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**Academic success and resiliency among low-income African
American male students**

Witty, Janeen Paige, Ph.D.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1992

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ACADEMIC SUCCESS AND RESILIENCY AMONG LOW-INCOME
AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS

by

Janeen Paige Witty

A Dissertation Submitted to
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of the Requirements for the Degree
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1992

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APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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The purpose of this study was to identify discriminating factors of academic success for African American males in the middle school years. The study contrasted academically successful low-income students with less successful students from similar backgrounds to isolate the within group factors that contribute to school success.

This study tested the following hypotheses: (1) alterable factors, specifically, higher academic self-concept, more positive attitudes toward school, more positive perceptions of support for school activities will discriminate academically successful African American male middle school students from their less successful peers; (2) alterable factors will discriminate academically successful African American male middle school students from their less successful peers better than will unalterable factors such as birth order, number of siblings, and spacing between siblings; (3) higher racial socialization by family members making students aware of racial barriers and interracial protocol will discriminate academically successful African American male middle school students from their less successful peers.

Eighty inner-city African American male seventh grade students and parents of 16 of these students participated in this study. A general information form, the Harter Self-Perceived Competence Scale, a school attitude and support scale, and three open-ended questions were administered to students in their schools. Interviews were conducted with a subset of students and parents in their homes. Discriminant function analyses were employed to test the first two hypotheses. The third hypothesis was tested through content analysis of responses to open-ended questions and interviews.

The findings revealed that (1) alterable factors did discriminate between passing and failing students; (2) alterable factors were better discriminators than were unalterable factors; and (3) while racial socialization was provided on a limited basis by these parents, those students whose parents indicated that they provided racial socialization were in the passing group.

This study showed that while African American male students may experience many unalterable stressors, the positive influence of factors that schools can alter play a dominant role in academic achievement. Parents can also promote better academic achievement by increasing the racial socialization provided throughout their sons' development.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The factors related to the academic success of African American males have remained relatively unexplored as the majority of studies on these students have focused on predictors and explanations of failure. Such research has left many unresolved issues related to the achievement of these students during a time when the plight of African American males, especially in the educational system, is of serious concern. However, some low-income African American males are academically successful and resilient in the face of many odds.

The success stories of low-income, African American students however, are rarely written. The poor school performance of African American students, especially boys from low-income families has been of major concern for educators, parents, and community leaders throughout the nation. Evidence of failure among these students has been widely documented (Orleans Parish School Board, 1988; Milwaukee Public Schools, 1990). Few studies have examined the factors that mediate the academic success of African American males despite evidence that these children manifest a wide distribution on achievement (DeSantis, Ketterlinus, &

Youniss, 1990). Consequently, there is very little empirical research that explores the resiliency or invulnerability of low-income African American students who are academically successful while their peers are not.

Given the role of education in shaping life outcomes, it is important to examine the factors that distinguish academically successful and resilient African American males from their unsuccessful peers so that effective interventions can be implemented on behalf of those students who do not fare well in our nation's schools. Therefore, the concern in this study is the identification of distinguishing predictors of academic success for African American males in the critical middle school years. By contrasting academically successful low-income African American students in middle schools with less successful students from similar socioeconomic backgrounds, it is possible to isolate the within group factors that contribute to school success.

Research Questions

Specifically, the study will target the following questions:

1. What factors discriminate academically successful and resilient students from their unsuccessful peers?

2. Which of these factors are most important in discriminating academically successful and resilient students from their unsuccessful peers?
3. What is the combination of factors that distinguish academically successful and resilient students from their unsuccessful peers?

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter will present a review of research related to factors that influence academic success of low-income African American male adolescents. The first section presents a conceptual framework for the investigation. The second section presents research related to the developmental considerations that influence adolescents' responses to transitions during their middle school years. The third section reviews the concept of resilience of children faced with numerous risk factors and the protective factors they employ. This chapter concludes with the fourth section which reviews the research on the school achievement research of African American students that has been useful in identifying protective factors employed by academically successful African American students.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this proposed research is grounded in two theoretical perspectives: (1) Eriksonian theory; and (2) Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective. The following is a brief summary of both of these perspectives.

The middle school years coincide with the most critical turning points in the lives of young adolescents (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989). As students,

young adolescents are required to make many adjustments in their lives in response to the numerous transitions that accompany adolescence. At the same time, adolescents are members of families, which also go through marked changes through the family life cycle. In the midst of these transitions, adolescents face a critical developmental task--they must come to terms with who they are.

Erikson's (1968) psychosocial theory addresses this task of identity development, which for some adolescents, is confounded by issues of race and ethnicity. Erikson labels this stage *identity vs. role confusion*. It is a time when young adolescents begin to integrate basic drives with evolving physical and intellectual endowment as they strive to determine who they are (Thomas, 1985). When adolescents confuse who they are with who others think they are, role confusion has occurred. Overidentification with others and loss of individuality are symptomatic of role confusion.

Elkind (1979) adds to Erikson's description of what happens during this stage with his discussion of imaginary audiences. He suggests that adolescents' preoccupation with self is evident in their construction of imaginary audiences. He contends that when young adolescents experience confusion between self and others the result is the creation of an imaginary audience. Thus, young adolescents believe they have an audience when in fact, they do not. What is important to the adolescent does not

necessarily constitute importance to others. For example, a male middle school student who is disappointed with a haircut may think that the entire student body and school staff is looking at the haircut when they speak to him in the hall when, on the contrary, people are merely extending customary courtesies in passing, unaware of the student's concern over his appearance. The student fails to realize that this his personal concern is not common to everyone else.

The construction of imaginary audiences, while not unique to adolescence, is more prevalent during these transitional years because of adolescents' increasing abilities to think about what others are thinking. This new ability is accompanied by the confusion that arises when adolescents have difficulty distinguishing their own thoughts from those of others (Elkind, 1979). During this struggle of identity resolution, conflicts with parents, siblings, and others are common, thereby straining and testing these once stable relationships (Thomas, 1985).

An ecological perspective of development embraces the transactions between the developing individual, for example, the young adolescent as described above, and the environment in which development occurs. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological perspective is a framework for recognizing the transactional relationships between the developing individual and the ecosystem and among the systems in the

ecosystem. The ecosystem is comprised of four levels: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem.

The microsystem is the immediate setting in which individual development occurs. The family is the most notable microsystem, while daycare centers or schools may be additional microsystems for children. Individuals' relationships with peers, communities, churches, and other settings represent significant microsystems. Relationships with peers become increasingly important during adolescence, in some cases, challenging adolescents' reliance on the child-family microsystem (Steinberg, 1990).

The mesosystem is the relationship among the microsystems. It represents one of the most critical areas of concern because it is at the mesosystem level, particularly between the home and the school, that so much attention has and needs to be focused in research on academic success. Many researchers have focused on the mismatch between home and school (Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, & Hemphill, 1991) and have cited such mismatches as influences and causes of the failure of some school children. Another look at this important issue, however, reveals that the home-school mesosystem alone cannot explain failure or achievement; rather, it is a part of the complex transactions that influence individual development at many levels. As is the case for the sample proposed in this study, the factors that reportedly exaggerate mismatches

such as socioeconomic status and ethnic minority status are similar for the children, however, some of these children are still achieving well academically. Thus, while the home-school mesosystem provides fruitful information about the development of children, other relationships, within microsystems, the mesosystem, and in other levels of the ecosystem must be considered in the analyses of contributions to and explanations of performance.

The exosystem represents other systems in which the individual does not directly participate but which influence the individual's development. Decisions made by school boards, by parents' employers, and by city councils are examples of exosystem influences on development. Changes at this level may affect the budgets, transportation, and program priorities of the schools, thereby influencing the students in the school system. For instance, a school system's policies on nonretention in the elementary grades influences students' development.

In addition to the relationships individuals have with immediate settings (microsystems), the relationships among those settings (mesosystems), and the relationships between individuals and settings in which they do not directly participate (exosystem), another level of influence must also be considered. This final level, the macrosystem, involves the social, economic, and political factors that are evident at the national and international levels. The

macrosystem is the system under which all other systems operate and represents the order of functioning for a particular society or group. Macrosystem effects permeate all institutions in society and subsequently all relationships. Societal norms related to racism and discrimination, the economy, and the level of national security are examples of macrolevel influences on development. The sense of job availability and future prospects for African American males illustrate macrosystem influences.

Although Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective acknowledges the contribution of the individual to development (Garbarino, 1982), his perspective does not give adequate attention to the characteristics the individual brings to the transactional relationships he mentions. Rather than allowing the relative omission of this ego aspect of the ecological perspective to jeopardize the use of the ecological model, for the purposes of this study, the internal or personal attributes that play a role in academic achievement will be considered along with the ecosystem model as presented by Bronfenbrenner.

Collectively, these theoretical perspectives provide a framework for examining the factors that may influence student achievement during adolescence. Erikson's theory explains the importance of the task of identity development in adolescence. The ecological perspective suggests the

relevance of the various levels and numbers of factors in the immediate and external environment that influence development.

Developmental Transitions

The entire ecosystem influences identity development as well as the school performance of adolescents. As Chall (1990) points out, the demands of students in school change from year to year and grade to grade. Chall approached the topic by viewing reading as a developmental process. Chall's (1990) investigations of reading skills among school children led to her developmental model of reading. Her position that reading is a complex combination of skills and abilities that changes with development is useful for the proposed study because it looks at the demands placed on students by the schools in a developmental context. Thus, reading is different for first graders, fourth graders, seventh graders, high school students, and adults. At each stage of reading development, the reader gains additional skills and abilities, moving from learning to read to reading to learn (Chall, 1990). It is this transition that has proven to be most crucial for later academic success (Chall, 1990).

The findings from Chall's intensive longitudinal study of low-income elementary school children indicated a general downward trend in reading beginning at the fourth grade. This slump started earliest and was more intensive through

the sixth and seventh grades for below-average readers (Chall, 1990). Specifically, skills related to word meanings, word recognition, and spelling were evident in the slump.

These findings, coupled with evidence that the demands made on students are compounded and increasingly complex at the middle school level, present a serious concern. With a decline in school performance evident at the fourth grade and with the general demands increasing rather than decreasing, young adolescents face crucial challenges with the transition to middle schools. In fact, as they reach middle school, some students have experienced as many as three years of declining school performance. Students must deal with the skills and abilities needed to progress in school at the same time they are experiencing new changes and demands in every other facet of their development.

Research on transitions in early adolescence generally focus on the complexity of changes in physiology, physical appearance, cognition, emotional and personality functioning. Early adolescence is a period of many turning points for today's youth. In addition to the many normative developmental transitions associated with this period on the biological, cognitive, and social levels, early adolescents must also make numerous decisions that will ultimately influence their outcomes.

A growing number of studies of adolescents emphasize the importance of considering interactions among developmental transitions and the responses to these transitions by individual and social systems (Simmons, Black, & Zhou, 1991). Some adolescents experience these various transitions across a number of years. For others, the onset of puberty, the changes in the socialization patterns and family relationships, and the change from elementary to middle or junior high school all occur almost at once. Adolescents who experience multiple life changes within a short period of time are at risk for poorer developmental outcomes than adolescents who experience these changes over a longer period of time (Simmons, Burgeson, Carlton-Ford, & Blyth, 1987). Of particular concern is the cumulative impact of normative changes along with atypical traumatic life events such as moving, death in family or divorce.

Results of a study of cumulative change experienced by 447 early adolescents suggest that as the number of transitions increases, grade point average and participation in extracurricular activities decrease (Simmons, Burgeson, Carlton-Ford, & Blyth, 1987). School change, pubertal change, early dating, geographic mobility, and major family disruption were the transitions studied. Three out of these five life changes (changing schools, pubertal change, and early dating) were considered normative since they are

changes that all adolescents must go through at some time. The remaining two factors, geographic mobility and major family disruption, were considered nonnormative.

These findings are significant because they support the idea that several changes occurring during a short span of time can negatively impact on young adolescents' adjustment, particularly on school performance. Further, coping with normative changes causes some discomfort, even in the absence of nonnormative changes. Therefore, more attention has been given to both types of transitions, the timing of these transitions, and the stress and impact of these transitions on early adolescents.

Hirsch and Rapkin's study (1987) found that adolescent adjustment to the transition to middle-level schools varied depending on the domain in question. For example, a student's grade point average may not be affected by this change but extracurricular participation might be. Grades and measures of self-perceptions were the indicators of transition effects used by Crockett, Petersen, Graber, Schulenberg, & Ebata (1989) in their study of the effects of timing and number of transitions experienced by white, suburban, middle-class early adolescents. The results support the findings of Simmons and colleagues (1987, 1991) that as the number of transitions increases, students have more difficulty adjusting as measured by grades and self-esteem instruments. In addition, the timing of the

transitions proved to be critical as well, although those results were not conclusive (Crockett, Petersen, Graber, Schulenberg, & Ebata, 1989).

Within the family context, many changes in relationships occur during early adolescence as a function of the onset of puberty (Anderson, Hetherington, & Clingempeel, 1989). In addition, family reorganization, as in the case of divorce and/or remarriage, may exacerbate transformations in parent-child relationships. In a longitudinal, interview and observational study of 153 remarried, divorced, and nondivorced families, researchers found that parental remarriage was particularly difficult for boys prior to puberty and that changes in family relations between parents and children in remarried families resembled those of nondivorced families after a two-year adjustment period (Anderson, Hetherington, & Clingempeel, 1989). One can think of a situation like remarriage as the blending of two microsystems or from the child's perception, a radical rearrangement or realignment of his most intimate microsystem: the family.

The individual contributions and the context in which these transitions occur cannot be ignored. Studies that have identified specific negative life events, such as divorce, death, and change in socioeconomic status suggest that these events have a negative impact on children's adjustment (Emery, Weintraub, & Neale, 1982; Billings &

Moos, 1982). Low-income African American students who may have the fewest resources and who more often experience the exaggerated cumulative impact of transitions, may experience even more difficulty than other children in negotiating the developmental tasks of adolescence. Negative life events may be more common for low-income and minority children than for other children. The development of peer relations, striving for independence from parents, the transition to formal operations, and the transition to middle or junior high school all take place under less than optimal conditions, in environments that sometimes hinder rather than facilitate such development.

Of particular concern is the challenge of transitions for adolescent African American males who are achieving less well than any other group when they reach early adolescence. Research conducted by McAdoo (1986) and Kagan (1982) suggest that children in families of lower socioeconomic status who suffer from chronic poverty are indeed exposed to more stressors and therefore more difficult transitions than their peers. In addition, children in single-parent households experience more stressors (Belle, 1984; McAdoo, 1986) and disadvantaged minorities experience more stressful events than their nondisadvantaged, nonminority peers (Kessler & Neighbors, 1986). Thus, the mesosystem relations for these children may be less smooth, more disorganized,

and less habitual than for children who experience fewer radical breaks in their microsystems.

These children from poor environments must not only negotiate the normative transitions typical of this period, but must also handle numerous events, such as more family disruption (death, divorce, remarriage) and dislocation (moving more often). However, cumulative change and risk factors affect children in different ways. Thus, not all low-income children characterized by at-risk indicators are actually at risk. There are, in fact, African American males who, despite fitting into every definition of riskness, actually thrive during the transitions of their early adolescence (Pollard, 1989). The study of such resilience provides a basis for identifying the factors that facilitate academic success of low-income African American males.

Resilience

The concept of resilience has been applied to the study of children who face various risk situations. Resilient children are those who thrive despite deprivation when others with similar risks have negative developmental outcomes (Garmezy, 1987; Rutter, 1979).

Garmezy's (1987) research suggested that various aspects of children's dispositions combined with family cohesion and the presence of supportive persons in children's environments were the significant factors related

to children's resilience. Rutter's approach to the study of resilience has been from the perspective of examining risk and protective factors (Rutter, 1979). He discusses four implications from the research on individual differences in children's response to stress and adversity. He suggests that first, attention should be given to reducing risk exposure to the fullest extent possible in efforts to improve children's circumstances. Secondly, Rutter suggests that an investigation of the specific responses of children to risk situations should be undertaken since it is apparent from the literature that damage is not inevitable in high risk situations. This would include a look at the coping mechanisms and social problem-solving skills children use. Thirdly, Rutter advocates that attention to the potential value of compensating positive experiences should be examined. There are cases where increasing positive experiences may reduce the harmful effects of some risk situations. Thus, according to Rutter, by building on strengths rather than weaknesses, children's circumstances can be improved. Finally, Rutter maintains that investigations should be made of protective and buffering factors that have no effect on their own but which increase coping and resilience. Social support systems, for example, appear to have a protective effect on children facing adversity (Rutter, 1985; Nettles, 1991).

Werner's (1985) longitudinal studies of children on Kauai revealed that as adolescents, resilient children put to good use the attributes they possessed. They were found to be responsible, had internalized values by which they lived, and were more socially mature than the adolescents who had more positive circumstances. Resilient children relied on informal sources of support, particularly peers (including siblings) and parents. Their perceptions of the need and usefulness of such supports was significantly more positive than the children who displayed coping problems.

In her examination of stress-resistant children and peers of the same age, sex and low socioeconomic status who exhibited vulnerability to the stress, Werner (1985) found that the key factors in the children's environment that appeared to contribute to their resilience in the midst of chronic poverty were: age of opposite-sex parent (younger mothers for resilient males, older fathers for resilient females); four or fewer children in the family; more than two years between the resilient children and their next-born sibling; alternate caretakers, such as father, grandparent, or older siblings; steady outside employment of the mother; amount of attention given to the child by primary caretaker in infancy; sibling available as caretaker or friend in childhood; rules and structure in adolescent households; and supportive, informal multigenerational network of relatives

and friends. She also found that resilient boys were more often firstborn sons (Werner, 1985).

Similarly, Rutter (1981) found that firstborn children tended to have superior academic achievement. The differences in the ways parents respond to their first child and the ways they respond to later-born children suggest that parents may have more active interactions with firstborns and may also tend to be more social, affectionate, anxious, and controlling. These behaviors lend themselves to more talking and more attention all of which may account for achievement differences among siblings as a result of birth order. Another factor that appears to have a positive relationship with academic achievement is family size. Most often, Rutter and Madge (1976) found that children from smaller families tended on average to achieve at a higher level. Once again, these findings were consistent with those later found by Werner (1985).

In many cases, the protective factors identified by Garnezy, Rutter and Werner are unalterable constitutional or environmental factors. While these factors are of interest, what is encouraging is that there is some evidence that there are alterable characteristics or protective factors of academically successful and resilient students. Examples of alterable factors are academic self-concept, school attitude, and perception of family and school support.

The research on resilience suggests that protective factors exist in each level of the ecosystem as well as on the individual level. Protective factors that have been found to facilitate achievement among African American students are reviewed below.

Research on Academic Achievement of African American Children

Despite the wealth of educational research conducted during the past three decades, few studies have focused on the African American children who are thriving in seemingly risk-laden settings. In the midst of the persistent numbers of African American youth who are performing at levels that appear to contribute to academic failure, there are students in this group who do achieve in school. What remains unanswered in the literature are the factors that enable some students to negotiate the developmental tasks of adolescence successfully and to achieve in school despite poor environments. What are the protective factors that serve as buffers for African American male students? What contributes to their resilience?

While there are many studies that have focused on the academic failure of African American students, few have examined the factors related to the academic success and resilience of African American students. In this review of such research, several common threads linked to resilience become apparent.

Edwards (1976) studied successful high school seniors from a large, predominately African American school in a large midwestern city. Of the 21 students with grade point averages of 3.0 or better selected for study, only six were male. The first of several common characteristics Edwards found in this interview study was that the average age of these students was younger than that of the population average of high school seniors. Discussions with the students revealed that perhaps because they were younger than their peers, they were not granted the same freedom by their parents or were not fully accepted by their peers. Edwards suggested that such limitations may have turned these students away from non-academic activities allowing for more effort, time, and concentration to be placed on academic activities.

Large family size did not appear to be detrimental to the achievement of students in Edwards' sample. The average number of persons living in their households was 5.4. Nine of these students were the oldest of the children in their families. Residential stability seemed to have a positive effect on student performance as only one student had attended more than one high school and the average number of schools at the junior high level was 1.6.

Students' ratings of their elementary and secondary school experience indicated overall pleasant experiences with the most positive experiences reported at the

elementary level (1.9 on a 1-5 scale with 1 being high positive). School was a successful microsystem for these students as indicated by their reports of numerous positive school experiences such as winning math and spelling contests, receiving awards, etc. The family was also a successful microsystem as each student cited one or both of their parents as motivating influences for their academic success. In addition, students with older siblings pointed to their support and help with schoolwork. Relatives, teachers, and counselors were also cited as supportive influences. Thus, students expressed family and school support for their academic activities, thereby facilitating good mesosystem connections.

Most of the students also reported a critical incident or catalytic experience when asked to identify experiences critical to their academic success. These students were not apologetic for their interest in school and they did not express significant problems with their peers. They also expressed an understanding in and belief in the operation of the "job ceiling" described by Ogbu (1990). Ogbu maintains that for caste-like minorities, such as African Americans, academic achievement often does not translate into future job opportunities. Students tend to use as examples the adults in their environments as gauges for their own future opportunities.

Edwards (1976) also reported that as a group, these students studied at home for an average of 2.4 hours per day. They all had household chores and 19 of the 21 participated in extracurricular activities. On ratings of their best friends' grades, these students, especially the males, were critical. Edwards suggests that this may have been because few of the males had male friends who were also good students.

Lee (1985) found some very specific factors related to academic and social success for 68 rural African American adolescents who were identified by teachers as successful despite personal, social, and economic hardships. Through extensive interviews with these students, Lee found psychosocial variables appeared to explain the commonalities among these students in grades eight to 12. These variables can be classified as ego factors, microsystem factors, mesosystem factors, and exosystem factors.

Ego factors, those factors that are internal and central to the student, included strong identification with positive role models, strong future orientation based on realism, high educational and occupational goals, moderate to highly conservative moral attitudes, strong religious convictions, positive but realistic view of self; ability to accept responsibility for self and behavior, ability to lead and follow; internal locus of control, well-developed, though somewhat limited interests, limited degree of black

consciousness, and well-developed views on the nature of success. Microsystem factors Lee found included close, supportive family networks with strong parental influence, highly developed social networks outside of family, active participation in school and church, and positive educational experiences with school as major social outlet.

Lee's findings suggest that there are identifiable characteristics of academically successful students. These psychological strengths, personal competencies and support appear to operate as protective factors for these students.

Lee, Winfield, and Wilson (1991) studied data from the 1983-1984 National Assessment of Educational Progress and examined the academic behavior and characteristics of the African American eighth grade students who scored above the national average. Associated with students' high achievement and resilience were factors such as reading more, doing more homework, and watching less television and generally making more positive use of their time.

Nelson-Le Gall & Jones (1991) found that academically successful African American students used skills in getting and using help from others. Nelson-Le Gall and Jones consider help-seeking skills as protective mechanisms in the classroom learning context. In addition, they argue that academically successful African American students have parents who are responsive to their help-seeking and encourage an active coping style which involves initiating

change and manipulating the environment to produce and employ resources that can assist them in reaching their goals.

Other researchers believe that as members of a caste-like minority, African American students must deny their racial identity in order to be academically successful. They suggest that the success of such students is contingent upon the extent to which they cope with the burden of "acting white" or "racelessness" (Fordham, 1988; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Fordham maintains that African American students must develop a raceless persona in order to achieve academic success. She suggests that when African American children enter school they must unlearn or at least modify their own culturally sanctioned interactional and behavioral styles and adopt those styles rewarded in the school context in order to be successful in school (Fordham, 1988).

Fordham (1988) collected data over a two-year period in a high school in Washington, D. C. She conducted formal and informal interviews with students, teachers, counselors and parents, and observed students during in-class and out-of-class activities. The study of the school climate and curriculum led Fordham to identify various indicators at the school as valuing racelessness for African American students. It should be noted that the boys in the study were found to be less accepting of racelessness than were girls.

Clark (1991) identified social identity and support networks as two variables that may serve as either protective mechanisms or sources of vulnerability for academic achievement. Clark states that resilient African American adolescents (1) adopt either a raceless or bicultural identity; (2) develop support systems which provide assistance for success in and out of school; (3) develop close, reciprocated friendships with persons who are most often of the same race and who place a high value on education; (4) have high perceptions of family support; and (5) have high perceptions of teacher and school personnel support.

Clark suggests that in relation to Fordham's research, racelessness may be a protective mechanism that facilitates the academic success of some African American students. Likewise, the development of a bicultural identity may also serve as a protective mechanism. While most African American adolescents who adopt raceless or bicultural identities may not risk academic failure, these identities may place such students at risk for poor social development at a time when peer support and involvement is critical in adolescent development. Clark also suggests that African American adolescents who suffer from alienation from mainstream society and the African American community have poor academic and social competencies and therefore have educational, social, and psychological adjustment problems.

Clark states that social support serves two major functions. One is to play a role in the development and another is to serve as a buffer against stressors.

Studies of at-risk early adolescents in the general population have presented profiles of the non-successful and drop-out student as a male minority student from a low-income family (Strahan, 1988). In exploring the differences in students who stay in school and those who drop out, Alpert and Dunham (1986) found that students' perceptions of the nature of peer and parental support, the likelihood of success in school, and the relevance of education were critical considerations for students who dropped out of school. In a later study, Strahan (1988) found that low achieving students were like their peers in their perceptions of peer and parental support, however, they differed in that they did not relate their current school performance to their academic futures and did not perceive many opportunities for success in school.

Other factors have also been found to contribute to students' academic achievement. Students' perceived self-efficacy for academic achievement has been causally linked to students' grades. Zimmerman, Bandura, and Martinez-Pons (1992), in their study of 102 ninth and tenth grade social studies students, found a direct link between students' perceptions of their capability to learn and their final grades. The path analysis in this study revealed that self-

efficacy for academic achievement influenced students' grade goals, which, in turn, influenced final grades. The perceived self-efficacy for academic achievement combined with students' grade goals accounted for 31% of the variance in the students' final grades.

In addition, there was also a significant causal path between students' perceived efficacy for self-regulated learning and self-efficacy for academic achievement, suggesting that the degree to which students are proactive regulators of their own learning process plays a critical role in their scholastic competence. These findings of causal links between alterable factors such as perceived self-efficacy and final grades suggest that there are several different avenues for interventions that may be effective in altering students' perceptions of school-related abilities, skills, and goals. Studies such as these provide the foundation for future studies that investigate the influence of these variables on the achievement of African American male middle school students.

Racial socialization has also been linked to the academic performance of African American students. Peters (1985) defines racial socialization in her discussion:

The tasks Black parents share with all parents-- providing for and raising children--not only are performed within the mundane extreme environmental stress of racism but include the responsibility of raising physically and emotionally healthy children who

are Black in a society in which being Black has negative connotation. (p. 161)

Spencer (1985) suggests that socialization experiences are manifested "either in practice or knowledge: as social behavior or as social awareness" (p. 219). Bowman and Howard (1985) employed a blocked opportunity approach in their study of racial socialization and achievement in black youth. This approach focuses on the socialization of active rather than passive orientations toward racial barriers and blocked opportunities by African American parents. This proactive orientation is considered a critical factor in the higher sense of efficacy and academic success. Thus, parents' efforts to socialize their children in this proactive orientation promotes resilience by enabling African American youth to take advantage of opportunities that do exist as they exercise proactive behaviors when faced with racial barriers and inequalities (Bowman & Howard, 1985).

Bowman and Howard (1985) found that youths' academic performance and upward mobility could be promoted through intergenerational transmission of proactive orientations. In their interview study of African American youths aged 14-24, they examined the race-related socialization messages that parents and grandparents gave their youth. Researchers obtained students' self-reports of school grades and students' responses to a four-item index of personal

efficacy which was used as the motivational measure. They used answers to the following two questions and related probes to operationalize race-related socialization themes communicated by parents: "When you were a child, were there things your parents, or the people who raised you, did or told you to help you know what it is to be black? (If yes) What are the most important things they taught you? Are there any (other) things your parents or the people who raised you told you about how to get along with white people? (If yes) What are the most important things they taught you?" The findings indicated that those youths who had been socialized to be aware of racial barriers and interracial protocol attained higher grades than did students who lacked such socialization experiences (Bowman & Howard, 1985).

Summary

The research that contributes to the understanding of the academic success of African American males suggests that the transactions between the students and their ecosystems should be considered in identifying protective factors most closely associated with academic invulnerability, resiliency, and success. These students are facing critical turning points as evidenced by the numerous transitions they experience in virtually every domain of their lives coupled with the major developmental task of identity development. For low-income, African American male students, these

demands must often be met in strained ecosystems, especially at the micro- and mesosystem levels. Ego factors, such as high academic self-concept and positive school attitude, combined with microsystem factors, such as perception of high family and school support, appear to operate as protective factors that increase resilience.

Hypotheses

In an effort to examine these factors, the following hypotheses will be tested:

1. Higher academic self-concept, positive attitudes toward school, more positive perceptions of family support, and more positive perceptions of school support will discriminate academically successful African American male middle school students from their less successful peers.
2. Alterable factors such as higher academic self-concept, positive attitudes toward school, more positive perceptions of family support, and more positive perceptions of school support will discriminate academically successful African American male middle school students from their less successful peers better than will unalterable factors such as birth order, number of siblings, and spacing between siblings.
3. Higher racial socialization by family members making students aware of racial barriers and

interracial protocol will discriminate
academically successful African American male
middle school students from their less successful
peers.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Phase I

Subjects

The subjects of this study were drawn from two middle schools in an urban mid-sized city in the southeast. These schools were selected as the target schools since they serve the majority of the low-income neighborhoods in the city.

A computerized list of all 202 seventh grade African American male students from the selected schools was generated. All courses and grades for the seventh grade were recorded. Most students were enrolled in English, mathematics, science, social studies, physical education, and an elective. Grades for the first three grading periods for the school year were used for the calculation of grade point averages.

Twenty-seven students were eliminated from the pool of potential subjects based on two criteria: (1) special education status and (2) unavailability of grades. Nineteen of the students were assigned to special education classes. Complete grade reports were not available for eight students. In most cases, grades for these students were missing because the students were not enrolled in the school system for the whole year. The remaining 175 students were

included in the pool of students to be recruited for the study.

Consent was obtained for 96 of the students. Eighty-four students completed the surveys. Upon verification of test scores, four students who participated were identified as special education students and were therefore eliminated from the analyses. The final sample consisted of 80 students.

The General Information Form (see Appendix A) was designed to obtain data on unalterable factors related to the students' family environment, such as birth order, number of siblings, spacing between siblings, and presence of extended family, that may be significant contributors to resilience (Werner, 1985). Students ranged in age from 12 to 15, with a mean age of 13.3 years (see Table 1).

Table 1

Students' Ages

Age	Percent
12	21.3
13	37.5
14	32.5
15	8.8

Sixty percent of the students lived in single female-headed households. Only 26 students indicated that they lived with fathers or stepfathers. Additional data from student responses to the General Information Form are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

Low income status, as defined by the school system, is based on eligibility for free or reduced lunch. Data provided by the school system indicated that nearly 90% of the students in this sample qualified for free or reduced lunch status. Students whose families received food stamps or Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) qualified for free lunch. The income chart on which reduced lunch status is based is shown in Table 4.

The mean grade point average across the three grading periods for students in the final sample was 1.67 (sd=.64) with a range of 0.17 to 3.0 (see Table 5). During the recording of the grade point averages, an unexpected pattern emerged. Many students (n=26) had grades that fluctuated one or more full grade points between grading periods. For example, one student in the sample had grades of 1.00, 0.66, 2.33 respectively for the three grading periods evaluated, constituting a 1.67 grade point change. Another student in the sample had grades of 2.0, 2.5, 0.83, and yet another student had grades of .80, 2.0, 0.83.

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of Students' Families

Persons in Household	Percent
Mother	88.8
Father	30.0
Mother and Father	28.8
Mother Only	60.0
Father Only	1.3
Neither Parent	10.0
Brothers	76.3
Brothers Living at Home	60.0
Sisters	72.5
Sisters Living at Home	49.0
Grandmothers	16.3
Grandfathers	7.5
Aunts	5.0
Uncles	10.0
Nephews	8.8
Nieces	2.5
Cousins	8.8
Guardian	1.3
Stepfathers	2.5

Table 3

Unalterable Factors

Variable	Percent
First Born or Only Child	35.0
3 or more Years to Next Youngest Sibling	37.5
Four or Fewer Siblings	87.5
Live in Family Structure Other than with Mother and Father	71.2

The analysis of the grade point averages revealed no interpretable pattern to the incidence of grades dropping and going up. Students' grades were as likely to drop at the end of the year as at the beginning or middle of the year. These students, called fluctuators, will be discussed again in the analysis section.

Instruments

The School Attitude and Support Scale (see Appendix B), adapted from the Iowa Youth and Families Project (R. Conger, personal communication, April, 1992), is a combination of two subscales with a total of 26 items. The first subscale included 13 items on a Likert-type scale that measure students' attitude toward school. Students' perceptions of

family and school support were measured by the 13 items on the second subscale. Items on the School Attitude and Support Scale were based on a five point rating scale, with response options ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Table 4

Eligibility Criteria for Reduced Lunch Status

Household

Size	Annual	Monthly	Weekly
1	12,599	1050	243
2	17,002	1417	327
3	21,405	1784	412
4	25,808	2151	497
5	30,211	2518	581
6	34,614	2885	666
7	39,017	3252	751
8	43,420	3619	835
For Each Additional			
Family Member Add	+4403	+367	+85

Note. From school district Food Service Application, 1992.

Table 5

Distribution of Grade Point Averages for Phase I Subjects

GPA Band	Percent
3.0 - 3.5	1.2
2.5 - 2.9	8.8
2.0 - 2.49	25.0
1.5 - 1.99	22.5
1.0 - 1.49	31.2
.5 - .99	7.5
.49 and Below	3.8

The second instrument, the Harter Self-Perception Profile for Children (See Appendix C), contains 36 items that measure students' competence in five specific domains: Scholastic Competence, Social Acceptance, Athletic Competence, Physical Appearance, and Behavioral Conduct, as well as Global Self-Worth. While students completed all items on this scale, only the scholastic competence (academic self-concept) subscale responses (items 1,7,13,19,25,31) were used in the analyses. The validity and reliability data for the Harter scale are published elsewhere (see Harter, 1985).

In addition to the surveys, students were asked to respond to three open-ended questions as a first step in Phase II of the study (see Appendix D). The paucity of reliable measures for middle school students on the relation of racial identity and awareness to educational outcomes, coupled with the need to uncover the intricacies of such feelings led to the development these questions. These questions, pertaining to school performance, gender, and race, were sequentially ordered to gradually increase in sensitivity. The first question permitted students to write their advice to rising sixth graders about what it takes to do well in middle school. The second and third questions asked students to write what differences they thought gender and race, respectively, made in how well they did in school. These final two questions were designed to elicit data from students that could inform the development of the interview guide.

Procedures

Data collection was conducted in two phases. Collection of the survey data began prior to the end of the school year. Consent forms were distributed at both schools through homeroom classes (see Appendix E). Both principals met with their cluster leaders to explain the study and solicit their assistance in the distribution and collection of consent forms. Due to low response rates, second notices with bright yellow cover sheets were distributed four days

after the first set of forms were sent home. In addition, parents who had working telephones were called. The study was explained to them and they were encouraged to return the consent forms.

At the time set aside by the principals of the two schools, the investigator and three trained assistants administered the surveys. Students whose parents signed and returned the consent forms completed the surveys during homeroom time. Students were informed of the nature of their participation and assured of the confidentiality of the information they would be sharing. Students not participating in the study were occupied with previously assigned activities.

Two students declined to participate. These students, who were sitting next to each other, stated that they did not feel like completing the surveys. They were then excused from the activity. Two students came to school late on the day of survey administration. These students came to the office on the following day and completed the surveys in a conference room. Most students needed 15-25 minutes to complete the surveys.

Nine additional students were recruited through home contacts. These students completed surveys at their homes at a time agreed upon with the parents. Four of these students were absent during survey administration at their

school although they had been given permission to participate.

Phase II

Subjects

The second phase of data collection began later in the summer when 17 families were contacted for interviews. Sixteen families participated in the interviews. In order to obtain interview data for students in each GPA band, the families contacted were targeted in groups. The first objective was to recruit as many of the top achievers as possible. Therefore, attempts to contact the eight students whose grade point averages were 2.5 and higher were made. All but one of these students were successfully recruited for interviews. The remaining student had moved and no forwarding address was available. The second objective was to recruit students in the lowest grade group with grades below 1.99. As shown in Table 6, students from each of the GPA bands were successfully recruited for interviews.

Instruments

Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendices F & G). Questions for the interviews were grounded in the responses of Phase I. Specifically, Phase II of the study was designed to better understand how students related their racial identity with the educational and future outcomes. In order to accomplish this, questions were designed to gather data on students'

perspectives of school and school-related issues as well as how being African American played a role in such issues. In addition, questions were developed for parents in an effort to investigate what they do and tell their sons about school, the educational process, and how they fit in as African American males.

Table 6

Distribution of Grade Point Averages for Phase II Subjects

G.P.A.	<u>n</u>
2.5-3.0	7
2.0-2.49	5
(Fluctuators 2)	
1.99 and Below	4
(Fluctuators 1)	
Total Interviewed	16

Discussions with students began with general questions about school memories and performance at the elementary level and progressed to more sensitive issues. In a similar pattern, interviews with parents began with the more benign questions and progressed to questions about the racial socialization of their sons.

Procedures

Families were contacted for interviews either by telephone or through home visits. Many of the families did not have telephone service, thereby requiring contact in person. In all cases, parents were told of the purpose of the study and were asked to participate (see Appendix H). All parents contacted by telephone and in person agreed to participate. An appointment was then set for a home visit for the interview. Parents were asked to schedule a time when both they and the student would be available. In one case, a grandmother indicated willingness to participate, however, the grandson, who stays with her only during the school year, was to be out-of-town with his mother until school started. This family was not included in the interview phase of the study.

In three cases, interviews were conducted at the time of the first contact. These parents were interested and available to be interviewed on the spot. Due to scheduling conflicts, in four cases, two visits were required in order to talk with the parent and the student. On several occasions, appointments had to be repeatedly rescheduled due to time conflicts on the part of the parents and/or children. In two instances, parents called to reschedule appointments. Families who had working telephones were called for confirmations on the day or evening prior to the

appointment time. Three appointments were rescheduled during confirmation calls.

Once at the home, the investigator reminded the parents of the purpose of the study, how the data and tape recordings would be used, and the format for the interviews. Parents and students were given an opportunity to ask questions and parents were asked to sign the consent form (see Appendix I). Parents were then asked if they would like to begin or if the student would like to begin. Many of the parents asked the student his preference and most of the parents were interviewed first and then excused themselves to allow privacy for the student interview. Seven parents chose to stay in the room during the student interview. In one case, however, the grandmother, who was the guardian of the student, stayed in the room, and influenced the student to modify his answers to her liking and perceptions by questioning him as to why he answered the way that he did. She did leave the room before the interview was completely over and the student seemed to be more relaxed.

Combined, student and parent interviews lasted from 25 minutes to one hour fifty-five minutes with an average of about 50-60 minutes. At the completion of each interview, parents and students were once again given an opportunity to ask questions. They were then thanked and each student received a copy of a guidebook on high school credits needed

for graduation, and information sheets on homework and test-taking tips.

Data Analyses

A series of discriminant function analyses using standardized scores was conducted to determine which factors and which patterns of alterable factors best distinguished passing from failing students. Similar analyses were used to test the hypothesis involving unalterable factors.

Students were allowed to generate as many responses to the short answer questions as they desired. Content analysis of these data was conducted on all student responses. All responses were typed and coded and then categorized by achievement group for further evaluation. Students with grade point averages of 2.0 and above were placed in the passing group and all remaining students were placed in the failing group.

Transcription of interview data was conducted with the aid of audio-recordings for 10 of the 16 interviews. Parent and student responses to the questions were entered into the computer. After all data were entered, responses were divided into three groups based on grade point averages: (1) 1.99 and below; (2) 2.0-2.5; and (3) 2.5 and above.

Students and parents were allowed to generate as many responses to the interview questions as they could. Therefore, protocols were coded in full, and any subject could be credited with several categories per question.

All responses were coded using descriptive statements with coding categories identified through content analysis. These descriptive statements, which were a combination of summaries and verbatim responses, were then collapsed into patterns of response for each question asked. Thus, this process of pattern coding allowed for grouping statements into a smaller number of overriding themes (Miles & Huberman, 1983).

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Phase I

Hypothesis I

The first hypothesis was designed to determine the extent to which students' scholastic competence, attitude toward school, and perception of school support discriminated between passing students and failing students. Discriminant function analyses using SPSS (Norusis, 1990) were conducted to test this hypothesis. Discriminant function analysis is often useful for distinguishing among groups and for developing a procedure for predicting group membership. Linear combinations of the independent variables, in the first hypothesis, scholastic competence, attitude toward school, and perception of support, as measured by the Harter Perceived Competence Scale for Children and the School Attitude and Support Scale, served as the basis for classifying students into one of the two groups.

For the first discriminant function analysis, subjects were classified as either Group 1 if their grade point average was 2.0 or above (passing group) or Group 2 if their grade point average was 1.99 or below (failing group). This classification process produced 28 Group 1 and 52 Group 2

subjects. (Two cases in the failing group had missing discriminating variables, therefore all tests of this hypothesis are based on N=78.)

Significance tests for the equality of group means for each variable are shown in Table 7. Group means for the School Attitude Scale were significantly different. Following a similar pattern, group means for the Scholastic Competence Scale and the School Support Scale approached significance. Thus, it appears unlikely that students in the passing group and those in the failing group had the same means on the discriminant function.

Table 7

Univariate F-Ratio for First Analysis

Variable	F	Significance
Scholastic Competence	3.65	0.06
Attitude toward School	7.69	0.01
Perception of Support	3.50	0.07

A usual assumption in the proper use of discriminant function analysis is that the covariance matrices of the groups in the analysis do not differ significantly. Using Box's M to test for equality of covariance, the results indicated that the matrices were significantly different (p

<.05). It should be noted, however, that Box's M tends to be overly sensitive to departures from multivariate normality and tends to incorrectly call matrices unequal when this assumption is violated. Since the dependent variable was dichotomous (i.e., decidedly non-normal), the decision was made to continue with the discriminant function despite the significant test for the comparison of the two matrices.

The standardized and unstandardized discriminant function coefficients are shown in Table 8. The average standardized discriminant scores for each group, the group centroids, are presented in Table 9. The discriminant function centroids along with the discriminant function coefficients allow a dynamic description of typical students in each of the two groups. Students scoring high on the positively weighted classification variables and low on the negatively weighted variables tended to have high discriminant function scores and vice versa. More specifically, students with positive attitudes toward school, more positive perceptions of support and higher self-perceived scholastic competence tended to be classified in the passing group. By contrast, students with the opposite pattern tended to be classified in the failing group.

Table 8

Standardized and Unstandardized Canonical Discriminant
Function Coefficients

Function 1	Standardized	Unstandardized
Scholastic Competence	0.484	0.750
Attitude	0.672	1.243
School Support	0.254	0.505
(Constant)		-8.65

Table 9

Canonical Discriminant Function Evaluated at Group Centroids

Group	Function 1
Passing	0.494
Failing	-0.276

When the discriminant function was used to predict group membership, 69.23% of the cases were correctly classified. The complete classification results for this analysis are shown in Table 10.

Table 10

Classification Results

Actual Group	Number of Cases	Predicted Group	
		Passing	Failing
Passing	28	18 (64.3%)	10 (35.7%)
Failing	50	14 (28.0%)	36 (72.0%)

There are two indices of classification effectiveness. One is to view the improvement over chance of classification. Typically, for a two group discriminant function, the correct classification is compared with a prior probability of 50 percent. However, a more conservative approach is to compare the classification rate of 69% with the classification rate based on actual prior probability, in this case 73 percent. Using the former method, the improvement over a "no knowledge" classification was 19 percent.

In order to test the extent to which the measures discriminated between the extreme groups, in the second discriminant function analysis, subjects were classified as Group 1 if their grade point average was 2.0 or above

(passing group, $n=28$) or Group 2 if their grade point average was 1.49 or below (failing group, $n=34$). The 18 students whose grade point averages ranged from 1.5 to 1.99 were excluded from this analysis to allow for more distance between groups.

A discriminant function analysis was again performed using the three discriminating variables described in the first approach. As expected, the univariate F tests indicated that there were significant differences between group means on the three measures (see Table 11).

Table 11

Univariate F-Ratio

Variable	F	Significance
Scholastic Competence	5.34	0.02
Attitude Toward School	3.53	0.01
Perception of Support	4.86	0.03

The test of equality of group covariance matrices using Box's M indicated that there were no significant differences between the covariance matrices ($p>.05$). Therefore, the analysis continued with the computation of the standardized and unstandardized discriminant function coefficients shown in Table 12.

Table 12

Standardized and Unstandardized Canonical Discriminant
Function Coefficients

	Standardized	Unstandardized
Scholastic Competence	0.442	0.681
Attitude Toward School	0.717	1.406
School Support	0.249	0.484
(Constant)		-8.911

The group centroids are shown in Table 13. Again, as expected, the passing group had the positive discriminant function centroid. This suggested that students who scored high on the three scales, indicating more positive scholastic competence, more positive attitude toward school, and more positive perception of school support were more likely to be classified in the passing group. Conversely, students who scored lower on the three scales were more likely to be assigned to the failing group.

Predictably, the assignment of students by extreme groups improved the overall classification rate. When the discriminant function was used to predict group membership, 73.33% of the cases were correctly classified (see Table

14). This was 23% above chance and a slight improvement (4.1%) over the first analysis.

Table 13

Canonical Discriminant Function Evaluated at Group Centroids

Group	Function 1
GPA \geq 2.0	0.581
GPA \leq 1.49	-0.508

Table 14

Classification Results

Actual Group Membership	Number of Cases	Predicted Group	
		GPA \geq 2.0	GPA \leq 1.49
GPA \geq 2.0	28	20 (71.4%)	8 (28.6%)
GPA \leq 1.49	32	8 (25.0%)	24 (75.0%)

As mentioned earlier, a number of students were identified whose grades fluctuated by at least one grade point between grading periods. This group of students were

included with the passing and failing students in the next analysis. Discriminant function analyses were conducted to determine to extent to which the three measures used in the prior analyses discriminated between students in the passing, failing, and fluctuating groups. Students whose grade point averages were equal to or above 2.0 and equal to or below 1.99 were assigned to Groups 1 ($n=20$) and 2 ($n=32$) respectively. Fluctuators were assigned to Group 3 ($n=26$). These groups were mutually exclusive, therefore some students in Group 3 had averages above 2.0 and some had averages below 2.0. However, for the purposes of this analysis these students were grouped together as fluctuators in an effort to determine any differences in the ability of the measures to discriminate between students with more stable grade point averages and those whose grades fluctuated.

Univariate F tests indicated no significant differences among the three group means as shown in Table 15. The covariance matrices for the three groups were significantly different ($p<.01$) according to Box's M test of equality. The sensitivity of this test to the violation of the normality assumption was again considered. As in the first analysis, the decision was made to continue with the discriminant function despite the significance of the Box's M test.

Table 15

Univariate F-Ratio

Variable	F	Significance
Scholastic Competence	1.33	0.27
Attitude Toward School	2.33	0.10
Perception of Support	0.39	0.68

Tables 16 and 17 present respectively, the standardized and unstandardized discriminant function coefficients and the canonical discriminant function centroids. On the first function, students in the passing group had a positive average score, while students in the fluctuating group had negative average scores and students in the failing group had even lower negative average scores. This means that passing students were more likely to have higher self-perceived scholastic competence, more positive attitudes toward school, and less positive perceptions of school support than failing or fluctuating students. It appeared that fluctuating students resembled failing students more than passing students.

The classification results indicated that 46.15% of the cases were correctly classified (see Table 18). This is 13.15% above chance.

Table 16

Standardized and Unstandardized Canonical Discriminant
Function Coefficients

Function 1		
	Standardized	Unstandardized
Scholastic Competence	0.495	0.757
Attitude Toward School	0.877	1.584
School Support	-0.215	-0.417
(Constant)		-6.308
Function 2		
Scholastic Competence	0.543	0.830
Attitude Toward School	-0.660	-1.192
School Support	0.954	1.849
(Constant)		-5.222

Table 17

Canonical Discriminant Functions Evaluated at Group Centroids

Group	Function 1	Function 2
GPA \geq 2.0	0.468	0.055
GPA \leq 1.99	-0.251	0.057
Fluctuators	-0.049	-0.150

Table 18

Classification Results

Actual Group	Number of Cases	Predicted Group Membership		
		GPA \geq 2.0	GPA \leq 1.99	Fluctuators
GPA \geq 2.0	20	13 (65.0%)	4 (20.0%)	3 (15.0%)
GPA \leq 1.99	32	7 (21.9%)	16 (50.0%)	9 (28.1%)
Fluctuators	26	9 (34.6%)	10 (38.5%)	7 (26.9%)

In the final examination of this hypothesis, the 26 fluctuators were excluded from analysis resulting in 54

cases being tested. This approach allowed for a more stable grade point average to serve as the dependent variable. Group 1 included non-fluctuating students whose grade point averages were equal to or above 2.0. Non-fluctuating students with averages equal to or less than 1.99 were assigned to Group 2.

As shown in Table 19, only the group means on the attitude measure were significantly different. Box's M test of equality of covariance was not significant ($p < .06$). The standardized and unstandardized discriminant function coefficients are presented in Table 20.

Table 19

Univariate F-Ratio

Variable	F	Significance
Scholastic Competence	2.27	0.14
Attitude Toward School	6.26	0.02
Perception of Support	0.30	0.59

Table 20

Standardized and Unstandardized Canonical Discriminant
Function Coefficients

	Standardized	Unstandardized
Scholastic Competence	0.406	0.627
Attitude Toward School	0.838	1.757
School Support	0.033	0.066
(Constant)		-8.509

As shown in Table 21, the pattern observed for the earlier analyses was repeated. The passing group had the positive discriminant function. Conversely, students in the failing group had a negative centroid. Since only 67.31% were correctly classified, it would appear that the elimination of the fluctuators to obtain more homogenous groups did not have much influence on the classification results. Perhaps this analysis would result in greater classification with a larger sample. When the discriminant function was used to predict group membership, 67.31% of the cases were correctly classified (see Table 22). This was 17% above chance.

Table 21

Canonical Discriminant Functions Evaluated at Group Centroids

Group	Function 1
GPA \geq 2.0	0.478
GPA \leq 1.99	-0.300

Table 22

Classification Results

Actual Group	Number of Cases	Predicted Group Membership	
		GPA \geq 2.0	GPA \leq 1.99
GPA \geq 2.0	20	13 (65.0%)	7 (35.0%)
GPA \leq 1.99	32	10 (31.3%)	22 (68.8%)

In sum, the analyses for the hypothesis that the three alterable factors would discriminate passing from failing students was confirmed. As might be expected, discrimination was best achieved when extreme groups were used in the analysis.

Hypothesis II

In the test of the second hypothesis, that alterable factors would discriminate better between passing and failing students than would unalterable factors, demographic data from the General Information Form were used. Four unalterable variables, birth order, number of siblings, spacing between siblings, and family structure served as the discriminating variables for this second hypothesis. All of these variables were defined dichotomously. For the birth order variable, students who were first born and only children were assigned to one group while students whose birth order fell elsewhere were assigned to another group. Students with four or fewer siblings were assigned to one group and students with five or more siblings were assigned to another for the number of siblings variable. Students had two or fewer years between them and their next youngest sibling being assigned to one group and other students, those with three or more years, were assigned to a second group. For the fourth discriminating variable, family structure was considered. Students who lived with their mother and father were assigned to one group and students who lived in any other family structure were assigned to another group.

The dependent variable for these analyses was also dichotomous. As in the first series of analyses, students were assigned to Group 1 if their grade point average was

greater than or equal to 2.0. All other students were assigned to Group 2.

Students appeared to be rather homogenous on the family structure variables. The univariate F tests indicate that there were no significant differences between students in the two groups on these variables (see Table 23). In keeping with the assumptions of discriminant function analysis, there were also no significant differences between the group covariance matrices as tested using Box's M ($p > .63$).

Table 23

Univariate F-Ratio

Variable	F	Significance
Birth Order	0.34	0.56
Number of Siblings	1.12	0.29
Space between Siblings	0.06	0.81
Family Structure	0.0006	0.98

The standardized and unstandardized discriminant function coefficients are shown in Table 24. The group centroids indicated that passing students most often had lower discriminant function scores than failing students (see Table 25), indicating that students in the passing

group were more likely to score relatively higher on the negatively weighted variables and relatively lower on the positively weighted variables. Therefore, students in the passing groups tended to be first born or only children, have more than four siblings, have three or more years between them and their next youngest sibling, and lived with their mother and/or an adult other than their father. Students in the failing group were more likely to have the opposite pattern.

Table 24

Standardized and Unstandardized Canonical Discriminant
Function Coefficients

	Standardized	Unstandardized
Birth Order	-0.618	-1.282
Number of Siblings	1.008	3.031
Space Between Next Youngest Sibling	-0.244	-0.498
Family Structure	0.249	0.544
(Constant)		-3.967

Table 25

Canonical Discriminant Function Evaluated at Group Centroids

Group	Function 1
Passing	-0.227
Failing	0.122

When the discriminant function was used to predict group membership, 56.25% of the cases were correctly classified. This was 6.25% above chance. Table 26 shows the complete classification results for this analysis.

Table 26

Classification Results

Actual Group Membership	Number of Cases	Predicted Group	
		Passing	Failing
Passing	28	14 (50.0%)	14 (50.0%)
Failing	52	21 (40.4%)	31 (59.6%)

A second approach to this analysis was implemented by adjusting group assignment. Group 1 remained the same while

students were assigned to Group 2 if their grade point average was less than or equal to 1.49. This excluded 18 students with averages ranging from 1.50 to 1.99 in an effort to increase variability among groups. This discriminant function analysis for extreme groups correctly assigned 54.84% of the cases (see Table 27).

The results of these analyses indicated that the second hypothesis, that alterable factors would discriminate between passing and failing students better than would unalterable factors, was supported. The classification results for the alterable factors were higher than those for the unalterable factors.

Table 27

Classification Results for Extreme Groups

Actual Group	Number of Cases	Predicted Group Membership	
		GPA \geq 2.0	GPA \leq 1.49
GPA \geq 2.0	28	6 (21.4%)	22 (78.6%)
GPA \leq 1.49	34	6 (17.6%)	28 (82.4%)

Hypothesis III

The examination of the third hypothesis, that higher racial socialization would discriminate passing from failing students, began with content analysis of the third open-ended question posed to the students in Phase I. This question, "What difference does race, being black or white, have to do with how well you do in school?", was designed to provide the basis of interview questions about racial socialization. It was answered by 61 students. Most students wrote that race played no role in school achievement. Responses to the open-ended questions will be discussed separately for the groups of students with passing grades ($GPA \geq 2.0$) and failing grades ($GPA \leq 1.99$). All responses, some of which were multiple, were coded and were included in the analysis. In addition, responses were transcribed verbatim, therefore, any errors in grammar or usage in the quotations reflect students' writing. Analyses of this question are presented first followed by data from the advice and gender questions.

Content Analysis of Responses to Open-Ended Question on Differential Treatment due to Race. Of the 22 students in the passing group who responded to this item, 11 (50%) of them felt that race made no difference. Six (27%) indicated that blacks fared less well than whites in school. Three responses did not pertain to the question. One student indicated that the difference he perceived was in teachers'

efforts to help black students learn. He wrote, "Most teachers push harder on black students because they won't them to learn how important it is to get an education." Another student wrote that he did not know. One student who clearly perceived differences for black students wrote:

I am black so I already have to work harder to get somewhere cause white men don't care anyway and also I want to see myself achieve school and I'll be able to say damn I beat the system.

The following response was written by a student who also recognized differences:

You may get the wrong idea about how your teacher feels about you because of your race. But sooner or later you'll get over it.

Typical of students in all achievement groups who did not believe race made a difference was the following response:

It does not make a difference. Because anybody can do good in school and they can do the work just as good as anybody else.

Of the 39 students in the failing group who responded to this question, 24 (62%) wrote that race did not make a difference in school achievement. Seven (18%) students in this group stated that school was worse for blacks, while 6 (15%) indicated that there was no difference unless teachers were prejudiced. Two (5%) students wrote that black was beautiful and smart.

One student in this group said, "There is no difference whether you black or white. It has nothing to do with how well you do your schoolwork." Responses similar to this suggested that these students were either unaware of differences in school-related matters that were rooted in race and believed that race was not a factor in school or that they preferred not to disclose their feelings about the role race plays in their school lives. Further, investigation of the extent to which students may have been socialized about race-related issues continued with the content analysis of the student and parent interviews in Phase II of this study.

Content Analysis of Additional Open-Ended Responses.

The first open-ended question, designed to determine the extent of students' abilities to articulate what they think it takes to do well in middle school, was answered by 63 of the 80 students. Results for the passing group will be presented first, followed by results for the failing group.

Sixty percent of the responses of students with GPAs of 2.0 or better related to the development of good work habits. This included suggestions to work hard, pay close attention, study, and do homework. Twenty percent of the responses related to the development and maintenance of good student/teacher relations. Most of these suggestions involved getting along with teachers and obeying teachers. Ten percent of the responses were suggestions to stay out of

trouble. In nine percent of the responses, students specified good behavioral and social skills as important to success in middle school. One student noted the importance of avoiding peer pressure to being successful in middle school.

One student's response illustrates the pattern for the passing group:

First, get good with the teachers. Show them that you care about you're work. Show manners. Pay attention. Listen.

Some students were more specific than others, giving examples of how to maneuver in middle school and explaining why their suggestions were important:

First of all you need to know how to behave yourself. Next you shouldn't talk while the teachers are talking because you might not hear what they are talking about. After that day has ended go and get your book and take them home to study.

One student related the role friends can play in getting schoolwork done:

The advice I would give them is to make friends as quickly as possible to have friends that would help you with your schoolwork. Also act along with your teachers and do what you are supposed to do.

While this student was the only one to relate peer relations with schoolwork in a positive manner, this suggestion reflects the attitudes of students in research on help-seeking behaviors (Nelson-Le Gall & Jones, 1991).

To the question on what it takes to succeed in middle school, for failing students, 59% of the responses suggested that work habits were the most critical element in success in middle school. In contrast to the passing group, when only one student suggested avoidance of peer pressure, nine percent of the responses for the failing group related to this issue. Another difference was evident in the number of suggestions for the development of good student/teacher relations. While 20% of the passing group mentioned this, only one student in the failing group did. Seventeen percent of the responses related to having good behavioral and social skills. An additional 14% of the responses dealt specifically with staying out of trouble.

One student whose response captured four of the categories of responses listed four steps to success in middle school. His response was, "4 steps 1 work hard and do your work 2 follow the school rules, 3 don't follow behind others. 4 Do your homework." Another student who appeared to be dealing with help-seeking issues and schoolwork wrote:

So, you've made it to middle school. It's time now for some advice about middle school. First of all, you need to try to make as many friends as possible (not like I have), but try not to make more friends than you can handle. But you do need them to have someone to talk to. Try not to go them to often because that might make them think that either you're not smart enough or it will make them rebel against you.

While responses for both groups were coded into similar categories, differences in the concentration of responses by achievement groups were evident as shown in Table 28.

The second short answer question asked students to write about their feelings about differences in school for boys and girls. Sixty-two students, 23 passing and 39 failing, responded. Most students (71%) said that there was not a difference.

Table 28

Suggestions for School Success by Achievement Group

Response	<u>Group</u>	
	Passing	Failing
	Percent	
Work Habits	60%	59%
Avoidance of Bad Peer Influence	1%	9%
Development of Good Student-Teacher Relations	20%	1%
Development of Good Social Skills	9%	17%
Deliberate Behavior to Avoid Trouble	10%	14%

Of the 23 students in the passing group who responded to this question, 16 said there was no difference between boys and girls in school achievement. Only seven (30%) said that gender does make a difference. Three students said girls get preferential treatment. One student said boys and girls are different while another student said that teachers are different and may only like girls or boys. One student said, "Girls are usually smarter but I am kind of smart." One student indicated that he did not know.

Thirty-nine students in the failing group responded to this question. Twenty-nine said that there was no difference in how boys and girls achieve in school. Of the ten students who said there was a difference, eight indicated that teachers liked girls better than boys. In addition, one student said that some boys do better than girls. Another student said, "It makes no difference unless someone is prejudiced."

Phase II

Hypothesis III

The second phase of this study included in-home interviews with 16 students and their parents. Students who participated in the interviews were classified into one of three groups. They were considered high achievers if their GPA was equal to or above 2.5; average achievers if their GPA between 2.0 and 2.49; and low achievers if their GPA was 1.99 or lower.

Transcripts of student and parent interviews were subjected to content analysis. Responses related to race-related socialization from students and parents will be presented first. A summary of student and parent responses to other interview topics will then be presented.

Content Analysis of Student Responses to Racial Socialization Questions. Only three of the 16 students, one high achiever and two average achievers, said that they felt that being a black boy had any influence on how well they were doing in school. One high achieving student, indicating his awareness of the role racial prejudice plays in school said, "Teachers can do anything." One of the average achievers said, "To some white teachers. Some teachers. They see a black boy talk they make a big thing about it than they would a white kid." Another average achiever suggested that race played a role in the motivation of black students to do well in school, "Well, if you live in a bad neighborhood, it usually helps you to want to get out."

Most students insisted that race played no role in school performance. One low achiever, while acknowledging that some prejudice against blacks existed, discounted that statement by saying that it did not make a difference:

I don't know. It's some prejudice teachers in our school, but it don't matter what color you is. You can do your work long as you try to do it. If you clowning

around you ain't going to do your work that good.
Don't matter the color. Matter what you do.

These responses followed the same pattern as the responses to the open-ended question about race differences in school. In the first phase of the study and again in the second phase, students tended to say that race did not make a difference in their school experiences. Additional probing of students during the interviews about what they had been taught about being black and getting along with white people resulted in only one response. This student, a low achiever said:

My stepdad told me when he was little, he didn't like them but he just say you gotta deal with them. He say they all around so you don't have to deal with them and he say just don't be mean to them. Some of them your friends and some of them ain't.

This comment was the exception to the generally noncommittal responses of students about their racial socialization.

In their study of black youth's socialization experiences, Bowman and Howard (1985) 38% of the black youth interviewed reported that they had not been taught anything about being black or getting along with whites. These findings raise questions about the extent to which black parents socialize their children in the ways defined by and Bowman and Howard (1985).

Content Analysis of Parent Responses to Racial Socialization Questions. Parents' responses to questions about the racial socialization of their children supported the responses of the children. Overall, parents indicated that very little racial socialization took place. This finding may help to explain the paucity of responses from students about racial differences. Six parents said that they did not discuss race with their sons. In the 10 cases when parents said that they did discuss race, seven indicated that they tried to relate messages of equality among the races to their children. Of the six parents of high achievers who said they had discussed race with their sons, three said that they had stressed equality. A parent of an average achiever also said she emphasized equality. One of the parents of a high achiever replied, "I don't see where there is no difference. I don't make him racist. I bring him up in church."

Some of these parents tended to send mixed messages. While they acknowledged the existence of racism and discrimination, their discussions with their children did not attend to those stressors. Instead, they stressed equality. A parent of an average achiever who acknowledged prejudices and yet stressed equality said:

We generalize that we don't put a child down because of the color on his skin. We accept the child for who he is just like you want to be accepted for who you are. OK? We don't want our boys to feel like they have to have these little prejudices because a lot of this is

still going on. It is going on in the classroom. I am talking from the teachers on down. I think that is why it is easy for him to recognize it when it is going on. He can talk about it at home. That is one of the issues that he has had to deal with. He know what we taught him from the Bible and others. People are people. I have found that some of the others can be better to you than your own and it goes both ways. When you run into these biased people when you know what is right you stand firm on what you know is right. You can respect a person's issues and how they feel about certain things but you don't have to agree with them.

This is just one example of a response that indicated that the parent was aware of the existence of prejudices but focused on communicating messages of equality to her son instead of teaching proactive coping strategies in the face of genuine discrimination. She suggested that her son was aware of differences he may face because of his race and indicated she was preparing him to handle it by referencing the Bible. This type of response reflects two types of appraisal strategies identified by Barbarin (1983). First, the acknowledgment of prejudice coupled with a sense that there was little control over such prejudice is indicative of "paradoxical" control attributions. Second, the use of Biblical references is illustrative of a personal religiosity coping strategy that provides a basis for optimism. Barbarin suggests that these two adaptive approaches to the stress minority families encounter are often employed by African American adults.

In contrast, three parents of high achievers said that they stressed the fact that discrimination exists, making it harder for blacks. Barbarin (1983) suggests that causal attribution of undesirable events to racial discrimination is a third type of coping strategy that is often employed by African Americans. For example, a parent of a high achiever said:

I have always told him that its more harder for black than it is for whites. It seem like they look at us as...They give us a hard time...chance, a hard time in life. That's why I am so hard on him making sure that he really study and get all the education he can because when he get out there, things will really be competitive between black and white and they will give him a hard time because he may have good potential and good grades but they will give him a hard time.

This is the type of proactive racial socialization Bowman and Howard (1985) and Peters (1985) suggested actually buffered and prepared black students to face the challenges brought about by race. It was, however, the exception rather than the rule for this group of parents. Most parents reported that they either said nothing to their children regarding race and how to handle it or they said that they taught their children that everyone was equal.

These findings are similar to those of Spencer's (1983) interview study of 45 middle and low income Southern parents of children aged three to nine. In Spencer's study, when asked whether their socialization approaches would differ if their child were white, 73% of the parents, regardless of

social class, said that the content of their socializing goals would not be different. Thirty-three percent of the parents said that they did not discuss issues related to race unless asked specifically by their child. In fact, 50% of parents said that they did not feel that teaching children about race was important. Finally, approximately 60% of these parents told interviewers that their children would not have problems in school because of their race. Parents' socialization efforts appeared to be targeted toward racial neutrality. Such efforts to "transcend race", (Spencer, 1985) were also suggested by the parents in this study.

Overall, the results of the content analysis of student and parent interviews failed to provide strong support for the hypothesis that higher racial socialization would discriminate passing from failing students. The majority of the parents in this study indicated that they stressed equality and did not discuss the possibilities of blocked opportunities or strategies for dealing with racism and discrimination. This finding is consistent with the students' responses to the question on the influence of race on academic achievement. Only three students and three parents indicated that they experienced or provided racial socialization. Lending support to this hypothesis, however, is the finding that these three students were passing students (one high achiever and two average achievers) and

these three parents were parents of high achievers. This suggests that there may be a relationship between racial socialization and academic achievement as hypothesized.

Content Analysis of Other Interview Questions.

Analysis of questions to students and parents about school and student achievement were analyzed individually and by achievement group. A summary of students' responses and parents' responses will be presented respectively. Note that all student and teacher names have been changed.

Overall, students in all achievement groups expressed concern about their academic progress. High achievers tended to have more academic-related memories and concerns of elementary school and seventh grade than did students in the other groups. Although in response to the question about favorite memories of elementary school most students remembered something about recreational activities, their worse memories were almost exclusively related to bad grades they received. In seventh grade, however, most students named an academic concern as their most vivid memory. Students made statements such as, "Not making honor roll. Not making as good grades as I could" and " The social studies project that we did in Mr. Smith's class".

Throughout the three achievement groups, no identifiable pattern of responses emerged in reference to what students felt they did well in school. Each subject area was named at least once; however, social studies and

mathematics were cited most often. In contrast, mathematics was also cited most often as the subject in which students felt that they did poorly. In explaining the reasons why they did not do well in various subjects, students mentioned the difficulty of the class or textbook used for the class as the major reason for problems. Most of the students described themselves as pretty good or average students, yet only one student in the high achieving group, and no students in the average or low achieving group, said unconditionally that he would make an A on a test in his best subject if he studied hard.

When asked if anything had happened that made them want to do their best in school, parental encouragement, future goal orientation, and personal observations and experiences of failure emerged as the motivators. One student explained how he had benefitted from his brother's mistakes: "My brother didn't take advantage of things. I wouldn't want to be like him." Another student described his motivation, "If I fail, I know that I'll get in trouble. So I know that I better pass."

Family members were most often named as people who had been helpful and encouraging with their school activities. Sample statements made by students were: "My mother and grandmother tell me what I can do and be"; "My mom and my sister and the rest of my family"; "My mom. She helps me stay focused."

Specific teachers were also named by some students as persons who had been extremely helpful and encouraging of their school activities. Students made the following comments, "My computer teacher, a good teacher" and "One teacher this year and my sixth grade teacher". The following statement was made by a low achiever:

My teachers...It was three or four people this year. My principal, my assistant principal, and one of my sixth grade teachers, Ms. Walker and she my first subject teacher [English] and math [teacher]. They ain't act like the rest of the teachers. When I was down and stuff they said, they came up there to see what was wrong then they to help me do my work and stuff and they act like they care. They told me that when I get in the higher grades they said that you gonna be just like a number. We the best teachers you gonna have. To the other teachers you just gonna be another student, that's all. Just another student.

When asked about their feelings about boys who do well in school, most students said that it was good for boys to succeed. High achievers, however, responded as though they were not in the group of students who did well in school, although most did describe themselves as good students. Most high achievers said boys who do well were "alright" or "good people". In contrast, high achievers were quick to put down boys who don't do well in school, calling them "dumb" and "stupid". A typical comment was, "It's ordinary to see that."

The students said that studying hard, following directions, and paying attention were the keys to making

good grades in school. One student, a low achiever, added a different dimension when he said:

"For me, if they separate me from all of my friends, I think I can do great. If I could just go to school and nobody didn't know me I could do excellent. People always expect me to try to show off."

All but one of the students said that making good grades was helpful to students because of the relation of grades to future jobs, college admission and scholarships as exemplified by responses such as, "More chances of being a judge, lawyer, doctor or getting a scholarship." The exception to this type of response was a student who said, "Makes you feel good."

When asked to discuss their feelings about how their sons were doing in school, most parents indicated that they were pleased. As expected, parents who indicated displeasure tended to be parents of low achievers. The following statements made by parents are representative of the responses:

I'm really pleased at him because in a sense I know that he can do it. And see if he bring the bad grades in here that's when I have to buckle down on him because I know that he can do better.

Not pleased and therefore he will go to private school next year. No one seems interested in his potential but me. School system doesn't allow children to speak. He was in the gifted program but only because I inquired and then insisted. Teachers seem to like girls better. He has never been appropriately challenged.

Pretty good. He keeps up his average. I am glad about the drugs. He is not interested in keeping up with the older boys his age. He stays away from drugs. He likes to go to school. Thank God for the child that I have. His mind is not out there where the rest are.

Last year he did very well. Not at the beginning of the school term he didn't. But after a little coaching and a little fighting and things like that, he got it together...He is beginning to realize that he can have what he wants but he has to work. Nobody is going to give him anything.

Responses of parents of questions about their interactions with their son's elementary school teachers revealed that they felt that they had frequent contact. Parents indicated that they attended functions, had conferences with teachers, and went on field trips. One parent of a high achiever said:

Yes. Sometimes I used to go over there and help them out with field trips and stuff like that. One year they wanted to skip him from one grade to the next but I told them that I didn't want them to do that because he may miss something. They understood and everything. They asked if he could go to the gifted and talented school. So he went there a whole summer in kindergarten...I went out there to the conferences and everything and they were glad but they didn't have nothing to tell me because he was doing his work and everything. And they didn't have no problems with him. It's just that he was an excellent student. He just the type that go ahead and do his work and then he gets bored with it because he don't have nothing else to do. So it was pretty good.

Some of the parents said that they trusted their son's elementary teachers' judgments about their son's progress in school while others questioned teachers' judgments. One parent of a high achiever said, "Some things I did question.

I thought that he was doing better than they did." One parent of a low achiever, however, explained her disappointment that resulted from trusting the teachers:

Yes. I did but I was disappointed because he failed twice. You know and I didn't know at that time that you didn't have to let them fail him when they was little like that. But I just went on their judgment. I didn't like it because it messed him up a lot...You know, I just don't know why I went for it.

Only four parents said that they had no set pattern for homework completion and study. Typical responses were:

Usually he will go ahead and do it right, and I'll check it because I work nights too. When I come in he be done finished and everything and I go ahead and check it and its wrong he go and do it. I tell him to read the materials again because you are not reading it like you are supposed to. This is not what it is supposed to be. They know that they get their work. No TV no radio, no nothing. You can't go outside. They be on punishment.

He goes to a sitter after school. He does his homework after he gets home, after 6. He studies even when he has no homework and does homework on weekends to catch up.

I am usually not home when he gets home. My rule is off the bus, snack, and get onto your homework. Unless there is something else going on. Like we have somewhere to go or someone else in the family is taking him somewhere. Most of the time he can handle his homework. If he can't he got help from me and from his older sister. The rules are basically the same. It is just that I am not at home to enforce them like I was in elementary. I feel like children are growing and I shouldn't have to sit right there. But I will help them. But he should start on it and not wait until I get home to say that he can't do it.

The predominant responses to the question, "What do you think is most important in helping your son do well in school?" indicated that parents felt that their behavior was key to their sons' achievement. In contrast, parents of low achieving students were more likely to suggest that their sons' own behavior was key to their academic performance. Parents of high and average achieving students made statements such as: "To praise him", and "Stay on him. Always stay on him. Check and see if he's doing his homework. If not I can call up to the school and ask the teachers". Another parent described how she instilled values:

I think discipline because you have to have some type of relationship with your child so they know what to expect from you and you know what to expect from them and they know that you are expecting a certain something from them and you are not going to take anything else... and that is a form of discipline.

In discussing what is most important in helping their son do well in school, parents of low achieving students, however, made statements such as: "Study more. Stay away from the peer pressure. I guess that's about it. Concentrate on homework," and "To have him understand his potential. That he can't worry about peer pressure."

In response to the questions about what parents tell their sons about the importance of education, most parents revealed that they stressed the role of education in helping

their sons to "be somebody". Some parents also stressed the importance of education to getting a job and future security. Responses illustrative of these themes are:

Had a discussion the other day. He said something to the fact that, 'I made the honor roll for you'. And I said, 'Baby, you could never make that honor roll for me. It will not benefit me in my lifetime. It may make me feel good. You have no idea how I feel. You could never imagine, but doing it for me? It is not like that. Anything you are doing and you are doing well, you are doing it for you. That's why you should always strive to do your very best. When you do your best, nobody can expect anything more from you and you never forget that. Even when others don't know, I know when you are doing your best.

Well you know I told him that he needs an education to get a good job, get out of school and in order to get a good job he got to get a good education.

When asked, "What do you and your family do to encourage your son's school achievement?", most parents said that they provided emotional support through listening, talking, and praying. Parents also indicated that they provided material things such as art supplies, an appropriate environment, instruction in values, and instruction in specific skills such as reading.

Representative responses were:

I've always given good compliments. I always tell him that he does real good and to really study in his habits of study. I always try to make him feel good about himself because Ron is sometimes real shy and sometimes he feels like he can't do it, so I have to really push him to give him that potential that he can do anything that he wants.

Listen to him. Talk to him. We pray a lot. My niece, she talks to him a lot. She's in the 12th grade. She talks to him a lot about school and lets him know what he needs to get into to get all of his credits. Because this year in the 8th grade he is going to take up algebra. That will be like a half a credit when he gets over there.

Tell him to keep mouth, hands to himself. Stay away from peer pressure. Don't go looking for trouble. If there is a problem take it to one of the school officials and if they can't handle it, we'll take it from there.

Just like with his art. He likes art so I buy different art supplies. So he can keep it up and have a good self image of himself. They called me from Massachusetts to enter him into an art class. But I didn't have the money. But he won the award. He is good in that. He is tops. So I try to keep him up. You have to pay interest. As long as you do your best I am behind you one hundred percent.

In terms of what parents thought schools could do to help their sons, most parents suggested more positive teacher behavior. For example parents said, "Show they care. Have expectations" and "Try to get him to read. Something like Chapter One...He don't think he is comprehending what he is reading". Other parents explained in detail what they thought was needed:

What I would like for them to do is instead of complaining all the time about the weapons and all that, give them some good potential about themselves, and maybe their studies will be more strong because a lot of kids don't have no good potential about themselves. The teachers are complaining about the kids bringing weapons and disturbing they class, they don't give the kids any potential. A lot of them feel afraid. The students feel afraid. Jeffrey sometimes feels negative about that. I have to really push him

and give him that good encouragement because everywhere you go you might have some fear, so I just try to make sure that he stay strong.

Teachers can try to have a better line of communication with students. For example, he doesn't understand why he got an E on his report card the last term.

I suggest that some teachers, I know they got a lot of students in school, but like last year, I had to write a note to ask the teacher to explain something to him. She didn't want to take time. I don't think that I ought to have to write a note, especially for a student who wanted to learn.

It is interesting to note that when asked what schools could do to help their sons in school, two parents , both parents of low achievers, said there was nothing the schools could do. One of these parents said, "They know that he is functioning below potential. Change has to come from home." The other parent responded, "Nothing. They've done everything--set appointments, they call me." This suggests that these parents have given up hope that schools can be effective with their sons. This attitude corresponds to the earlier responses by parents of low achievers that their sons' behavior, rather than the school or parental influence, is key to academic success.

One Student's Story

Wesley, a high achiever, was especially typical of the students in his group. This student had just moved into a small apartment in a high-crime and drug-infested area with his mother and two brothers. During the school year, he

lived with his grandmother in one of the housing projects. The first attempts to contact this family for an interview were unsuccessful because the grandmother's address did not have a telephone and she was not at home at the time of the first two visits.

After understanding the reason that the investigator was trying to reach the child's mother, the grandmother revealed that they had moved. She provided the address where they could be reached and suggested a time when the family would be at home.

The first visit to the new address was successful as the whole family was at home. The mother agreed to participate in the interview and a time and date were set. Upon my arrival at the home for the interview, the mother began explaining how happy she was to participate in the study. She introduced all three sons and asked them to tell their ages and grade levels.

Wesley did not speak very much throughout the visit. He was particularly quiet. Most of his responses were short, although he did expand with probing. He described his worst elementary school memory as failing the first grade. He said he that while he liked the fact that his school was far away from home, he did not like his school because the people, students and teachers, were bad and mean. Wesley felt that he was doing well in school because

he paid attention and said that he tried hard because knew he would get in trouble at home for making bad grades.

Wesley named his mother and grandmother as the most important people who encouraged him with his schoolwork and said that they were helpful by telling him what he could do and be. He related doing well in school to feeling good about himself. With respect to the relation of race in his educational and future life endeavors, Wesley shied away from pinpointing anything his family had told him about getting an education and black males.

In contrast, his mother talked at length about the things she tells Wesley about the importance of education and the difficulties black males face. She expressed an understanding of the job ceiling and said that she was trying to prepare Wesley for disappointments he may face in life due to his race.

She was very proud of him. She complimented Wesley throughout the interview. She explained that he failed the first grade because he did not do all of his work. She helped him by giving him responsibilities at home. Primarily, he was responsible for getting his younger brothers from school everyday.

Wesley's mother also discussed her faith in God. She described the kinds of support she and her family got from church as critical to her perspective about her children.

A Special Case

One of the students in the low achievement group was a student who has been afflicted with Tourette's Syndrome which usually begins during childhood, causing vocal and facial tics, progressing to generalized jerking movements and often accompanied by other symptoms. In this case, the student's condition was in remission and he had not had any problems related to Tourette's Syndrome since earlier in elementary school.

Robert's interview took more than twice as long as the average interview. He was a very thoughtful and deliberate in his responses to the questions. Robert acknowledged that he knew how to do most of his work. He said that his problems in school related more to poor teacher understanding of his needs and teachers' lack of patience. It became evident as the interview progressed that Robert was very intelligent but that because it takes him longer than average to respond, teachers and students avoid interactions with him. In fact, he described one school year when he often raised his hand but never got called on the respond. His subsequent reaction was to withdraw.

He enjoyed reading when he was reading something interesting and when he was free from distractions. He stressed that he liked schoolwork that was interesting and that unless he found it interesting, schoolwork could not hold his attention. Unlike most students who were

interviewed who lived in apartments, duplexes, and housing projects, Robert lived in a single family home with his mother and father, both of whom he named as his biggest supporters.

His mother's support became clear when she explained that she was going to quit her job to help Robert with his schoolwork for the eighth grade. She acknowledged that it would be a hardship on the family but that her husband was working and they would make the necessary adjustments for Robert's sake. She expressed real disappointment in Robert's performance in seventh grade. Although she provided him with a tutor on weekends, she felt that the schools could not do anything else to help Robert succeed in school. She felt that Robert's difficulty in school last year was due to peer pressure, not Robert's ability to do the work.

CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to identify predictors of academic success for African American males in the middle school years. The study contrasted academically successful low-income African American students with less successful students from similar backgrounds to isolate the within group factors that contribute to school success.

The two theoretical perspectives which provided the conceptual framework for the study were Erikson's (1968) psychosocial theory and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological perspective. The review of the literature suggested that the transactions between the students and their ecosystems should be considered in identifying protective factors most closely associated with academic invulnerability, resilience, and success.

Given the challenges many young African American males face at each level of their ecosystems, examination of alterable and unalterable factors that contribute to school success appeared warranted. Further, during this critical developmental period when adolescents experience numerous physical, cognitive, social and other changes in the context of less than optimal microsystems with stressed and weak mesosystems, a better understanding of the role racial

socialization plays in students' academic success of these students was needed.

It was hypothesized that alterable factors such as higher academic self-concept, more positive attitudes toward school, more positive perceptions of family support, and more positive perceptions of school support would discriminate academically successful African American male middle school students from their less successful peers. It was also hypothesized these alterable factors would discriminate academically successful African American male middle school students from their less successful peers better than unalterable factors such as birth order, number of siblings, spacing between siblings, and family composition (father presence/absence). Further, it was hypothesized that higher racial socialization by family members making students aware of racial barriers and interracial protocol would discriminate academically successful African American male middle students from their less successful peers.

On the whole, the results from this study indicate that the alterable factors did discriminate passing from failing students and did so at a higher rate than unalterable factors. The test of the third hypothesis was less conclusive as limited evidence was found of racial socialization of either the passing and failing groups.

Summary of Results

Hypothesis I

Students' responses to three measures, the Scholastic Competence subscale of the Harter Self-Perceived Competence Scale, the Attitude Toward School subscale, and the Perception of School Support subscale served as the three independent variables in the first series of discriminant function analyses. This combination of variables successfully discriminated passing from failing students. This suggests that there were differences in the pattern of responses by students in the two achievement groups. Specifically, as hypothesized, passing students were more likely to have higher self-perceived scholastic competence, more positive attitudes toward school, and more positive perceptions of school support. While this combination of variables discriminated, it did so at a moderate rate (19% above chance).

The Attitude Toward School subscale was the most powerful discriminator. This was not surprising given that students who are more successful in school would be expected to have more positive attitudes towards school and school activities as result of positive reinforcement through grades, if nothing else.

It might also be expected that students in the passing group would have significantly higher self-perceived scholastic competence. However, this variable contributed

to the prediction only moderately. Methodological concerns may account in part for the limited utility of the Harter scale to measure this construct. First, this subscale was composed of only six items. In addition, this instrument was slightly more difficult and time-consuming to answer, and some students may not have devoted adequate attention to their responses.

An additional concern about the Harter scale is the possibility that some students answered these questions in terms of what they believed to be school standards, rather than their own. For example, students were asked whether or not they were pretty slow or quick in finishing their schoolwork. Some students may think that they finish their work in a timely fashion given the level of difficulty of the work, however in school, they may be penalized for not completing work before the bell rings. Given this scenario, some students may have answered this particular question in terms of school standards although they thought by their standards that they finished their work in plenty of time. This represents a problem if students' personal standards do not match their schools' standards.

The scale measuring students' perceptions of support for school work and activities was also expected to be a significant predictor of achievement group. This variable, however, only approached significance. Once again, this may be a reflection of different approaches to the questions

asked. For example, one question asked students about the frequency of their parents' attendance to school meetings and conferences. Students may know that their parents are deeply concerned and supportive of their academic progress through interactions at home, as indicated by the student interviews in which almost all students identified parents and other family members as the persons most helpful and supportive of school work and activities. However, students may also know that because of their parents' jobs and/or lack of transportation, they are unable to attend meetings and conferences at school even when they want to. Thus, students in this sample may have indices of school support from family members other than those included on this instrument. Therefore, it is possible that the items on this scale may not have had the same relevance for this population of inner-city families who may have different resources and access than families in rural Iowa where this scale originated. Despite these issues, however, together these three variables did discriminate between passing and failing students, therefore, the first hypothesis was supported.

Hypothesis II

Unalterable factors were examined for the second hypothesis. Birth order, number of years between student and next youngest sibling, number of siblings, and family structure (father presence/absence) served as the

discriminating variables. As predicted, these variables did not discriminate passing from failing students as well as the alterable factors. One explanation for the low classification rate is that there was very little variability of family structure variables across the two groups. Another reason is that the alterable factors, all of which are based on experience in the two most significant microsystems, the home and the school, were more salient factors to the students.

Specifically, the alterable factors are developed by the interactions of each child and school environment in a way that is not predicted by demographic factors. The unalterable, family structure variables that are assumed to be contributors to academic achievement probably do contribute in a holistic way but when these unalterable structural variables are similar, as in the case of this sample, then other factors account for achievement differences. One factor that may account for achievement differences among students with similar backgrounds is racial socialization.

Hypothesis III

Although the literature suggests that racial socialization is positively associated with higher academic performance (Bowman & Howard, 1985), findings in this study did not clearly support the hypothesis. First, through content analysis of an open-ended question posed to all 80

students about differences that may exist in school for black students as opposed to white students, only a fraction of the students wrote that they were aware of any differences. Overwhelmingly, most students wrote that there were no such differences.

In the follow-up questions posed to a subset of students and their parents in the interviews, a similar response pattern was noted. Most students said that being black had nothing to do with how well they were doing in school. This was supported by parents, most of whom said that they did not discuss racial issues with their sons. Even in cases where parents said they discussed racial concerns, most often, they said that they told their sons that everybody was equal. This was the response even when parents acknowledged the existence of racial discrimination in our society. Only three parents indicated that they provided racial socialization as defined by Peters (1985) and Bowman and Howard (1985). These parents were parents of high achievers.

It is likely that the low rate of responses by the 80 students to the open-ended questions may have been due to social desirability. Most of these students completed the surveys in school and although they were briefed on the confidential nature of the research, they may have been

unwilling to disclose feelings about racial issues to someone who appeared to be so closely associated with the school personnel.

Similarly, there may be explanations for student responses to questions during the interviews. In some cases, the parents were within listening distance during the student interviews and even if students had feelings that they could express about race and education, they may have been unwilling to do so, for fear of reprisal from parents. Parents, though made aware of the confidentiality of their responses, may have also had more thoughts on these issues than they were willing to share with a stranger who they perceived to be associated with the school. It appeared that some parents wanted to convince the interviewer that they were good parents and they may have thought that they were expected to teach their children equality even though they did not believe it existed. There may also have been an effort on the part of some parents to be noncommittal in their responses. Such appeared to be the case with parents who readily acknowledged the existence of racial discrimination, but who quickly made references to the Bible suggesting that all people are equal. Another way to obtain more data on students' and parents' feelings about racial issues may be to initiate the study through a neighborhood group or community agency rather than through the school system. This type of approach may be less threatening to

the students and their parents and they may then be more willing to disclose their feelings about race-related issues.

Finally, it may also be the case that some parents, given that almost all of the families were living at or below the poverty line, really do not see the macrosystem effects on their daily lives and those of their children. Concerns about basic needs, shelter, and transportation may override some parents' abilities to consider why some things happen and how they fit into the larger picture. Thus, these parents may feel that there is something going on that impacts their individual efforts and those of their sons, however, they are not able to articulate or identify what it is.

Students need to be aware of racial differences that they may encounter so that they will be prepared to handle it and place it in a macrosystem, rather than personal, perspective. This might permit students to use appropriate strategies for dealing with discrimination where it exists without using undue emotional energy that may limit the attention given to their academic studies. Parents need to understand that the reframing (giving new meaning) or denying (refusing that it exists) of discrimination and racism does not make it go away. These ways of addressing racism may actually lead to children believing they are less than others because of race. Specifically, in cases where

parents encourage their sons to adopt an equality approach to buffer themselves from racial discrimination, parents should be aware that their sons may not employ this strategy effectively.

A final point on the issue of racial socialization is a developmental question. When should children be told about racial issues? Although racial socialization is an ongoing process, some of the parents in this study may be waiting for an appropriate time to discuss this with their sons. However, the sons of these parents may find themselves less prepared to deal with the reality of these issues as they face them in middle school.

Implications

The findings of this study suggest that alterable factors such as perception of scholastic competence, attitude toward school, and perception of support do influence academic success for African American middle school males. Interventions targeted toward students' scholastic competence (how they feel about themselves as students), students' attitude toward school (how they feel about school and school activities), and students' perception of support for school-related activities can begin at the school level. Principals, teachers and other school staff can show that they care about students' progress by providing more positive school climates,

meaningful academic activities, and academic challenges that allow for all students to experience success.

The parents interviewed in this study reported that they were interested and supportive of their sons' school progress and of the schools' efforts to provide the best educational experiences possible. However, they were not always in position to attend the meetings and events at the school. School personnel must understand that the absence of parents at such meetings does not constitute absence of parental concern or involvement in their children's school-related activities. It simply indicates absence of parental participation in scheduled events.

Schools are in a unique position to work alone and in coordination with other agencies to provide parents such as those in this sample with strategies and opportunities to help their children to achieve in school. All parents in this study indicated that they wanted their children to succeed in school because they valued education. In some cases, however, parents were not sure what they can do to help their children. Special workshops and events that are conveniently scheduled and brought to the communities of the families can be arranged to suggest to parents ways they can help their children. These workshops can be designed to also inform parents of special classes being offered at the school, issues they should consider regarding the classes their students take, preparations they should make for

standardized testing days, etc. Parent support groups that are neighborhood-based that have a school liaison may also be established to provide parents with a forum to discuss their concerns about their children's education in a nonthreatening environment. This is an alternative to the traditional parent-teacher meetings that do not always provide such opportunities for discussion of individual concerns. Regular Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings can be held on a staggered schedule and at neighborhood based centers to further widen the door for parental participation. These suggestions of high expectations, significant support structures for students, opportunities for success, and encouragement for parental involvement are characteristic of model schools described by Lewis (1990) and the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1988) and basic elements of school-based attempts to address the needs of students such as those in this study.

It is critical, however, that before any intervention effort is implemented with the parents, that some measure of the extent to which parents feel there is a need for such an intervention should be assessed. When parents indicate their general support for the schools as they did in this study, they may not know how to identify *specific* needs they have for help. A part of the intervention would have to be working with parents to determine culturally appropriate

interventions since parents will not attend and will not benefit from intervention efforts that are mistargeted (Comer, 1986). School officials may be able to identify several areas of need for intervention with parents but unless the parents share that need and relate its importance to their efforts to helping their children, the intervention will not be effective.

Finally, school officials may want to explore the findings of emerging research on schools and classes designed primarily for black males. This is especially true for school districts such as the one in this study where the average grade point achieved for African American males was well below 2.0. Schools in Milwaukee, Detroit, Baltimore and other cities have implemented educational programs that place black male students in classes taught by black male teachers. The major goal of these programs is to provide positive male role models in the daily school life of inner-city black boys in response to failing job of the general educational system to educate black male students. While test scores and attendance have risen significantly according to preliminary reports (Gibbs, 1991), further study is needed to determine the effectiveness of this type of intervention. School officials, however, may initially want to consider some attempts to provide their black male students with positive role models in their school routines.

Recommendations

It is recommended that additional study be conducted on the issues investigated in this research from a non-school based approach. Further, future research extend the investigation of students whose grades fluctuate. An in-depth study of factors related to changes in students' grades and/or performance across grading periods may be informative. Finally, it is recommended that more research be conducted on black boys' awareness of and ability to cope with racial identity in school and society from the point of view of how parents and teachers can be helpful.

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Appendix A
GENERAL INFORMATION FORM

General Information Form

Please answer the following questions about you and your family.

1. Who lives with you at home?
2. Does your father live with you at home? Yes No
3. Does your mother live with you at home? Yes No
4. How many brothers live with you at home? _____
5. How many sisters live with you at home? _____
6. How many nephews live with you at home? _____
7. How many nieces live with you at home? _____
8. How many aunts live with you at home? _____
9. How many uncle live with you at home? _____
10. How many cousins live with you at home? _____
11. How many grandfathers live with you at home? _____
12. How many grandmothers live with you at home? _____
13. Are there any other people who live with you at home?
If yes, who else lives with you at home?

14. Are you the oldest child in your family? Yes No
15. Are you the youngest child in your family? Yes No
16. How old are you? _____
17. If you have younger brothers or sisters, how old are they? _____, _____, _____, _____, _____, _____, _____, _____

Appendix B
SCHOOL ATTITUDE AND SUPPORT SCALE

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Appendix C
HARTER SELF-PERCEIVED COMPETENCE SCALE
FOR CHILDREN

Appendix D
OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Please answer the following questions.

1. Since you have now been in middle school for at least two years, you know some things that are important for doing well in middle school. What advice would you give to the students who will be in the sixth grade next year about how to do well in school? What would you tell them they need to do and know in order to do well in middle school?

2. What difference does being a boy or girl make in how well you do in school?

3. What difference does being a certain race, black, white, or other, make in how well you do in school?

Appendix E

PHASE I CONSENT FORM

Dear Parent:

This is an invitation for your child to participate in a research project I am conducting as part of my graduate work at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. The purpose of this study is to get information about students' feelings about school. Your child's participation will help in understanding what we can do to improve educational experiences for students in middle schools. Your child's principal has agreed to help.

Students who participate will be asked to complete a survey about school. I will be at the school to pass out and collect your child's responses and to answer any questions students may have about the survey. Thirty minutes of homeroom time will be set aside for your child to complete the survey. Your child's name will not be on the survey and your child will be given the opportunity to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time with no penalty. All of your child's responses will be kept confidential and will not be seen by any teachers or principals. After the project is completed, the surveys will be destroyed.

I encourage you to consider including your child in this opportunity, however, your decision to allow your child to participate is completely voluntary. Your child will not be penalized in any way if you decide to withdraw your child from the study or if you refuse to let your child take part. This activity will not affect your child's grades in school. If you choose to allow your child to participate, you may be contacted to be interviewed. Ten families will be interviewed.

This project has been designed in accordance with regulations enforced by the University Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions, you may call the Office of Research Services, University of North Carolina at Greensboro at (919) 334-5878. Here in Norfolk, you may also call me, your child's principal or the Office of Research, Testing, and Statistics at 441-2319 if you have any questions about the project.

Please complete the attached permission slip and return it to your child's homeroom teacher. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,
Janeen P. Witty

PERMISSION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH PROJECT

Student's Name _____

I give permission for my child to participate in the research project about feelings about school. I understand that my child will complete a survey at school and that no names will appear on the survey. I also have been informed of the purpose of this study and I understand that it has been approved by the school system and the university.

I have read the letter sent by Janeen Witty that gives me the information I need to have my questions answered. I reserve the right to refuse or withdraw my child from the study at any time.

Parent's Signature _____

Date _____

Please write your address below if you would like to receive the findings of the study when it is completed.

I do not give permission for my child to participate in the research project about feelings about school. I understand that my child will not be penalized for my decision.

Child's Name _____

Parent's
Signature _____

Date _____

*****RETURN TO HOMEROOM TEACHER*****

Appendix F
STUDENT INTERVIEW GUIDE

Student Interview Guide

1. Tell me about your experiences in elementary school.
--What is your favorite memory?
--What is your worst memory?
 2. Tell me about the school you attend now.
--What do you like about it?
--What do you dislike about it?
 3. What are some things you do well in school?
--Why do you think you ____ so well?
What are some things you don't do so well?
--Why do you think you don't ___ so well?
 4. Do you like reading?
How do you feel about yourself as a reader?
Why?
 5. Tell me about your best subject.
Why is ___your best subject?
If you worked very hard studying for a test in your best subject, how do you think you would do?
 6. What do you think you will remember most about this school year?
 7. What would you like for your teachers next year to know about you?
What could they do to make school better for you?
 8. How would you describe yourself as a student--pretty good, OK, not so good? Why?
-

9. Can you think of something that happened that made you decide to do your best in school?
10. Can you think of something that happened that made you not want to do your best in school?
11. Has there been anyone who has been extremely helpful to you and encouraged you while you have been involved in studying or other school activities?
12. Has there been anyone who has made you not want to do well in school?
13. What do you think about boys who do well in school?
14. What do you think about boys who don't do so well in school?
15. Tell me about your friends. Do they do pretty well in school? How do they feel about boys who study and get good grades?
16. What do you think it takes to make good grades in school?
17. How does making good grades help students?
18. To what extent does being a black boy have anything to do with how well you do in school?

Appendix G
PARENT INTERVIEW GUIDE

Parent Interview Guide

1. Tell me about your feelings about _____'s progress in school.

Are you pleased or displeased? Why?

2. Tell me about your interactions with his elementary school teachers. Did you meet with them often? Did they call you or inform you on a regular basis? Did you trust their judgment about your son's performance? Did you have a good feeling about meeting with them?

3. Tell me about your interactions with your son's middle school teachers and counselors.

How is your relationship with his middle school different from your relationship with his elementary school.

4. Tell me about how you help your son with his schoolwork.

5. What do you think is most important in helping your son do well in school?

6. What have you told him about the importance of getting an education?

What issues related to race and school have you discussed with him?

To what extent have you discussed with him differences in treatment that may exist in and out of school for black boys and men?

7. What do you and your family do to encourage your son's school achievement?
8. What do you think has been the most important influence on how well he is doing in school now?
9. What do you think schools could do to help your son do well in school next year?
10. What would you want the teachers and counselors to know about your son next year?

Appendix H
ORAL PRESENTATION TO PARENTS

Oral Presentation to Parents

(Greetings.)

I am calling/visiting to thank you for allowing your child, _____, to participate in the recent survey project about feelings about school. I am certain that with the help of your child and other students, we can develop a better understanding about concerns they have a middle school students.

I am also calling to ask you if you would like to participate in the second phase of this project. I will be talking with several parents and their children during the next few weeks. I would like to visit you at your home to talk with you and ____ for about an hour about your feelings and concerns about the education of black males. All of my discussions will be kept confidential and the school will not know if you are interviewed.

As with giving your permission for _____ to complete the survey, you are under no pressure to continue. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Appendix I
PHASE II CONSENT FORM

Consent to Participate in Interview

I agree for my child and I to be interviewed by Janeen Witty for the purpose of discussing our feelings about black students and their education. I understand that our participation in this interview will not have any impact on my son's grades in school. Our answers will be used to help educators design projects that will help more children do well in school. I understand that our responses will be kept confidential and that I can stop the interview at any time without penalty and that there is no risk to me or my child. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about this project and know that this interview will last approximately one hour.

Parent's Signature _____

Child's Name _____

I give permission for this interview to be audiotaped ____.

I do not give permission for this interview to be audiotaped ____.