide to stop participating. Also, the people who are running this study may need for you to stop. If this happens, they will tell you when to stop and why.

What if I have questions?

You can ask questions about this study at any time. You can talk with your parents, guardian or other adults about this study. You can talk with the person who is asking you to volunteer. If you think of other questions later, you can ask them.

Assent to Participate

I understand what the person conducting this study is asking me to do. I have thought about this and agree to take part in this study.

_____ _____

Name of person agreeing to take part in the study Date

_____

Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study

_____ _____

Name of person providing information (assent) to subject Date

Appendix D

Demographic Questionnaire

1. Sex: Male_____ Female_____

2. Age: _____

3. Grade Level in School: _____

4. Check off all family members you currently live with:
   Father _____ Aunt _____
   Mother _____ Sister _____
   Grandfather _____ Brother _____
   Grandmother _____ Cousin _____
   Uncle _____

5. Below, list your current classes and current grade:
   _____ _____
   _____ _____
   _____ _____
   _____ _____
   _____ _____
   _____ _____
   _____ _____

6. Future Plans:
   Getting a university education is very important to me
   ___ Strongly Agree
   ___ Somewhat Agree
   ___ Somewhat Disagree
   ___ Strongly Disagree

   I would prefer not to go to university after high school
   ___ Strongly Agree
   ___ Somewhat Agree
   ___ Somewhat Disagree
   ___ Strongly Disagree

7. Father's Education Level (Check highest level obtained)
   ___ Some High School
   ___ Graduated High School
   ___ Vocational School
   ___ Some College
   ___ Graduated College
   ___ Advanced Degree

   Father's Occupation _____

8. Mother's Education Level (Check highest level obtained)
   ___ Some High School
   ___ Graduated High School
   ___ Vocational School
   ___ Some College
   ___ Graduated College
   ___ Advanced Degree

   Mother's Occupation _____

9. Being involved in religious or spiritual activities, such as praying and attending church is very important to me.
   ___ Strongly Agree
   ___ Somewhat Agree
   ___ Somewhat Disagree
   ___ Strongly Disagree

10. List all of the activities you participate in outside of school. Either currently or in the past.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix E

Participant Demographic Questionnaire Information

Participant Name	Household Members	Father's Highest Education	Father's Occupation	Mother's Highest Education	Mother's Occupation	Involvement in Extracurricular Activity
KJ	Father, Mother, Younger Sister, & Younger	College Graduate	Entrepreneur	High School	Head Restaurant Chef	Basketball & Community Service Volunteer
Bruce	Mother & Younger Brother	Some High School	Air Conditioner Technician	Some High School	Supervisor	Boy scouts, Chess, & Community Service Volunteer
James	Mother, Sister, & Brother	Unknown	Unknown	Some College	Insurance Agent	Football, Basketball, Choir, & Bowling
Christopher	Mother & Younger Sister	Some College	Disabled	High school Graduate	Clerk	Pianist, Drummer, Basketball, Baseball, & Football
Aaron	Father, Mother, & 2 younger siblings	Advanced Degree	Undergraduate Recruiter	Some College	Beautician	Vocal Lessons
Ashton	Mother	Advanced Degree	Pre-Kindergarten Teacher	Some College	Fire Sprinkler Worker	Football, Basketball, Baseball, & Karate
Bruce Willis (B.W.)	Father, Mother, & Sister	Some High School	Studio Engineer	College Graduate	Nutritionist	Boy scouts & Chess
Michael	Father, Mother, & 2 siblings	Some College	Disabled Veteran	Some College	Homemaker	Basketball, Tang Soo Do, Chess, & Golf
John Lucas	Father, Mother, Sister, & Brother	Some College	Unemployed	Some College	Customer Service Rep	Art Club & Baseball

Appendix F

Opening script

Thank you so much for agreeing to be a part of my research. As you know I am interviewing African American boys in seventh or eighth grade who are academically high achieving. I am going to ask you a series of questions about your experiences. Please tell me as much me as you feel comfortable sharing. There are a couple of things that I want to let you know ahead of time. First, this will be the first of three times that we will meet. With your permission, I am tape recording our conversation each time, but it will not be heard by anyone but me or my dissertation committee members. After our meeting today, I am going to type out our conversation and I will bring a copy of it the next time we meet so that you can review what we discussed. Our second and third meetings will also involve me asking you questions and reviewing our previous conversations. Second, I want to give you a little background on myself. I grew up in Tampa and I am pursuing a doctorate in school psychology. I am interested in studying high achieving African American boys because very few people have looked at this group of kids. I want to help other people to understand African American boys who are academically successful. That's why I am doing this research. Finally, I do want to let you know that what you share with me will be kept confidential when I type up the notes from our conversation I will not use your real name. Instead you will choose a fake name that I will attach to your interviews. However, there are three things that I cannot keep confidential. Number one, if you tell me that you have been abused or are currently being abused, I will

need to share that with someone else so that you can get help. Number two, if you tell me that you are thinking about hurting someone else. I will need to share that information to keep the other person safe. Number three, if you tell me that you are thinking about harming yourself. I will need to share that information to keep you safe. Otherwise, anything you tell me will not be directly linked to you. I plan to use statements you make in my research paper, but I will not connect them to you. Instead, I will use the fake name you give me. Do you have any questions for me before we get started? Okay the first thing I would like you to complete is this demographics form and then I will begin by asking you the questions.

Appendix G

School

1. Tell me how you feel about school.
    a. How is it that you became a student here?
    b. What are the best things and what are the worst things about being here?
    c. What do other kids in your neighborhood think about you going to this school?
    d. On an average day, how much time do you spend on academics outside of the school day and what do you do?
    e. Help me understand what school was like for you before you came here and how the experience of being here compares to where you were before.

Success

2. On a scale of 1 to 10, how successful do you feel as a person?
    a. When you picked a number, what kinds of things were you thinking about?
    b. In what areas of life are you most satisfied with yourself?
    c. Where do you think you need to improve?

Support

3. If you had to pick three people in your life who have supported you the most, who would they be and why?

Passion

4. People often talk about things that are really important to them, things that they are passionate about. What would you say you are passionate about?
    a. How did you develop that passion?

Challenges

5. Most people have some type of challenges in their lives. What challenges have you faced and how have you responded?
    a. Some people might say that African American individuals face particular challenges. What are your thoughts about this?
    b. How much have you been taught about Black/African American History? How has your history impacted you?

Future

6. What do you see for yourself in terms of your future?
    a. As a high achieving middle school student, what have you learned that you think could help other kids like you to experience success