

HERRING, MELVIN H., Ph.D. The Influence of Negative School Climate Factors on African American Adolescent Males' Academic Outcomes: The Mediating Role of Internalizing and Externalizing Behaviors. (2013)
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This study explores the relationship between negative school climate factors (i.e., teacher neglect, peer rejection, discrimination) and academic outcomes amongst a sample of adolescent African American males. Specifically, this study directly examines a) the influence of negative school climate perceptions on the students' academic achievement (i.e., grades), and b) the mediating influences of internalizing and externalizing behaviors on this relationship. This study also examines the moderating effects of family factors on the associations between negative school climate and internalizing and externalizing behaviors. Using a sample of 318 middle school African American boys from a larger study ($N = 21,109$), students reported on their perceptions of their school environments. Findings revealed that negative school climate perceptions were positively related to both internalizing and externalizing behaviors. Negative school climate factors were associated negatively with students' grades; however, the relationship was mediate through internalizing and externalizing behaviors. Findings also indicated that family processes may moderate the relationship between negative school climate and adolescent outcomes. Results suggest that school environments may have adverse effects on African American males' developmental outcomes. Implications for interventions and future research are discussed.

THE INFLUENCE OF NEGATIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE FACTORS ON AFRICAN
AMERICAN ADOLESCENT MALES' ACADEMIC OUTCOMES: THE
MEDIATING ROLE OF INTERNALIZING AND
EXTERNALIZING BEHAVIORS

by

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To my wife, Christel, my son, Melchizedek, and my daughter, Camille; for without their love and support I would not have been able to complete this program or dissertation.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It has been well documented that African American male students perform below their European American counterparts in almost every academic category including grades and standardized test scores (Bruce, Getch, & Ziomek, 2009; Hillard, 1995). Moreover, African American males are more likely to be disciplined, to be labeled academically disabled and placed in special education classes (Adkins-Bradley, Johnson, Rawls, & Plunkett, 2007; Clark, 2007), and are at greater risk of dropping out of school compared to European American students (Wood, Kaplan, & Mcloyd, 2007; Martin, Martin, Gibson, & Wilkins, 2007). In fact, African American males' graduation rates have significantly decreased over the past several decades as the gap has widened from European American males, to 50% and 86%, respectively. (Schott Foundation, 2010).

Expanding educational gaps have not only been documented between African American males and European American students, but with African American females as well. Although African American females lag behind European American students in most academic categories, they have widened the academic margins from their male counterparts (Garibaldi, 2007). Since 1990, African American females have met with greater academic success than African American males, as evidenced by their higher high school and college graduation rates (Saunders, Davies, Williams, & Williams, 2004). Additionally, African American females are also less likely to be disciplined within the

school context and teachers generally have higher expectations and academic goals compared to African American males.

The perpetual and drastic academic decline of African American males within our educational system brings into question, at minimum, public schools' commitment to providing a fair and equitable education for this group. However, this study contends that the problem derives from pragmatic and systemic issues rooted within the historical context of the educational structure that promotes discriminatory practices based on race and gender. In other words, public schools' inherent culture, ideologies, and practices are incompatible with those of students who are of minority status and male, more specifically African American males. I will argue that the intersection between race and gender places African American males at a particular academic disadvantage that often results in poor educational outcomes.

Historical Context of African Americans in Public Schools

Educational inequality and inequity have existed between European Americans and African Americans in the United States since the creation of the formal public school system, by Massachusetts's Horace Mann in 1837 (Baines, 2006). Although Mann and many other educational reformists declared that public education should be granted to all children, African American children were subjected to inferior instruction and resources or denied educational opportunities altogether. The pragmatic view of European Americans was that African Americans were innately deficient of the cognitive capacity to learn and any attempts to acquire even the basic literacy skills would be deemed useless and unlawful. Mann clearly articulated his position in an earlier writing, "We are

created and brought into life with a set of innate, organic dispositions or propensities” (Brick, 2005). The racial discriminatory practices embedded within the political, social, and educational structures of society resulted in African Americans being subjected to decades of social exclusion through the practice of segregation. In 1896, the racial inequalities suffered by African Americans were legally implemented through “separate but equal” laws established under the Supreme Court ruling of Plessy versus Ferguson. With regard to public education, this ruling provided legal mandates that allowed state and local governments to establish separate schools for whites and African Americans or *de jure segregation* (legally imposed segregation), so long as these governments deemed the two “equal”(Garibaldi, 1997). This case, along with an earlier 1875 Supreme Court ruling limiting the federal government’s ability to intervene with state matters, freed states to establish race-based discriminatory policies and practices and thereby ushering in the Jim Crow era. African Americans would experience inferior educational instruction and inequity through segregation for decades following this ruling.

It would take over a half century before the social and political climate of the U.S. would be conducive enough to challenge the debilitating effects of the “separate but equal” statute. In 1954, the landmark ruling of Brown versus the Topeka Kansas Board of Education determined that “separate but equal” not only created an inferior social structure for African Americans but was psychologically damaging as well, particularly to African American children in public schools. Marshall illustrated this psychological impairment through the research findings of Kenneth and Mamie Clark (1939, 1940, 1950), which concluded that by age five African American children were aware of the

inferior status of their racial group and that most preferred white skin to darker shades consistent with their own. It is plausible to assume, as does this study, that racially charged educational inequality and inequity experienced by African Americans in public schools may lead to various psychological and academic problems. Although *Brown v. Board of Education* provided the legal grounds for the elimination of *de jure segregation*, in our society, African Americans remained unprotected from widespread practices of *de facto segregation* (segregation without lawful authority) within many of society's social structures, particularly its educational system. In fact, contrary to the early beliefs that the desegregation of public schools would improve the quality of education for all children, some scholars argue that African Americans have made only marginal academic gains and that public schools remain nearly as segregated as before the monumental ruling due to a lack of enforcement of the law and the mass exodus of European Americans to suburban areas, often referred to as "White flight" (Garibaldi, 1997; Darling-Hammond, 2000). For example, during the 1980's ninety-six percent of high poverty urban schools students were minority. Generally, students of high poverty schools are exposed to fewer resources, more unqualified teachers, and inadequate facilities. Moreover, research from the past several decades would suggest that African American males' educational attainment has suffered the most from these social and educational changes.

Despite the forward progress made by African Americans during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's as well as the steady increase in educational attainment experienced through the 1980's, the achievement gap between African American and European Americans remained substantial (Gibbs, 1988). Although achievement and

educational attainment continued to increase for African Americans in general by the mid 1990's, considerable gender differences began to surface (Garibaldi, 1992). This marked the era in which African American males began a descending academic trajectory from which they have yet to recovery. For example, dropout rates for 16-24 year old African American male students marginally improved between 1975 and 1990, but declined by over 13% between 1990 and 1997 (Hammond, 2000). Current trends continue to exhibit a disproportionate numbers of African American males underachieving academically at the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary school levels. Nationally, African American males, as a group, receive the lowest scores in most academic measures but leads in suspensions, expulsions, non-promotion, dropouts, and special education placements (Garibaldi, 2007; Harry & Anderson, 1994). According to the 2009 Nation's Report Card on mathematics, released by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES Report, 2009), all racial/ethnic groups have shown academic progress since the inception of No Child Left Behind Act, however, the gap between white and black students has only marginally improved. The numbers become even more disturbing when individual states are assessed. For example, in North Carolina only 44% of the African American students were at or above grade level in comparison to 77% of European American students in the 2008-2009 school year (Vanneman, Hamilton, Baldwin, Anderson, & Rahman, 2009). Furthermore, when achievement is assessed by gender, the gap is even more staggering with African American males falling well below their European American male counterparts.

Research has revealed several reasons as to why the educational system has failed African American males. Some scholars have suggested that ethnically insensitive state and local accountability policies on testing, exiting examinations, and retention have unfairly targeted and disproportionately impacted African American males and is a major source of their increased academic failure and dropout rates (Hammond, 2000). Others contend that African American males are marginalized in the school setting because of their race and gender and as a result are denied adequate access to academic experiences through the curriculum, teachers, peers, and other activities (Jordan, 1994).

Gender Differences in the U.S. Public School System

Despite the notion that the social structure of U.S. public schools is founded on patriarchal principles, the argument may be made that males students are at an academic disadvantage, particularly those of African American decent. While, historically, female students have been at a disadvantage in school, the U.S. public school system has experienced a major paradigm shift away from a traditional male-biased structure and females are now outperforming males. Overall, females outperform their male counterparts in most academic categories, including higher grades from kindergarten through 12th grade, high school completion, and college and graduate degrees (Hoff Sommers, 2000). Moreover, males are diagnosed as emotionally disturbed, suspended or expelled, retained, and placed in special education at greater frequencies than females in public schools (Hoff Sommers, 2000).

Scholars have begun to explore possible explanations for this academic phenomenon experienced by males within public schools. For example, Stolzer (2008)

postulated that several influences on the development of males in schools including political and contextual factors. Politically, the author argued that federal legislation, such as the 1991 amendment of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), made it easier for public schools to classify students with behavioral and learning difficulties as disabled and opened the gateway for special education placements and mental health diagnoses of young boys (p.89). Today, male children are disproportionately diagnosed as learning and behaviorally disabled. For example, approximately 70% of male children classified as learning disabled and 80% receiving a behavioral/emotional diagnosis (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

Another factor identified by Stolzer (2008) is the “goodness of fit” between male students and the school environment. Defined as “the match between a child’s basic needs and the environmental demands the child must cope with” (p.85), male students may be at a distinct disadvantage in an environment whose standard is based on feminine styles of play and learning. For example, males are generally socialized and biologically constructed to engage in physical and unstructured activities outside of school, whereas organized and passive activities, often associated with female-oriented play, are encouraged in schools (Stolzer, 2005). Moreover, research has found that a lack of fit between a child’s biological needs and environmental demands may lead to cognitive, emotional, and physical stress for the child (Matheny & Phillips, 2001; Rothbart & Bates, 2006).

The incompatibility between teacher and student gender has been hypothesized as a contributing factor to this lack of fit between male students and the school (McIntyre &

Tong, 1998). As the majority of male students are instructed by female teachers, one may argue that male students may be subjected to gender biases with regard to their behavior and learning styles and as a result may perform poorly under these conditions.

Given the disproportionate academic failure of African American males, further investigations are warranted to examine the contextual influences of negative school climates that may stifle the academic and personal development of this population.

Negative School Climate Factors and African American Males' Development

The impact that positive school climates may have on students' developmental outcomes has been frequently studied in the social sciences. Researchers have documented the relationship between positive school climate and a number of student outcomes, including performance (Klem & Connell, 2004) and internalizing and externalizing problems (Aunola, Stattin, & Nurmi, 2000). Although many scholars have examined the influence of positive school climates on students' academic outcomes, there have been limited empirical efforts in exploring school climate factors, in general, on African American males' development. Moreover, the majority of these studies tend to broadly define school climate as a construct and only examine the positive effects it has on adolescents' outcomes, thereby leaving a void in the literature regarding the adverse effects negative school climates may have on students' development. Few investigations have narrowed this focus to examine the adverse effects of specific aspects of the school climate, such as social relationships, on students' academic and personal development. Further, no studies to date have taken this approach to examine the influence of social

relationships on the academic and personal development of African American males within the school setting.

Social relationships within the school context may be critically important to the academic success of students. In fact, healthy social relationships in school may provide students with supports and opportunities for success through the sharing of information and resources. According to Coleman (1988), social capital exists in relationships between people within social structures that define the normative behaviors of its members. These relationships are marked by a high level of trust, which breeds a sense of obligation to one another. Moreover, Coleman identified the process by which adults in a social structure transfer their knowledge, skills, and resources onto their youth as the most salient reproduction of social capital. These social relationships are reflected in the interactions between African American male students and their teachers and peers. For example, much of the current school climate literature espouses the benefits of teacher-student relationships in the educational setting (Wood, Kaplan, & McLoyd, 2007), however, little attention is given to the debilitating effects of negative teacher-student relationships on the academic and personal development of many marginalized students. When teacher-student relationships are trustworthy, supportive, and caring, the adolescents may benefit from the social capital produced. For example, teachers are likely to feel more obligated to provide increased attention and greater opportunities to student with whom they trust and care about the most. However, for many African American adolescent males, a lack of trustworthiness, support, and care from teachers often result in social capital deficits. In such cases, teachers often lower academic

expectations and limit opportunities by disrupting the learning process through means of disciplinary actions.

Negative school climates may also deprive African American male students of social capital established through social networks with peers and teachers. These social relationships reflect what Coleman referred to as simplex relations in his theory. *Simplex Relations* refers to the social capital or link between a person and one context. African American males who fail to establish healthy and productive relationships with their peers potentially deny their parents of valuable social network closures. Social network closures allow parents and their children to collectively share valuable information and resources that promote successful outcomes for the students and their families (Fletcher, Hunter, & Eanes, 2006). Similarly, adolescents' relationships with their teachers connect parents to the schools' social structure and the opportunity to generate greater social capital for the family. This *bridging* process can be particularly important if the social linkages are heterogeneous (i.e., race and class). Unfortunately, many African American males are rejected by their peers and teachers, therefore being deprived of the valuable social capital that exists in such relationships.

In addition to the social alienation and rejection in schools, many African American boys must negotiate the destructive institutional racism permeated throughout U.S public schools (Garibaldi, 2007; Mattison & Aber, 2007; Davis & Jordan, 1994; Harry & Anderson, 1994). The attitudes and beliefs that African Americans students are intellectually inferior to European students continue to be purported by many educators

and policy makers. More, African American males have been stigmatized and profiled by society as dangerous, aggressive, and lazy. Taken together, African American males have become uniquely vulnerable to public school climates that have adopted and practice these views. The debilitating negative school climate conditions for many African American boys, often characterized by high teacher-student conflict, lowered expectations, and frequent disciplinary actions, exposes them to higher levels of stress and increased psychological and behavioral challenges. Further, African American adolescent males' development may be adversely affected by negative school climate factors that convey attitudes of prejudice and discrimination towards them through mechanisms embedded within its social structure (Jussim & Eccles, 1992). This additional stress may lead to a number of academic and personal risk behaviors including dropout, substance use, alcohol use, sexual intercourse, suicidal ideation, and carrying weapons to school (McNeely & Falci, 2004).

To gain a clearer understanding of how social relationships may shape the development of African American males within the school context requires a closer investigation into the processes associated with the relationships. Phenomenological Variant Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) considers the interactions between external and internal factors within an individual's environment on their developmental outcomes. More specifically, PVEST is a cultural ecological framework that critically examines the identity and normative development of youth of color while simultaneously enhancing resiliency and vulnerability factors within their environments (Spencer et al., 1997). For example, PVEST considers the influence of both risk and protective factors in the youth's

environment. *Risk factors* are the negative environmental conditions that predispose individuals to adverse outcomes, whereas *protective factors* are supportive conditions that promote successful developmental outcomes. *Net vulnerability* is the off-setting influences between potential risk factors and protective factors within an adolescent's context. African American males may experience a number of risk factors within their school climates, including a lack of teacher support, peer rejection, perceived discrimination. Students are more likely to experience academic issues when *teachers fail to support* them academically and emotionally. Similarly, African American males are often perceived by their peers as aggressive, which may lead to social rejection. Given that social support from peers is critical to the adolescent developmental stage, *peer rejection* may present considerable risks for this population. Finally, if African American males perceive the adults and/or peers in the school to treat them unfairly due to their race or ethnicity, then they may feel unwelcomed and become disengaged in the academic process.

PVEST suggests that an imbalance of risk and protective factors may lead to non-normative stress levels for African American boys, which often result in maladaptive reactive coping strategies in the school context. It is plausible to assume that many African American adolescent males become so overwhelmed with the numerous negative stressful events in their lives that they begin to internalize themselves as the source of the stress. This internalization processes may manifest through internal and external maladaptive strategies such as depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and/or externalizing behaviors. Moreover, PVEST posits that continued employment of such maladaptive

coping responses may create a context by which the adolescent begin to associate himself, thereby allowing maladaptive identities to emerge. In other words, African American adolescent males' consistent exposure to negative messages of inferiority and worthlessness may encourage a repetitive self-internalization process that over time emerges into identities that produce adverse developmental outcomes. For example, if an African American adolescent male is reprimanded by his teacher in the presents of his peers, he may choose to respond in an insubordinate manner. Although this maladaptive strategy may be in response to the cumulative stress experienced (e.g., lack of teacher support, peer rejection, and perceived discrimination), it may also serve as an effective strategy in alleviate the source of stress by causing him to be removed from the classroom. The attainment of the desired results, through the use of this defiant behavior, may encourage the continued use of this strategy over time and eventually emerge into how the adolescent identify himself in the school context.

The Influence of Family on African American Males' Development

It is also plausible that various parenting strategies and family structures may attenuate negative school influences on African American adolescent males' outcomes. Parenting strategies, such as support and behavioral control, have been shown to have both direct and indirect influences on adolescents' development (Kerpelman, Eryigit, & Stephens, 2008; DeKemp, Overbeek, Wied, Engels, & Scholte, 2007; Supple & Small, 2006).

Parental support is generally defined as the extent to which parents show warmth and acceptance towards their children, whereas behavioral control (e.g., monitoring)

refers to the provision of regulation or structure in an adolescent's world (Bean, Barber, & Crane, 2006; Supple & Small, 2006). Research on the socialization processes of African American families suggest that various parenting strategies may play critical roles in assisting adolescents in negotiating barriers in non-familial context such as school (Bean, Barber, & Crane, 2006; Coard, Wallace, Stevenson, & Brotman, 2004). For example, behavioral control has been shown as an effective parenting strategy employed by African American parents to alleviate behavior problems. Bean, Barber and Crane (2006) found that as African American parents' behavioral control increased, their adolescents' delinquent activities decreased. Consistent with PVEST tenets, positive parenting strategies, such as support and behavioral control, may attenuate the risk factors within the school environment of the African American male adolescents.

Coleman (1988) also discussed the developmental implications of parents employing strategies that created warm and supportive for their children. Coleman suggested that the way in which a family functions through relationships can have detrimental effects on the level of social capital produced. More specifically, he concluded that a lack of strong relationships between the parents or other adult family members and their adolescents may have a lasting impact on the adolescents' developmental outcomes. Coleman explicitly regarded this as the point in the process in which parents transfer their human capital (i.e., knowledge, emotional support, expectations) to their children (p. 224) and that close ties and warmth and supportiveness mark this relationship. In other words, African American parents who develop close relationships with their adolescents through positive parenting strategies may improve

their adolescents' developmental outcomes by providing them with valuable knowledge, skills, and resources. This transfer of knowledge and skills is consistent with many African American parents who often employ racial socialization practices to teach their children, particularly males, how to navigate racial discrimination in non-familial context such as school (Coard, 2007).

Finally, African American adolescent boys' development may be influenced by the structure of their family unit. For example, Coleman (1988) explicated the importance of family structure in the production of social capital and posited that families who are structurally deficient- meaning a member of the family is physically absent- are at a disadvantaged in producing sufficient levels of social capital for their children. Although African American males are more likely than European American males to reside in a home without their father, the absence of the mother or father in the homes for many African American males increases their risk of experiencing negative developmental outcomes.

Study Aims

The proposed study examines the association between perceived negative school climate, internalizing behaviors, externalizing behaviors, and academic performance for African American adolescent males. The specific research aims were (a) to examine the relationship between perceived negative school climate and internalizing and externalizing behaviors for African American adolescent males, (b) to examine the relationship between internalizing and externalizing behaviors and academic performance, and (c) to examine the moderating effects of parenting and family structure

on the relationship between perceived negative school climate and internalizing and externalizing behaviors. The following research questions were investigated:

1. Is there a direct relationship between perceived negative school climate and grades for African American adolescent males?
2. Is there a relationship between perceived negative school climate and internalizing behaviors for African American adolescent males?
3. Is there a relationship between perceived negative school climate and externalizing behaviors for African American adolescent males?
4. Is there a relationship between internalizing behaviors and grades for African American males?
5. Is there a relationship between externalizing behaviors and grades for African American males?
6. Does internalizing behaviors mediate the relationship between negative school climate and grades?
7. Does externalizing behaviors mediate the relationship between negative school climate and grades?
8. Does parenting and family structure attenuate the relationship between perceived negative school climate and internalizing behaviors for African American males?

9. Does parenting and family structure attenuate the relationship between perceived negative school climate and externalizing behaviors for African American males?

Significance and Contributions of Study

First, this study seeks to identify the processes within schools that adversely influence the academic outcomes of African American males. Existing literature has failed to examine the risk associated with various negative school processes and the impact they have on African American males' internalizing and externalizing behaviors. This research focuses on negative school climate factors (i.e. teachers, peers, and practices), traditionally considered protective factors for students, to examine their impact as risk factors within the school context.

Secondly, the employment of a homogeneous sample allows for the assessment of within-group variability among the study variable outcomes. Furthermore, this type of sampling diverges from the typical across group comparisons made with heterogeneous samples, which usually employs the deficit approach for African American males, particularly, when being compared to European males. This study focuses on processes, albeit negative and troubling, that are relevant and, unfortunately, normative for this population. The ability to compare within-group results may provide insight into factors that may be protective in nature for some, as well as the circumstances under which they maybe risk factors for others. In fact, such sampling practices illuminate the resiliency demonstrated by many African American males as they negotiate unfavorable conditions

on their way to school success. Moreover, the result may reveal which school processes negatively impact the group as a whole.

Finally, the identification of such processes may contribute significantly to the work of practitioners who are interested in improving African American males' outcomes. Educators equipped with this information can more readily implement assessment tools and programs to improve upon the relational issues affecting this group. For example, in school environments conducive to discrimination, school leaders can implement policies and programs, such as cultural competency training, to eliminate such practices. Similarly, mental health professionals can identify critical intervention points by which to incorporate treatments to improve psychological or behavioral functioning of African American males. In addition, family life educators may emphasize the importance to parents of African American males to provide support and monitor their sons in cases where negative experiences at school may be leading to behavioral and mental health problems. For instance, one might assess student-teacher relationships to assist these males in addressing anxiety or depressive symptoms.

Overview

The subsequent chapters of this paper begin with Chapter II explicating the theoretical models employed to frame this work. The chapter describes in detail the foundations of the theories as well as their relevance to the study variables. Each component of the models is discussed in terms of its posited influence on the development of African American males. Additionally, this chapter will focus on the school climate literature as it relates to negative school climate factors, such as teacher

support, peer relationships, and perceived discrimination. The various negative school climate factors will be discussed with regard to their documented influence on adolescents' internalizing and externalizing behaviors. Chapter III will discuss the research methods used in the current study and descriptions of the variables used in the research model. Chapter IV will follow with the results of the analysis conducted with the data, whereas Chapter V will discuss these findings and their meanings with regard to the targeted population. Finally, Chapter VI will conclude the study by summarizing the findings and identifying the contributions and limitations of the study.

CHAPTER II

THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

This study employed two theoretical models to examine the processes by which African American males may develop within the context of family and school. First, social capital theory examines the social networks and relationships that influence developmental outcomes for African American males at home and in school. Social capital theory explores how these relationships serve as either valuable resources or barriers to successful academic and personal development. Additionally, the phenomenological variant ecological systems theory (PVEST) illustrates the interactional influences of identity formation, culture, and differentiated maturation processes experienced by youth of color. Moreover, the PVEST model provides a conceptual framework for how marginalized youth manifest psychological and behavioral problems through context linked processes.

Social Capital Theory and African American Males' Development

John Dewey (1900) and L.J. Hanifan (1916) were the first to introduce the term social capital however; it was Pierre Bourdieu (1997, 1986) who has been credited with advancing the concept at the theoretical level. Bourdieu discussed social capital in terms of the aggregate of resources acquired through means of extreme sociability and inheritance, such as a family's name. His concept, which was more systematic in nature,

articulated how an individual or institution's accumulation of reciprocal relationships with others can increase one's economic power, status, and overall value through a collective pooling of resources. Bourdieu suggested that the natural distribution of social capital is imbalanced (i.e., those born with a name exert less effort to accumulate it), however, the only other way to obtain it is through the establishment and maintenance of social networks. Bourdieu's assertion that social capital is imbalanced within society suggests that certain people inherit social capital deficits at birth and are developmentally disadvantaged by default. Historically, racial minority groups in our society have experienced inequities in social capital resources with regard to economic, political, and educational access.

In addition to Bourdieu's work, sociologist James S. Coleman's (1986) theory and concept of social capital is often cited and widely regarded in the literature. Coleman was the first to explicate the function of social capital through social relations (Durham & Wilson, 2007). More specifically, he posited that social capital exists where there are social structures that facilitate and restrict certain actions from the actors within the structures (Coleman, 1997/1988). In other words, social capital resides within the relationships between people and may be produced within as well as outside of the family unit. Those fortunate to possess high levels of social capital maintains an advantage over those with less capital because of the increased access to resources and opportunities afforded through relationships. African American males disproportionately inherit families, communities, and schools deficient in social capital and are required to

negotiate their limited social relationships within these contexts to maximize on opportunities.

Social Capital within the Family

Inherent in Coleman's theory (1986) is the notion that the establishment of within-family social capital is a prerequisite for building outside social capital (i.e., communities and schools). He described the process, by which social capital is formed within the family, as the close relationship between parents and adolescents that allows for the transference of the parents human capital onto the adolescent. A primary tenet describing the characteristics needed for the successful production of social capital within the family was structural intactness. Coleman suggested that a family must not be *structurally deficient*; meaning a member of the family must not be physically absent. Given that African American adolescent males disproportionately reside in households absent of their fathers, is further support that this group often inherits environments potentially deficient in social capital. However, African American adolescents who reside in the home with both biological parents are likely the beneficiaries of high levels of social capital due to the egalitarian parenting practices of many African American fathers (Coles & Green, 2010). Although non-residential African American fathers have shown to participate in more care taking responsibilities than non-residential fathers in other racial groups, residential African American fathers in two-parent families have a greater influence on the development of their children (Coles & Green, 2010).

Second, Coleman's (1987) theory posited that a family must not be *functionally deficient*, or lacking strong relationships between the parents (or other adult family

members) and the children. This is what he suggested was the catalyst to the production of social capital within the family. In fact, Coleman explicitly regarded this as the point in the process in which parents transfer their human capital (i.e., knowledge, emotional support, expectations) to their children (p. 224) and that close ties and warmth and supportiveness mark this relationship.. A direct strategy used by many parents to create social capital is the employment of support and behavioral control strategies. *Support strategies* are often conveyed through encouraging messages and discussions regarding future plans (Kerpelman, Eryigit, & Stephens, 2007). Consistent encouraging messages regarding adolescents' abilities and potential career plans (e.g., college attendance) are likely to foster stronger parent-adolescent relationships and serve as valuable social capital. Similarly, parents utilize *behavioral control strategies* by establishing provisions of regulations or structure in the lives of their adolescents (Bean, Bush, McKenry, & Wilson, 2003). Although these strategies are employed by parents of various ethnicities, most minority parents find them to be critically valuable not just to the success, but to the survival of their children, especially when exposed to impoverished living conditions. For example, by setting boundaries by way of strict behavioral control practices (i.e., clear rules and consequences), African American parents are preparing their adolescents to negotiate the rules of society that severely penalize minorities for norm deviations, particularly African American males.

Social Capital in Schools

Coleman's theory, like other social capital theorist, extends the creation of social capital beyond the boundaries of the family. He described this process as the social

relationships that exist among parents within a community, as well as parents' relationships with institutions of the community, such as schools (Coleman, 1997/1988). Schools have been documented as a context critical to the production and transference of social capital, particularly for children (Arriaza, 2003). Hanifan (1916) articulated this when he wrote:

the use of social capital I make no reference to the usual acceptation of the term capital, except in a figurative sense. I do not refer to real estate, or to personal property, or to cold cash, but rather to that in life which tends to make these tangible substances count for most in the daily lives of people, namely, goodwill, fellowship, mutual sympathy, and social intercourse among a group of individuals and families who make up a social unit, the rural community, whose logical center is the school... The individual is helpless socially, if left to himself...(p.130).

Likewise, Bourdieu and Passeron (1970) considered schools to be the central functioning social agent that reproduces the thoughts, perceptions, and actions valued in society. More specifically, the authors described teachers as the “most highly finished output of the reproduction system and key agents for sustaining and nurturing such reproduction” (p.194).

The utility and intended purpose of elementary and secondary schools, as defined by many, is to provide a central location for children to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to develop into productive citizens and workers (Papalia, Feldman, & Olds, 2008). School, by its very nature and design, perpetuates a social structure conducive to producing social capital through the establishment of relationships. If, according to Coleman (1986), the basis of the formation of social capital resides within social relations, then many opportunities to produce social capital are present within the

structure of schools, including relationships between parents and teachers, teachers and teachers, students and students, and more importantly students and teachers. Inherent in this process is the notion that trust and obligation is warranted in the relationship as a result of the caring and concerned generated through the emotional ties established between the parties that facilitates.... Scholars have examined the impact various social relationships within the school context have on the development of students, both directly and indirectly. For example, Penuel, Riel, Krause, and Frank (2009) concluded that establishing school environments which foster professional interactions between teachers, including the sharing of ideas and resources, significantly improved the learning environment for the students. These results suggest that as teachers develop stronger bonds of trust in their professional relationships, it is likely that each teacher will benefit from ideas, tools, and resources passed on through greater communication. These increased resources, in turn, may lead to better academic outcomes for the students. Similarly, parents who are able to foster productive and trusting relationships with school staff members and teachers are likely to provide an academic advantage for their adolescents. Positive parent-teacher relationships have been documented to improve the motivation and engagement of students, particularly those with poverty and minority statuses (Hughes & Kwok, 2007). Given that African American parents often feel alienated or intimidated by school staff and teachers (Koonce & Harper, 2005), those parents who are able establish relationships with school personnel may tap into a reservoir of resources generally not available to many minority families.

Although relationships formed by adults within the context of school have resulted in social capital for students, the relationships established by the students themselves have shown to be just as, if not more, critical to their development. More specifically, researchers have found that student-student and teacher-student relationships can directly affect the academic trajectory of students (Buchanan & Bowen, 2008). Coleman discussed the notion of simplex relations as means of producing outside social capital. *Simplex Relations* refers to the social capital or link between a person and one context. While most social capital scholars tend to focus on the capital generated by parents for the child, the notion of simplex relations may be applied to social capital created by the child. Adolescence is a period marked by a search for identity and independence from parents and other adults. It is during this time that youth begin to forge relationships with others outside of the family context and establish their own social capital. This form of outside social capital has been documented to be critical for the development of African American adolescents in school. In fact, some African American students have reported feeling alienated and disconnected from their schools (Booker, 2004). Much of this disconnection experienced by these students can be attributed to their relationships with their teachers (Davies, 2007; Jussim & Eccles, 1992). Studies have indicated that African American students, particularly boys, are subjected to lower expectations, more disciplinary actions, and greater conflict in the school setting than are other groups (Wood, Kaplan, & McLoyd, 2007). Although researchers have investigated positive student-teacher relationships and have found the social capital produced through these relationships to be positively associated with

improved academic outcomes for socially disadvantaged youth (Croninger & Lee, 2001), many African American males are deprived of such opportunities to establish close relationships or build sufficient social capital with their teachers.

Another influential social relationship that has proven to be important for adolescents within the school context is the peer relationship. Adolescents spend a great deal of their waking hours in close proximity to their peers in school. Given the increased social awareness and dependency upon emotional support from their peers during this developmental stage, the direct feedback received from peers can have detrimental effects on the academic outcomes of adolescents within the school context. Particularly, rejection from peers may act as a stressor and have deleterious effects on adolescents' behavior and psychological development (Prinstein & Aikins, 2004). Failure to establish meaningful social relationships with peers in the school context may limit adolescents' ability to access additional academic resources, such as information regarding academic opportunities, emotional support, and closure networks, which can enhance the educational experience. African American males may be at greatest risk of failing to form such relationships in school considering they are often rejected by their peers and teachers (Rodkins, Farmer, Pearl, & Van Acker, 2000) due to their perceived aggressive behaviors (Watkins & Kurtz, 2001).

Peer relationships may be even more vital for students who lack support from the adults within the school context. Although some researchers have found that relationships with adults in school (i.e., teachers) are more influential on adolescents' academic adjustments than peer relationships (Buchanan & Bowen, 2008), it is plausible to assume

that toxic peer relationships may exacerbate the stress endured by students who lack support from adults. Social capital generated through peer relationships may be a critical resource for adolescents, particularly African American male students.

PVEST and African American Males' Development

Developmental researchers have long acknowledged that human development does not occur in a vacuum and, in fact, is largely influenced by the environment in which the development takes place. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory articulated that not only does context influence development, but that this influence is manifested at varying levels of social interaction. Whereas ecological systems theory was instrumental in identifying the criticalness of examining the variability of human development through the lens of process-person-context, Margaret B. Spencer's (1997, 2001) Phenomenological Variant Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) expands this concept to account for the interactional influences of identity formation, culture, and differentiated maturation processes experienced by youth of color. The theory allows for the exploration of normative developmental variability within and across contexts over the life course. Furthermore, PVEST, as utilized in this study, seeks to capture the experiences of African American males within and across contexts and how they influence the formation of youths' identity, particularly as it relates to academic achievement.

The PVEST model is comprised of five bidirectional components that are cyclical in nature: net vulnerability, net stress, reactive coping processes, emergent identities, and stage-specific coping outcomes. *Net vulnerability* refers to the counter-balance between

the potential risk factors and protective factors that exists within the developmental context of an individual. In other words, net vulnerability represents the number of potential risk factors in an individual's environment that may negatively affect normative development, that are offset by the number of protective factors in that same environment that may positively affect normative development. With regard to PVEST, *risk factors* are environmental conditions that may predispose individuals to adverse outcomes, whereas *protective factors* are environmental conditions that support successful developmental outcomes. The second component of PVEST is *net stress* and refers to the actual cumulative experiences of stress and support associated with the risk and protective factors in an environment that are endured by individuals. For example, adolescents that are subjected to impoverished family and community conditions are likely to experience increased stresses related to a lack of resources (e.g., food and shelter) and relational conflict (e.g., family or community discourse).

African American males are often subjected to a number of conditions, within the school context, that represent risk factors but could be considered protective factors given the right circumstances. For example, this study examines African American males' perceptions of potential risk factors as it relates to their teachers, peers, and environments. Teachers who show little concern for African American males' personal and academic well-being, via lowered academic expectations, culturally insensitive developmental goals, and constant disciplinary action, may pose challenging risks to their developmental process. These risks may lead to undue stress that serves as a barrier to African American males' academic development, whereas, supportive and caring

teachers may provide an academic environment that encourages successful development (Klem & Connell, 2004). Similarly, African American males may experience social exclusion from their peers that leave them alienated and disconnected from the schooling process (Booker, 2004). This peer rejection may represent a significant environmental risk or stress for many African American males within the school context. However, peers and classmates that are welcoming and friendly are more likely to provide a supportive social structure that promotes academic success. Finally, school climates that are conducive to racial discriminatory and prejudice behaviors produce considerable risks that may subsequently undermine the normative development of African American boys. For example, Nyborg and Curry (2003) concluded that experiences with racism within the school context were related to self-reported internalizing symptoms such as lower self-concepts and higher levels of hopelessness for African American males. Contrastingly, schools that are sensitive to the cultural and historical perspectives of youth of color are much more likely to create an academic environment that is engaging to this population.

The PVEST model postulates that exposure to varying levels of net stress are likely to invoke *reactive coping processes* within an individual. When faced with adversities or stress, the natural inclination of human beings is to deploy defense mechanism to address the threat. The most effective problem-solving strategies employed are unique to the knowledge, experiences, instincts, and external supports of the individual under duress. Spencer's (1997, 2006) model suggests that, based on the available resources possessed by each person, reactive coping processes may yield

adaptive or maladaptive solutions. *Adaptive solutions* refer to strategies that are successful in ameliorating or eliminating sources of stress and allows for positive and productive growth during the normative developmental process. *Maladaptive solutions*, by contrast, may or may not be successful in addressing sources of stress, but generally have a negative and unproductive impact on the normative developmental process. In many cases, maladaptive solutions can exacerbate stressful conditions to heightened levels. However, Spencer noted that the effectiveness of selected strategies may vary based upon the context in which they occur. In other words, solutions that are adaptive in one context may be maladaptive in another.

Marginalized groups, particularly African American males, are disproportionately exposed to extremely stressful environments and are at greater risks of engaging in maladaptive solutions. For example, in the context of school, African American males are much more likely to be viewed by teachers as aggressive (Watkins & Kurtz, 2001) and therefore disciplined and suspended from school (Ruck & Wortley, 2002) than their white counterparts. It is plausible that if any misperceptions are held by teachers, then they may lead to student-teacher conflict, thereby causing African American males additional stress. If these students are unequipped to address the unexpected and unwarranted threats, it is likely that maladaptive solutions (e.g., resistance or insubordination) may be viewed as their only options. On the other hand, the solutions employed by these youth may be successful adaptive strategies used in other contexts, such as their homes and communities, but are rendered maladaptive and unsuccessful in the school context. For instance, an adolescent may engage in fathering roles at home that

demands he take on adult-like responsibilities such as disciplinarian and setting rules, whereas in the context of school these same behaviors are likely to be viewed as inappropriate or insubordinate.

Regardless of the reactive coping strategies used by adolescents, PVEST suggests that continued use of any strategy over time may result in the emergence of identities. In this fourth component of the model, individuals develop “behavioral stability over time and space” (Spencer et al., 2001; p 642) through constant self-appraisal and replication of coping strategies that have been deemed effective. *Emergent identities* are the ways in which people view themselves, within and across different contexts, as their culture, ethnic, and gender roles interact and develop within various contexts. For example, as African American males learn what it means to be African American and male through their experiences within various contexts, such as family and school, they begin to make meaning of these experiences that shape how they see themselves. Unfortunately for many African American males in school, these experiences have identified them as aggressive, unmotivated, disruptive, and academically inferior to all other adolescent groups.

Finally, PVEST posits that adolescents’ identity formation and patterns of behavior over time will lead to either productive or unproductive outcomes at varying life-stages. The *life-stage specific coping outcomes* component contends that certain types of reactive coping strategies (i.e., adaptive or maladaptive) used by adolescents will foster identities that will eventually lead to certain types of outcomes (i.e., productive or unproductive). *Productive outcomes* refer developmental outcomes that promote success,

such as academic achievement, positive relationships, and healthy psychological well-being. *Unproductive outcomes*, adversely, refer to negative developmental outcomes such as academic failures, corrosive relationships, and psychological issues. Although a number of African American males statistically have experienced unproductive academic outcomes, it is important that we identify the processes within the school environment that create or exacerbate stress which contributes to these negative outcomes for this population. Additionally, Spencer (2006) noted that, although productive outcomes are more likely under environmental conditions of low risk and high protective factors, many marginalized youth exhibit *resilience* by attaining productive outcomes despite living under extremely stressful conditions. Moreover, risk factors and stress are viewed as valuable opportunities for refining coping strategies in the PVEST model. A good illustration of this are the countless number of African American males who manage to successfully navigate the rough terrains of public schools while subjected to home, community, and school environments limited in support. Many of these youth demonstrate resilience by being resourceful and establishing supports from unconventional sources such as distant relatives, community leaders, and peers.

Literature Review

This section examines the relationships between negative school climate, internalizing and externalizing behaviors, and academic outcomes on African American males. More specifically, the subsequent sections examine existing literature exploring the impact of teacher support, peer rejection, and adolescent perceived discrimination on internalizing and externalizing behaviors within the school context. First, an explication

of the current conceptualization of negative school climate is provided to allow for a better understanding of how the construct was operationalized. Next, research on the main study variables will be discussed, followed by literature focusing on several indirect influences that may moderate and/or mediate these relationships, such as positive parenting and family structure.

Conceptualization of Negative School Climate

A number of constructs have been commonly used in the literature to measure school climate (Libbey, 2004). Although a plethora of research examining the influence of school climate on adolescent development has been conducted, social scientists have failed to reach a consensus on a single definition (Anderson, 1982). School climate has been operationalized in a variety of ways and has been loosely defined as a “complex, multidimensional construct encompassing the atmosphere, culture, values, resources, and social networks of a school” and usually include “organizational, interpersonal and instructional dimensions” (Loukas & Murphy, 2007). In a review of the literature, Libbey (2004) argued that variations in definitions for school climate and similar constructs are biased to the researcher using the term; the theoretical framework guiding the term; and the nature of the research question regarding the relationship between the student and school. Furthermore, most previous studies have operationalized the school climate construct to measure the positive influences the school context may have on developmental outcomes. For example in their examination of middle school climate as an influence on student behavioral problems and emotional distress, Kuperminc, Leadbeater, Emmons and Blatt (1997) defined perceived school climate as achievement

motivation, fairness, order and discipline, parent involvement, sharing of resources, student interpersonal relations, and student-teacher relations. This definition implies that each student enters the school environment with an equitable chance of developing sufficient social capital through social resources and fails to account for those negative school climate factors, such as adverse relationships, which may contribute to the marginalization of youth of color, particularly African American males. In an effort to measure the impact adverse social relationships may have on African American males' personal and academic outcomes, this study chose to operationalize negative school climate using three variables: *teacher support*, *peer rejection*, and *perceived discrimination*. Contrary to previous research, this construct is intended to measure the extent to which schools adopt environments that discourage African American males from attaining positive and healthy developmental outcomes.

Teacher Support. Previous studies have used the *teacher support* variable to measure the positive influences associated with the teacher-student relationship. It has often been defined as the perceived levels in which the student feels his or her teacher cares about their personal and academic well-being (Rosenfeld, Richman, & Bowen, 2000). Teachers may demonstrate support by showing their appreciation and respect for individual differences, attentiveness to specific needs, being accessible, exhibiting compassion, and advocating. Consistent with social capital theory, the relationship between teacher and student may serve as a valuable resource for students' academic success, by offering opportunities and support. PVEST would also suggest that a positive teacher-student relationship may act as a protective factor for students within this context.

Several researchers have reported findings with direct associations between teacher support and various positive adolescent outcomes. For example, Rosenfeld, Richman, & Bowen (2000) found that teacher support was related positively with students' school self-efficacy, hours of studying, attendance, avoidance of externalizing behaviors and grades in high school and middle school. However, given that African American males are last in nearly every academic category, the nature and influence of the teacher-student relationship warrants further exploration for this group. Moreover, it is plausible that many of African American males are academically disadvantaged due to the lack of support from their teachers in the classroom. In fact, because many teachers have lowered academic expectations for their African American male students and are more likely to perceive them as aggressive and disruptive, which results in more frequent and harsher disciplinary actions, it is likely that many of these young men may experience neglect from or conflict with their teachers. PVEST posits that under these stressful conditions, teacher-student relationships may act as a risk factor for many African American male students. The current measure *teacher support* seeks to capture the adverse impact that poor teacher-student relationships may have on development of African American boys within the school context.

Peer Rejection. The ambiguity in defining school climate has led to an overlap of constructs measuring the relationships between students and the other school members. The impact of peer relationships on student development has been conceptualized using several constructs such as *school connectedness*, *school bonding*, and *school attachment*. These constructs generally measured the positive influences of both peers and teachers

within the school setting. For example some researchers have conceptualized *school connectedness* as representing students' feelings regarding fair treatment by teachers and students, as well as whether the school is safe and welcoming (Loukas, Ripperger-Suhler, & Horton, 2008; Mrug & Windle, 2009).

African American adolescent males may likely have a different experience with teachers and peers within the school setting. Because African American adolescent boys are likely to be perceived as aggressive by peers and adults in the school environment, they are at a greater risk of being rejected by their peers (Rodkins, Farmer, Pearl, & Van Acker, 2000). This study chose to incorporate separate measures to capture African American males' relationships with their teachers and peers. In an effort to measure the contributions of negative peer relationships on developmental outcomes, peer rejection was examined as a component of the negative school climate construct. The peer rejection construct has been previously operationalized as a component of various sociometric measures that dichotomize the responses of a student's classmates as "more likely" or "least likely" to engage in peer relations with that student (Prinstein & Aikins, 2004). Although this method is generally effective in measuring the global perception of acceptance and rejection among peers, it fails to capture the subjective and personal perceptions of the adolescents themselves. This study examined the perceived rejection of African American adolescent males' by assessing the exhibited behaviors of their peers that were indicative of social alienation. Students who are physically and verbally harassed by their peers are likely to feel alienated and rejected. Moreover, alienation and hostility expressed towards African American boys by their peers would further

perpetuate the denial of valuable social capital needed for academic success, as well as presents as an environmental risk factor for normative development.

Perceived Discrimination. Finally, school climate researchers have often measured the positive institutional and environmental factors as a component of the school climate construct, such as attachment and belongingness (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Maddox and Prinz, 2003). Studies that employ such measures assert that aspects of the institution promote positive feelings within the student and as a result they experience positive outcomes. Inclusive in many of these definitions are measures of students' perceptions of racial or ethnic discrimination within the school context. Generally, the overall constructs are intended to measure the positive impact that school belongingness or attachment may have on the students' academic outcomes and less attention is given to negative influences within the school context.

Given the historical context of African Americans in U.S. public schools, attachment or belongingness for this group may be challenged by social and structural resistance. African Americans adolescents are often tasked with burden of addressing issues of racism and discrimination within the school context and are more likely to be adversely affected personally and academically. Taken together with the more recent academic challenges of boys in school, African American males may experience extremely difficult opposition in this setting. The perceived discrimination construct examines the extent to which African American males reported experiencing unfair treatment in school due to their race or ethnicity. This study contends that hostile and discriminatory environments erect social and emotional barriers that prevent this group

from receiving adequate academic instruction and personal development. In the subsequent sections, the literature for each negative school climate factor will be reviewed with regard to their influence on adolescent outcomes.

Teacher Influence on African American Adolescent Males' Internalizing Behaviors

Adolescence is replete with physiological and social stressors that may result in an onset of depressive symptoms or depression at clinical levels (Ge, Brody, Conger, & Simons, 2006). Research has shown that adolescents are more likely to experience behavioral and academic problems such as alcohol and drug use, delinquency, truancy, poor grades and poor school engagement when depressed. The combination of adolescent developmental issues and negative social climates too often lead to experiences of depressive symptoms for many students. Teacher support has been linked to multiple adolescent outcomes such as academic engagement, academic achievement, and drug and alcohol use (Klem & Connell, 2004; LaRusso, Romer, & Selman, 2008). Moreover, research has shown positive school climates, particularly teacher support, to be associated with decreased depressive symptoms and improved academic performance, and lower risk behavior for adolescents (Reddy, Rhodes, & Mulhall, 2003; LaRusso, Romer, & Selman, 2008; Ryan & Patrick, 2001). Kuperminc, Leadbeater, Emmons, and Blatt (1997) found the more adolescents perceived their school climate to be positive, the less likely they were to experience internalizing problems such as depression and anxiety. When students perceive their academic environments to be warm and caring, they are less likely to become anxious over the increased demands of secondary school curriculums. Given this evidence for teacher support, it is likely that a lack of teacher support may

have an adverse influence on the psychological and behavioral functioning of students. In other words, when students perceive their academic environments to be harsh and neglectful, they may be more likely to become anxious under increased academic demands. Indeed, teachers are important in establishing a school climate conducive to fewer social and academic stressors for students, therefore they must be cognizant of the messages conveyed through their interactions with each student. For example, students who perceived support from their teachers (i.e. care about them academically and personally) reported fewer depressive symptoms than students without teacher support (LaRusso, Romer, & Selman, 2008). Similarly, McNeely and Falci (2004) found that teacher support acted as a protective factor against adolescent suicidal attempts. Both researchers demonstrated the influential effects of supportive teachers on adolescent internalizing behaviors, however, each studies' results may be interpreted from a different perspective. For example, in the LaRusso, Romer, and Selman (2008) study, it can be assumed that those students who perceived less teacher support reported more depressive symptoms. With regard to McNeely and Falci (2004), it is plausible that a lack of teacher support may act as a risk factor for adolescent suicidal attempts by elevating anxiety and depressive symptoms. Adolescence is a volatile time for most students and guidance from adults is often sought. The proximal relationships shared between the students and teachers may be either an emotionally safe or a distressing place for many students, particularly African American males, who sometimes lack family and community support.

Teacher Influence on African American Adolescent Males' Externalizing Behaviors

The environments in which adolescents are exposed play a vital role in how they interact with others and the likelihood of them experiencing externalizing behaviors, such as fighting, disruptive behaviors, and aggression. Due to the inconsistent and fragile nature of their self-perceptions at this developmental stage, the characteristics of the environmental context have a greater influence on behavioral outcomes (Jeffery, 2009). For example, adolescents who are subjected to families, schools, or communities that are high in delinquent or externalizing behaviors (e.g., fighting and stealing) are at an increased risk of engaging in similar behaviors (Mrug & Windle, 2009). By identifying contributing contextual factors, parents, teachers, and leaders can augment environments to be more conducive to positive social and behavioral outcomes. Teachers have been identified by researchers as a major source of influence on students' behavior in the school setting (Wang, Selman, Dishion, & Stormshak, 2010; McNeely & Falci, 2004; Kuperminc, Leadbeater, & Blatt, 2001). More specifically, the type of relationship established by teachers, such as supportive (i.e., warm and caring) or conflicting (i.e., harsh and hostile), has been shown to be an important factor in determining how students behave within the school context. Wang et al. (2010) interviewed 677 middle school students and concluded that when students perceived their teachers to be supportive, they were less probable to engage in externalizing behaviors and those who did exhibit such behaviors did so less frequently. A different articulation of these same results would be to suggest that those students who did not perceive their teachers as supportive engaged in more externalizing behaviors.

Teacher Influence on African American Adolescent Males' Academic Outcomes

Perhaps the most salient influence of school climate on adolescents is reflected in their academic outcomes. Although schools are partly responsible for the socialization of children, their pedagogical responsibilities are primary. Often schools' climates create barriers to successful instruction of the academic curriculum and deny many students an appropriate education. One such barrier has been the discrepancy between adolescents' need for autonomy and traditional school values of control. More specifically, as adolescents encounter the new demands of secondary school, as well as negotiate the identity formation process, it is important that schools provide a nurturing climate considerate of these developmental issues. School climate researchers have identified teacher support as a characteristic associated with positive adolescent academic outcomes such as academic motivation, academic engagement, and academic achievement. For example, teacher support was found to be associated positively with student academic engagement and achievement in a study conducted by Klem and Connell (2004). Likewise, Marchant, Paulson and Rothlisberg (2001) reported teacher responsiveness (i.e. student-teacher relationships) and school responsiveness (i.e. student's perception of nurturing environment) directly affected student motivation and achievement. In other words, students are likely to invest more in their academic responsibilities and have more positive attitudes towards school if they believe their teachers care about them. In contrast, school climates that present with risk factors, such as adverse teacher-student relationships, may be counterproductive for adolescents and impede their development. For example, in a meta-analysis conducted by Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, and Oort (2011) of

99 studies examining teacher-student relationship, the authors found that both positive and adverse teacher-student relationships were associated with students' academic engagement and achievement. In fact, their findings suggested in some cases the effects were stronger for adverse teacher-student relationships than for positive teacher-student relationships.

Peer Rejection on African American Adolescent Males' Outcomes

It has long been established that interpersonal relationships are vital to the development of adolescents, given the natural cognitive and biological changes occurring during this developmental stage. As adolescents increase in their social awareness, they begin to place a higher value on their peers' perceptions. Subsequently, their interpretations of peer feedback are often perceived as direct reflections of their self-worth. In turn, adolescents who perceive themselves to be valued by their peers (i.e., acceptance), as evident by socially healthy relationships, tend to exhibit fewer internalizing and externalizing problems as well as perform better in school (Wentzel et al., 2004; Garcia-Reid, 2007). In contrast, rejection by peers can have detrimental effects on adolescents and lead to a number of psychological and behavioral outcomes for adolescents such as depression, anxiety, aggression, and delinquency (Prinstein & Aikins, 2002; Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 1998). For example, Coie, Lockman, Terry, and Hyman (1992) found that peer rejection in middle childhood predicted internalizing problems (as reported by self and parents) and externalizing problems (as reported by parents) in a sample of African American adolescents. Furthermore, research has shown that peer rejection is associated with negative outcomes in adulthood, such as

underemployment and engaging in criminal activity (Bagwell, Schmidt, Newcomb, & Bukowski, 2001).

Additionally, researchers have found that peer rejection is highly correlated with aggression, and that aggression is the greatest single behavior determinant of the construct in the early developing years (Coie et al., 1992; Coie et al., 1990). Therefore, African American adolescents, particularly boys, are at greater risks of being rejected by their peers, given that they are more likely to be perceived as aggressive by peers and adults in the school environment. For example, Rodkins, Farmer, Pearl, and Van Acker (2000) found that African American students in majority white classrooms were nominated as least liked more frequently than in multicultural classrooms and these nominations were conjoined with aggression. Moreover, African American males are suspended and expelled from school at greater frequency than any other population (Ruck and Worth, 2002).

The perception of aggression may have varying social consequences for African American males within the school setting that are majority white as opposed to majority African American. First, African American males who are perceived as aggressive in a school setting primarily populated by white students are at a greater risk of being rejected by their peers, given that popularity status is dictated by the larger contextual environment (Rodkins, Wilson, & Ahn, 2007). Second, African American males who are perceived as aggressive in a school setting primarily populated by African American students are likely to be admired and labeled popular by their peers, thereby perpetuating their antisocial behaviors (Xie et al., 2006).

Perceived Discrimination on African American Adolescent Males' School Outcomes

Adolescence presents with a number of contextual stressors in which developing youth are challenged to address. Unfortunately, African Americans adolescents are tasked with the unique challenge of addressing issues of racism. Racism has been defined as “beliefs, attitudes, institutional arrangements, and acts that tend to denigrate individuals or groups because of phenotypic characteristics or ethnic group affiliations” (Clark et al., 1999). Many African American adolescents report frequent experiences of racism that is pervasive throughout their daily lives (Garcia et al., 1996). Research has found that experiences with racism are associated with negative psychological outcomes for African Americans such as anxiety and depression (Gibbons et al., 2004; Greene et al. 2006). More specifically, Nyborg and Curry (2003) concluded that African American males who reported experiencing personal racism also reported greater levels of internalizing problems, hopelessness, and lower self-concepts.

Schools provide an important social context for adolescents, as it is the place where the majority of their social interactions transpire. Therefore, the nature of the social experiences of adolescents within the school setting is critical to their development. For example, adolescents who feel devalued by their teachers and peers may be at greater risks of negative outcomes such as poor academic performance and increased externalizing and internalizing problems (Eccles et al., 1993). More importantly, schools that provide a climate that is conducive to racism and racial discrimination promote a message of devaluation to African American students. African Americans in U.S. public schools generally find themselves in classroom environments

receiving academic instruction from white female teachers and sometimes majority white peers. The cultural divergence in this type of instructional setting may place minority students in an academically compromising position that undermines their abilities to perform. Wong, Eccles, and Sameroff (2003) found that racism by teachers and peers towards African American adolescents predicted lower grades, academic self-concept, academic task value, and increased internalizing (i.e., depression, anger, self-esteem) and externalizing (i.e., externalizing behaviors) problems. Moreover, Swanson, Cunningham, and Spencer (2003) suggested that African American males receive more negative treatment and less preferential treatment in schools than do other adolescent populations. Given that African American boys are more often perceived as aggressive and rejected by adults and peers in the school environment, it is plausible that they may be exposed to experiences of racism at greater frequency than other minority populations.

African American parents' parenting strategies offer another indication that their sons are frequently exposed to racial discrimination. The racial socialization literature has shown that African American parents tend to prepare their sons with more strategies for combating issues of racism than they do their daughters. For example, Coard, Wallace, Stevenson, and Brotman (2004) found that African American males receive more messages regarding racial barriers (i.e., preparation for bias) from their parents than did African American girls. It is likely that this increased sensitivity to racial cues may result in African American males' awareness of racial events.

Family Structure on African American Adolescent Males' Outcomes

Although the literature on family structure has met with criticism over the past several decades, as to whether it is the structure of the family (i.e., family members) or the more intimate family processes (i.e., parent-child relationships) that influence adolescent outcomes, the general consensus is that adolescents still benefit more from the nuclear family structure (i.e., two-biological parents), than in other types of family structures (Booth, Scott, & King, 2010; Demo & Acock, 1996). Adolescents may be particularly affected by the two-parent family structure as a result of the increased financial security, monitoring, disciplining, and involvement efforts afforded by two adults in the home (Booth, Scott, & King, 2010; Bumpus & Rodgers, 2009). In fact, Bumpus and Rodgers (2009) found that both two-parent and African American families are more likely to solicit information from their adolescents regarding their whereabouts and activities away from the home. Specifically, African American adolescents are more likely, than their European American counterparts, to benefit from the egalitarian nature by which African American fathers participate in rearing, monitoring, and disciplining activities. Using a nationally representative sample of children under age 13, Hofferth (2003) concluded that African American fathers engaged in more monitoring and rearing activities with their children, than did both Hispanic and European American fathers.

The additional parenting efforts may be responsible for a number of positive adolescent outcomes, such as improved academic performance and fewer internalizing and externalizing behaviors. For example, Booth, Scott, and King (2010) found that, after controlling for close ties to biological mother, adolescents who reported having close ties

to their fathers in biological two-parent homes also reported better grades, fewer delinquent behaviors and depressive symptoms, and higher self-esteem. Demo and Acock's (1996) earlier work provided an indication of the influence of two-parent family structure on adolescent outcomes by concluding that adolescents from "intact first married family units" fared slightly better in global wellbeing, when compared to divorced single-parent families, stepfamilies, and continuously single-parent families.

Hypotheses

Previous investigations have explored the relationship between negative school climate and adolescent outcomes. However, no studies to date have examined the association between negative school climate factors and African American males' internalizing and externalizing behaviors. The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of perceived negative school climate factors on African American males' internalizing and externalizing behaviors. Further, this study will examine the moderating effects of parenting and family structure on the relationship between perceived negative school climate and internalizing and externalizing behaviors. The following research questions and hypotheses were investigated:

1. Is there a direct relationship between perceived negative school climate and grades for African American adolescent males?
2. Is there a relationship between perceived negative school climate and internalizing behaviors for African American adolescent males?

Hypothesis 1: African American males' perceived negative school climate will be negatively associated with their internalizing behaviors.

3. Is there a relationship between perceived negative school climate and externalizing behaviors for African American adolescent males?

Hypothesis 2: African American males' perceived negative school climate will be negatively associated with their externalizing behaviors.

4. Is there a relationship between internalizing behaviors and grades for African American males?

Hypothesis 3: African American males' internalizing behaviors will be negatively associated with their grades.

5. Is there a relationship between externalizing behaviors and grades for African American males?

Hypothesis 4: African American males' externalizing behaviors will be negatively associated with their grades.

6. Does internalizing behaviors mediate the relationship between negative school climate and grades?

Hypothesis 5: African American males' internalizing behaviors will mediate associated between negative school climate and grades.

7. Does externalizing behaviors mediate the relationship between negative school climate and grades?

Hypothesis 6: African American males' externalizing behaviors will mediate associated between negative school climate and grades.

8. Does parenting and family structure attenuate the relationship between perceived negative school climate and internalizing behaviors for African American males?

Hypothesis 7: The association between perceived negative school climate and internalizing behaviors will be weaker for African American males residing with parents who employ positive parenting strategies in their homes than for African American males in homes whose parents do not employ positive parenting strategies.

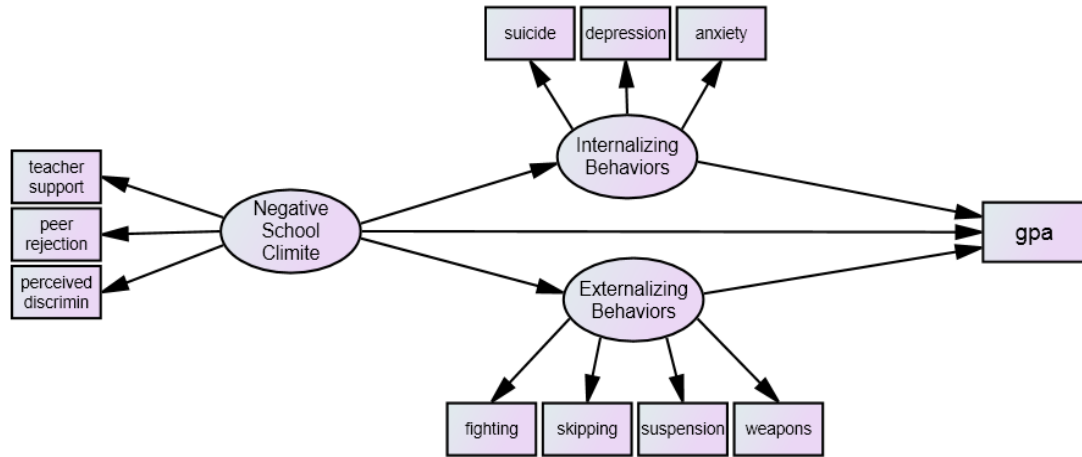
Hypothesis 8: The association between perceived negative school climate and internalizing behaviors will be weaker for African American males residing in two-biological parent in their homes than for African American males in non-two-biological parent homes.

9. Does parenting and family structure attenuate the relationship between perceived negative school climate and externalizing behaviors for African American males?

Hypothesis 9: The association between perceived negative school climate and externalizing behaviors will be weaker for African American males residing with parents who employ positive parenting strategies in their homes than for African American males in homes whose parents do not employ positive parenting strategies.

Hypothesis 10: The association between perceived negative school climate and externalizing behaviors will be weaker for African American males residing in two-biological parent in their homes than for African American males in non-two-biological parent homes.

Figure 1. Path Diagram for the Hypothesized Model



CHAPTER III

METHODS

Participants

The analytic sample for this study included 14,346 respondents; however, with statistical post-survey weights applied (see sampling below) these data were representative of a total of 21,109 adolescents. The unweighted frequency in the sample (weighted samples are in parentheses) for African Americans was $n = 1,102$ (2,806). The mean age of respondents was 14.74 years ($SD = 1.61$) and the sample was 51% female.

The sample for this study only included the 558 African American urban and rural male respondents in grades 7 through 12 and whose ages ranged from 11 to 17. In the mid-western county from which these data were drawn, African Americans experience relatively low socioeconomic standing as a group and also social and economic marginalization in the broader community. The African American population in this county has seen a steady increase over the past several decades. In fact, the African American population in this county rose from less than 1% in the 1980's to roughly 3% in the 1990's and up to 6% in 2004. Also, the African American population is relatively young (13% of this sample was African American), more likely to live in families below the poverty line compared to European Americans (36% versus 3%), has a lower high school graduation rate (54% versus 83%), and a fourfold risk of being referred to juvenile corrections (Dane County Department of Human Services, 2003b). In terms of family

structure, 36.9 percent of respondents lived with both biological parents, 34.9 percent lived with their mother or father only, 14.3 percent lived with a cohabitating parent, 4.8 percent lived with relatives other than their biological parents, with the remaining 6.5 percent of the sample living in a variety of non-family structures (e.g., foster/group homes, friends, homeless). Eighty-one percent of respondents resided in the county's largest city (a midsize city).

Procedures

Survey administration successfully took place from November 2008 to early February 2009 by the Dane County Youth Commission (DCYC), an organization that partner with schools and community agencies to address health-related issues for youth in Dane County. The survey was to assess adolescents' mental well-being, family background, academic success, risk-taking behaviors, school and community experiences, and health. Approximately every five years the agency conducts a survey of all middle and high school students across 32 schools in 14 school districts. A census survey strategy was implemented in smaller schools (outside of the sole large metropolitan area) while random sampling was done in the larger schools (all in the metropolitan area). Post-survey weights were constructed by statistical consultants working with the community agency to adjust for unequal probabilities of participation in the surveys across schools. The 2008-2009 survey was administered electronically through middle and high schools on a voluntary and anonymous basis. The conversion from a paper and pencil format to an electronic one increased survey reliability and provided immediate results and useable data. The electronic format allowed school

districts to extend data collection over a longer period so to capture students who otherwise may have been missed due to absenteeism. Data were provided in a de-identified format so that no identifying information was available and responses could not be linked to any individual student. Parental consent was obtained from parents and assent was obtained from all adolescents surveyed prior to data collection.

Measures

Negative School Climate

Adolescent perceptions of negative school climate were assessed with eleven items designed to measure to what extent adolescents perceived their school to be relevant, equitable, and safe. The items measured students' perceived teacher support, peer rejection, and discrimination. Responses were coded so that higher scores indicate higher perceptions of negative school climate. *Teacher support* was measured with four items that included: (1) I usually enjoy going to school, (2) Teachers and other adults at school treat me fairly, (3) There are other adults I can talk to at school if I have problems, and (4) I feel like I belong at this school. Response scales ranged from 0 (strongly agree) to 3 (strongly disagree) and were coded so that higher scores indicate higher perceptions of teacher support. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .82. *Peer Rejection* is a composite score taken from five items designed to determine to what extent the students were rejected by their peers at school. Students were asked the number of times in the past 30 days: (1) other students hit and pushed them, (2) other students picked on them, (3) other students made fun of them, (4) other students called them names, and (5) they got into a physical fight. . Response scales ranged from 0 (never) to 4 (7 or more times). Responses

were coded so that higher scores indicate higher peer rejections. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .86. *Perceived Discrimination* was measured using two items that included: (1) In the past 12 months, how often have you been bullied, threatened, or harassed about your race or ethnic background, and (2) In the past 12 months, how often have you been bullied, threatened, or harassed about how you look. Response scales ranged 0 (never) to 4 (very often). Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .81.

Internalizing Behaviors

Internalizing behaviors was measured using four survey items assessing the extent to which adolescents exhibited pathological symptoms such as anxiety and depression. Two items were used to assess *anxiety*: (1) When was the last time you felt fearful, scared, or panicked like something bad was going to happen, and (2) When was the last time you were reminded of the past and became very distressed and upset. Responses ranged from 0 (never) to 3 (past 30 days), with greater scores indicating higher anxiety. Items were recoded so that any indication of a positive response resulted in students being scored with a 1 for each item. No symptoms were coded as a 0. The variable used in this study was to account for whether or not adolescents experienced anxiety.

Depressive symptoms were assessed using one item: (1) "During the past 12 months did you feel sad or hopeless almost everyday for two weeks in a row or more that you stopped doing some usual activities?" *Suicidal Ideation* was using one item: (1) "During the past 30 days have you seriously thought about killing yourself?" Both items were coded or recoded such that any positive responses were assigned (1) and negative responses a (0). Higher scores indicated a greater number of internalizing behaviors.

Externalizing Behaviors

Externalizing behaviors were assessed by a composite score taken from four items. Students were asked if they: (1) carried a weapon to school in the past month, (2) How many suspensions they received in the past year, and (3) How often they had skipped school in the past month, and (4) Number of times got into a physical fight in the last 30 days. Students indicated their responses as ranging from 0 to 10 or more times, on a scale from 0 to 4. Items were recoded so that any indication of a positive response resulted in students being scored with a 1 for each item. No involvement in the activity or behavior was coded as a 0. The variable used in this study was a count of involvement in externalizing behaviors that ranged from zero to four to produce a variable that was more normally distributed (since few students engage in high levels of each behavior). Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .74.

Grade Point Average

Grade point average was assessed using a single self-reported item. Students were asked to indicate the grade range most reflective of the grades they earned ranging from mostly A's to mostly below D's. The original response options ranged from 0 to 7 and were recoded onto a standard 4-point scale with higher scores indicating higher self-reported grades.

Family Structure

Family Structure was measured by one item that asked participants to identify their family's structural status. Responses were: lived with their biological parents, lived with their mother or father only, lived with a cohabitating parent, lived with relatives

other than their biological parents, and lived in a variety of non-family structures (e.g., foster/group homes, friends, and homeless). Because the 2008-2009 survey did not identify the parents' gender in the non-two-parent households, the participants responses were coded (1) two-parent biological households and (0) non-two-parent biological households.

Positive Parenting

Positive parenting was measured using six survey items assessing perceptions of parents as supportive, knowledgeable about the youth's life, and behavioral control. Students responded to items indicating if: (1) parents usually know where I am when I go out, (2) parents set clear rules about what I can and cannot do, (3) parents have talked with me about future plans, (4) parents have consequences if I break rules, (5) parents encourage me to do my best, and (6) parents love and support me. Response scales ranged from 0 (strongly disagree) to 3 (strongly agree) and responses were coded so that higher scores indicated greater support by parents. Cronbach's alpha in this sample was .89 indicating a high degree of internal consistency among the items in this scale.

Analytic Strategies

Preliminary analysis will be conducted using descriptive statistics (i.e., mean and standard deviation) and a correlation matrix. The hypotheses for this proposed study will be analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling in Amos 18.0 software. First, the model will be evaluated using the chi-square statistic and three fit indices. While a non-significant Chi-square statistic is generally used to indicate that there is a good fit between the hypothesized conceptual model and the observed data, with relatively large

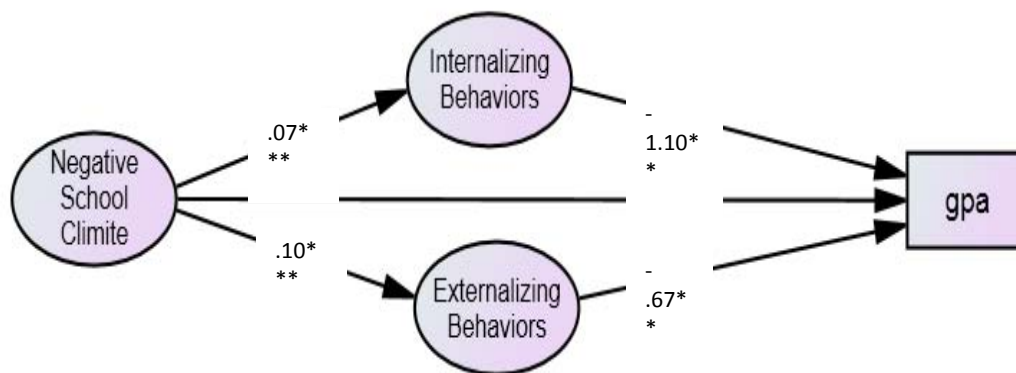
samples like this one, chi-square is almost always statistically significant for large sample sizes of 200 or more (Kline, 2005). Given this study employs a sample size of over 300 participants, a significant chi-square statistic is expected. As a result, alternative fit indices will be evaluated. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) is based on the non-centrality parameter and indicates good fit with values of .05 and below. RMSEA values over .10 are considered a poor fit. Finally, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) will be used to compare the null model with a model of uncorrelated variables. CFI values above .90 are generally accepted as indicating a good fit with values greater than .95 indicating excellent fit. The Goodness of Fit (GFI) indicates the proportion of the variance in the sample variance-covariance matrix that is accounted for by the model and should exceed .90 for a good model.

Structural Model

This structural baseline model is recursive and comprised of three latent variables and three observed variables. Negative school climate is an exogenous latent variable and is measured by three observed variables; (1) teacher support, (2) peer rejection, and (3) perceived discrimination. Internalizing behavior is an endogenous latent variable and measured by four observed variables; (1) suicidal ideation, (2) depressive symptoms, (3) anxiety 1, and (4) anxiety 2. Externalizing behavior is also an endogenous latent variable comprised of four observed variables; (1) carrying weapons to school, (2) suspensions, (3) skipping school, and (4) fighting. The three observed variables include positive parenting, family structure, and GPA. Negative school climate is expected to be indirectly associated with grades through internalizing behaviors and externalizing

behaviors. Positive parenting and family structure are expected to moderate the association between negative school climate and both internalizing behaviors and externalizing behaviors.

Figure 2. Unstandardized Path Coefficients for Direct and Indirect Effects. GFI = .97, CFI=.95, RMSEA = .05. ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$



Mediation Analysis

A variable may be considered a mediator to the extent to which it carries the influence of a given independent variable (IV) to a given dependent variable (DV). Generally speaking, mediation can be said to occur when (1) the IV significantly affects the mediator, (2) the IV significantly affects the DV in the absence of the mediator, (3) the mediator has a significant unique effect on the DV, and (4) the effect of the IV on the DV shrinks upon the addition of the mediator to the model.

To demonstrate mediation, it was necessary to illustrate significant association between negative school climate and the outcome variable. Next, the indirect paths from negative school climate to the mediating variables internalizing behaviors and externalizing behaviors and to the outcome variable must yield significant coefficients.

Non-significant coefficients for one or both indirect paths would have indicated no mediation and the analysis would have been complete. However, if both indirect paths were significant then a conclusion could be made for, at minimum, partial mediation. Subsequently, the baseline model was compared to a model where the path from negative school climate is constrained to zero. Holmbeck (1997) suggested that mediation is present if the constrained model demonstrates a better fit to the data than the baseline model. A chi-square difference test was conducted to determine which model fit is best. The Sobel test was also conducted to determine which indirect paths between negative school climate and GPA are statistically significant.

Moderation Analysis

Moderation analysis was conducted using SEM, as recommended by Holmbeck (1997). While moderator effects are commonly tested using OLS regression and interaction terms, using SEM to examine moderator effects minimizes the impact of compounded measurement error, occurring when the independent variable and moderator are multiplied to create an interaction term (Holmbeck, 1997). Further, SEM offers the benefit of using Maximum Likelihood Estimation (MLE), which maximizes statistical power of a sample because it does not require list-wise deletion when variables can be assumed to be generally missing-at-random (Kline, 2005). Finally, SEM analysis has the capacity to examine constructs using multiple indicators, further reducing the effects of measurement error (Kline, 2005; Holmbeck, 1997).

To test for model differences between moderator groups, multi-group analysis was conducted using AMOS. Once the baseline model was identified, two groups were

created, two-parent biological and non-two-parent biological, to determine whether associations between negative school climate and GPA differ for boys in homes where both biological parents are present versus those where one or both biological parents are absent. At each stage, any constraint that failed to result in a significant chi-square change was retained in subsequent comparisons, to improve parsimony, while narrowing the source of variability between groups and freeing degrees of freedom in the model (Cole & Maxwell, 2003; Kline, 2005). Moderation was indicated when constraining the structural regression paths in the model to be equal between the two moderator groups precipitated a significant increase in chi-square and resulted in a worse fit to the data. Subsequently, the same procedures were repeated for the two moderator groups: Positive Parenting and Poor Parenting.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

Correlations and descriptive statistics for all study variables are reported in Table 1. An examination of significant correlations revealed that negative school climate was positively associated with internalizing behaviors and externalizing behaviors. These results would suggest that students who perceive their school climates to be negative experience increased internalizing symptoms such as anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation, as well as behavioral problems, such as carrying weapons, suspensions, skipping, and fighting. Correlations also indicated a positive association between internalizing behaviors and externalizing behaviors, suggesting that students experiencing greater psychological issues are likely to exhibit increased externalizing behaviors. Finally, externalizing behaviors was negatively associated with GPA, indicating the greater the externalizing behaviors an adolescent exhibits the poorer he will perform academically.

Table 1. Correlations and Descriptive Statistics (n= 318)

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Negative School Climate	1.00			
2. Internalizing Behaviors	.385**	1.00		
3. Externalizing Behaviors	.445**	.250**	1.00	
4. GPA	-.069	-.106	-.193**	1.00
Mean	7.92	.97	.95	3.07
SD	6.64	1.13	1.14	.91

Note: ** p <.01

The data were assessed for non-normality using the SEM function and suggested high skewness and kurtosis existed among the data. To address this issue, a bootstrapping procedure was performed using the Bollen-Stine method to generate unbiased standard errors and fit statistics that occurs in SEM applications due to non-normal data. It is a modified bootstrap method for the chi-square goodness of fit statistic which provides a means to testing the null hypothesis that the specified model is correct. It tests the adequacy of the hypothesized model based on the transformation of the sample data such that the model is made to fit the data perfectly. In this study, 1000 bootstrap samples were drawn with replacement from this transformed sample. The p value for overall fit of the tested models was calculated using the Bollen-Stine bootstrap approach in place of the traditional chi square statistic (Bollen & Stine, 1993).

Main Analyses

The initial baseline model yielded fit statistics that indicated a poor fit for the data ($\chi^2 = 139.61$, $df = 40$, $p < 0.001$; GFI = .93, CFI = .82, RMSEA = .09). Modification indices were evaluated to determine if model fit could be improved by correlating residuals with extremely high values. Upon investigation of the modification indices, it was decided that correlating several residuals were theoretically practical and would improve the model fit. The adjusted baseline model (see Figure 1) demonstrated an acceptable fit to the data (GFI = .97, CFI = .95, RMSEA = .05) and the non-significant Bollen-Stine p value .068 ($p < .05$) indicated that there was insufficient evidence to reject the hypothesized model. The model's main effects suggested that African American adolescent males reporting greater negative perceptions of school climate also reported experiencing increased internalizing behaviors ($\beta = .59$, $p < .001$) and externalizing behaviors ($\beta = .61$, $p < .001$). Negative school climate was not significantly associated directly with the adolescents' GPA. These results suggests that exposure to negative school factors, such as a lack of teacher support, peer rejection, and discrimination, may adversely affect African American boys' psychological functioning and increase delinquent behaviors.

An examination of the associations between the mediating variables and the outcome variable revealed that both adolescents' internalizing behaviors ($\beta = -.23$, $p < .001$) and problem behavior ($\beta = -.18$, $p < .001$) were negatively associated with their grades. African American adolescents who experienced internalizing and externalizing behaviors as a result of a negative school climate were more likely to earn lower grades

in school. The main effects relationship between negative school climate and internalizing and externalizing behaviors as well as between internalizing and externalizing behaviors and adolescent GPA all yielded significant associations, with exception of the direct path from negative school climate to GPA. These results suggest that both internalizing behaviors and externalizing behaviors acted as mediators in the current study. Further mediational analyses were warranted, given the significant associations between these predictor and outcome variables (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Holmbeck, 1997). To further test for evidence of mediation, Sobel test statistics were calculated and suggested that indirect effects of the association between negative school climate and GPA through internalizing behaviors ($z = -2.37, p < .05$) and externalizing behaviors ($z = -2.09, p < .05$) were statistically significant. Taken together, these results suggest that mediation is present in the model and that negative school climate is indirectly associated with GPA through internalizing and externalizing behaviors.

Multi-group analyses were conducted to determine the moderator effects for the adolescents' family structure on the relationship between the predictor and outcome variables in the model. Competing models (i.e., free and constrained) for biological parents and non-biological parents groups revealed a statistically significant difference in chi-square [$\Delta\chi^2 (8, N = 318) = 147, p < 0.05$]. Structural parameters were compared between the models and revealed that the associations between negative school climate and both internalizing behaviors and externalizing behaviors varied by family structure. The association between negative school climate and internalizing behaviors was positive for biological parents ($B = .04, p < .05$) and non-biological parents ($B = .10, p < .001$).

Similarly, the association between negative school climate and externalizing behaviors was positive for biological parents ($B = .05, p < .05$) and non-biological parents ($B = .11, p < .001$). Pairwise parameter comparisons were evaluated to determine if the parameters for the biological parent adolescents differed from those of non-biological parent adolescents. Moreover, a significant difference may be concluded for the parameters if the critical ratio (C.R.) was greater than 1.65 given the model hypothesized was a one-tail test. The results suggest that the paths from negative school climate to internalizing behaviors ($Z = 2.82$) and to externalizing behaviors ($Z = 1.80$) were significantly different for the groups. Such a finding suggest that, while these associations were significant and positive for both groups, non-biological parent adolescents experienced a greater increase in internalizing and externalizing behaviors due to their perceptions of school climate than did biological parent adolescents. In other words, African American boys who had less favorable perceptions of their school climate reported fewer internalizing and externalizing behaviors when they resided in homes with biological parents than their counterparts residing in homes with non-biological parents.

Similar analyses were executed to determine the moderator effects of positive parenting on the relationship between negative school climate and internalizing behaviors and externalizing behaviors. A comparison of competing models for positive parenting and poor parenting groups yielded a statistically significant difference in chi-square [$\Delta\chi^2 (8, N = 318) = 194.45, p < 0.05$] and the structural parameters suggested the associations between negative school climate and both internalizing behaviors and externalizing behaviors varied by parenting. The association between negative school climate and

internalizing behaviors was positive for Positive parenting ($B = .03, p < .001$) and Poor parenting ($B = .09, p < .001$). Similarly, the association between negative school climate and problem behavior was positive for Positive parenting ($B = .06, p < .001$) and Poor parenting ($B = .11, p < .001$). Pairwise parameter comparisons revealed that all paths were significantly different from negative school climate to internalizing behaviors ($Z = 2.38$) and to externalizing behaviors ($Z = 1.66$). The findings suggest that African American males who receive positive parenting are likely to experience fewer psychological and behavioral issues when exposed to a negative school climate than their counterparts receiving poor parenting. The positive parenting strategies included knowing where their adolescents are when they go out, setting clear rules, talking about future plans, having consequences for breaking rules, encouraging them to do their best, and loving and supporting them.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Given our limited knowledge regarding the influence of contextual factors on the development of African American males, particularly within schools, this study contributes to our understanding. The purpose of this study was 1) to examine the association between negative school climate (i.e., teacher neglect, peer rejection and discrimination) and African American adolescent males' internalizing behaviors and externalizing behaviors, 2) to investigate the influence family variables (i.e., positive parenting and father presence) had on the relationship between the main study variables, and 3) to identify what influence a negative school climate has on students' grades by way of these direct and indirect relationship. Specifically, this study provides insight into how various risk factors embedded within the social structure of schools may adversely affect the academic and personal development of African American adolescent males.

The findings of the study supported the hypotheses that a negative school climate factors, such as a lack of teacher support, peer rejection, and discrimination, may increase psychological and behavioral issues for African American males and in turn affect their academic performance in school. Additionally, the structural equation model also suggested that family processes and structure can ameliorate or exacerbate the impact that a negative school climate may have on African American adolescent males' outcomes. This section will begin by addressing the findings regarding negative school climates'

impact on African American males' internalizing behaviors and externalizing behaviors and the implications for their academic performance. Subsequently, this chapter will discuss the roles African American parents may play in reducing or compounding the effects negative school environments may have on their adolescent sons. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a discussion of the limitations of this study and suggestions for future research.

Associations between Negative School Climate and African American Males

African American males experience a number of academic challenges in school that often lead to inadequate outcomes. These findings suggest that the school environment itself may be contributing to these poorer outcomes by adversely influencing African American boys psychological functioning and behavior. More specifically, the results suggest that negative school climate, as defined by teacher support, peer rejection, and discrimination, was positively associated with African American males' internalizing and externalizing behaviors. This finding is consistent with previous research that found school climate to increase internalizing and externalizing problems in African American males (Kumperminc, Leadbeater, Emmons, & Blatt, 1997). Moreover, Kumperminc et al. (1997) found the teacher-student relationship to be more volatile with regard to African American boys than any other group and that the participants were more likely to experience anxiety when they perceived their school climates to be negative. The PVEST theory would suggest that the accumulative effect of these risk factors may increase the net stress levels of African American males such that their academic and personal development is compromised. It is

likely that when African American boys experience conflict and alienation from the social structure in schools, they begin to internalize it as a function of their self-worth. For some, this internalization may lead to higher levels of anxiety, depressed moods, or even suicidal ideation. Negative school environments may very well be a contributing source to the recent upward trend in African American adolescent males' suicide attempts and completion rates (Fitzpatrick, Piko, & Miller, 2008; Joe & Marcus, 2003). For others, the heightened social tension may manifest into oppositional behaviors that deviate from the social norms of school, such as skipping, fighting, carrying weapons, and lead to out of school suspensions. As suggested by the PVEST model, some African American boys may employ these maladaptive strategies as reactive coping mechanisms to deal with their feelings of being unwelcomed. Moreover, the strategies selected by these adolescents are likely derived from their knowledge, instincts, and past experiences of successfully addressing similar threats from other context, such as family and community.

The influence of the negative school climate on adolescent outcomes in this study may also reflect the deficiencies in social capital experienced by African American males within the school context. Coleman's social capital theory (1997/1988) articulated that social capital exists where there are social structures that facilitate and restrict certain actions from the actors within the structures. Moreover, the production of social capital exists within the social relationships within the structure and generally affords each actor with greater opportunities and resources for success. Consequently, African American males who are exposed to negative school climates may be deprived of access to

adequate social capital in the school context through exclusion from social relationships with teachers (i.e., teacher neglect) and peers (i.e., peer rejection). The deprivation of resources and opportunities may compromise the academic and personal development of this group and result in unfavorable outcomes.

Results also suggest that increased psychological and behavior problems in African American boys predicted their academic performance. The greater the level of internalizing and externalizing issues reported by these youth, the lower the reported grades. It is reasonable to expect that African American males who are mentally unstable may find it difficult to focus on their academic responsibilities and as a result yield poorer grades than their mentally healthy counterparts. However, this study suggests that the learning environment may initiate or exacerbate the internalizing behaviors experienced by these adolescents.

Similarly, poorer academic outcomes may be expected for African American males who present with a greater frequency of externalizing behaviors. This is consistent with other studies that found increased externalizing behaviors, such as delinquency and aggression, were linked to academic underachievement (Barriga et al., 2002). PVEST would suggest that continued use of these maladaptive strategies may result in “behavioral stability over time and space” (Spencer et al., 2001; p 642) to shape African American males’ identities. Unfortunately, the identities associated with such negative behavioral patterns are likely to yield “unproductive coping outcomes” such as lower grades. In essence, some African American boys continually engage in maladaptive strategies, despite the adverse outcomes, because they are successful in addressing the

immediate environmental threats. However, over time these behavioral patterns begin to shape how they view themselves within the context of schools. Kumperminc et al. (1997) results supported this when the African American males in their study were more likely than other boys to be perceived as disruptive and disciplined by their teachers, but did not perceive themselves as having more externalizing behaviors.

Additionally, students who exhibit externalizing behaviors in school are often removed from the learning environment due to conflicting relationships with teachers and peers. The disruptions in the instructional process create learning voids that causes these students to fall behind and perform poorly on academic measures. As noted earlier with regard to social capital, such exclusionary practices deprive African American males of academic opportunities and resources, as well as valuable social relationships that may promote academic growth. Understanding the barriers to social capital within the school context may be critically important for prevention or intervention programs seeking to improve African American boys' academic performance. This study's findings suggest that program developers should not only focus on the development of the boys, but should expand their objectives to address relational issues within the context of the school. In the case of African American males, it may be that both the individual and the school contribute to the problem.

In this study, negative school climate was not directly associated with students' grades. In other words, the perceptions of negative interactions with teachers and peers did not directly influence African American boys' academic performance. Kuperminc et al. (1997) also found no direct correlation between school climate and grades for the

group of adolescents in their study. It is likely that African American males identify the negative school climate factors in this study as a function of the social environment and not their academic capacity.

The Importance of Family for African American Males' Development

An examination of the moderating variables in this study suggests that parents may attenuate the impact that negative school climate factors have on the mental health and behavior of their adolescents. This is consistent with Coleman's (1988) social capital theory in that parents in functionally sufficient families promoted successful development in their offspring by transferring their knowledge, skills, and resources to their offspring through intimate social relationships. In fact, Coleman explicitly regarded this as a defining point in the generation of social capital within families and suggested that warmth and supportiveness mark this relationship. Results of this study indicated that African American males reported fewer school related psychological and behavioral problems when their parents employed positive parenting (i.e., combination of support and behavioral control) strategies as opposed to poor parenting strategies. The affirmation of their parents' love and support seemed to serve as a protective factor for African American males against the caustic social relationships in the negative school environment. The continual reinforcement of love at home may elevate the tolerance and resiliency of these boys. Furthermore, the structure provided at home through close monitoring and future planning may establish boundaries for expected behaviors and provide strategies to successfully negotiate challenging circumstance in school. Although previous studies have found support for a direct relationship between these parenting

strategies and adolescent outcomes (Bean, Barber, & Crane, 2009), this study contributes to the literature by examining the moderating effects of these strategies. This may be particularly valuable to schools looking to increase parental involvement. These parenting strategies may be conveyed to parents as parental involvement activities that do not require visits to the school, which is often cited as a barrier to involvement for African American and other minority parents (Cooper, 2009).

Finally, study findings revealed that the presences or absence of both biological parents in the household may have significant impact on African American boys' internalizing behaviors and externalizing behaviors. More specifically, the results suggest that the negative effects of school climate on African American males' psychological and behaviors problems may be mitigated by the presence of both biological parents in the home. The adolescents in this study reported fewer school-related mental health and behavioral problems when both parents were present as opposed to when only one or none of their biological parents were present. Social capital theory posited that the structure of the family was critically important in generating sufficient social capital within the family. More specifically, Coleman (1988) described families as being structurally deficient when an adult member was physically absent from the household. With regard to internalizing behaviors, African American males living with both parents may experience a greater sense of safety and security and therefore gain a psychological advantage over their counterparts residing without both parents. This additional psychological support may buffer the influence of negative school climate factors on this groups' mental health. Additionally, residing with both biological parents may curtail

externalizing behaviors due to the increased disciplinary monitoring and activities of two parents in the household. This may hold particularly true in African American households given both the mother and father often share disciplinarian roles. The Kumperminc et al. (1997) study may have provided early evidence of this relationship when the authors reported that their African American male participants living in two-parent homes had fewer disciplinary referrals when they perceived their schools as negative, as compared to their counterparts living in single-mother homes. This study further extends the literature by suggesting family structure may have indirect influence on adolescent psychological and behavioral outcomes.

Conclusion

Existing literature examining the influence of school climate on adolescent outcomes has primarily focused on the positive influences of various school factors such as teacher support and peer acceptance. Moreover, African American males have been largely overlooked in most research efforts, leaving void with regard to our understanding of this population's development within the school context. The current study expanded the literature by examining the associations between negative school climate factors, such as a lack of teacher, peer rejection, and discrimination, on African American males' personal and academic development. Specifically, this study sought to determine whether negative school climate factors adversely influenced African American males' internalizing behaviors, externalizing behaviors, and grades.

Findings revealed that African American males subjected to negative school climates may experience considerable undue duress and stress which may lead to greater

levels of anxiety and increased suicidal ideations. This significant finding may be valuable for practitioners combating the recent upward trend of African American males' suicidal attempts and completions. Results also suggested that African American males engage in more externalizing behaviors when they perceive their school climates to be negative. These maladaptive strategies may serve as coping mechanisms to address the perceived environmental threats for this group. Consequently, the adverse impact of negative school climate factors shape how these adolescents view the school and themselves and eventually affect their academic performance. A better understanding of the dynamics of these social relationships within the school context may allow for interventions that can improve African American boys' outcomes as well as the overall climate of the school.

Another important contribution of this study was the indirect influences that family factors had on African American males' developmental outcomes, particularly their psychological and behavioral problems. This study suggested that positive parenting strategies and biological parents in the home may help protect African American boys from the negative consequences of adverse school conditions. Family practitioners interested in improving this group's developmental outcomes should design programs around educating and training African American parents on effective parenting strategies, as well as programs that promote fathers' presence in the home.

Limitations and Future Directions

A major limitation of the current study is the cross-sectional nature of the data, which makes it impossible to examine causality. Longitudinal studies examining these

variables are needed in the future to identify the causal relationships. For example, is it that African American boys who exhibit internalizing and externalizing behaviors are more likely to perceive their school climates as negative? This may be particularly true for African American boys who are profiled and stereotyped as aggressive and disruptive by the other school members. The internalization of these expectations may result in many of these boys fulfilling these behavioral roles.

Another limitation was that this study employed a sample from a single geographical location to examine in the model. Although the study yielded significant relationships amongst the variables for this sample of African American males, conclusions may not be generalizable to other areas of the country. For example, a replication of this study in the Southeast United States may conclude different findings given the increased population of African Americans and the historical context of racial discrimination.

The utilization of only student reports limited the interpretations of these findings as well. The use of only the perspectives from the African American males in the study may have result in reporter biasness in the findings. Future studies should recruit multiple reporting sources to increase variability in the data and to allow for a more complete assessment of the constructs being measured.

Although these findings contribute to the literature on African American males development across multiple context, future researchers should also expand on the current model in several ways. For example, it would be important to ascertain as to what other aspects of school's climates may be negatively impacting African American males.

This study focused on students' perceived teacher support, peer rejection and discriminatory practices, however, other areas of the school climate may be relevant. Also, researchers should investigate whether negative school climate affects other aspects of African American males' internalizing and externalizing behaviors, other than those of interest in this study. A more complete understanding of the influence negative school climates may have on African American males' psychological functioning and behavior is vital to the development of effective prevention or intervention programs for this group. It is also important information for schools that are committed to diversity and the improvement their practices to effectively serve all students. The moderating influence of family variables can be improved upon in the current model. This study only examined the moderator influence of biological two- parent and non-biological two-parent families on the relationship between negative school climate and internalizing behaviors and externalizing behaviors. Given the variety of existing family structures and increased number of single-parent households, particularly in the African American community, future studies should examine a broader range of family structure influences on this relationship. For example, researchers may focus more on various levels of involvement of non-residential parents and less on family characteristics (Dudley & Stone, 2001). Similarly, the positive parenting variable in this study only focused on universal parenting strategies, such as monitoring and support, but failed to explore the specific strategies employed by African American parents. A common parenting practice of many African Americans is the utilization of racial socialization messages that are intended to guide their offspring in addressing societal threats of hostility and discrimination (Coard,

Wallace, Stevenson, & Brotman, 2004). Further investigation into the types of parenting practices that effectively buffer the impact of adverse school conditions could have great implications for future researchers and practitioners.

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