TRUESDALE, ALTHEA SAMPLE, Ph.D. An Examination of Achievement Motivation among Middle Grade African American Males. (2007)
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The purpose of the study was to examine factors influencing achievement motivation among nine seventh grade African American male students attending middle schools in the Southeastern region of the United States. The focal question of the study was how peer influence, perceptions of educational experiences, feelings of alienation (cultural discontinuity), cultural context of learning; and elements of Black masculinity influenced achievement motivation among African American seventh grade males. The relationships between these factors were also explored.

An instrumental case study methodology was used to collect data. Data were derived from individual interviews with students, interviews with parent(s)/caregiver(s), focus group interviews, observations in the schools and communities as well as field notes taken in the researcher's journal. A content level of analysis was conducted.

The results of the study indicated that achievement motivation was demonstrated in the lives of the participants through three contexts of learning. Within the personal context, participants described their self-concept as learner, self-efficacy as learner, and perceptions of Black masculinity. In the sociocultural context, family structure and influence as well as the significance of peer relationships were cited. For the academic context of learning, pedagogical influences and learner self-regulation were noted. Through these contexts, an individual type and a collectivist type of achievement motivation emerged. Implications for classroom practice and research are recommended.

AN EXAMINATION OF ACHIEVEMENT MOTIVATION AMONG

MIDDLE GRADE AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES

by

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This dissertation is dedicated with loving appreciation to my family: my husband, Gerald, my son, Gerard, and my daughter, Jessica. The inspiration from this dissertation comes from my mother, Mrs. Florence B. Sample, and the memory of my father, Mr. Robert Sample, Sr. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my brother, Bobby and all of my extended family members who sustained me throughout this process. I have special friends who encouraged me with their wisdom and steadfast support over the past few years. Finally, I would like to thank my dissertation chair and committee members: Dr. Ceola Ross Baber, Dr. Johnnetta B. Cole, and Dr. Steven R. Cureton for their continued guidance in helping me realize this dream.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Gunnar Myrdal's (1964) landmark work, *An American Dilemma* revealed a major

contradiction between democracy and racism in American society—a contradiction that

persists today. On one hand, America ostensibly represents boundless opportunities and

democratic ideals for its citizens. Yet, on the other hand, America continues to promote

and sustain racial inequality (Grant, 1997; Hale, 2001). African American males have

always presented a challenge to American democracy. In particular, future opportunities

for our African American males have invariably been at the center of America's race

question (Atkinson & O'Connor, 1996). One of the most tragic results of American

racism, however, is its relentless impact on adolescents. Bankston and Caldas (1997)

assert that the opportunity for African American youth to obtain a quality education, the

ability to secure gainful employment that pays a livable wage, and the desire to live in

safe communities are all marked by a racial hierarchy where Whiteness is valued and

Blackness is degraded.

Hale (2001) maintained that the miseducation of African Americans can be

viewed as a form of educational malpractice. In many instances, African American

students face educators' low expectations and indifferences daily. They are more at-risk

for: (a) not being able to read at grade level; (b) being absent from school due to in-

school and out-of-school suspension; (c) being placed in special education; (d) and

becoming drop-outs (Bronkhurst, 2001). Consequently, African American males are the most at-risk for not receiving a quality education that will afford future life opportunities.

Educational researchers have consistently found unequal levels of achievement between African American and Caucasian students (Bankston & Caldas, 1997; Graybill, 1997). Academicians and educational specialists such as Hurd (2001) referred to the problem faced by African American students, as the "achievement gap." Hurd (2001) further pointed out that in North Carolina's school system less than sixty percent of African American high school students graduate in fourteen years. As Joseph (2000) noted, if Caucasian students were dropping out at the same rates as African American students, we would declare a state of emergency. It is time to proclaim a state of emergency and require educators, administrators and elected officials to consider issues related to achievement motivation among African American male students (Tyson, 2002).

Disparity in achievement among middle grade African American males in America's public schools continues to rise. By the time African American males reach the sixth grade, they are two years behind their Caucasian peers in reading, writing and mathematics (Graybill, 1997; Joseph, 2000). According to Graybill (1997), achievement motivation is the heart of the learning process. Achievement motivation is a pivotal concept in most theories of learning. It is closely related to: (a) arousal; (b) attention; (c) anxiety; and (d) feedback/reinforcement (Graybill, 1997; Joseph, 2000). A wide variety of variables that are believed to influence achievement motivation in African American students have been investigated in great detail. These factors include: (a) peer influence; (b) perceptions of educational experiences; (c) feelings of alienation (cultural

discontinuity), (d) cultural context of learning; and (e) elements of Black masculinity (Bankston & Caldas, 1997; Bennett, 1999; Gay, 2000; Grant, 1997; Graybill, 1997; Hale, 2001; Irvine & Armento, 2001; Johnson, 2000; Nieto, 1999).

An important issue related to my study is what constitutes a positive educational experience for middle grade African American males in terms of how the learning environment is related to achievement motivation, and the ways in which the current middle school system seems to be failing these students. In order for teachers and other professionals to understand this issue, they need to become familiar with the factors related to achievement motivation. Therefore, the purpose of my study was to examine sociocultural factors affecting achievement motivation for adolescent African American males.

The impetus for my beginning this research journey was the middle school experiences of my own son. Although my son Gerard was a highly motivated and engaged student while attending elementary school, by the time he reached middle school and especially seventh grade his interest in school declined sharply. Gerard's grades were not reflective of his capabilities and he seemed to have lost his motivation to learn. I was completely perplexed and could not understand why this was happening. After discussing this issue with other African American and Caucasian male students about the same age as Gerard, I began to realize that African American males described their motivation toward school in different ways and appeared to experience the learning environment differently.

Conceptual Framework

Two theories undergird this study: attribution theory and motivation theory. Attribution theory posits that students' perceptions of their educational experiences will generally influence their achievement motivation more than the actual objective of those experiences (Weiner, 1985). For example, a history of success in a given subject area is generally assumed to lead one to continue persisting in that area. When students have a history of failure in school, it is particularly difficult for them to sustain the motivation to continue trying.

Weiner (1985), however, pointed out that students' beliefs about the reasons for their success will determine whether this assumption is true; students' attributions for failure are also important influences on motivation. According to Anderman and Maehr (1994), attribution theory has particular relevance for young African American adolescent students.

Students who believe that their poor performance is caused by factors out of their control are unlikely to see any reason to hope for improvement. In contrast, if students attribute their poor performance to a lack of important skills or to poor study habits, they are more likely to persevere in the future (Weiner, 1985). The implications for teachers revolve around the importance of understanding what students believe about the reasons for their academic performance.

Weiner (1986) connected attribution theory to achievement motivation. He described the theory as a sequential process initiated by the outcome of a certain event. The process involves several steps. The first step commences with the realization of the

outcome. The second step is determining if the outcome is negative or positive. Specific information about the outcome is gathered during this third step. The search for a cause of the negative or positive effect represents the fourth step of the sequential process and involves pointing out effort, strategy, or luck as explaining achievement motivation.

It is also important to note that achievement motivation in the view of McClelland (1985) is comprised of numerous factors. He has identified several common characteristics among achieving individuals, including the ability to set obtainable goals, concern for personal achievement over external rewards for success, and the desire for performance related feedback rather than attitudinal feedback. McClelland (1985) found that achievement-motivated students consistently think about ways in which they can progress. This, in turn, increases achievement. McClelland (1985) further posited that the motive or need for achievement can be learned. It is possible that African American male students have tempered their academic achievement motivation with the achievement need associated with peer influence—that is, of wanting respect (belonging, etc.) from friends (peer group). Perhaps this is the attribute most influencing overall achievement motivation among male African American middle school students.

Keller (1995) presented four major types of strategies that can be used to increase achievement motivation in African American students: (a) attention; (b) relevance; (c) confidence; and (d) satisfaction. Attention strategy engaged perceptual arousal, where the teacher gained and maintained students' attention by using novel, surprising or uncertain events in instruction. Relevance strategy incorporated familiarity as a key component by using concrete language examples and concepts that related to the students' experiences,

helping them to integrate new information. Confidence strategy incorporated an

expectation for success, ensuring students are aware of performance requirements and

evaluative criteria while providing a challenging environment for each student.

Satisfaction strategy allowed students to apply newly acquired knowledge in a real or

simulated setting. It also required feedback and reinforcement to sustain desired

behaviors, and practices equity by maintaining consistent standards and consequences for

all students.

My study examined a number of attributional factors influencing achievement

motivation that are identified in the literature. These include: (a) peer influence; (b)

perceptions of educational experiences; (c) feelings of alienation (cultural discontinuity);

(d) cultural context of learning; and (e) elements of Black masculinity.

Peer influence is considered to be one of the more important attributional

variables influencing achievement motivation (Bankston & Caldas, 1997; Graybill,

1997). As children grow, develop and move into early adolescence, involvement with

one's peers and the attraction of peer identification increases (Johnson, 2000). When

identification increases and adolescents become members of groups, peer influences thus

become an attributional variable that can influence both achievement and the motivation

to achieve academically, especially among male African American students.

Perceptions of educational experiences represent another attributional factor

influencing achievement motivation. If students do not relate to the educational

experiences or perceive them to pertain to others and not themselves, they will be less

motivated to achieve. According to Curtis (1998), educational experiences can relate to

African American as well as Caucasian students by creating a culturally responsive curriculum – that is, by making race matter. Other researchers have agreed; both the curriculum and the teaching need to be culturally responsive in order to improve achievement motivation among minority group students, especially African Americans (Gay, 2000; Grant, 1997; Hale, 2001).

As noted by Graybill (1997), teachers' contributions to cultural discontinuity can also serve as an attributional variable influencing students' feelings of alienation and thus their achievement motivation. Graybill has explained that:

> Cultural discontinuity occurs when the White middle-class teacher, frequently female, views Black male behavior as disruptive, talking back or acting out . . . Black males who find themselves in a clash with a White female teacher may be misunderstood because the teacher does not understand African American males. (1997, p. 314)

African-American students are often in conflict with their teachers as a result of cultural discontinuity, as described by Graybill. In other words, the students' language, behavior, and learning style are primarily Afro-centric, while the majority of administrators, teachers and curricula are Euro-centric in their cultural outlook. According to Whaley and Smyer (1998), cultural discontinuity in the context of feelings of alienation causes African American adolescents to drop out of school. The researchers provided support for their viewpoint from a study that measured alienation. Middle school students' scores on the Adolescent Alienation Index were negatively correlated with grade point average and level of social involvement in school activities for all students (Whaley & Smyer, 1998). However, scores were positively correlated with measures of behavioral maladjustment

for African American students only (Whaley & Smyer, 1998). In this particular study, African American students often misbehaved if they had low grade point averages and believed that they could not relate, or benefit from activities in the classroom that were performed by other students.

Cultural discontinuity can also be described as the cultural context of learning. Graybill (1997) maintained that all school curricula should contain references to the various cultures represented in the classroom. Irvine and Armento (2001) have suggested that lesson plans for middle grade students should reflect culturally responsive teaching. Clearly, when an individual's learning experiences relate to her or his own culture, there is more interest in learning and thus knowledge has more meaning. This translates into improved achievement, especially among African American male students.

The final factor of the study, elements of Black masculinity, is another attribute of concern related to achievement motivation. "Acting tough" is an important part of Black masculinity, especially among adolescents and that, in turn, means defying authority.

Anderson (2000) contended that African American masculinity is revealed when one commands respect from his peers through vengeance and violence. Moreover, according to Anderson, it is not really possible to determine whether a person is "decent" or "street" by their lifestyle. The elements of Black masculinity are revealed as Anderson interviewed the inhabitants of North Philadelphia in his book entitled, *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence and the Moral Life of the Inner City.*

Conflict with Whitestream America is the focus of Nathan McCall's (1995) autobiography entitled, *Makes Me Wanna Holler: A Young Black Man In America.*

McCall focused upon Black masculinity in an effort to critique the political and economic dimensions of the White power structure. McCall (1995) further maintained that African American men express their masculinity differently than White men.

West (1993) entwined one of America's most explosive issues and dilemmas: Black masculinity in ways in which the legacy of White supremacy contributes to the arrested development of America's democracy. The environmental conditions that serve as the context for masculine development begins by distinguishing two opposing analytical camps. The "liberal structuralists" call for full employment, health, education and child-care programs, and affirmative action practices. On the other side are the "conservative behaviorists" who promote self-help programs, African American business expansion, and non-preferential employment practices. See Figure 1 for an illustration of the relationship between the major variables in this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) was to examine personal, sociocultural, and academic factors influencing achievement motivation among African American male seventh grade students who are currently attending Golden County middle schools in the Southeastern region of the United States.

Research Questions

The focal question of this study was how does peer influence, perceptions of educational experiences, feelings of alienation (cultural discontinuity), cultural context of learning, and elements of Black masculinity influence achievement motivation among

Figure 1. *Conceptual Framework*
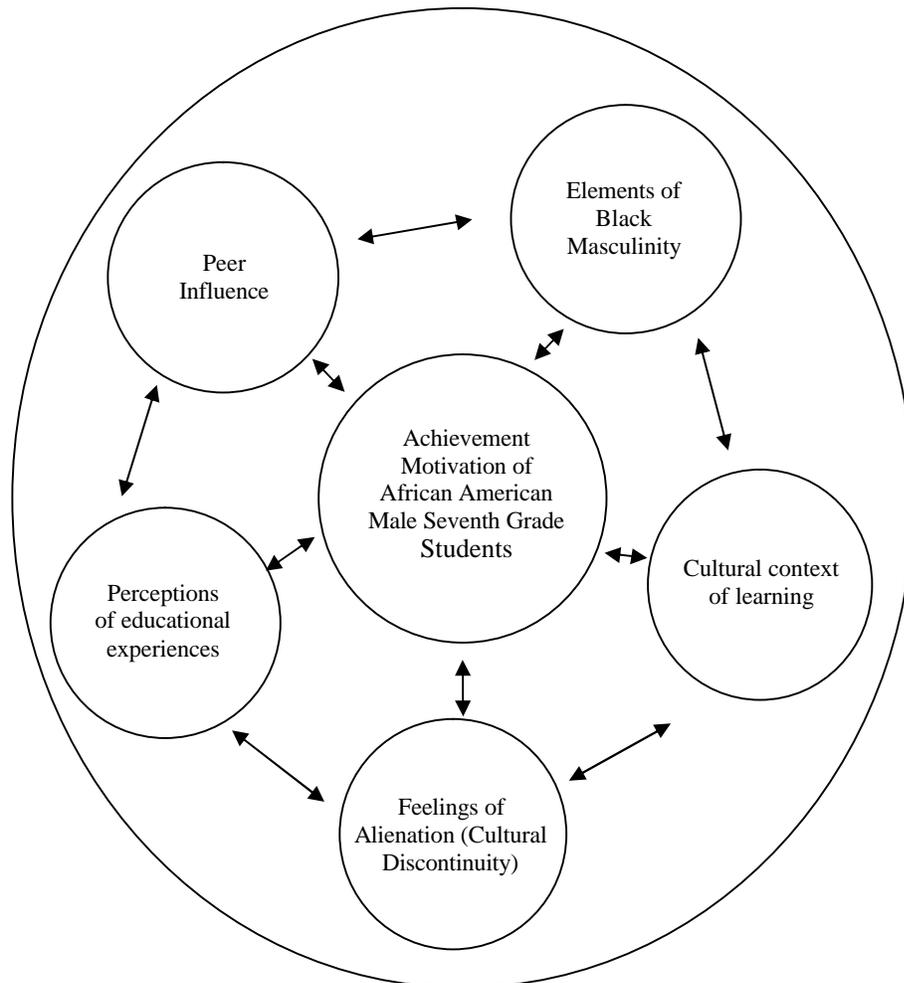
African American seventh grade males? The following research questions guided the

study:

1. How do the participants perceive their motivation to achieve in school?

2. How do the participants perceive peer influence?

3. How do the participants perceive their educational experiences?

4. How do the participants perceive their feelings of alienation (cultural

   discontinuity)?

5. How do the participants perceive their feelings about the cultural context of learning?

6. How do the participants perceive elements of Black masculinity?

7. What are the relationships between peer influence, perceptions of educational experiences, feelings of alienation, elements of Black masculinity, and achievement motivation for these participants?

Definitions of Key Terms

Achievement Motivation: The drive to achieve is present to some degree in all individuals and is defined by Waxman and Huang (1997) as a need to strive towards standards of performance encountered in a wide range of situations especially in the school environment. Student motivation is an important aspect of learning and effective instruction. When students are motivated to perform competently on academic tasks they will learn in accordance with their abilities. Students' learning is maximized when their achievement motivation is enhanced.

Peer Influence: As children grow, develop and move into early adolescence, involvement with one's peers and the attraction of peer identification increases (Johnson, 2000).

Perceptions of Educational Experiences: African American male students' perceptions of their educational experiences will generally influence their motivation to learn or achieve (Bandura, 1991; Mahiri, 1998; Weiner 1985, 1986, 1992). In this study, the term refers to how students interpret their classroom learning experiences.

Feelings of Alienation (Cultural Discontinuity): African American children are likely to have experiences that differ from school practices in communication strategies, rules of intervention and in the degree of literacy in their home backgrounds. As a result African American students often feel alienated in their classrooms (Banks, 1992; Braddock, 1990; Dean, 2000; Delpit, 1995; Fordham, 2000; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

Cultural Context of Learning: It is through the learning process that students may find characters and texts they can relate to on a personal level, in order that they "see" themselves in the course and know that school is for and about them (Bennett, 1999; Irvine & Armento, 2001; Nieto, 1999). In many instances, students enter the classroom with a great deal of knowledge and experience. Darling-Hammond, French, and Garcia-Lopez (2002) maintained that students are more likely to remember concepts if they can connect them to their personal experiences. If students find that the curriculum is linked to their own lives, they will often remain engaged in the subject matter.

Black Masculinity: Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner (1994), Kimmel (1996), Funk (1992), Segal (1993), and Kivel (1992), describe Black Masculinity as a social construct that depict men's social power and identities as constructed both in relation to women and in relationships between men.

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

The purpose of an instrumental case study is to identify factors that serve to influence the central phenomenon of the study (Stake, 1995). This instrumental case study identified the sociocultural factors influencing achievement motivation among African American male seventh grade students who are currently attending Golden

County middle schools located in the Southeastern region of the United States. The study

had several limitations. First, the scope was limited in that this researcher only examined

achievement motivation among African American male seventh grade students in a

particular school system, subsequently; the findings may not be generalizable to all

seventh grade African American male students. Lastly, as Creswell suggests, in this type

of qualitative study, "the findings could be subject to other interpretations" (Creswell,

2003, p. 149).

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study and its potential results touches a number of areas

and addresses several different audiences. Findings of the study that support previous

research results may lead to changes in school policy, program modifications, teacher

preparation, and teacher professional development. It is a well known fact that disparity

in achievement among middle grade African American males in America's public

schools has become an alarming problem (Joseph, 2000). Teacher professional

development would be necessary to help teachers employ appropriate strategies that

address factors affecting achievement motivation.

Administrators and stakeholders may become more responsive to students' needs

and make policy changes in order for institutions to address factors pertaining to student

motivation. When African American males are provided adequate direction, support and

opportunities, they are better able to overcome many of the academic and social

challenges that often hinder their development (Joseph, 2000). Authorities agree that

motivation is enhanced by students' active involvement and ownership of the learning process (Fordham, 2000; Waxman & Huang, 1997).

Parent(s)/Caregiver(s) will be able to understand their child's willingness, need, desire and compulsion to participate in the learning process. They will also be able to examine various aspects of their child's achievement motivation. For example, motivation to learn is a competence acquired through general experience, but stimulated directly through modeling, communication, expectations and direct instruction or socialization by significant others—especially parents (Brophy, 1987).

Students will become aware of factors that promote achievement motivation in the classroom and how they can increase their overall engagement in the learning process. They will also understand the reasons or goals that underlie their involvement or noninvolvement in academic activities.

Strategies that correspond to achievement motivation among African American males tend to replicate the society in which the student is oriented (Dean, 2000). For example, the "No Child Left Behind Act of 2001," signed by President George W. Bush reflects a greater demand for accountability and standards within education towards the demonstration of students' as well as teachers' performance skills (U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2001). Given the growing disproportion in academic achievement motivation among middle grade African American males in America's public schools at the present time, the need for a study investigating factors affecting how African American males experience the learning environment is clear.

Summary

This chapter provided an introduction to the research study. The statement of the problem, research questions, the purpose of the study, and conceptual framework were presented. Key concepts and terms have been defined.

Chapter II contains a discussion of the literature related to this research study. It covers the following topics: achievement motivation within academic settings, peer influence and its impact on academic success, student perceptions of the educational experience, cultural discontinuity, the cultural context of learning, and Black masculinity relative to adolescent males.

Chapter III details the methodology of the study. Included in this chapter is an explanation of the settings and participants and method of data collection. Issues of trustworthiness or credibility of the study are also discussed.

Chapter IV provides results from an analysis of the data. Chapter V connects the results to the research questions. This chapter also provides implications for educational practices and recommendations for future research.

Chapter V provides a review of the results of the study and relates the findings to the research literature. Implications for classroom practice and further research are discussed.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature pertinent to the major variables of the study, as based in its focal question. The first section examines achievement motivation, primarily as it operates within academic settings. The second section discusses peer influence and its impact on achievement motivation. Student perceptions of their educational experiences are the focus of the third section, followed by a section on feelings of alienation (cultural discontinuity) experienced by students. The fifth section looks at the cultural context of learning, with a focus on African American male students. Finally, in the sixth section, Black masculinity is discussed as it relates to adolescent males.

Achievement Motivation

Achievement motivation has been defined as the reason why a student achieves (McCollum, 2005), the motivation behind accomplishment (Vallance, 2004), and a product of the interaction between student characteristics and instructional practices (Okolo & Bahr, 1995). Ugodulunwa (1997) wrote that, "Achievement motivation propels a person to desire success and to make a commensurate effort to achieve the same" (p. 523). Familiarity with the necessary steps to success, and the willingness to take them, is the primary characteristic of achievement motivation.

High levels of achievement motivation are associated with striving for excellence and success without consideration of a particular reward (Coleman, 1993). According to Jorgensen (2000), achievement motivation is conceptually similar to activity involvement and self-esteem, because one's perception and interpretation of competence directly influences participation and continuance. Achievement motivation is considered a learned behavior or response that can be evident in many areas of life.

There are two overarching types of achievement motivation, according to Canatan (2001), the individual type and the group-oriented, or collectivist, type. Most research on achievement motivation places achievement in the context of individual success and competition; thus, the stronger emphasis has been on personal accomplishments, desires, and self-actualization. The less-studied collectivist type of achievement motivation stresses loyalty to the group and the fulfillment of others' expectations.

According to the socio-cognitive theory of achievement motivation proposed by Nicholls' (1989) study, there are two different goal perspectives, or dispositional goal orientations, that influence an individual's perceptions of success. They are the task-involved goal orientation (also known as the mastery, or learning, orientation) and the ego goal orientation (also known as performance orientation) (DeBacker & Nelson, 2000).

The task-involved orientation (also known as the mastery orientation): Individuals with this perspective define competency and success in terms of learning, effort and task mastery. Their perception of ability is self-referenced (Jorgensen, 2000). According to Bennett (2002), the task-involved orientation is associated with positive, adaptive

motivational patterns. Adaptive patterns stress working hard, attributing success to effort, witnessing personal improvement, and persisting in the face of difficult circumstances (Bennett, 2002).

The ego orientation: On the other hand, individuals with ego orientation assess their ability by normative information. Success or competence is perceived as the capacity to demonstrate superior abilities through outperforming peers, not through effort or personal improvement (Nicholls, 1989). Comparison to others is the primary focus (Jorgensen, 2000). This perspective is associated with negative, maladaptive motivational patterns. Maladaptive patterns stress avoiding challenges, attributing failure to ability, and giving up easily.

In general, it has been shown that students who engage in task goals have greater cognitive engagement and persistence than those who engage in ego-involved goals (Ames & Archer, 1988; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Greene & Miller, 1996, as cited in DeBacker & Nelson, 2000). Task performance consists of learning for the sake of internal and intrinsic rewards (Meece, Blumenfeld, & Hoyle, 1988). In addition, it has been found that successful achievers report more positive self-perceptions, more interpersonal support, more active problem solving, deeper processing, persistence, and effort (Pollard, 1993; Elliot, 1999, as cited in Vallance, 2004). Ego-involved performance is associated with the desire to compare one's self to one's peers, to perform relative to others, and to aim for external reinforcement and rewards regardless of whether learning has taken place (Vallance, 2004).

Studies have found that males tend to be more ego oriented, whereas females tend to be more task oriented (Claes, 2003; Duda, 1997; Jorgensen, 2000; Mann, 2001). Older students are more inclined toward ego orientation and ego-involved climate, and students tend to become more ego oriented as they advance from grade to grade (Chaumetson & Duda, 1988; Harter, 1981; Maeher, 1983, as cited in Bennett, 2002; Nicholls, 1989).

Nicholls (1989) theorized that the achievement motivation orientation of a particular individual is a function of three factors: (a) dispositional differences (such as variations in task or ego orientation, or the proneness individuals display towards being task- or ego-involved), (b) situational characteristics (or the motivational climate reflected in the environment), and (c) developmental differences. Motivation has been found to be heavily influenced by students' beliefs about effort, ability, goal setting, and task difficulty; levels of motivation in turn impact academic outcomes (McCollum, 2005). Evidence suggests that achievement deficiency is the result of motivational problems rather than cognitive disabilities (Okolo & Bahr, 1995).

There is clear evidence to imply that achievement motivation is a critical determinant of behavior in the classroom; studies on achievement motivation and the academic performance of students revealed that there is a positive relationship between the two variables (Hancock, 2004; Ugodulunwa, 1997). Learning and motivation are no longer two separate constructs, but are inextricably linked (Okolo & Bahr, 1995). Achievement motivation, the bridge between two constructs, impacts how well students learn new skills and information, as well as how they use their existing skills and knowledge in new as well as familiar situations.

Researchers have offered a number of theories, refinements of previous theories, definitions, and constructs related to the motivational beliefs of students (McCollum, 2005). Theories of achievement motivation include the goal-orientation theory, self-determination theory, the expectancy-value theory, the attribution theory, and the self-worth theory (McCollum, 2005; Vallance, 2004). The goal-orientation theory and expectancy-value theory are the theories most used in student motivation studies.

The expectancy-value theory, proposed by Atkinson and Feather in 1966 (as cited in Cole & Denzine, 2004), states that students are motivated through their expectation for success as well as the value placed on the task. The first part, expectancy, refers to a student's belief that he or she is in control of learning and both positive and negative outcomes (Solomon, 2003). The second part, value (or task value), refers to students' opinions of importance, interest, or usefulness of the task (Pintrich, 2002). According to this theory, high task values lead students to be more involved in their learning. Expectations increase as a result, and further motivational increases follow.

The goal orientation theory, based on Nicholls' (1989) research, was specifically developed to study achievement behavior in classrooms and student motivation (Ames, 1992). This theory attempts to explain why students engage in achievement-related behavior and what meanings they attribute to that behavior (Vallance, 2004). Earlier theories assumed that either environmental or individual factors contributed to motivation. However, goal orientation research suggests that students are motivated by environmental and individual, as well as academic and social goals, in the classroom. In

this theory, motivational and cognitive factors are integrated, and the nature of motivation is exposed as being dynamic and multifaceted (Pintrich, 2002).

The four key facets of motivational beliefs include self-efficacy, attributions, intrinsic motivation, and goals (Pintrich, 2002). In addition, the goal orientation theory, and other social cognitive models, emphasize that motivation is not a stable individual trait, but is situational, contextual, and domain-specific. "In other words," wrote Pintrich, "not only are students motivated in multiple ways, but their motivation can vary depending on the situation or context in the classroom or school" (p. 324). It has been recognized that there are countless situational and personality variables working together simultaneously; this, unfortunately, makes it more difficult to clearly determine how these variables impact student motivation (Hancock, 2004).

According to goal orientation theorists, students' achievement-related cognitions and behaviors are thought to be influenced by individual differences in achievement goals and the function of perceived motivational climate (Bennett, 2002). Bennett's study found that the students who reported task-oriented goals perceived the motivational climate of their classroom as task-involved. At the same time, students who reported ego-involved goals viewed the climate as ego-oriented.

In young children, achievement motivation appears to be heavily influenced by parents (Coleman, 1993). Those children whose parents reinforce achievement, initiative, competitive behavior, and observational learning are likely to have higher levels of motivation. However, motivation in young children is of limited value with regards to achievement if not accompanied by behavioral regulation (Boyles, 2003). Evidence

suggests that the self-regulation skills of children, or their "deliberate attempts to self-regulate the quality and sequence of their behaviors in task settings" (Boyles, 2003, p. 152), enhances achievement beyond the general, initial effects of intrinsic motivation.

Okolo and Bahr (1995) discovered that there are specific student behaviors that are associated with achievement motivation. These are: paying attention to the teacher, maintaining interest in academic activities, volunteering answers in class, asking for guidance, persistence in problem solving, going above and beyond what is required, and taking risks for improvement.

The study (Okolo & Bahr, 1995) also revealed that there are particular characteristics that affect achievement motivation. These include:

> (a) students' ability to perform a task, which includes their skills, background knowledge, and prior experiences;
> (b) the degree to which students value an activity and perceive it as relevant, interesting, and important; and
> (c) students' beliefs about learning and about themselves as learners. (p. 285)

After an extensive review of the research, Okolo and Bahr concluded that achievement motivation in classrooms is the result of interactions between student characteristics and instructional practices.

Several studies have examined achievement motivation from the perspective of identifying factors that contribute to the achievement gap between majority and African American students. Flaxman (2003) reported on two studies conducted by Ronald Ferguson (2003, as cited by Flaxman, 2003) and John Ogbu (2003, as cited by Flaxman, 2003). Ferguson's study was concerned with teacher behavior and found that African

American students identified teacher encouragement as a motivation for their effort rather than teacher demand. Ferguson (2003, cited in Flaxman, 2003) concluded that because students value and respond to encouragement, teachers need to provide it routinely. In Ogbu's (2003) study of schools in Shaker Heights, Ohio, Whites in that community felt that the achievement gap was due to social class differences, while African-Americans maintained that it was the result of racism. African-American students also strongly believed that their teachers did not "care" for them because they were not supportive, nurturing, and encouraging, lending support to Ferguson's (2003) conclusion.

Noguera (as cited in Fashola, 2005) reported that there is considerable evidence that the ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds of students have bearing upon how students are perceived and treated by the adults who work with them within schools. Noguera noted that little is known about the specific nature of the perceptions and expectations that are held toward African American males and how these may in turn affect their performance within schools. More to the point, there is considerable confusion regarding why being African American and male causes this segment of the population to stand out in the most negative and alarming ways, both in school and in the larger society.

Mixed results regarding whether the achievement gap is narrowing, particularly for middle schools, have been found in the literature. A study by Wenglinsky (2004) of 15,000 eighth graders who took the 2000 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in mathematics concluded that the middle school itself has been shown to be an influence on student achievement and lessening test score gaps. However, Hall and

Kennedy's (2006) study examined state assessment results in reading and mathematics between the years 2003 and 2005. They found that while most school systems are narrowing achievement gaps, particularly at the elementary school level, little progress has been made in narrowing the gap between low-income and minority students and majority students at the middle and high school levels.

The specific personality variables that affect achievement motivation were the subject of a study by Cole and Denzine (2004), which sought to examine the relationship between explanatory style and self-systems (self esteem and self efficacy) and the motivation of students who claimed dissatisfaction with performance in a particular class. The authors found that while self-esteem played a minimal role, variables such as self-efficacy were most tied to achievement motivation in students. Self efficacy refers to "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). The authors concluded that students' perceptions of their abilities and confidence for completing a task is related to motivation in that situation.

This is particularly important for middle school students, as suggested by three different studies of academic success of middle school students. Akos and Galassi (2004) investigated perceptions of difficulty of transition and connectedness to school in sixth and ninth grade students and of persons who they perceived as helpful in the transition process. The researchers found differences by gender for feelings of connectedness to middle and high school following the transition. In terms of race, Caucasian and African

American students perceived the transition to middle school as less difficult than Latino students.

Usher and Pajares' (2006) study was based on Bandura's (1997) self efficacy theory and found that for their sample of 263 entering middle school students, mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasions, and physiological state independently predicted academic and self regulatory self efficacy, with mastery experience proving the strongest predictor. Mastery experience and social persuasions predicted females' academic and self regulatory self efficacy, whereas mastery and vicarious experiences predicted these self beliefs for males. African American students' mastery experiences and social persuasions predicted their academic self efficacy. Mastery experience did not predict the self efficacy beliefs of low-achieving students. Finally, a study conducted by Farmer, Irvin, Thompson, Hutchins, and Leung (2006) that examined the relationship between end-of-year grades and the academic, behavioral, and social characteristics of rural African American youth found females were more likely to have positive characteristics than males. In addition, academic, behavioral, and social difficulties were related to low end-of-year grades, and positive characteristics were linked to high grades.

Achievement motivation has been examined in general terms and across subject areas, with little attention being paid to specific subject-area domains or instructional contexts. Reading, Mathematics, Science, and Sports have been the most common subject focal points. For example, McCall (2004) analyzed the achievement motivation and attitudes toward learning of African American students enrolled in balanced literacy

programs, uncovering an inconsistency in attitudes that requires further research. Therefore, according to Anderman (2004) "much research and theory in educational psychology is moving from the consideration of individual differences alone to a greater focus on the person within a context" (p. 283).

Peer Influence

Peer pressure has been defined as a "specific instance of social influence, which typically produces conformity to a particular way of acting or thinking" (Lashbrook, 2000, p. 8). Kiesner, Cadinu, Poulin, and Bucci (2002) characterize a peer group as "a personally defined group with whom the adolescent identifies and spends time" (p. 197). Academic research has recognized the importance of peer relations in the lives of young people. From the period of childhood to young adulthood, the influence of peers increases relative to other sources, and typically peaks in antisocial behavior around the ninth grade (Berndt, 1996).

Reference group theory has been the primary construct used in studying peer influence and the corresponding socialization component. This theory posited that the individual in question will orient him- or herself to various reference groups, normatively and/or comparatively. Lashbrook (2000) explained that a normative group provides the individual with behavioral norms, attitudes, and values, while a comparative group provides benchmarks against which the individual compares himself or herself, thus affecting the self concept and/or behavior of the person. In both cases, a degree of socialization takes place when the individual attempts to conform to the group. Most studies of peer influence focus on normative group dynamics.

According to a study by Burton, Ray, and Mehta (2003), young children tend to depict their peers as either best friends or acquaintances in a variety of four different peer pressure scenarios: positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, expert, and referent, or modeling, power. The most powerful form of influence is reinforcement, or reward. This "refers to anything that promotes a behavior being repeated in the future" (Burton et al., 2003, p. 242). Since children spend so much time with their friends, and subsequently rely on their friends' advice and opinions, the ability of a peer to disperse or withdraw rewards can be a very powerful tool for motivation and influence.

Reinforcement can also lead to the beginning of negative behaviors when used in antisocial situations or through negative reinforcement. This leads individuals to avoid negative consequences by engaging in a behavior (Burton et al., 2003). Lashbrook (2000) found that peer influence is strongly shaped by negative emotions. In particular, feelings of inadequacy, isolation, and ridicule are related to shame. Shame is thought to be one of the most instrumental elements that motivate children to conform. The powerful influence of shame-related feelings also encourages others to apply pressure to conform.

Expert social power is the kind of power or influence that is exerted by competent individuals over individuals who are not competent (Burton et al., 2003). Those with special knowledge in a specific area exert this power over others either intentionally or unintentionally. People with expert power give more highly valued advice than those without expert power in any given scenario.

The last type of social power is referent power. This power encourages children to want to follow the behaviors of those they perceive as popular, athletic, or attractive, and

to model those behaviors (Burton et al., 2003). This modeling is the most subtle and indirect of all of the peer behaviors. Though pressure is not involved, it remains a powerful influence (Berndt, 1996). Modeling "involves the imitating of one person's behavior to another person's behavior as a consequence of direct or symbolic observation" (Burton et al., 2003, p. 240). In other words, children will mimic what they see their peers doing. As children see the consequences of others' specific behaviors, those behaviors will be reinforced so that the observer will either engage or not engage in the conduct.

The timing in which the peer pressure is applied is also an issue. Many teenagers are more susceptible to peer influence when they are making lifestyle decisions, or when experimenting with new behaviors (Razzino et al., 2004). Burton et al. (2003) found that teenagers were more prone to cheating, responding negatively less often during evaluations, and being more easily influenced than younger children. Substance use and other health-related behaviors are areas in which peers exert great control. Being involved with a peer group that is academically-oriented has been linked to reduced drug use (Clasen & Brown, 1985, as cited in Razzino et al., 2004).

In the classroom environment, peer influence is powerful. According to Hoxby (2002), high-achieving students do have an affect on their peers through "knowledge spillovers" and influence on academic and disciplinary standards. Peers can be considered both resources and challenges for the academic performance and future planning of students (Azmitia & Cooper, 2001). Emotional support, academic guidance, and companionship are just a few of the resources that peers can offer, and these affect

motivation, adjustment, and achievement from elementary to junior high school (Azmitia & Cooper, 2001; Hoxby, 2002; Woodward, 1999, as cited in Black, 2002).

For many students, peer relationships are a factor that drives them to stay in and do well in school (Azmitia & Cooper, 2001). In a study by Woodward (1999, as cited in Black, 2002), rejected children who had no peer friendships at the age of nine were, at the age of 14, more likely to be engaged in criminal behavior, conduct disorders, substance abuse, and classroom behavior problems than other children. In another study by Lopes, Conceicao, and Rutherford (2002), students who were perceived as rejected, controversial, and in some circumstances, neglected students: "(a) are seen by teachers as disruptive, (b) exhibit more socially inappropriate behaviors, and (c) tend to be low achievers. Most importantly, these groups tend to get worse, not better" (p. 491).

According to Razzino et al. (2004), for some adolescents, the peer group may be an extension or reflection of the parent-adolescent relationship, particularly if there are unmet needs for acceptance and individualization. The research has not been conclusive on peer versus parent influence; however, it appears that there are certain circumstances in which peer influence supersedes parental influence. Conger (1971, as cited in Werner-Wilson & Arbel, 2000), noted that this happens when:

> (a) there is a strong, homogeneous group that has attitudes and behaviors that are very different from parents; (b) there is not a rewarding parent-child relationship; (c) parental values are uninformed, inconsistent, unrealistic, maladaptive, or hypocritical; and (d) the adolescent lacks self-confidence of independence training to resist peer influence. (p. 266)

However, Black (2002) asserted that an important emphasis needs to be placed on the fact that students often deliberately choose their friends, just as they choose to be more like them. The assumption that students have little power to withstand peer pressure is common in peer relationship literature.

Perceptions of Educational Experiences

Student perceptions of their school climate and social environment are related to their overall educational experiences. Studies have shown that students' perceptions of school impact a wide variety of social and academic success factors, and vice versa. For instance, the social environment of the school and the culturally-driven actions available within those environments, influence students' perceptions of their own effort and success in school (Kaufman, 2004). Moeller (2005) found that students' perceptions of school climate and their own sense of responsible behavior are correlated. Smerdon's (2002) study, which collected data from a nationally representative sample of high school students, discovered that students who may need perceived school membership the most and may benefit most from it perceived lower levels of membership than did their peers.

Aside from academic and social factors, cultural factors serve to enhance or worsen student perceptions. A study by Osborn (2001) examined the relationship between national educational values as mediated by the school context, teacher beliefs and classroom processes. Students from Denmark, England, and France participated in the study. Osborn hypothesized that perceptions of schooling are correlated with the construction of identities as learners and as adolescents; these perceptions are also formed

in order to negotiate pathways which lead to academic success, peer status, and social conformity.

Results revealed that Denmark's students had the most positive attitude towards schooling, learning, and teachers (Osborn, 2001). Due to their cultural emphasis on collaboration and consensus, and the cultural ideals of citizenship and democracy, Dutch students felt that the purpose of school was to bring students into group situations, rather than to help them develop as individuals. Conversely, the English students were found to be the least enthusiastic about school, as they felt that it diverted them from their lives. However, English students believed that their teachers gave good feedback and felt that teachers made them work hard. In France, students sensed that teachers did not respect them and did not explain things sufficiently. Universalism and republicanism are stressed in French schools, so there is a lack of differentiation among students. As a result, the French participants claimed that they didn't feel a social or personal dimension in their school experience.

One study (Tobias, 2004) examined whether variables such as birth order, gender, or ethnicity determined student perceptions, and to what extent. The results indicated that while birth order was not a significant discriminating factor, there was a slight difference between males and females. On the dimension of positive school climate, males had a significantly higher mean. However, on five of the seven dimensions, African American students' mean scores were significantly lower than those of Caucasians. Tobias (2004) concluded that "ethnicity, as the literature suggested, played the greatest role in influencing student perceptions" (p. 2385).

Two studies investigated the impact of gender on student perceptions of educational experience. Hawkins and Mulkey (2005) examined the impact of gender on the association between sport participation and students' educational opportunities and outcomes. The researchers compared African-American eighth-grade females and males using educational plans, peer status, and academic investments as indicators of academic attachment. They found that athletic participation can and often does have a positive impact on student motivation and engagement for both male and female athletes. Mickelson and Greene's (2006) study also was concerned with gender differences, but focused specifically on underachievement in middle school African American males. Findings indicated that although there are no gender differences in achievement in second grade, differences become evident by middle school, with females obtaining higher test scores and grades than males. Although prior achievement and track placement affect all students in expected ways, males' test scores are more likely to be affected by peers, educational attitudes, school structure, and school climate. Females' test scores are more likely to be influenced by family socioeconomic status and cultural capital (Mickelson & Greene, 2006).

According to a study by Fiala (2002), six issues influence success for African-American students (ranked in order of importance): (a) initiative; (b) self-image; (c) family; (d) teachers; (e) labeling/racism; and (f) participation in school programs. Ceballo, McLoyd, and Toyokawa (2004) found that for the adolescent children of their sample of 262 poor African American mothers, the neighborhood in which they lived influenced the adolescent females' and males' educational values and school effort.

Mandara's (2006) study showed that for African American males, the odds of their succeeding in school increase when parents use an African American version of authoritative parenting, teach children about their cultural heritage and personal power to achieve in spite of barriers, and are actively involved by monitoring homework and limiting counterproductive time.

Feelings of Alienation (Cultural Discontinuity)

A general definition of cultural discontinuity, or alienation, was offered by Homey (1950), who described it as a negative self-perception, loss of meaning in daily activities, and feeling of powerlessness. Cultural discontinuity for students, however, entails, "a separation or distance among two or more entities and involves a sense of anguish or loss, resulting in a student viewing life and school as fragmentary and incomplete" (Paulsen, 2003, p. 4). According to a description by Thoma (2003), based on Bronfenbrenner's (1986) definition, student alienation is:

> A lack of sense of belonging, feeling cut off from family, friends, or school.
> It is the inability of adolescents to connect meaningfully with other people.
> It is the feeling of aloneness, a feeling that no one is like them, and that they are
> not what others want them to be. (p. 227)

Brown (2004) gives a more expansive view of student alienation, writing that it is, "a result of pervasive social forces beyond school, such as specialization, mobility, bureaucratization, capitalism, or other features of the modern world that fragment human experience" (p. 192).

Alienation from the school environment is negative and found in connection with other undesirable outcomes. According to a number of studies (Brown, 2004; Oerlemans

& Jenkins, 1998; Paulsen, 2003; Thoma, 2003), alienation has been tied to increased gang activity, poor peer relationships, poor school-student relationships, poor teacher-student relationships, violence, vandalism, absenteeism, truancy, and other forms of deviant behavior. Changes such as those having to do with family structure, the increased mobility of society, decreased family stability, and the dehumanization of the adolescent all contribute to feelings of alienation (Thoma, 2003).

Unfortunately, alienated adolescents who find it difficult to cope with the expectations they face frequently become alienated adults; these adolescents are more likely to live in poverty and have little political power (Oerlemans & Jenkins, 1998). Adolescence is a time in which individuals try to strive for important goals such as graduating, choosing a career, developing intimate relationships and defining one's self (Claes, 2003). This requires a reliance on social institutions like school to support them. Therefore, the school environment plays an important role in the prevention or exacerbation of alienation in young people (Claes, 2003). School allows children and adolescents to learn how to function in society (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

Researchers have identified some of the characteristics in school environments that alienate students. Students who are prone to feelings of alienation are more affected by school policies such as academic tracking, referral, and placement in special education; teacher attitudes and the fundamental beliefs or practices of the institution may also have an effect (Thoma, 2003). For instance, Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson, and Bridgest (2003) conducted a study of perceptions of 136 middle school teachers of African American males' aggression, achievement, and need for special education

services based on cultural movement styles. Neal et al. (2003) found that teachers perceived students with African American movement styles as lower in achievement, higher in aggression, and more likely to need special education services. Wong, Eccles, and Sameroff's (2003) study found that students who experience racial discrimination from teachers experience declines in grades, academic ability self concepts, academic task values, and mental health, all leading to increased alienation away from the educational environment. Elements such as student vs. school culture, staff control over students, student-teacher relations, student-student relationships, school size, teacher expectations, social acceptance, student autonomy, and curriculum relevancy are other immediate environmental factors (Brown, 2004; Claes, 2003; Paulsen, 2003).

Monroe's (2005) study examined cultural discontinuity from the perspective of school discipline. According to Monroe, societal forces may be the basis of teachers' perceptions of African American student behaviors that, in turn, influence their disciplinary actions in the classroom. In other words, culturally-based constructs of the social image of African American men and boys and the teachers' notion of effective disciplinary strategies may be based on prevailing social norms and practices of the dominant culture. This creates a discipline gap that can add to alienation of students.

Carter (2005) maintained that students' experiences of ethnicity, class, and gender influenced their relationship to dominant cultural capital and thus the extent to which they experience a sense of belonging in school. It is this feeling of inclusiveness—not belief about the value of education that accounts for varying degrees of academic success.

Some students, such as those from diverse backgrounds or those with disabilities, do not feel included in decision-making processes within their classrooms and schools. As Allen and Boykin (1992) pointed out, the absence of multi-cultural factors in classroom settings leads students to believe that the most important aspects of their lives are not valued or respected in the academic world. Their resulting alienation results in increased patterns of maladaptive coping behaviors.

Models of alienation have been proposed by Seeman (1959) and Dean (1961, as cited in Thoma, 2003). The five elements of alienation, according to Seeman, are powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolationism, and self-estrangement. Dean combined the last two categories in his model. Therefore, the four essential elements are as follows:

Powerlessness. Powerlessness "reflects fatalism, pessimism, and a perception of losing control over one's own life" (Lacourse, Villeneuve, & Claes, 2003, p. 639). Paulsen (2003) characterizes powerlessness as the feeling that teachers, administrators, and school personnel, are manipulating students, and there is little to be done to remedy the situation or to influence their future in academics. At this point, students begin to disengage from the schooling process. These students may be more easily manipulated because of their feelings of helplessness (Thoma, 2003).

Normlessness. Claes (2003) defined normlessness as a, "positive attitude towards deviance" (p. 646). Lacourse et al. (2003) defined it as "a belief that socially disapproved behaviors may be used to achieve culturally defined goals" (p. 642). Normlessness results from the perception that engaging in socially unapproved behaviors, such as cheating on

a test, is required in order to reach the high expectations that have been imposed externally. These students lose socialized values that give purpose to life (Dean, 1961, as cited in Thoma, 2003). The student makes the decision to present to their teachers and administrators what they want to see and hear, and as long as he or she is not caught, these behaviors are okay (Paulsen, 2003).

Social Estrangement/Isolation. Lacourse et al. (2003) noted that this category has roots in classical philosophy and is "related to a discrepancy between actual and idealized self" (p. 643). Socially isolated students do not hold the goals, beliefs, standards and objectives of the school as their own (Rafalides & Hoy, 1971, as cited in Paulsen, 2003). The student has little interest in completing school, and they reject everything about it. Feelings of being different from the group usually lead to isolation and having a lack of people to confide in (Paulsen, 2003).

Meaninglessness. Meaninglessness is an individual's perception of failure by the particular social institution in question to provide support; it may act as a precursor to normlessness. For example, adolescents with learning difficulties or disruptive behavioral problems may feel that resources within their school are inadequate to meet their needs, possibly leading them to use non-socially sanctioned means to achieve their developmental goals (Claes, 2003). The student has a difficult time predicting outcomes (Thoma, 2003). The student may wonder why he or she is involved in any school activities. The benefits of school to the student's life, or its relevance to their present life, may be in question (Paulsen, 2003; Thoma, 2003).

The element of powerlessness is similar to the psychological notion of external locus of control. Locus of control is often mentioned in alienation literature. Flowers, Milner, and Moore's (2003) study disclosed that students with elevated levels of locus of control are more likely to have higher educational aspirations. Educational aspirations are made up of a student's perception regarding the intention to pursue additional education in the future (Flowers et al., 2003). A person's locus of control has likely been shaped by their life experiences, and academic past histories inform present academic positions. Therefore, suggested Flowers et al., students who come from lower socio-economic backgrounds aspire for lower levels of academic achievement. However, Davis-Kean (2005) found that socioeconomic factors were related only indirectly to academic achievement; parents' beliefs and behaviors and years of schooling were found to be more direct factors.

Mann (2001) suggested that teachers and administrators can take five possible responses to combat alienation in schools:

1. *Solidarity*: Dissolving estrangement through closing the gap between teachers and students, and between student groups.

2. *Hospitality*: Welcoming new members into the school community.

3. *Safety*: Making sure that students must feel accepted and respected, and all comments and opinions are solicited and heard.

4. *Redistribution of power*: Ensuring that teachers and administrators are successfully able to maintain authority.

5. *Criticality*: The capacity to act on awareness of the experience of alienation on the part of the students themselves.

Cultural Context of Learning

Chamberlain (2005) defined culture as the "values, norms, and traditions that affect how individuals of a particular group perceive, think, interact, behave, and make judgments about their world" (p. 195). A group's way of understanding and interacting, seeing and doing are essential parts of culture; that have developed over time and are maintained through tradition. According to Graybill (1997), while our sense of identity is certainly one thing that gets reinforced through our understanding of culture, so is the way we learn.

In the context of school, culturally and linguistically diverse students are different from the mainstream culture and language, which, in the U. S., reflects European American values of those who established the major institutions (Chamberlain, 2005). According to Berry (2003), students that are not a part of the mainstream culture do not respond to the instructional methodologies and style offered by most schools. Unfortunately, this usually means that teachers and administrators undermine these students' intellectual potential and abilities. The resulting culture clashes arise from differences regarding cognition, language, behavior, emphasis on the individual versus the group, interaction with authority figures, family roles, and expectations of educators (Chamberlain, 2005).

A taxonomy of multicultural education was proposed by Sleeter and Grant (2006). It consisted of five major categories:

1. *Teaching the culturally different*: Using instructional strategies that act as transitional bridges for culturally different students.

2. *Human relations*: Improving the communication between people from different cultural backgrounds in order to garner respect and appreciation.

3. *Single group studies*: Connoting the experiences, contributions, and issues pertaining to various ethnic, cultural and gender groups through curriculum incorporation.

4. *Multicultural education*: Advocating cultural pluralism and equality through the reform of educational institutions and programs.

5. *Education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist*: Preparing students to be critical of social and institutional structures with regards to equity, equality and diversity.

Baptiste (1994, as cited in Parsons, 2003) offered a multi-tiered process view of culturalizing instruction through three levels: product, process, and philosophy. At the product level, the achievements of ethnic individuals are presented separately from the curriculum. At the process level, these achievements are incorporated throughout the curriculum. Finally, at the philosophy level, teachers change their methods of teaching in order to include certain cultural values. Instruction is a crucial element of creating a cultural framework within a classroom, because it will create or perpetuate familiar or alien contexts, which will then influence the extent of learning (Parsons, 2003).

Tharp et al. (1984, as cited in Allen & Boykin, 1992) focused on the role of beliefs and cultures in creating culturally responsive instructional settings. The authors

attempted to discern whether instructional settings altered to match the traditional cultural

predilections of the students would have any impact on academic achievement. The study

took place in Hawaii, with Native Hawaiian children as its participants. The authors

concluded that learning contexts, such as cooperative groups, offer a culturally familiar

setting, and students can access and build their skill ability in more productive ways.

However, these contexts also "serve to lend a perspective to the task which signals value

within the individual's cultural domain. Increased task value is thought to lead to

increased task engagement or motivation" (Tharp et al., 1984, as cited in Allen & Boykin,

1992, p. 590).

According to Townsend (2000), ethnic minority students must be familiar with

both the minority and dominant cultures. However, dominant culture individuals only

need to familiarize themselves with dominant or mainstream culture. In order to maintain

their identities, ethnic minority students feel they must reject these mainstream values

and behaviors. Theoretical frameworks on the academic performance of African

American children have been dominated by the cultural disadvantage view, which

purports that African American children are the victims of inferior socialization

experiences (Allen & Boykin, 1992; Boykin, 2005).

Many researchers make the assumption that most African American students are

affected in some way by feelings of cultural discontinuity. Graybill (1997) characterized

cultural discontinuity as being similar to when a "White middle-class teacher, frequently

female, views African American male behavior as disruptive "talking back" or "acting

out" (p. 312). According to Graybill, because this teacher does not understand African-American mores, she may clash with those students.

Research suggests that African American students have particular learning preferences as a result of cultural influences. Like Native Americans or Mexican Americans, African Americans have a group orientation, and they value orality (Parsons, 2003). According to Berry (2003), African Americans also have a preference for a relational style of learning; this preference "is characterized as freedom of movement, variation, creativity, divergent thinking, inductive reasoning, and focus on people" (p. 246). They tend to draw on daily experiences to facilitate learning, and use the classification of ideas, items, and experiences to determine how things relate to one another. African American students are more likely to prefer experimentation, improvisation, and interaction within the classroom.

The problem, however, is that mainstream schools in the United States are structured to advantage students whose learning preference is analytical, and not relational. This is an example of cultural contexts of learning working against a particular cultural group.

Elements of Black Masculinity

African Americans have a cultural disadvantage; their social context ensures that they are unable to fully participate in the mainstream culture. According to Flewelling (2003), African American male adolescents are more likely than non-African American adolescents to engage in delinquent behavior. African American adolescents are overrepresented in juvenile detention centers and adult prisons, morbidity and mortality

statistics, and reports of academic underachievement (CDC, 2000, NCES, 2000, NCHS, 2000, Snyder & Sickmund, 1999, as cited in Flewelling, 2003). In addition, African American adolescents make up about 15% of the total U. S. adolescent population, but represent 41% of juvenile delinquency cases involving detention (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999, as cited in Flewelling, 2003). African-American males made up 47% of homicide victims in the age group between 15 and 19 (NCHS, 2000, as cited in Flewelling, 2003), and African American males 20 years or younger are associated with much higher rates of homicide (Whaley, 2003).

What is behind all of these troubling statistics? Part of this African American male behavior may be explained by several different, yet interrelated theories. According to the Cooley-Mead Symbolic Interactionist theory people live in a world that is socially constructed (Lundgren, 2002). For example the meanings of objects, events and behaviors are derived from the interpretation that people give them, and interpretations vary from one group to another. Basically, the Cooley-Mead hypothesis proposes "that feedback from significant others provides the basis for individuals' self-appraisals" (p. 267). In particular, Cooley argued in his theory of a "looking glass self," that the way in which we think about ourselves is often a reflection of other people's assessments, and that our self concepts are formed in intimate groups.

From the symbolic interactionist perspective, then, the African American male's self-image is derived from specific others—in this case their home, community, peers, and school. However, at the same time the individual student exhibited active and creative types of behavior. How the student defined the situation and reconciled self-

actions and group expectations, however, depended on how the peer group process was structured and portrayed. Symbolic Interactionist theory holds that people are social creations. Subsequently, they are a product of their environment, social setting, social events, personal groups, culture and/or subculture. According to Lundgren (2004), research revealed that others' judgments and self-appraisals are somewhat associated and that others' expressions of feedback vary across circumstances, depending on how close the relationships are. In this study, as previously noted, it is all about "my dogs and me" which revealed a very close relationship between the African American male participants and their peers.

These realities have symbols that guide development or act as significant components for social construction. Symbolization is an unconscious mental process in which images or objects represent subdued thoughts, feelings, or impulses (Bruner, 1997). The particular symbol is chosen because it is associated in some way with the repressed material and can therefore stand for it. The purpose served by this mechanism is to enable emotionally charged material to obtain expression without arousing excessive anxiety. Symbolization has often been called the language of the unconscious (Bruner, 1997). Masculinity is a social construction, therefore, it logically follows that masculinity would be dependent upon cultural symbols, reinforced behaviors, identity formations (generalized other, looking glass self) and symbols (language and role expectation).

Whaley (2003) noted that there are two major psychosocial tasks of adolescence: moral development and identity formation. According to Spencer (1999), African American young males learn to use a limited range of behaviors as a result of general

disregard from broader society, including hypermasculinity and aggressiveness. Spencer maintained that these behaviors derive from a narrowly defined code of ethics and morals assuring short-term respect, thereby stunting moral development in some young men. Unfortunately, these behaviors tend to exacerbate adverse societal attitudes and reactions.

Thus it can be seen that race-specific masculinity is a social construction – that is, a social reality of context, both class and subculture. Also, as Cohen (1955) pointed out more than five decades ago, it is the lower class (which he calls the working-class) more so than the middle or upper class that has developed a type of masculinity that is out of sync with mainstream society. Cohen's theory was based on the supposition that the majority of criminal behavior represents participation in a delinquent subculture. His theory posited that the working class (i.e., low income) male faces a typical problem of adjustment which differs from that of the middle class and that this male's problem is a status frustration that emanates from contact with the low income socialization pattern early in life. According to Cohen:

1. The working class boy's socialization handicaps him for achievement in the middle class status system.

2. Nevertheless, the working class boy is thrust into this competitive system where achievement is judged by middle class standards of behavior and performance.

3. Ill prepared and poorly motivated, the working class boy is frustrated in his status aspirations by the agents of middle class society.

4. The delinquent subculture represents a "solution" to the working class boy's problem for it enables him to "break clean" with the middle class morality and legitimizes hostility and aggression "without moral inhibitions on the free expression of aggression against the sources of his frustration. (pp. 211-212)

Cohen's (1955) theory emphasized how individuals such as lower or working class boys make sense of the world—that is, how they interact with established systems of shared meaning and with the beliefs, values, and symbols of the world in general. Specifically, Cohen's theory focused on how lower class boys construct their realities, as based on common cultural narratives and symbols, in addition to how their reality is essentially inter-subjective in that it is promoted through social interaction rather than traditional or external means.

Pertaining to the first two points of Cohen's theory in explaining the delinquent subculture, he explained that lower or working class boys—similar to middle and upper class boys—seek status in the same conventional terms as the middle and upper class boys at first, but come to find out that the middle class judges them according to their own standards which differ from those of the lower class. It becomes clear to the lower class boy that his environment does not support the middle class ethic—that is, learned values of delayed gratification, working towards distant goals, the benefits of achievement, and respect for people and property. The lower class boy is basically oriented to immediate satisfactions instead of future goals and he is not socialized in the techniques of hard work and discipline. Consequently, he has not adapted, conformed, or adopted the norms of the middle class. "He is less likely to identify with these norms, to make them his own, and to be able to conform to them easily and naturally" (Cohen, 1955, p. 97).

Of greater importance to the lower class boy is his emotional relationship with his peers since he has not adopted middle class values. Peer relationships have lesser value to

the middle class boy who has internalized the appropriate middle class beliefs. The lower

class boy has thus "reacted" to the problem. This reaction formation is explained by

Cohen as an endeavor to repress or deny some impulses or to defend the individual in

question from some natural feelings of danger, although the original opposite attitudes

still exist in the subconscious mind.

The basic problem relates to the fact that subcultures have emerged and have

assumed dominance in socialization because lower class boys are not only being

measured by middle class standards, but are also being denied and rejected equal status in

the school system (conventionalism). In reaction, the lower class boy searches for

conventional associations with conventional peer groups, but cannot find acceptance

there either. Again in reaction to this situation, the lower class boy chooses another

alternative—to find others like himself and develop his own subcultural system of

successful values such as toughness and street bravado, for example. According to

Cohen (1955), middle class success goals permeate our society. No one is immune to

them including lower or working class boys. Unfortunately, these boys are often

unprepared to compete for success in a middle class world. Cohen (1955) noted:

> The working class person is less likely to possess, to value or to cultivate the
> polish, the sophistication, the fluency, the 'good appearance,' and the personality
> so useful in 'selling one's self' and manipulating others in the middle class world.
> (p. 97)

These liabilities are painfully obvious in the classroom.

Cohen (1955) has explained that this reaction is mainly a problem of self-respect and status. It arises because of the lower class boys' inability to meet the standards of the established middle and upper class culture. This new delinquent subculture provides an alternative status system. For those who become members, the new subculture justifies hostility and aggression, again the cause of their status frustration because of its values of negativism, hatred, and immediate gratification. Success within this street context subculture provides status to the lower class boy which is contrary to that provided by conventional institutions. It therefore logically follows that adopting street realities or subcultures and emulating behaviors in a street context will result in producing disinterested youth enrolled in middle and/or high school.

This now explains the fifth point of Cohen's theory above—that the delinquent subculture represents a "solution" to the lower class boys' problem. In this way the adolescent can make a clean break with the dominant class's morality and his actions/behaviors are legitimized. He no longer has moral inhibitions regarding his expressions of anger against the middle class because his behaviors are legitimized. He is essentially ". . . without moral inhibitions on the free expression of aggression against the sources of his frustration" (Cohen, 1955, pp. 211-212).

It is clear that Cohen's (1955) theory helped to explain the reasons for the development of a delinquent subculture. As further noted by Cohen and Short (1958), "delinquency is based on a set of norms antithetical to those of the dominant culture and, indeed, deriving their content by a process of hostile and negativistic reactions against the dominant culture" (p. 20). The working class boy is not oriented to status in the middle

class system. Cohen and Short concluded in their further studies on reaction formation or status frustration that satisfactory emotional relationships with his peers are likely to be far more important in most instances for the working class boy than for his middle class counterpart.

"Acting tough" is an important part of the race-specific Black masculinity of those in the lower class, especially among adolescents and that, in turn, means defying authority. In a report assessing differences among African American and Caucasian students attending an affluent high school in Ohio, Clementson (1999) pointed to the dilemma of either acting White or Black. If African American students "acted White" they were ostracized by their peers. In order to act Black, they had to assume a tough veneer. "Blacks gave higher marks for being tough. [As a result] that tough kid is going to be more standoffish toward authority figures…and that social requirement [works against] achievement motivation" (Clementson, 1999, p. 38). Pollack's (2001) study concurred and revealed that boys often wear the "mask of masculinity" which is often a posture of male bravado that they learn to use to hide their inner feelings of sadness, loneliness, and susceptibility to protect themselves basically from their peers and from society in general.

Therefore, "acting tough" is subsequently a symbolic representation of the lower class African American male subculture's stance against the dominant society with its attendant social, structural, and political forces. Both Cleaver (1968) and West (1993) best addressed the impact of macro level structural, social and political forces on masculinity. Cleaver (1968) first noted that the historical forces of the 1960s—racism,

war, poverty and sexism helped form the lives of African American males and as a result many expressed militantly oppositional responses against White authority. He further expressed that as a result of economic, political and social conditions many African American men use violence to assert their masculinity both with women and against society.

West (1993) entwined one of America's most explosive issues and dilemmas: Black masculinity in ways in which the legacy of White supremacy contributed to the arrested development of America's democracy. The environmental conditions that served as the context for masculine development began by distinguishing two opposing analytical camps. The "liberal structuralists" who called for full employment, health, education and child-care programs and affirmative action practices. On the other side were the "conservative behaviorists" who promoted self-help programs, African American business expansion and non-preferential employment practices. We must acknowledge that structures and behaviors are inseparable, that institutions and values are a part of each other. How people act and live are shaped—though in no way dictated or determined—by the larger circumstances in which they find themselves (West, 1993). West further posited:

> Culture is as much a structure as the economy or politics; it is rooted in institutions as families, schools, churches, synagogues, mosques, and communication industries (television, radio, video, music. . . . the economy and politics are not only influenced by values, but also promote particular cultural ideals of the good life and good society. . . . we must delve into the depths where neither liberals nor conservatives dare to tread, namely, into the murky waters of despair and dread that now flood the streets of Black America. . . . to talk about the depressing statistics of unemployment, infant mortality, incarceration, teenage pregnancy and violent crime is one thing. . . . but to face up to the monumental

eclipse of hope, the unprecedented collapse of meaning, the incredible disregard for human life (especially Black) life and property in much of Black America is something else. (p. 12)

It was McCall (1995) who argued that Black masculinity was specifically a product of a subcultural phenomenon among male peer groups. In his view, the masculine mask that gets acted out on the streets represents the dominant traits that afford some level of street success or peer group positive evaluation. This stance is indeed critical to the lifestyles of many males residing in the lower, working class environments. Specifically, conflict with White stream America was the focus of Nathan McCall's (1995) autobiography entitled, *Makes Me Wanna Holler: A Young Black Man In America*. McCall focused upon Black masculinity in an effort to critique the political and economic dimensions of the White power structure. He also maintained that African American men expressed their masculinity differently than White men. For example, whereas some White men tend to communicate their masculinity in the corporate environment, some African American men tend to express their masculinity in interpersonal relationships, where a premium is placed on arrogance, violence, social and personal power, as well as huge egos.

McCall (1995) renounced his life of crime as a "gang banger in the 'hood,'" and maintained:

There is a forbidden zone that exists among men. If a man invades that zone, or if he gets too close in another man's face, it is considered a challenge to his manliness and an invitation to tangle. (p. 76)

Anderson's (2000) code of the street perspective pinpointed a type of masculinity that develops in lower class environments. Anderson described a two-fold purpose of the importance of the "code"—first, for purposes of survival; second, for coping with the usual routine activities of living in certain environments such as a low income neighborhood. Anderson (2000) explained that Black masculinity is revealed when one commands respect from his peers through vengeance and violence. Moreover, according to Anderson, it is not really possible to determine whether a person is "decent" or "street" by their lifestyle.

The elements of Black masculinity are revealed as Anderson interviewed the inhabitants of North Philadelphia in his book entitled, *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence and the Moral Life of the Inner City.* Anderson (2000) reported that there are two types of families in North Philadelphia: "decent," or those who do the best that they can to align themselves with mainstream values such as obeying the law, considering other people's feelings and making some effort to get an education, and "street" families. The attitude of "street families" has some roots in the perception and reality of racism. "Street families" believe that there is one type of justice for Whites and another for African Americans (Anderson, 2000).

On another note, Anderson (1990) asserted that a lack of educational opportunities, moral values and hope often causes young impoverished African American males to disrespect others as well as their property. Anderson maintained that when the family structure falters these young adolescents do not have legitimate financial opportunities and therefore will often resort to illegal means of supporting themselves.

Anderson's investigations revealed that deprived African Americans are more likely to attend schools that are old and dilapidated, and in many instances are taught by teachers who are inexperienced or who can not relate their culture.

Although parent(s)/caregiver(s) are often very influential in their child's life, Anderson (2000) pointed out that a child's peer group and neighborhood are very significant. He further revealed that in African American neighborhoods stereotypes are abound. In addition, those who come from the "hood" or lower class neighborhoods learn certain behavioral codes such as acting tough and using their sexual prowess as an indicator of their manhood. More specifically Anderson (2000) explained:

> For those who are invested in the code, the clear object of their demeanor is to discourage strangers from even thinking about testing their manhood, and the sense of power that comes with the ability to deter others can be alluring even to those who know the code. (p. 92)

Many scholars are quick to point out that there is a pervasive media image of lower class African American male youth as aggressive, criminal, and dangerous; unfortunately, this image contributes to developing gender identities (Stevenson, 1997; Whaley, 2003). Stevenson noted that this image caused African American males to appropriate the images so that they can gain power in a powerless context. This coping behavior has been given a number of terms, from Spencer's (1999) "hypermasculinity" to Cunningham's (1999) "bravado." Violence is a sanctioned way to express anger, protect one's reputation, or defend one's honor (Graybill, 1997). A study by Reese (2001) found that inner city African American male adolescents felt that aggression and violence are reinforced by peers as symbols of masculinity. Graybill noted that in some lower income

African American communities, males are encouraged, indeed if not required, to be athletic, sexually competent, streetwise, and able to fight. Anderson (1990) noted that inner city peer groups value casual sex. He further revealed that although sex may be casual in terms of commitment to a partner, it is often used as a measure of the boy's worth by his peers.

One's sense of identity is interrelated with one's social world and also significantly impacts masculinity. According to Ross (1990) and Ross (1998), major aspects of social and personality development emerge through the growth of early conscience, cooperation, social understanding, self-awareness, and relationships (e.g., peers, family, etc.) that permeate these early developments. For African American male adolescents, social worlds are fundamental to the process of identity formation. As they mature, African American males must deal with the usual challenges of adolescence complicated by a process of racial and ethnic identification.

Identity formation is an example of the generalized other, looking glass self offered in Symbolic Interactionist Theory. It is also influenced by the media's perceptions which reflect on the individual and confirm identity formation. For example, Ross (1998) asserted that the media tends to regard African American men as either 'supermen' or a 'masculine menace,' and reinforce the idea that African American men are a 'natural criminal class.' Ross wrote:

> How can these discourses thrive so happily alongside each other? On the one hand, a proliferation of images suggested that successful African American men represented the over fulfillment of expectations for normative masculinity in the United States' mass culture; on the other hand, these discourses posited that African American men nationally lack-decline, failure,

deprivation, endangerment, extinction, bad fathering, suicide, Black-on-Black homicide, and racial genocide. (p. 611)

According to Ross (1998), African American men who are successful are placed in two contradicting categories within the media: a national liability and an over fulfilled expectation for normative masculinity. This factor is more evident today than ever before. For example, Senator Joseph R. Biden described Senator Barack Obama, a 2008 democratic White House hopeful in a recent interview as, "The first African American [presidential candidate] who is articulate and bright and clean and a nice-looking guy. I mean that's a storybook, man." (Balz, 2007). These types of public comments made by Senator Biden only confirm that African American males are still systematically plagued with stereotypic racism—a skepticism that appears to be woven in American society. Ross (1998) alleged that both critical race theory and African American scholars tend to downplay the ideology of race and how it has played a role in the concept of African American masculinity.

Researchers have recognized that the status of African American men is under attack in the United States, and this is most apparent in the arena of academics (Pollard, 1993). Studies have found that African American male children are more likely to be retained or demoted, or exhibit negative attitudes and behaviors as early as the 4th grade (Ferguson, 2000; Jordan, 2005; Rowan, 1989). Males tend to avoid what they perceive as intellectual activities, due to racism they have encountered in the past (Rowan, 1989). In schools, African American males often experience academic and social difficulties. They are frequently placed in restrictive classes (Jordan, 2005). In addition, African American

high school students display high rates of delinquent behavior on school property. This behavior further alienates them from peers and teachers, leads to a high frequency of disciplinary actions, and lends itself to continued academic underachievement (Flewelling, 2003).

It can now be seen that language is also a symbol that serves to reinforce social, normative, subcultural expectations. Therefore, it logically follows that communication is an effective tool for governing behavioral outcomes. Thus it can also be assumed that whatever governing norms prevail in the minds of individuals will either function to assist or negate academic achievement.

Language is an important factor in African American masculinity. According to Ferguson (2000), African American males are brought up speaking what the author termed 'Black English,' which is associated with the important people and events in their lives. Most mainstream schools treat this form of Standard American English as inferior, and young African American students are consistently corrected, giving the impression that the way they have spoken all of their lives is bad. Furthermore, many of these students feel that they are distancing themselves from their families and lives by being forced to use Standard American English. They must learn to use one type of English in the classroom, and one type outside of it. Ferguson asserted that these students are actually very conscious of the way they speak and make efforts to maintain it, and that they have a heightened sense of language.

Noguera (2001) argued that teachers and schools also have a profound impact on African American students' success. Noguera asserted:

> While African American males are in "deep trouble," in society leading the nation in homicides (as victims and perpetrators), in incarceration, and often unemployment, as well as school suspensions, expulsions, and disproportionally in special education, schools can counter the effects of these societal forces. . . . schools have historically continued patterns that exist in society, stigmatizing and labeling Black males as disruptive. . . . African American males do not feel that their teachers support or care for them. . . . 80% of African American males stated they disagree or disagree strongly with the statement, "My teachers support me and care about my success in this class" . . . this compared with 46% of White male respondents. (pp. 51-67)

Studies on African American students confirmed the conclusion that every young African American male regardless of his socioeconomic status is confronted with negative stereotypes at every turn, and this is just as true inside the academic world as outside of it. Instead of being able to craft their own identity, they are already labeled, expected to behave a certain way, and treated in accordance with stereotypes rather than individual merit. All of these factors are forms of institutionalized racism, according to Ferguson (2000), prevent many African American students from achieving and maintaining their commitments to education.

Cohen (1955) reported that the traditional school embodies middle class values such as honesty, courtesy, and responsibility, and this is where the competition takes place for status, approval or respect. Losers in this competition often experience strong feelings of frustration and deprivation. Cohen further argued that subcultures are formed as a result of class-based status frustration and are often in poor urban environments, resulting in malice and opposition to those of the dominant culture. According to Cohen (1955) deviant behavior is often rooted in class differentials, parental ambitions and school standards given that the status of a family in the social structure may determine

the problems the child will face later in life. He further posited that delinquent boys band together for no real purpose except to establish and maintain peer status as well as consolidate group loyalty.

In an educational context, early work by Cohen (1955) showed how boys become judged and experience feelings of failure that lead to the formation of peer groups and a different set of guidelines for success. Cohen's theory - also called Reaction Formation or Status Frustration - is directly related to this investigative study. From the analysis as derived from student and parent(s')/caregiver(s') interviews, focus group interviews as well as classroom and community observations, it became clear that the students involved in the study have reacted over time to the media, community, and others' opinions and perceptions of them. In frustration and adjustment, they assumed a role and status portraying their identity with their own subculture. Cohen explained that a delinquent subculture is comprised of a system of beliefs and values that are created ". . . in a process of communicative interaction among children similarly circumstanced by virtue of their positions in the social structure, and as constituting a solution to problems of adjustment to which the established culture provided no satisfactory solutions" (Cohen & Short, 1958, p. 20).

It is now clear that events that have happened in the African American male participants' homes, communities, schools, and with their peers have helped to shape their masculinity and impacted their academic performance. However, as Cohen and Short (1958) noted so long ago, an adequate theory of a delinquent subculture must not only be able to explain the phenomenon, but also be able to identify the problems that

cause the delinquent subcultural response in addition to ". . . the ways in which the social structure generates these problems of adjustment and determines the forms which the solutions take" (p. 28).

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to review the literature pertinent to the research questions proposed in Chapter I. First, achievement motivation was defined and its theoretical foundation was provided. It was discovered that there are two types of achievement motivation, the individual type and the group-oriented, or collectivist, type. Furthermore, there are two goal perspectives, according to the socio-cultural theory of motivation: the task-involved orientation and the ego orientation. Achievement motivation within educational contexts was examined. Peer influence was the focus of the next section, and the four types of social power at the basis of all peer relations were presented (positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, expert, and referent-modeling). The influence of peer relations on academic success was discussed. The next section examined students' perceptions of educational experiences. Research in school climate and student perceptions was included. Cultural discontinuity, or alienation, was the focus of the next section. In this section, the five elements of alienation were listed and described. The fifth section discussed the cultural context of learning, primarily how it relates to African American male students. Finally, Black masculinity in adolescent males was discussed with regards to academic impact factors.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter begins with an explanation of the qualitative research methodology chosen for this study—the instrumental case study. The next section includes a description of the context of the study and its participants, followed by a description of the data collection and data analysis procedures. The role of the researcher is also addressed. Finally, I explain the establishment of trustworthiness.

Design of the Study

The specific methodology chosen for the proposed study of achievement motivation among African American male students was the instrumental case study (Stake, 1995). As suggested by Stake, the case could be an individual person or classroom of students. Stake further points out that "the case is a specific, a complex; functioning thing…the case is an integrated system" (p. 2). My integrated or bounded system is nine African American male seventh grade students. Their attendance in the same school system also binds the case in addition to their gender, ethnicity and grade level.

The case is also instrumental in achieving an understanding of something else (Stake, 1995). In this study, I sought to understand the sociocultural factors that influence achievement motivation. Also, the case has several other attributes that are considered to

be advantages. For example, it helps to discover hidden forms of behavior, links phenomena, and often provides explanations for discrepancies. Yet another attribute of the case study design, according to Stake (1995), is that it provides a way of studying human events and actions in their natural surroundings and has the attribute of "particularization" in that it allows the researcher to concentrate on the uniqueness of the case.

As a result of observing and interviewing students at school and in their home environment, I studied the participants in their natural surroundings. In this way, I was able to concentrate on the uniqueness of the case with respect to determining how peer influence, educational experiences, feelings of alienation (cultural discontinuity), cultural context of learning, and elements of Black masculinity influence achievement motivation among African American seventh-grade males.

This investigative study added to the scholarly research on understanding factors that influence achievement motivation particularly among seventh grade African American male middle school students. The study also helped reveal the underlying logic that influences their motivation during this stage of their education. Students' achievement motivation is enhanced when there is active involvement and ownership of the learning process (Fordham, 2000). Since there are disproportional levels of achievement among middle grade African American males in most of our nation's public schools (Joseph, 2000), this study was also unique in that the findings may support previous research results that will lead to changes in school policy, program modifications, teacher preparation, and teacher professional development.

Participants and Context of the Study

As previously noted, nine seventh grade African American middle school males who are currently attending three Golden County middle schools located in the Southeastern region of the United States were selected to participate in the study. Seventh grade students were chosen for this study because they are already acclimated to the middle school environment. Sixth grade students, on the other hand, who are experiencing transition from elementary school into middle school, are often faced with many challenges. Eighth graders, however, have been in middle school for three years and are now focusing on entering high school.

The participants were selected from three school locations: Hinshaw, Sr. Middle School, Johnson Middle, and King Middle School. Principals and counselors from each school aided me in locating the African American seventh graders chosen for the study. After selections were made, letters were sent to those students' parent(s)/caregiver(s) via the middle school counselors. Letters granting permission to participate in the study were received from nine African American males.

The ages of the participants ranged from 12-14 years old. Of the nine African American males, one was reared by his grandmother with another one being raised by his mother and stepfather. Another participant lived with his mother and her significant other. The remaining six were cared for by single parents or single caregivers. Six participants received free and/or reduced lunch. Three were on the Honor Roll; five were above average to average students. Only one struggled in most of his classes. Two participants had been suspended from school once.

Hinshaw, Sr. Middle School

Three students who participated in the study—Casper, Frank, and Kyree—were enrolled at Hinshaw, Sr. Middle School. Located at the far eastern end of the county, Hinshaw, Sr. was located near a branch of the school system's Central Office and the city branch of the county's community college. At the time of the study, 804 students attended Hinshaw, Sr. Of these, 266 students were in the seventh grade. The school employed 65 classroom teachers, similar to the district's average. Of these, 67% were fully licensed teachers as compared to 77% in the district. Teacher turnover rate was higher at Hinshaw, Sr., (27%) as compared to the district's (26%). Regarding student academic performance, both reading and mathematics achievement scores of seventh grade students were significantly below those of the district. Furthermore, the average number of student short-term suspensions was 36 as compared to an average of 26 in the district (Student Performance Report). Even with these challenges, the Hinshaw, Sr. principal was named 2006 Principal of the Year by the school system. Hinshaw, Sr. teachers observed during the study included 11 African American females and six African American males who taught in the content areas of science, mathematics, social studies, language arts, physical education, music, business/marketing, technology, and guided studies.

Thirteen-year old Casper lived in the southeastern area of the county and rode the bus to school. Casper lived with his mother, three foster siblings, and his mother's significant other in a middle class neighborhood. Casper was the oldest of his three siblings—a 2-year old brother, a 4-year old brother and two sisters ages 8 and 10. A

neatly dressed and respectful young man, Casper was also quite affable. He paid particular attention to his school attendance; he did not like to miss school. Casper's friends considered him "cool" because the seventh grade girls swooned over him.

Frank was 12 years old and had resided with his maternal grandmother for ten years. He lived in a four-room duplex that was filled with old newspapers and magazines and other items throughout two of the rooms. Frank rode the bus to school; however, he was often picked up by his grandmother and taken to or picked up from school. He and his grandmother lived in a modest five room house in an economically depressed southeastern area of the county. The walls were covered with pictures of Frank, his mother, grandfather and other relatives. Frank always spoke of his grandmother's influence in his life and of her expectations of him to do well. His demeanor was always very serious; he rarely bantered with his peers. Like Casper, Frank took pride in his school attendance; he had not missed a day of school since beginning Kindergarten.

Calling a public housing community his home, 14-year-old Kyree resided with his mother and younger brother. He, too, rode the bus to school and was often considered a troublemaker and bully by his peers. Though Kyree appeared to be shy, he was always identified as the culprit of any mischief that occurred in the classroom even though he may not have been involved.

Johnson Middle School

Achey, Kevin, and Patrick were enrolled at Johnson Middle School. This school was located in a once thriving community. Johnson Middle once had a population that was highly integrated and middle class; however, White flight was evident in not only the

ethnic population of the school, but also in property values and upkeep. A total of 632

students attended Johnson during the time of the study. Of these, 215 were enrolled in the

seventh grade. Again, reading and mathematics achievement scores for these students

were below the district's average. This school employed 54 teachers of whom 70% were

fully licensed. Again, teacher turnover rate was higher (32%) than that of the district, but

not as high as Hinshaw, Sr. (27%) (Student Performance Report). Johnson teachers

observed during the study included: nine African American females, six African

American males, one White female, and one Ethiopian male. These teachers taught in the

content areas of: mathematics, social studies, language arts, science, physical education,

guided studies, life skills, and technology.

Achey was 13-years old and lived with his mother, step-father and younger sister

in the southeastern area of the county. Achey had been living in his middle class

neighborhood for two years. Achey's stepfather was one of the basketball coaches for his

team. Of the nine participants, Achey was always prepared for class with his homework,

paper, pencils and other tools. Achey was well respected by his peers and was considered

to be a leader. In most instances, if other students did not understand an assignment, they

would ask Achey for explanations. Achey was the only participant in the study with a

stepfather who resided in the home.

Kevin was 13 years old and lived with his mother and older sister in the

southeastern area of the county. Although Kevin rode the bus to school, he lived eight

minutes away, and walked home after school on numerous occasions. Taller than most

males in his class, Kevin was very gregarious and always had an infectious smile and

playful demeanor. At school, many of the young ladies in most of his classes competed for his attention, in part, because Kevin was a member of the school's basketball team. Quite popular in his neighborhood, male and female peers congregated at Kevin's home. Not only did they come over to play basketball, but they also came over to work on projects and complete their homework.

Patrick was 13 years old and lived with his mother and older sister in a middle class neighborhood in the southwestern area of the county. Patrick's parents had begun divorce proceedings before he became a participant in this study. He often mentioned that he wished they would reconcile their differences. Although Patrick rode the bus to school, his mother picked him up on most days. Patrick was a member of the school's basketball team and often scored more than twelve points at each game. He was a handsome young man and was always well dressed in Sean John, Polo, and Rocawear attire. Patrick often received a lot of attention from his female classmates.

King Middle School

The remaining three students—Frederick, Lamar, and Wayne—were enrolled at King Middle School. Recent redistricting mandated by the school system's school board caused the ethnic makeup of this school to change drastically. Though this middle school fed into the school system's flagship high school, it was no longer considered a haven for the upper middle class. Nevertheless, a student noted that at this school "disruptive behavior is not tolerated. You are gone." This school was comprised of 891 students. Of these, 267 were in the seventh grade. Similar to the other schools in this study, seventh grade students were below the district in reading and mathematics achievement, but the

difference was less as compared to Hinshaw, Sr. and Johnson. More teachers were

employed at King, (65) as compared to the district (63) and an equivalent number to the

district (77%) were fully-licensed. However, the teacher turnover rate, similar to

Hinshaw, Sr. and Johnson, was (38%) and higher than the district's (26%) (Student

Performance Report, 2005). King teachers observed in the study included: four African

American females, eleven White females, and five White males. They taught in the areas

of: mathematics, language arts, social studies, science, technology, chorus, business

marketing, and guided studies. Some of these teachers served as participants' homeroom

teachers, also.

Frederick, one of the three students from King who participated in this study, was

13 years old and lived with his mother, grandmother, and younger brother in a public

housing complex in the southeastern area of the county. Frederick was often angry and

sullen and complained that he was not treated fairly at school. On numerous occasions

the assistant principal questioned Frederick about his behavior on the school bus,

perhaps, in part, because students believed Frederick was a bully. Frederick's voice was

not well modulated and he refrained from making eye contact with anyone who held a

conversation with him. In the community, Frederick played basketball on his recreational

center's team and was well liked by most of his team members.

Lamar was 13 years old and lived with his mother and older brother in a middle

class neighborhood in the southeastern area of the county. Lamar was very surly during

class and throughout most of the interviews. He was reprimanded for not having a pencil

on numerous occasions. Lamar's mother was a postal worker and was not home during evening hours; therefore, Lamar rarely completed his homework.

Wayne was 12 years old and lived with his mother and older sister in a once middle class neighborhood in the southeastern area of the county that had recently become infested with drugs. Wayne was an angry young man who was still grieving for his father who died in October 2005, three months before he became a participant in this study. Wayne wore his pain on his sleeves and was often reprimanded for treating others rudely. On most occasions, Wayne wore a T-Shirt with a picture of his father that said, "Big W" and "Little W."

Data Collection

Data for the study were derived from several sources. Specifically, data were obtained from: (a) three individual interviews with students; (b) one focus group interview per school; (c) one interview with parent(s) or other caregiver(s); (d) twenty-four observations in schools per participant; (e) three observations per participant in their communities; and (f) field notes taken in the researcher's journal.

Three types of protocol were used in the study: (a) Individual Student and Group Interview Protocol (see Appendix A); (b) Parent(s)/Caregiver(s) Interview Protocol (see Appendix B); and (c) Observations in Schools/Community Protocol (see Appendix C). The rationale for using three protocols was to provide additional support for the findings from each. This is called triangulation of data. Qualitative research of this nature also allows for the triangulation of information. Triangulation involves the comparison of two or more forms of evidence with respect to an object or area of research interest.

Underlying most uses of triangulation is the goal of seeking convergence of meaning from more than one direction. If the data from two or more methods seem to converge on a common explanation, the biases of the individual methods essentially cancel out and validation of the claim is enhanced.

Interviews

A major advantage of interviewing is that it is possible to develop a relationship with the subject and get a full range and depth of information. Also, the researcher can be flexible. Disadvantages relate to the researcher's presence in the interview. Since the researcher must be there to ask the questions, apprehension and trying to respond to please the interviewer can bias the subject's responses (Creswell, 2003). This can be eliminated by ensuring that the interview does not become a two-way form of communication and sharing. Therefore, this researcher functioned as a good listener and did not stray from the questions included on the interview sheet.

The interviews in this study took place in a private, non-threatening environment. The interview protocols consisted of a set of primary questions and a set of probing or secondary questions that were associated with each primary question. The interview protocol for individual and group interviews with students is presented in Appendix A. The interview protocol for parent(s) or other caregiver(s) can be found in Appendix B.

Manually recording interview information verbatim is difficult and can get misconstrued if the interviewee's own words are not accurately recorded. To overcome this limitation, authorities suggest taping interviews so that transcripts may be reviewed more than once. Thus, for student and parent(s)/caregiver(s)' interviews, the method was

taped recordings that were transcribed later. It is also important to mention that tape recorded interviews are often better than note-taking because tape recorders do not slow down the conversation and do not miss what is being said. Also, they do not change what is said through interpretation.

Observations

An observation requires a researcher to enter a situation where some behavior of interest is likely to take place, to watch the nature and frequency in which that particular form of behavior occur, and to record what is observed. Eventually, the record of observations is used to help answer a particular research question (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The recording method for observations in schools and in the community was note taking and can be found in Appendix C. Peer influences in the school and community can be observed from watching behaviors and actions of students in the classrooms and within the community at large.

Researcher's Journal

The researcher's journal was used to record investigators' thoughts, reactions, and questions about her or his research project. The journal also helped track a researcher's doubts, frustrations, biases, questions, and joys. Entries in the journal included: (a) how prior perspectives, opinions, and beliefs have been changed or reinforced; (b) the personal biases that are influencing observations; and (c) initial descriptions of the research site, setting or context. It also became a "historical record" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Table 1 on the next page presents a crosswalk aligning the research questions with data sources.

Table 1

Crosswalk Aligning Research Questions with Data Sources

Research Questions	Data Sources
1. How do the participants perceive their motivation to achieve in school?	Student Interviews, School Observations, and Parent(s)/Caregiver(s) Interviews.
2. How do the participants perceive peer influence?	Student Interviews, School Observations, Home/Community Observations, and Parent(s)/Caregiver(s) Interviews.
3. How do the participants perceive their educational experiences?	Student Interviews.
4. How do the participants perceive their feelings of alienation (cultural discontinuity)?	Student Interviews, School Observations, Home/Community Observations, and Parent(s)/Caregiver(s) Interviews.
5. How do the participants perceive their feelings about the cultural context of learning?	Student Interviews, School Observations, Home/Community Observations, and Parent(s)/Caregiver(s) Interviews.
6. How do the participants perceive elements of Black masculinity?	Student Interviews, School Observations, Home/Community Observations, and Parent(s)/Caregiver(s) Interviews.
7. What are the relationships between peer influence, perceptions of educational experiences, feelings of alienation, elements of Black masculinity, and achievement motivation for these participants?	Student Interviews, and Parent(s)/Caregiver(s) Interviews.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using content analysis. According to Babbie (2003), content analysis "is a social research method . . . used to study communication processes . . . [Also,] it may be used to study other aspects of social behavior" (pp. 322-323). Content analysis of data is somewhat subjective, which is an inherent limitation. Analyzing the data is usually an ongoing process in an attempt to identify themes related to the study and this identification is subjected to the researcher's interpretation. Overall, content analysis is essentially a coding operation, but methods of coding or classification differ, depending upon the conceptual framework (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Searching for themes is somewhat an art of recovering or uncovering what is embodied in content. In some instances, content analysis deals with the systematic examination of current records or documents as sources of data (Query & Kreps, 1993).

Sources for the present analysis were: student interviews, observations in schools, observations in the home and community and interviews with parent(s)/caregiver(s). Data analysis began at the microlevel by analyzing data related to each student. In this analysis, I looked for patterns within individual student data. Next, I conducted a macrolevel analysis, looking for patterns across the individuals' data.

The process began with coding the data in an effort to define units. From each interview, observation, and field notes' entry, I began reviewing the data to describe what I observed in units. For example, any data related to a Black man's reputation were grouped together. Thirty-eight units initially emerged. I was then able to collapse some of the units because of redundancy or overlap. While doing this process, the thirty-eight

units became twenty-two units. From this point of the analysis, I began discovering patterns among the units. The patterns were used to collapse the data into categories. Categories that were generated included self-concept, self-efficacy, the definition of what it means to be a Black man, parental influence, peer influences, and school-based descriptions of what affected the learning process. These categories became attributes of themes that were aligned with three strands of achievement motivation: (a) the personal context of learning; (b) the sociocultural context of learning; and (c) the academic context of learning. See Appendix F for an example of specific analysis of data from unit to category or attribute to theme to strand. Table 2 presents a graphic explanation of the achievement motivation strands, the related themes, and their attributes.

Table 2

Strands, Themes, and Attributes

Achievement Motivation Strand	Themes	Attributes
Personal Context	Achievement and Identity	• Self-concept as learner • Self-efficacy as learner • Black male identity
Sociocultural Context	The (Dis)Connected Family	• Family structure • Expectations of parent(s)/caregiver(s)
	"It's About My 'Dogs' and Me"	• Bonding through talk, play, and dress • Respect and camaraderie
Academic Context	Pedagogical Influences	• Interactions with teacher • Response to the curriculum
	Learner Behavior	• Listening • On-task behavior • Following rules

Role of the Researcher

My personal and professional experiences with achievement motivation are related to my background as a mother of an African American male and from my observations as a middle-grades teacher. As I have previously explained, my son Gerard was a highly motivated and engaged student while attending elementary school; however, once he entered middle school and particularly seventh grade his interest in school declined sharply. I also noticed in my seventh grade English classes that some of the African American males were not motivated to achieve. After discussing this issue with African American and Caucasian male seventh-grade males, I began to realize that the experiences of African American males related to their motivation toward school were quite different from those of Caucasian males.

Stake (1995) points out that, "The case researcher plays different roles and has options as to how they will be played" (p. 91). He then lists various roles such as evaluator, advocate, teacher, interpreter and biographer among others. I became an evaluator in that I assessed how peer influence, perceptions of educational experiences, feelings of alienation (cultural discontinuity), cultural context of learning, and elements of Black masculinity influenced achievement motivation among African American seventh grade males. I also played the role of an advocate in that I believe and support the view that African American males experience the learning environment differently and will describe their motivation toward school in different ways. I have experienced this firsthand as a result of watching my son mature from a child to an adolescent and now into a young adult as well as from my classroom teaching experiences. The role of the

researcher as a teacher is to enlighten according to Stake (1995), as well as facilitate learning both individually and collectively. In this capacity, I attempted to enlighten educators and facilitate their understanding of what African American male students perceive as pertinent factors in order for effective learning to occur. Enlightenment in this respect can result in school programs and administrative policy changes leading to an institution more responsive to the needs of African American middle school males. My study informs researchers on the growing need for more studies investigating factors affecting how African American males describe their educational experiences. The study should also facilitate educators', administrators' and stakeholders' understanding of what African American males describe as motivating factors for successful school achievement. I served in the role of interpreter as well, interpreting students' stories, experiences, or what they were telling me about their achievement motivation. As the author of the study and recorder of these students' stories, I also played the role of biographer.

Trustworthiness of Study

Janesick (2000) revealed that a key issue for qualitative research is developing a shared understanding of appropriate procedures for assessing the credibility or trustworthiness. In a broad sense, trustworthy qualitative research needs to be based on a systematic collection of data using "acceptable" research procedures, and allowing the procedures and findings to be open to systematic critical analysis from others. Janesick further noted that triangulation refers to comparison of findings derived from two or more data gathering procedures or sources of information. Using this technique, emerging

findings can be assessed for the extent of consistency or inconsistency among data derived from different sources. Data in this study were obtained from: (a) individual and group interviews with students; (b) interviews with parent(s) or other caregiver(s); (c) observations in schools and in the community; and (d) the researcher's journal. The responses to questions can thus be compared to each other in order to discern if parent(s)/caregiver(s) have the same perceptions as the students.

According to Janesick (2000), an audit trail provides a clear and defensible link for each step from the raw data to the reported findings. An audit trail is a record that shows what operations have been performed during a given period of time. Such trails are useful for going back and rechecking information and reconfirming results. The raw data in this study was first recorded in the form of transcribed interviews and manually logged observations (note taking) in the community and the school. Transcribed interviews were numbered in order to provide a marker in the audit trail. Observation sheets were dated and also referred to by number.

In a similar vein, Janesick (2001) explained that stakeholder or member checks refer to the process of taking the draft findings to the student participants and parent(s)/caregiver(s). Member checking is used to verify interpretations by having the student participants and parent(s)/caregivers(s) examine rough drafts or writings where their words have been transcribed for accuracy. It was important to take the draft findings back to the student participants and parent(s)/caregiver(s) to ascertain if the findings were taken to mean what the researcher said they meant. This gives the stakeholders a chance to further explain or even change the wording of a response. I sought comments on the

extent to which findings were consistent with their experiences, and whether the findings assisted in understanding the topic being investigated. There was, however, a methodological weakness involved with this technique. I completed the member checking as quickly as possible after the interviews and data analysis. However, I realized too much time had elapsed and circumstances may change. The participants may also have too much time for reflection and this may alter what they initially said. Either of these dilemmas may be a weakness of the study.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to examine the personal, sociocultural, and academic factors influencing achievement motivation among nine seventh-grade African American male students who were currently attending Golden County middle schools in the Southeastern region of the United States. The study was devised to explore what constitutes a positive educational experience for middle grade African American males in terms of how educational experiences, peer influences, feelings of alienation (cultural discontinuity), cultural context of learning, and elements of Black masculinity influenced achievement motivation among African American seventh grade males. Using an instrumental case study design, data were gathered through (a) individual student interviews; (b) school-based student focus group interviews; (c) parent(s)/caregiver(s) interviews; and (c) observations in schools/communities.

I studied the participants in their natural surroundings, observing and interviewing students at school and observing and interviewing students in their home environment. Three compelling strands related to achievement motivation emerged from analysis of the data: personal context of learning, sociocultural context of learning and the academic context of learning. Related to these strands are five themes: (a) achievement and identity, (b) significance of the (dis)connected family, (c) "It's about my 'dogs' and me,"

(d) pedagogical influences, and (e) self-regulation. Attributes of achievement identity are the student's self concept as a learner, self efficacy as a learner, and Black male identity. The (dis)connected family theme was influenced by a student's family structure and parent(s)/caregiver(s)' expectations. "It's about my 'dogs' and me" refers to participants bonding with peers through talk, play, and dress as well as the code of respect and camaraderie. Pedagogical influences included interactions with teachers and response to the curriculum. Learner behavior is defined by the students' listening, on-task behavior, and following of rules.

Within the description of the following themes, longer quotes are documented by data source and date. For instance, (II, 2/10/05) denotes individual interview that occurred on February 10, 2005. Two other abbreviations used were (FG) for focus group and (PI) for parent interview. Other data sources can be discerned explicitly within narrative portions of the study.

Personal Context

The personal context involves all of the distinct characteristics that a student brings to a learning situation including his interests and motivations, learning style preferences, prior knowledge and experiences. It is through the learning process that students may find characters and texts they can relate to on a personal level, in order that they "see" themselves in the course and know that school is for and about them (Bennett, 1999; Irvine & Armento, 2001; Nieto, 1999). There is, therefore, a strong relationship between *achievement and identity* that is reflected in this study through the participants' self concept as a learner, self efficacy as a learner, and Black male identity.

Self Concept as Learner

The insight that each student had regarding his ability as a learner was a unique

feature for each of the participants in this study. Their level of self-worth and self-esteem

seemed to have a tremendous bearing on whether or not they were motivated to learn,

regardless of the subject matter. The self involved one's personality and all the attributes

that are unique to its development—both positive and negative. In most instances when

students felt confident about their abilities to succeed their effort was often realized. The

participants' self concept as learner was related to desire—fueled by future aspirations,

public perceptions, role models, and friendships.

For Casper, learning was necessary, he said, "so I can have my education." Desire

to learn was evident from all of the participants. For example, Kyree said, "I want to get

my education and do something . . . I do not want to be on the street. I can know all that

I'm going to learn so I can go to college and I can follow anything I want." Wayne

asserted, "I need to help my community." Additionally, Wayne wanted to learn so that he

would not have to return to his neighborhood to live when he became older. He said,

> The fact of where I lived so long hasn't been real good; the neighborhood that I
> live in hasn't been real good. That makes me want to when I grow up make sure I
> don't end up being in the same neighborhood. (II, 3/8/06)

Anticipation of getting a good job was of paramount importance. Kevin said the

reason he wanted to learn was because, "if you have an education you can get a good job.

You've got to have a good education to do things that you want to do in life." Frank also

wanted to learn because he was convinced that he would, "get a good job when I get

older." Additionally, Casper wanted to learn as much as he could so he could go to

college and, "so I can know things so I won't be dumb and stuff like that." Frank, on the

other hand, knew that learning could land him, "a good job when I get older and that

makes me know that if I learn very good I can finish school sooner. It's a lot of different

stuff that makes me just keep going every day." Wayne mentioned, "I need to do

something with my life. Just thinking about being successful makes me want to learn."

He went on to say, "a good job and a place to stay, a house of my own," motivated him to

learn in school. Lamar simply stated, "I just want to pass."

Public perception received from the media added to the participants' desire to

learn. All of them realized that their schools were not noted for high achievement. For

some of them, debunking a stereotype was a major motivation; however, for others

making money was a conduit to self-reliance. Patrick from Johnson Middle School

explained his need to learn:

> Well, sometimes when you see a lot of people saying they want to grow up and make a lot of money that means or that tells me if I don't go out here and be successful, like get a good education then I can't be able to do what I want to do. (FG, 3/10/06)

Patrick went on to say:

> When I look at TV, I see some people on there that say that they struggled in their childhood and their mom and dad didn't have a lot to like make them be like other people that they saw. Like some of the people that had a lot of clothes, a lot of food, shoes, things like that. I see them on TV and they're making a lot of money and they're doing stuff that they wanted to do when they were little . . . . When I hear people talk about being on the street like they say they don't want to go to school because it's boring and you don't learn nothing really and they get to do better stuff out in the street than they could do . . . that makes me really feel like I

have to get my education. . . . Selling drugs and drinking and being on the street corner that really doesn't help you become successful. So you really want to go out there and achieve your goals so that you can make that money that you wanted to make. (II, 2/10/06)

Frank wanted to learn to become a lawyer, "because they make good money and I want to go to the Supreme Court."

More specifically, motivating some students to learn in school were media representations of famous athletes and community professionals in terms of importance and future earnings' ability. Referring to his friends, Patrick remarked:

They [his friends] say they want to be like the people that they see on TV. Like if they play, if anybody plays sports they say I want to be like Kobe [Bryant]. I want to be like Payton Manning in football. [For] basketball they want to play like that and make good money. That encourages me to let me know that they want to do what I want to do . . . I hear a lot of people say they want to play sports. They want to play sports, and become doctors, lawyers, pediatricians, veterinarians and stuff like that. (II, 2/10/06)

Frederick believed making good grades would allow him entry into the college athletics and ultimately into the professional sports arena. He said, "if I make good grades, I'll be able to play sports in college and in the pros."

Peer relationships were prevalent in the lives of all of the participants. These friendships influenced student actions, behaviors, and attitudes. For example, Frederick appeared to really want to become a class officer in his Technology class; however, the whole class laughed when he raised his hand to submit his name for one of the positions. As the students were laughing, he told the teacher, "That's okay, I changed my mind, I don't want to be one." Lamar stopped working on his math worksheet after a student

asked him three times about his plans to attend another student's party in the class on

Saturday. He ignored the worksheet and talked to the student about the new tennis shoes

he was going to buy to wear to the party. In this case, peer relationships took precedence

over the academic task.

Though learning was important, friendships were viewed as academic inspirations

in both a positive and negative ways. Lamar reiterated:

> Everybody else makes me want to learn a lot of stuff. They know more [stuff].
> Some know more things that I don't know in big words. They use a big word and
> I go look it up in the dictionary to see what it means. I'm going to need my
> education. (II, 3/8/06)

Lamar further explained his desire to learn was sometimes influenced by friends,

especially when, "they'd be wanting to work in groups with each other." (II, 3/2/06).

Frederick said he was influenced by girls in his classes. "Girls sometimes talk to me a lot

in class so I try and talk then I get in trouble." When asked why girls wanted to talk with

him, he smiled and said, "They like me. The girls talk to me a lot in class so I try and talk

then I get into trouble."

Classroom observations revealed student behaviors that supported participants'

choice to learn. For instance, Melvin turned around to talk to another student when the

other student tapped him on the shoulder to ask a question. The friend interrupted Melvin

twice while he (Melvin) was writing in his journal. Although Melvin was distracted by

the student, he continued his work after he talked briefly to his friend. On another

occasion, Wayne was easily distracted by his friends and would stop doing his work until

after he finished talking to thrm. He remained off task sometimes during the duration of

the class period. On another occasion, the teacher placed Wayne in a math group with four other students to discuss percentages and complete a worksheet, one of his peers asked him about the Super Bowl game. Wayne stopped discussing percentages and became engaged in a conversation about football. Too, Kyree, a class clown, was often off-task as a result of his playful nature.

Other examples of peer influence on the students can also be noted. For example, Kevin sat next to a female student in Social Studies class who called his name while he was writing in his journal. Once she captured his attention, he stopped writing and opened a small photo album that she gave him. When Patrick tried to complete his Language Arts assignment, a student tapped him on the back and distracted him. Patrick did not ignore the student. He put his pencil down, smiled, and talked to the student before the teacher asked him to return to the assignment.

Once, Frank was engaged in a board game with six male classmates during Social Studies class. The teacher told him that he could only roll the dice once. However, as a result of his peers' encouragement he rolled the dice twice after raising his head to see if the teacher was watching. During another time, Frank directly commented on the influence of his peers during interview sessions. Once he said [about his friend,] "When they put me in a good mood I'm just ready to learn." He also noted that "my best friend is very funny and makes me laugh, but when it comes to learning he's very smart. We have fun together but [Friends also] make me competitive sometimes . . ."

Casper sat next to a female student in Social Studies class. He answered questions she asked and ignored the teacher's explanations about the pending Writing Test.

Another time a female student who sat near Casper tried to distract him while he was completing a worksheet in Language Arts class that was due at the end of the class period. She threw a piece of candy and he caught it. Casper did not complete the worksheet during the class period as a result of this distraction.

During one of his physical education classes, one of Kevin's peers encouraged him to take the ball away from a shorter student. Kevin laughed and ran down the basketball court. He snatched the ball away from the student and ran to the opposite end of the court to score two points.

Several comments reflected the influence of peers on learning. For instance, when asked if Achey's friends influenced his desire to learn, he responded, "When they don't want me to learn." Another time, however, he said adamantly," They don't influence me." He later added, "Me and my friends don't talk about it [learning]." But he admitted when asked if his friends thought learning was important that, "some do and some don't." Achey also commented during another interview when asked if friends have positive learning experiences, "My friends have positive experiences because they make the Honor Roll. [It] Makes me want to get Honor Roll too because all my friends got on the Honor Roll."

Furthermore, Kevin reluctantly admitted that his friends influenced his desire to learn. He stated, "When I see them doing their work I want to do my work." He added that, "they think the same way I do just the way they do their work. They want to get their stuff done. Some of my friends want to be sports players and they have to go to college" (II, 2/10/06).

One example of peer influence on learning was captured in an observation of friendly competition between Patrick and Kevin. They were good friends and often studied together. If Patrick's test scores were higher than Kevin's in English, Kevin would vow to do better on the next test and make a higher score than Patrick. On one occasion, Kevin's score was higher than Patrick's on an English quiz. Kevin was proud of his score, but Patrick vowed to do better on the next test.

At other times, however, some of the participants denied peer influence affecting their behaviors. In this vein, Casper said that he did not know if his friends influenced him at school because, "I don't really talk to my friends like that sometimes." Kevin also said that he was not influenced by his friends. When asked if his friends affected his desire to learn at school, he remarked, "some people have their on days where they're doing everything right and sometimes they're just not doing well so I feel like they need to do their work then and I am not really influenced by this." He added, "because I feel that if I do my work I can get ahead and then when they're still doing stuff that I did, I'll be on something else."

Finally, participants cited family members' influence on their desire to learn. Parent(s)/Caregiver(s) expected participants to learn as much as they could and to do well. Kevin noted that his mother influenced his desire to learn. She recognized what he would face based on the reputation of his school. He recounted:

> What makes me want to learn is I mean people just down you saying you're not smart enough to learn. They're saying you're not smart enough to learn. I see a lot of people selling drugs and they make a lot of money, but I know if I get my education, I can make more money than them. (FG, 3/10/06)

Kevin was additionally influenced by his mother since she was a recent graduate of a local business college. She had been employed by a neighborhood steel plant for 18 years; however, her job was outsourced to a lower wage country. Pride in his mother's academic accomplishments encouraged him to work hard in school. He revealed:

> My mom makes me want to learn because my mom she did school. She did her twelve years of school and then she went to college, so that makes me want to do the things that she did because if she can do it, I know I can do it. (FG, 3/10/06)

Frank simply stated that he is inspired to learn, "so I can be anything I want when I grow up . . . What really makes me want to learn is knowing when it is report card time, I can come home with good grades to show my grandmother. She is so proud of me." Achey proclaimed, "my mother and stepfather always tell me they expect me to make A's and B's on my report card." Wayne revealed, "I know my mother expects me to do good at school, but sometimes, I don't." Lamar remembered, "my mother checks my homework sometimes when she comes home from work and it better be right." Casper explained, "I don't get my homework checked as much as I did in elementary school, but my mother expects it to be good . . . If I make good grades, my mom gives me money. Twenty dollars for A's, ten dollars for B's, and five dollars for C's."

Self Efficacy as Learner

Self efficacy refers to one's self judgment of his personal capabilities to initiate and successfully complete certain tasks, expend greater effort and persevere in the face of adversity. In most instances by the time students reach middle school, they have already

made significant decisions regarding their academic preferences and performance. Expectations regarding academic success relates closely to one's perceived ability.

Bandura (1997) explained that self efficacy refers to a learner's beliefs about his ability to accomplish a task. Six of the nine participants were motivated to complete their homework assignments on time when homework passes (a night without homework) were offered. Frederick, Wayne, Lamar, Achey, Frank, and Kevin worked harder when they envisioned successful completion of homework because they knew they would receive a homework pass. Frederick noted that, "I work hard to receive a homework pass in technology class." Wayne revealed, "I don't like Language Arts, but I do most of all my homework to get a pass." Lamar stated, "I only got two homework passes, but if felt good to get them." Achey and Frank maintained that they each received five homework passes in one class. Kevin expressed, "I got a homework pass one time and I was happy."

When asked to describe feelings about the ways in which the participants learned, a variety of answers were given. Casper said that he had positive experiences with math and that influenced his learning. He explained:

> Like I didn't know there was a whole bunch of math. Only thing I thought it was multiplication, subtraction, addition and division. I didn't know that you could have a's, b's, c's, and d's (variables) and all that and you could do math and dividing them up into numbers. I like doing them (math problems). That's my favorite thing is math. (II, 3/8/06)

Kyree has also had positive experiences with math. "We do, you know, like the alphabet that's in the math problems and word problems. Because when they say the stuff in a paragraph . . . I know what that asks that you multiply or divide." Kevin, on the other

hand, attributed his positive learning experiences to his teachers. "Some of the teachers they push me, they push too hard to make me do my work and so I do it and it makes them proud." In fact, six of the nine participants attributed their desire to learn to their teachers.

Belief in their ability to do the work was subject-specific, at times. For instance, Lamar, Casper, Lamar and Wayne expressed that there were mathematical concepts such as percentages that they knew they would never learn simply because they were not interested in them. These participants believed they could not do well in the mathematics content area and rationalized this feeling by saying that they were not interested in the subject. Furthermore, five of the nine participants revealed that they were confident about passing the seventh grade statewide writing test in which they had been practicing for in their Language Arts classes for three weeks. Achey maintained, "I know how to find the main idea in a sentence and that will be on the Writing Assessment Test." Wayne noted, "I have problems sometimes organizing my ideas and my teacher helped me to learn that for the test [Writing Assessment]. Lamar was confident in passing the writing test because he recalled that, "we be always practicing writing for the test next Tuesday." Frederick stated, "I don't know why we always be practicing for the writing test; it ain't gon' do no good." At yet another time, four of the participants believed themselves to not being motivated to learn in three of their classes. They subsequently did not achieve as a result of their beliefs. They did admit, however, that they needed to learn how to become more engaged in the lesson in order to remain focused and complete the assignments to pass the test without becoming distracted. Kyree admitted when speaking

about math, a subject in which he was not interested, "I don't know if I can sit still long enough to finish the test so I can pass it."

Black Male Identity

For some Black men claiming an identity is often rooted in how they conceptualize themselves through the eyes of their peers, society and the media. In many instances, Black male identity is formed through a sense of self esteem, pride and various coping strategies. Social conditions also determine how Black male identity is formed. Although a Black male's journey in life is often marred with discrimination, racism and a negative self image. It is important that Black male youth understand that they can become successful Black men.

All of the participants appeared to have a positive view of themselves as Black males. All of the African American males indicated that what they learned at school as well as from home and their participation in community activities would help them become successful Black men. The participants had a sense of personal dignity and respect for themselves as African American males which motivated their need to achieve. They stated that getting an education was important because African American men were perceived as drug dealers, having nice clothes and/or cars, and as thieves. Kevin maintained:

> When you see a lot of people [Black men] out in the streets selling drugs and they're making a lot of money then that makes you feel like if you go out there and sell drugs you can make just more money so you won't have to worry about getting an education to be successful. (FG, 3/10/06)

Frank believed that, "all African Americans aren't just good for selling drugs, going to

jail and stuff; they can be doctors, lawyers, basketball players, make furniture and

anything they put their mind to" (II, 2/20/06).

The perception of irresponsibility was noted by Wayne when he said:

> Some of the statistics are that Black males are just, they're not really doing
> nothing with their life. They're just going around getting girls pregnant at young
> ages and not taking care of their families, gang banging starting violence around
> the community and all that stuff. I don't want to be one of those people. I need to
> know that I need to go out and do something with my life. (II, 1/25/06)

Noting the reality of the drug culture and that some Black men participate in it, he

recognized that he did not want to have a part of it. "A lot of drugs are sold in my

neighborhood and you can make a lot of money, but I don't want to do it" (II, 2/13/06).

According to the participants, African American men were held to a higher

personal standard both internally (to the students) and externally (to the world). All of the

participants stated that African American men must work harder than everyone else in

order to become successful. They also pointed out that African American men were

scrutinized more than men in other ethnic groups. Frank stated, "I know I have to work a

little harder and try a little harder." Patrick added that, "a lot of people say that Black

men can't be successful and that makes me want to go out there and show them that we

can do what we want to do if we put our, set our minds to it." Frederick reiterated, "I

know my teachers watch me more than the White boys, they won't even let me go to the

bathroom without watching me and that makes me mad." Lamar shared, "they [teachers]

give us silent lunch when we do something, but the White boys get warnings. That's not

fair."

The participants described what it meant to be an African American male in

various ways. When Kevin noted the importance of being and African American male,

he stated:

> Being a Black man means a lot. I mean I have to respect my culture. I have to be
> with my friends whether they're Black or White. It's just the way I am. Like you
> have to accept me as in my color and you have to accept my culture. (II, 1/26/06)

Achey maintained, "my mom taught me to never hit a woman and to also respect other

people and they'll respect you. In addition, Lamar revealed, "I believe a Black man must

respect others if he wants to be respected." Kyree recalled that a school counselor [at

Hinshaw, Sr.] helped him to understand that a [respectful] Black man should grow up and

make something out of his life instead of being on the streets." Being Black also was

defined in the ethic of work. Frederick explained that a Black man, "must work for his

stuff, work for what you get."

Another way of demonstrating Black masculinity is by being successful against

all odds. Doing so becomes a challenge to defy a stereotype. Kevin described what this

means:

> A lot of people say that Black men can't be successful and that makes me want to
> go out there and show them that we can do what we want to do if we put our, set
> our minds to it. (II, 1/26/06)

Casper stated that, "being a Black man means being successful, being good and being on

task" (II, 2/14/06).

The stereotype of being a Black male extended itself to having to prove to the

world one's worth. Frank was vocal on this point when he commented:

> I have a lot more to prove. I have a lot more to do with my life than just average
> people. It feels like I have to do more in here to prove myself outside of school
> because on the news I heard about the police department had a black book on just
> Black police officers and they followed them around. That makes me want to
> prove myself more to society. (II, 2/20/06)

Wayne was very deliberate in describing his beliefs about a Black man. He explained:

> Being a Black man means that I need to so something in my life and make sure
> I'm not another statistic . . . that maybe I need to help my community and I need
> to be the best person I can be. A Black man also stands up for what's right and
> respects his civil rights. (II, 3/2/06)

When Patrick was asked what being a Black man meant to him, pride and a sense

of responsibility were evident in his reply when he said, "strong, successful, staying in

line, make sure that I look out for other people, not just myself. Don't think about myself

because it's other people out there that need help too so help them out also." Lamar,

Wayne and Frederick agreed that a Black man, "should take pride in his family, provide

for them, and take care of his children."

Saving face or not being embarrassed was attributed to being a strong Black man.

Four of the participants appeared to become embarrassed when they were reprimanded in

front of their peers and/or the researcher. For example, when Frederick was denied a

bathroom pass, five students laughed at him and he looked at the researcher and put his

head down on his desk. At another time, Lamar became surly with his African American

math teacher when she stopped teaching to call his mother to let her know that he did not

have his homework, Lamar stated, "I don't care if you do call her." After the class was

over, Lamar commented to the researcher while walking to his next class, "I don't usually

act like that, but she made me mad calling my mamma and stuff." Kyree was working in

a group with four other students when his teacher asked him to leave the table as a result

of his distractions. When one student laughed, Kyree stated, "Shut up dog, don't be

laughing at me." He came over to the researcher's desk and stated, "Don't write that

down." It was very rare for Casper to display disruptive behavior; however, when he

threw a piece of candy across the room to a female student, he was asked to leave. Casper

passed by the researcher's desk and said, "Don't tell my mamma."

Of interest was the fact that the hallmark of success for eight of the participants

was becoming a professional basketball player. Casper revealed, "I want to play sports,

like I want to be a good basketball player like Kobe." While Casper was interested in

basketball, Wayne, Lamar and Kyree revealed that they wanted to play professional

football. Kyree stated, "I like T.O. [Terrell Owens] I mean, I just like the way the dude

handles the ball. . . . I would play like him." Achey, Patrick, Frederick, and Kevin

maintained that they wanted to become professional basketball players so they could, as

Kevin said, "Do it big . . . have nice cars, clothes, bling and be on MTV Cribs."

Sociocultural Context

The sociocultural context is a division of two distinct but closely interrelated

components—social and cultural. A student's social environment and his cultural

background together exert a tremendous influence on his motivation and desire to learn or, conversely, not to learn. A student's peers, parent(s)/caregiver(s) and other community members are very closely interrelated and strongly influence the social environment in which he lives and learns.

The sociocultural context of learning according to Graybill (1997) has profound implications for teaching and learning. This emergent view of human development maintained that higher order functions develop as a result of social interaction. Vygotsky (1986) argued that a child's development cannot be understood by a study of the individual; one must also examine the external social world in which that individual life has developed. As a result of participating in activities that require cognitive and communicative functions, children are drawn into the use of these functions in ways that nurture and "scaffold" them.

Chamberlain (2005) defined culture as the "value, norms, and traditions that affect how individuals of a particular group perceive, think, interact, behave and make judgments about their world" (p. 195). A group's way of understanding and interacting, observing and behaving are essential parts of culture that have developed over time and are maintained through tradition. Culture, therefore is learned with a child's first experiences with the family into which he is born, the community to which he belongs, and the dynamic environment in which he lives (Chamberlain, 2005). By the time children begin formal education at age five or six, they have already internalized many of the basic values and beliefs of their native culture, learned rules of behavior which are

considered appropriate for their role in the community, and established the procedures for continued socialization.

In this study, the participants's sociocultural context was manifested in the significance of the (dis)connected family and, "It's about my 'dogs' and me" (interactions with peers).

Significance of the Dis(connected) Family

The disconnected family has an even greater influence on students' learning, especially in terms of motivation and desire, than the connected family. The disconnected family is a social unit that is not comprised of the traditional members—both a mother and father. As a result, one parent must bear the responsibilities and tasks of both the father and mother. This resulting burden is often overwhelming for the parent or caregiver who is left to raise the child. However, children who have a sense of belonging often work harder and are involved in positive activities. Following is a discussion of the attributes of this sociocultural theme: family structure and expectations of parent(s)/caregiver(s).

For eight of the nine participants, the female presence was predominant. Only one participant had a stepfather; one participant lived with his grandmother, and another lived with his mother and grandmother occasionally. Still another lived with his mother and her significant other. The remaining five lived with their mothers. In all of these cases, the female presence reminded the participants of the value of schooling and hard work inside and outside of school, and of transitions in their lives. For Casper, Frank and Kyree, their grandmothers expressed the importance of making good grades in school because they

wanted to see them go to the next educational level. In fact, Kyree's mother wanted him to graduate from high school. In a similar vein, Frank's grandmother wanted to live long enough to see him graduate from Alliance State University. In addition, Kevin's mother noted, "I've talked to him about doing better, being better for himself and eventually being the best person he could be." Frederick's grandmother explained that, "I constantly tell him how important education is." Mothers and grandmothers of the participants also cautioned them about the perils of not doing well in school Frank's grandmother warned him about the transition from elementary to middle school. She said:

> I told Frank, a whole lot of things happen in middle school. It's a different ballgame. You're not in elementary school anymore now. I said, you see somebody doing something you know that's not right you just walk on by them and go where you're supposed to be for sure. (PI, 3/14/06)

Being responsible outside of school was also emphasized by parent(s) and caregiver(s). Casper's mother pointed out that his chores consisted of cutting the grass once a week, taking the garbage cans to the curb and bringing them back as well as keeping his room clean. Frank's grandmother was a strict disciplinarian and often spoke of how she would not hesitate to use her belt if Frank misbehaved. "He [Frank] knows that I will get my belt if I have to." Frank's chores consisted of keeping his room clean and taking out the garbage. Frank knew that once he came home from school he had to complete his homework and chores before he could join his friends. Frederick was expected to clean his room, take out the trash, and help with the laundry before completing his homework. According to Kevin's mother, he had to complete his homework, clean his room, and sometimes the kitchen before he could go outside to play

basketball. Regarding Achey, a strong work ethic was expressed by both parents. His

mother and stepfather revealed:

> We tell Achey to get his education so that he won't have to work two jobs like we [mother and stepfather] do. He sees us getting up early in the morning. . . . like I drive the school bus and then I come home and go to Dollar General Store and then I [mother] have to go back and pick up the kids on my route in the afternoon. . . .Well I [stepfather] don't want Achey to struggle like we do to make ends meet. . . . I mean me and my wife we do pretty good, but we both know we have to work two jobs to live like we want to. (PI, 3/25/06)

While the female presence was predominant, there were other family members

who also had an influence and encouraged the nine participants to do well in school.

Frederick, Lamar and Wayne's godparents, aunts and uncles, and grandparents

encouraged them to study hard in school and make good grades. In this regard, Patrick's

mother explained, "His dad, pastor, godparents, and sister all stay on him about doing

well in school."

Even with the strong female presence, the participants still expressed a need to

have a male presence in their lives. Though four participants' fathers had been

incarcerated, their sons spoke well of them, with the exception of one, whose mother still

held negative thoughts about her experiences with his father. Too, significant male others

became surrogate family members. For instance, Lamar had a strong relationship with his

police officer neighbor who helped to guide him in the right path. Kyree looked to his

Hinshaw, Sr. Middle School male counselor for assistance in becoming a man. Achey's

stepfather served as not only a father figure, but also as a coach and a guide. Though

Frank's godfather, who resided in another state, was not physically present in a daily

sense, he often visited his godfather during school vacations. Furthermore, extended male family members were in the background cheering the participants on and encouraging them to persevere in school and in their social lives.

In fact, all the parent(s)/caregiver(s) instilled in the study's children a sense of self worth and the necessity of taking ownership of their educational growth. Also, five of the nine participants were taught and held accountable for their actions by their parent(s)/ caregiver(s). For instance, Frank and Casper could not play video games at home as a result of the teacher calling to inform their parent(s)/caregiver(s) that they did not have their homework. According to his mother, Patrick could not go to the mall for misbehavior in the life skills class.

While the strength of the female was present in the participants' lives, eight of them did not have ongoing, consistent relations with their fathers, something that was quite troubling to them. Frederick had not seen his father in seven years due to incarceration and expressed:

> I really don't know my father. . . . I only know what my mother and grandmother tell me and that's not good. . . . Like I heard he went to jail for robbing some old people . . . they didn't get hurt or nothing . . . I don't want to talk about it. (II, 3/20/06)

Frederick also explained, "I remember talking to my dad once on the phone and said he was going to try to see me, but he never did . . . I mean like I really don't care."

Casper noted that his mother became pregnant while in college and he really did not know his father; however, he asserted:

> My mother does not like to talk about my father . . . even if I ask her questions. One day when I was in fourth grade he came to see me and I just remember they argued. I don't remember too much about him. I haven't seen him since then and I don't ask about him. . . . It's like Fernell is my dad now because he lives here and get along pretty good. . . . He knows he's not my real dad. (II, 3/8/06)

Lamar's father left the family when he was two years old. As a result, his mother constantly berated his father and would become angry if Lamar asked about him. Lamar revealed:

> I haven't seen my dad since I was little. . . . I mean I don't remember how old I was when I saw him last. . . . Every time I ask my mother about him she gets mad and say stuff like he's never done nothing for you, I'm the one that takes care of you buy you stuff . . . what you worrying about him for. . . . So I just stopped asking about him. (II, 3/2/06)

Lamar's mother maintained, "I don't bring Black men into the house that have negative influence. I try not to around my children" (II, 4/5/06).

Wayne's father died shortly before he became a participant in this study. However, he often expressed that he was just getting to know his father before he died. Wayne's father had been incarcerated for several years and died in October 2005 from liver cancer after being home for seven months. Wayne was often angry and sullen. Casper's mother explained that she became pregnant while in college and Casper did not have a relationship with his father. Frank's grandmother stated that Frank had not seen his father since he was two years old. Although Kyree had a relationship with his father, he felt as if he did not know him because he had been previously incarcerated for ten years. He explained:

When I get in trouble she [mother] makes me go stay with my dad, but hey I really don't know the dude. . . . but I don't mind going because we talk and he takes me out to eat and stuff like that. (II, 3/14/06)

The absence of a father figure in the home was expressed by Wayne, whose father passed away before the study began. He spoke of how his father used to advise him. He sadly remembered:

He told me that I need to do something with my life because at first he was messing up too. He was really messing up. . . . Like at first he was an alcoholic and he really didn't take care of me; my mother and specifically he wouldn't take care of us and he just wasn't being a father to us. I mean for a long time he was really messing up but once he went and got help then everything got better. A father who is a real father, he has to be a real man. He has to be a real father. (II, 2/2/06)

Patrick's parents separated two months before he became a participant in this study. He often expressed that he missed his father and wished his parents could reconcile their differences. Patrick stated that he also missed talking to his father daily, but he will always remember:

My father taught me how to learn right from wrong, be successful. . . . He also told me to make sure I get a good education so that I can do things that I want to do. . . . yeah I miss talking to him. . . . but I get to see him sometimes. (II, 1/26/06)

Patrick's mother revealed that she noticed how much Patrick missed his father and stated:

My husband and I are going through a divorce and for a time we knew Patrick was going into different directions that we did want him to. . . . We prayed about it. . . . We do a lot of praying in our household. . . . One morning Patrick got up and he just said, "God allow me to accept things the way they are and do well in succeeding where I want to go. . . . I remember that and really want to keep that

and I always throw back at him remember the morning that you prayed and asked God to help you to move forward. (PI, 4/12/06)

Kevin did not have a relationship with his father nor did he talk about him. However, he stated, "man I haven't seen my dad in so long I don't even remember what he looks like." On the hand, Patrick often expressed, "I wish I could be with my dad more than I have since he left. . . . We used to do a lot of things together."

Frank did not remember ever meeting his father. He stated, "I haven't ever seen my real dad, my godfather lives in South Carolina and he comes to see me and sends me money sometimes." While interviewing Frank's grandmother she asserted, "Frank's got a living momma. I'm not teaching him to hate his momma but to me she's my daughter, but she didn't need to have no children" (PI, 3/14/06).

It's About "My Dogs" and Me

The context in which "my dogs and me" was considered in this study is very profound and far-reaching. This is perhaps the most important factor influencing achievement motivation. For some of the participants their manner of talk, play, and dress as well as the need for acceptance, motivation to learn, and desire to be a part of the learning community are developed through their "dogs." The manner in which students interact with their peers has a dramatic impact on learning.

Six of the nine study participants referred to their peers as "my dogs" during individual interviews and home and classroom observations. A popular culture term used by adolescents during the time of the study, it was interesting that this terminology was chosen and how it compared to the perception of the group of peers as being a "pack" or

"team" of persons banded together sharing common bonds. Peer influence had profound influence on all the participants in the study. The influence of peers was demonstrated in various ways. Lamar often prefaced his conversations with his friends by stating, "Hey, Dog." Although Achey was quiet and did not often engage in conversations with his friends in most instances, when his peers asked him questions he would respond, "I don't know, Dog." Wayne referred to his football teammates as "my dogs." Patrick yelled to one of his teammates while playing basketball, "Shoot the ball, Dog."

The participants' "dogs" also affected their behaviors in front of other peers. For instance, Casper and one of his friends got into an argument while they were playing basketball at his house. He walked to the end of the driveway and sulked. Another friend asked him three times to come back and join the game. Still angry, he hesitantly returned after sitting on the curb for six minutes. At a different time, Frederick was walking to the neighborhood recreational center. As he entered the building, he paused and reached in his pocket to pull out his black do-rag, a nylon covering that fits tightly around the head. He stated, "I can't go up in here without my do-rag on," meaning that he had to wear the do-rag in front of his friends or "dogs" in order to feel accepted and maintain his sense of belonging.

The same peer-related influence held true in the home environment as well. During an observation at Kevin's home, two of his friends were encouraging him not to let Marcus play basketball with them since one the friends indicated that he did not like playing with Marcus. Once Marcus arrived, Kevin told him that he could not play. While walking to the community center in Frederick's neighborhood, Frederick spoke to three

of his friends. Approaching the center, Frederick pulled a black "do rag" out of his pocket and covered his head. He told me, "I can't go up in here without my do rag on cuz' all my friends got one."

Sometimes, relationships with peers were not always congenial. Certain expectations of respect and camaraderie were required; disrespect was definitely not allowed. For example, Wayne was playing touch football at the community center in an "open space" or vacant lot. As he was running with the football, a football card fell from his pocket. One of his peers picked it up and placed it in his (the peer's) pocket. When Wayne discovered he did not have the card, he said, "Hey, Dog, who got my card?" No one responded. However, one peer laughed and began running with Wayne in rapid pursuit. When Wayne caught his peer, he pushed him down, punched him in the side, and retrieved his card.

Yet at another time, Kyree was practicing with his community center's band at the recreation center when one of the members yelled, "Yo dog, you need to pick it up." The member was referring to the musical beat. Kyree immediately glanced at a female who was sitting on some bleachers to discern whether or not she heard this comment. After the female laughed, Kyree yelled at the band member who had made this comment and angrily replied, "Why don't you shut the fuck up and play….you can't hear no way." The member that commented to Kyree about his musical timing did not respond.

Achey rarely responded to negative behavior at school or in the community; however, during basketball practice at his church's gymnasium, a teammate retorted, "You shoot the ball like a girl." Achey replied, "What's wrong with that, I know two who

can shoot better than you." The teammate replied," Can they shoot better than your mamma?" Achey dropped the ball and ran over to the teammate who made the comment. However, the team's coach yelled for both Achey and his teammate to sit on the bench and, "Cool off."

Academic Context

Society recognizes a set of widely held principles which provide structure for public education. It includes promoting educational practices that reflect a variety of learning styles, which present academic challenges that are appropriate for each student. The public education system should reflect the cultural heritage of the society it serves. In order for students to become successful learners and achievers educational techniques must focus on their individual learning style.

It is important that educators create an academic context that is responsive and promotes learning for all students. The classroom should be organized to encompass students' needs. Since students tend to learn best when they are involved in their educational processes, teaching strategies that motivate students to achieve should be developed in meaningful ways. Academic subjects should be taught to help students see the connections between other subjects and their daily lives. A variety of teaching strategies, particularly those which infuse culturally relevant experiences of students should be employed from a broad range of educational researchers in order to create unique educational opportunities for all students.

Two themes related to the academic context of learning emerged in this study: pedagogical influence and self-regulation.

Pedagogical Influence

The teachers and school personnel are the most important factors in classroom learning. A teacher's influence reaches far beyond the subject matter that is discussed in the classroom. In some instances, teachers, counselors and other staff motivate students to attain knowledge. In this study, the participants indicated two important aspects of pedagogical influence on their motivation to learn: interactions with teachers and curriculum content.

Through his or her interactions with students the teacher also influences moral development as well as a student's work ethic. A teacher's quest for personal excellence inspires students to strive for higher aspirations. Although teachers tend to create an environment in which learning occurs, knowledge is a function of the quality of the teaching. The person, called the teacher, has a far-reaching influence on the lives of students.

School environment, school climate, and teachers influence student perceptions in terms of their overall educational experiences. According to McCollum (2005), pedagogical influence may be defined as the persuasive effects/efforts of teachers, other school personnel, and the overall educational environment in general that influence students' motivation to achieve or not to achieve. Overall, the student/teacher relationships were very rewarding experiences for six participants. Frank, Casper and Kyree stated that they had a teacher in which they discussed academic as well as personal issues. Achey, Kevin and Patrick expressed their views about how two of their teachers constantly reminded them to study hard and, "stay off of the streets."

Seven of the nine participants stated that pedagogical actions by their teachers helped them to become academically motivated. Patrick commented that being with "my math tutor is a positive learning experience because she helps me learn math." Lamar agreed with Patrick with he explained that, "tutors help me learn more in math." Kevin revealed, "My teachers make me want to learn." Achey reiterated his teachers' influence when he explained, "My teachers reward me for doing well." Frederick beamed when he replied that he enjoys Language Arts class because there are, "books about African Americans in there." Also, Casper pointed out that he understands stories better when the Language Arts teacher, "reads to me." Frank added that he enjoys math since, "the teacher explains the concept a lot."

A student's response to the curriculum has a decided affect on his learning. If the curriculum does not relate to the student's own cultural background, students lose interest and do not learn as well as expected. It is clear that students are motivated to learn if good teaching methods are employed and references are made to all cultures represented in the classroom (Allen & Boykin, 1992). Students respond to the curriculum in a variety of ways that indicate whether or not the learning is positive.

The ways in which students respond to the curriculum depends on the degree of their motivation to achieve. Achievement motivation has been defined as the reasons why a student achieves (McCollum, 2005), the motivation behind accomplishment (Vallance, 2004), and a product of the interaction between student characteristics and instructional practices (Okolo & Bahr, 1995). Research suggests that African American students have particular learning preferences as a result of cultural influences. Like Native Americans

or Mexican Americans, African Americans have a group orientation, and value orality (Parsons, 2003).

Interactive, hands-on experiences were seen as a personal catalyst for achievement. For instance, Frederick and Lamar created a banner in their Social Studies class that depicted Aboriginal culture. This banner was hung in the downtown cultural arts center. The participants all became excited and more engaged when they could participate in the lesson. For example, when students could pour liquid into measuring tubes during science experiments, or mix cookie batter during life skills experiments they appeared much more enthusiastic about the lesson. Even though all nine participants seemed to differ on ways in which lessons were taught that helped them understand themselves and their learning strengths, six of the students expressed that interactive lessons were more meaningful while the remaining three pointed out they needed the instructions written on the blackboard. Patrick noted, "I like getting up in class and going to the blackboard to do work." Frederick and Lamar maintained: "social studies is my favorite class because we work on a lot of projects as a group. . . . We also look at a lot of videos and people sometimes come to our class and talk to us." Frank stated, "sometimes we go outside and have scavenger hunts in science class . . . I really like that because then it's not so boring." Kevin pointed out, "if I were the teacher, I would ask everybody what they wanted to learn and let the students get up and teach the lesson sometimes." Kyree asserted, "it's more interesting [science class] when we do experiments and stuff. . . . I learn better."

Six of the nine participants were motivated to complete their homework assignments on time when homework passes were offered. Frederick, Wayne, Lamar, Achey, Kevin and Frank worked harder when they envisioned successful completion of homework because they knew they would receive a homework pass. This vision of success was influenced by a reward.

All of the students were curious to discover contributions made by African Americans and how they could apply these attributes to their own achievement. Students wanted to know more about the history of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Mrs. Coretta Scott King, Walter Peyton, B. B. King, and Phillis Wheatley. In fact, each of the nine participants wanted to know more about their African American heritage, not only from textbooks, but also from other African Americans who were considered community leaders. All of the students wanted a better understanding of African American history. It was interesting to discover that although the students knew that African Americans and Whites could not drink from the same water fountain, they did not understand why. Casper asked, "What are 'Jim Crow' laws?" No response was given.

Important to the participants was being given the opportunity to learn more about their African American forefathers and how they affected their lives. Frank said:

> It makes me feel left out when African Americans are not part of lesson. . . . We should have different things that we don't hear about a lot like what did African Americans do besides build a traffic light or cell phone—different stuff should be part of lesson. (II, 2/20/06)

Wayne also agreed when asked the same question. He said, "They should include it. [This] should be part of lesson. I'm feeling like where are they?"

Kyree's response was similar. He explained that it [the lesson], "makes me feel not too comfortable because you're not talking about our colors…you should talk about all colors. Makes me feel like they [the teachers] should be doing it." Wayne added that if this information were part of the classroom instruction, "I would feel that I can be proud to be African American. I would know that African American are not just about gangs, and violence, and stuff."

Lamar added when African Americans were part of the lessons in his classroom, "it would really like make me pay attention because I like talking about African people. Like not in a bad way but like in a good way." When asked what he would want his teacher to include in the lesson about African Americans in his classroom, he replied, "That people, like people from here, that's like us, they should go over there and like help them. Like people need to help them with their money so they can live right and stuff." Patrick's response was somewhat different, however. He wanted to know the truth about African Americans, not the untruths or the stereotypes. When asked what he would want his teacher to include, he replied:

> They were saying stuff that's not true and they really do that a lot, but I want to really know what really happened that day, the real facts of why we're free today and how slavery began and stuff like that. (II, 2/2/06)

Frank's response was also more detailed and somewhat different from the other participants. When asked what he would like included in the lessons, he answered,

> What they've [African Americans] done cause we're still influenced by it. I want to learn more about how Rosa Parks, how she felt when the first, when African Americans had the right to sit where they wanted on buses or Martin Luther King

because he was a nonviolent part of the civil rights movement or just a lot of people in the history. (II, 2/9/06)

Self Regulation

 A learner's behavior is crucial to academic success or failure. Students who are not focused in the classroom tend not be successful learners. In an academic context, behaviors such as remaining on task, listening to instructions and disciplined work habits will lead to better learning and thus better grades. However, when students get distracted by their peers, don't ask questions when they do not understand, harbor a dislike for the teacher and/or the teaching methods, and have negative attitudes about the school or the classroom learning is minimized.

Learner behavior refers to the activities, actions, performance, and mental processes undertaken by the student to gain knowledge in the academic environment. According to Graybill (1997), the way students learn is reinforced through their understanding of culture. In an academic context, learner behavior is also influenced by other factors such as the attitudes of teachers toward the student, the type of instructional style of the teacher, and the climate of the school in general. How the student perceived the learning environment and thus the school's effectiveness influenced learner behavior (Tobias, 2004). In many instances, students engaged in negative behavior with their peers in the classroom while the teacher was explaining the lesson.

With regard to the learning behavior of the participants, listening was a characteristic that all of the participants knew they needed to hone. They were all aware and commented on the fact that if they had listened more carefully when the teacher gave

instructions they would not have to ask questions or their friends to clarify the assignment. Lamar revealed, "sometimes I just tune Ms. Turner out in math class, but I know if I don't listen, I can't learn." For Frederick and Wayne, inattentiveness often caused them not to have their assignments. For example, Frederick commented, "I need to stop playing when the teacher explains our homework. . . . sometimes I miss some of what we have to do."

Wayne maintained, "sometimes I can't understand what Mr. Price says and I just tune him out. . . . like I think he's from India or somewhere and I mean I just don't do it because I don't know what to do." Kevin noted, "I always talk to my friends in technology class because it is so boring. . . . I really don't be listening . . . but I know I need to." While Kyree was often reprimanded by his teacher for not listening, he admitted:

> I know what my biggest problem is it's that sometimes I just be looking out the window and I don't be listening when she [the teacher] tells us what we have to do for homework. . . . if I know I don't understand, I just keep looking out the window . . . I mean I need to ask more questions. . . . I don't want people to know that I don't understand. . . . I don't be wanting to go back after class because I'll be late for my next class . . . if I go back after school, I'll miss my bus. (II, 3/14/06)

In most instances, however, eight of the nine students were focused on doing well in class which was indicated by their on-task behavior. Following directions and being prepared for class were important to Frank. During one of the observations in his Language Arts class, he was the only student who raised his hand and correctly answered a question about the correct usage of quotation marks. On several occasions, Achey,

Kevin and Wayne were always first to volunteer in their math and Language Arts classes

to answer questions that the teacher had about the lesson or to go to blackboard and solve

math problems. Frederick was once praised by his music teacher for remaining on task

and knowing all of the musical lyrics for a statewide county choir competition. Patrick

stated:

> I know math is hard for me and I don't play around in there. . . . I mean I ask a lot
> of questions because I need to understand that stuff. . . . when I start doing my
> homework I have to know what I'm doing because I don't have no help . . . my
> mom she might understand some of it . . . but I like to know what I have to do. (II,
> 3/16/06)

Casper sat attentively in class and took notes as he watched a video about the civil

rights era in his hometown. He was completely enthralled during the forty-minute

presentation. Afterwards, he asked three questions about some of the events that had

occurred. Frank's Social Studies teacher often stated, "I know there's one person in here

who heard what I said, Frank could you please tell them what they're supposed to do on

the worksheet." Frank's on-task behavior proved that he was a conscientious student.

While Kyree was often disengaged in most of his classes, he often remained focused in

his math class throughout most of the lesson. For example, Kyree was always one of the

first to respond to questions about geometric angles. Even though Kyree would not raise

his hand to ask for clarification about an assignment in other classes, he often raised his

hand and stated, "Could you say that again. . . . I didn't get that."

Being on task and having the reputation for always having his homework and

participating in the lesson in meaningful ways, Achey always engaged in conversations

about the previous night's assignment in his Language Arts class. On numerous

occasions, Kevin was completely engaged in his assignments in the technology class. For

instance, he would remain engaged in completing the modules throughout the entire class

period while some students either lost their focus or distracted others. In a similar vein,

Patrick sat in the front row in the first desk that was parallel to the teacher's desk. His

reasoning was:

> I sit up here because I know I need to pay attention in order to learn math . . . .
> this is not my best subject and if I sit back there with my friends, I won't pay
> attention. . . . I know I'll be playing with them and stuff. (II, 2/10/06)

Although Frederick was inattentive in most of his classes, he was always engaged

and focused in his advanced math class. Not only was Frederick the only African

American male in his class, he was also the only African American. When math problems

were written on the blackboard, Frederick always raised his hand to either answer

questions about the problems or volunteer to solve them. Yet, during three observations

in Wayne's math class he was always among the first five students to complete his timed

math worksheets. On the other hand, even though math was sometimes challenging and

difficult for Lamar, he remained focused and more engaged in math class eighteen

minutes longer than in any of his other classes. All three of the aforementioned

participants worked hard and were completely engaged in their classroom and homework

assignments.

Five of the nine participants asked questions during class about assignments and

projects. Frank even returned to his Social Studies class after school on two different

occasions for clarification on an assignment and project. During a ten-minute class break,

Frank came back early to ask his science teacher about an impending Powerpoint

presentation. He asked, "can I have more than eight slides?" Receiving clarification on

homework assignments was very important to Casper as he always wanted to make sure

he understood what was expected of him. During Language Arts class, he asked, "how

many paragraphs do I need to write about the video we saw?" Even though Wayne was

admonished, at times, for not having his homework in most of his classes, he stated, "I

make sure I try to do my math and social studies homework because I can get a

homework pass." On most days, Lamar would raise his hand in technology class to ask

for help if he did not understand the module. During an interview, he revealed:

> Ms. Warner don't have no attitude when I ask her about what we got to do. She
> always come over and tries to help me. I will ask her for help, but in some of my
> other classes, I don't because they act like they [the teachers] don't want be
> bothered and some them have attitudes. I like get embarrassed in front of my
> friends when they [the teachers] act like that. I don't want my friends saying . . .
> Ms. Warner busted on you. (II, 3/2/06)

Kevin revealed that it is important for him to understand the assignment and stated:

> Sometimes if I just don't get what we are supposed to do I go back . . . before I
> get on the bus or one time I was in another class and I asked I could to the
> restroom and I went back and asked Mr. Battle what we were supposed to do
> because I didn't really want to ask my friends. (II, 2/3/06)

Six of the nine participants raised their hands regarding the lessons or impulsively

called out correct answers without being recognized by the teacher. For example, Wayne

raised his hand and correctly answered three questions about the previous night's

homework assignment in his language arts class. Lamar was ignored in math class after

he raised his hand twice in order to ask a question. Frederick often became excited when

his math teacher asked questions about math concepts that he knew. On four occasions,

he blurted out answers that other students were called to answer; all of his responses were

correct.

Five of the participants stated that they felt successful when they passed tests and

turned in their homework on time. However, Achey stated that he felt successful when he

passed the Benchmarks (mid-year content area assessments). Patrick and Kevin

expressed how they improved their desire to achieve in school by learning to stop playing

in class. Patrick was warned on three different occasions to stop playing in Life Skills

class. Of interest was the fact that after he failed the first test he did not have to be

warned again. Making good grades was very important to Patrick and he knew that he

could not be successful if he talked and played during class.

Kyree maintained:

> When I do my homework and turn it in on time I feel like I had a good day. . . .
> but like I told you if I don't understand it I may not do it and I don't feel
> good about it, but, I don't feel too bad because I didn't do it . . . I like try and do
> what I understand and I will give that to my teacher. . . . sometimes I get a little
> credit for at least doing something. (II, 3/14/06)

Lamar was always eager to receive the results from his technology module chapter tests.

After passing a major chapter review test, he stated:

> I studied real hard for that test. . . . I didn't do nothing else when I went home but
> study. I type pretty fast on the keyboard and I know where to find most of the

controls sometimes without looking down. . . . this comes pretty easy for me and I try to do good in that class. (II, 1/25/06)

Kevin admitted that he could improve his learning behavior more if he stopped playing around so much and, "push myself more." When asked the same question, Patrick also said that he could improve his learning behavior in the following ways: "Work harder in class, listen to people who have been through things, and not play around." Frederick's recognized "by not getting mad" he could improve his learning behavior. On the other hand, Lamar realized that "if I need help with something, I should ask the teacher, ask more questions, and not play around a lot in my classes." According to Wayne, he should "pay more attention to what I've got to do in class, get myself just into school work all the time, and stop talking to my friends a lot, and flirting with the girls." Further, Frank believed he should "get more involved, pay more attention in class, and don't get into trouble in class."

During their respective interviews, Wayne, Lamar, and Frederick stated that they were often singled out in class more than other students. They each gave examples of not having homework and how they were sent to In-School Suspension (ISS) whereas other students received silent lunch. Wayne stated:

One time I didn't have my language arts assignment and I got ISS . . . I wasn't the only on in there who didn't have their homework. . . . there was me, two White boys and a Black girl who didn't have it, but I was the only one who was given ISS. (II, 2/16/06)

Lamar rarely had his homework assignments for any of his classes. On one occasion his math teacher stated, "raise your hand if you have completed your

homework. . . . Wayne I know you don't have yours and I'm going to give you ISS if you don't. . . . I have given you too many warnings." At another time, Frederick was given ISS for not completing a technology project while three other students, two White males and a White female were given silent lunch.

Of the nine participants in the study, only five consistently followed classroom rules which revealed that they perceived rules as a form of inner discipline that added to their overall success. Casper was the only male who constantly remained focused and on-task during his music class. While others often talked and stopped singing, Casper remained fully engaged throughout the class period. Frank revealed that classroom rules very important and stated:

> I wish all of the disruptive students could be put into a class by themselves. I don't like it when they talk while the teacher is trying to explain something. . . . it is a waste of time because she has to go back over it and sometimes she has to stop two or three times before they [some students] stop playing and talking. . . . I know if I did that my grandmother would kill me. (II, 3/9/06)

While Achey always followed the rules, he revealed, "I don't like being in class with a whole lot of bad people; it messes up my concentration. . . . I just like to do my work and what the teacher tells me. . . . I just like being with the good people."

On the other hand, Patrick stated:

> When I know I'm in class with someone who likes to play around, I try not to sit next to them, or I'll ask to be moved especially if I know they'll get me in trouble. . . . I know I will get in trouble. (II, 1/26/06)

Wayne revealed that there were, "some classes that I know I can't play around in. . . . I do my work in there. . . . like mostly my math and social studies classes."

All nine participants agreed, like Frederick said, they "liked getting up in class and doing stuff." They further stated that this helps them learn "more better." Achey, Patrick, Kevin, Wayne and Lamar commented that they learned more math when the problems were written on the blackboard as opposed to receiving a handout. All of the participants pointed out that they worked harder to make good grades when they had an incentive. Rewards such as taking trips, going shopping, playing video games, and going outside to "hang" with friends were viewed as extrinsic motivators for doing well in school. Achey explained the importance of learning through extrinsic motivation. He stated, ". . . because sometimes when I work hard and they'd (his teachers) be like I'm going to give this prize to whoever gets this right and it makes me want to do more learning." When asked what prizes he has received, Achey proudly boasted that during the current school year he had received two homework passes and a reward for five points before he took a test. He went on to say, "I got a 102 on my test." Also, all of the participants used sports as an outlet to achieve and to challenge themselves physically and mentally.

CHAPTER V

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This study supported the proposition that the development of achievement motivation was related to three contexts of learning in the lives of nine seventh grade African American males: (a) the personal context, (b) the sociocultural context; and (c) the academic context. The lived experiences of the nine seventh graders within these contexts sustain the enactment of an individual type of motivation as well as a collectivist type of motivation. All three contexts are interrelated as participants demonstrate their self-concept as learner, self-efficacy as learner, their perceptions of Black masculinity, the influence of family and peers, as well as pedagogical influences and self-regulated learning behaviors.

In this final section of the dissertation, this researcher answers the study's seven research questions based on the findings of the study as they relate to the research literature. Additionally, implications for classroom practice and further research are included.

Summary of Research Questions

How do the participants perceive their motivation to achieve in school? (Research Question #1)

The participants in the study were intrinsically motivated to achieve in school. All nine of them believed earning a good education was important to them individually and

collectively. Their motivation stemmed from their desires to hold good jobs. Even though they were well aware of the public's perception of their schools as low-achieving, this knowledge motivated them even more to seek a good education, for they believed that schooling was the best way to make money. Earning such money was portrayed for them through the media in the images of professional athletes or community professionals, such as lawyers, Supreme Court justices, professors, and doctors. Friends motivated them to achieve through friendly competition; six of the nine participants competed with their peers in some cases to become successful learners. Additionally, the expectations of their families were also influential. Since the female presence was predominant in eight of the participants' lives, both mothers and grandmothers encouraged the desire for a good education and higher achievement for their sons and grandsons. Extended family and community members also encouraged participants to do well.

Specifically, six participants expressed a desire for higher academic achievement. Though participants believed they could accomplish most academic tasks, extrinsic motivation helped to encourage them even more. Some of the participants loved to receive homework passes and to be recognized as Honor Roll members that provided additional motivation to learn and to do well in school. Positive experiences related to particular subject areas were expressed by them; nevertheless, if participants had previous negative experiences in a subject area, they were not motivated to learn it. In addition to their individual motivation, on the one hand, at times peer influence deterred participants' learning behavior, with them favoring socializing with friends over learning. On the other

hand, however, peers motivated them to learn. In most instances, if the participants' peers were on-task in the classroom, they were also.

These findings corroborate the research literature. It was clear to see in this study that the participants' self concept as learner was related to desire--fueled by future aspirations, public perceptions, family, and friendships. Perceptions of peers (friendships), in fact, greatly influenced self-confidence as learner. Since the participants in this study perceived themselves positively as learners, they also believed in their ability to learn (Bandura, 1997; Vallance, 2004). Therefore, they had support from peers and family members who represented for them interpersonal support. Such support influenced their desire to persist and expend more effort in accomplishing their academic tasks and goals (Pintrich, 2002; Vallance, 2004). At times, participants' classroom learner behavior was affected by their ego-involved performance because friendly competition, whether learning took place or not, was important to them (Bankston & Caldas, 1997; Graybill, 1997; Vallance, 2004). Nevertheless, peer relationships positively motivated them to learn and do well in school (Azmitia & Cooper, 2001). How each student perceived himself and his peers had a strong bearing on his motivation to achieve as a learner (Azmitia & Cooper, 2001; Canatan, 2001; Fiala, 2002).

How do the participants perceive their educational experiences, feelings of alienation (cultural discontinuity) and the cultural context of learning? (Research Questions #3, #4, and #5)

In this study most of the participants perceived their school climate in a positive manner, and thus perceived their educational experiences as positive in general.

Frederick, for example, showed this positive perception through his behavior.

Specifically, he was on the Honor Roll. Kevin's positive experiences in school evidenced

itself in good grades. He enjoyed attending school, looked forward to group work, and

took pleasure in getting to know new people as a result of his positive educational

perceptions. Casper and Kyree showed their positive feelings in acknowledging that they

enjoyed knowing they had access to teachers and counselors with whom they could

discuss personal issues and seek guidance. There were classes that the participants liked

and disliked, of course. However, the participants' perceptions of the school climate and

social environment in general were positive.

Of the 54 teachers collectively observed at Hinshaw, Sr., Johnson, and King

Middle Schools, 24 were African American females, and 12 were African American

males. There were 12 White Females, five White males and one Ethiopian male. It was

interesting to note that while most of the teachers' classrooms at Hinshaw, Sr., and

Johnson had representations of various cultures through books, pictures and other

artifacts displayed on the walls and bulletin boards, King did not. Only three of the

African American teachers at King had illustrations of African American or ethnic

minorities arranged throughout their classrooms. All three participants at King

maintained that they wanted more lessons that included African Americans.

The literature has shown that a student's perceptions of his school climate and

social environment are related to their overall educational experiences (Bennett, 2002;

Graybill, 1997). Research has also shown that the social environment of the school and

the culturally-driven actions available within those environments will influence a

student's perceptions of their own effort and success in school (Kaufman, 2004). Moeller (2005) found that students' perceptions of school climate and their own sense of responsible behavior were correlated.

However, other factors were found in the literature that influenced educational experiences. Fiala (2002) suggested that there were six important issues that influence positive perceptions of educational experiences. These include: (a) initiative, (b) teachers, (c) participation in school programs, (d) family, (e) self-image; and (d) labeling/racism. To these issues can be added the cultural context of learning and feelings of alienation, also called cultural discontinuity (Gay, 2000; Joseph, 2000).

With regard to participation in school programs, results of this study have shown how such participation also influenced the educational experiences of some of the participants. In fact, participation in school sports programs seemed to have a significant positive impact in terms of how the participants perceived their educational experiences. As Hawkins and Mulkey (2005) discovered in their research, there was a positive association between sport participation and a student's educational opportunities and outcomes. Those students who were involved in sports saw the potential of educational opportunities and outcomes if they learned to play really well.

Another variable of influence was related to cultural factors. They can serve to influence how participants perceive their educational experiences in that they have the power to enhance or worsen perceptions. In this study, all students wanted more information about their African American culture and heritage, and this did serve to lessen their positive perceptions of their educational experiences somewhat. All of the

participants admitted that they enjoyed Black History month because they learned more about their culture. Although this was a positive learning experience for all of the participants, they wanted to learn more. All of the students in the investigation were somewhat disappointed in the cultural context of their learning. This was evidenced through individual classroom observations and especially in the participant's responses to the interview questions. Many expressed that they wished their teachers would include more current information about African Americans in the lessons. Specifically, the feelings of the participants were evidenced in their wishes to include in the classes more information, especially on African American male achievers in politics, education, medicine, sports, and African American heroes in general. They were also interested in historical events such as the Civil Rights movement and other African American struggles. Of interest in particular was how these events helped shape America. As Chamberlain (2005) noted, a group's way of understanding and interacting, seeing and doing are essential parts of culture that have developed over time and are maintained through tradition. Not only does a sense of identity get reinforced through understanding culture, but so does the way in which people learn.

When instructional methodologies are not geared toward ethnic minority cultures, students do not respond as well. It is possible that the students in the study may have attained greater achievement if the instructional approach had included more cultural references with which they could identify. This was noticed in the study's results through responses made by the participants. When the lesson dealt with achievers, famous people, heroes, and celebrities—especially sports figures—who were from their own culture, for

example, the students responded to the learning in a much more positive manner. Several

of the students asked their teachers for more information on the subject. It is for this

reason that teachers and educators must employ instructional strategies that act as

transitional bridges for students of various cultures. In summary, research has indicated

that when a student's culture is not considered in the classroom, chances for positive

learning experiences are often decreased (Allen & Boykin, 1992).

Research and theory suggest that African American students have particular

learning preferences as a result of cultural influences and that these must be addressed in

the classroom in order for more positive learning to take place (Chamberlain, 2005; Hale,

2001). For example, African American students are more likely to prefer

experimentation, improvisation, and interaction within the culturally responsive

classroom as opposed to a more non-cultural analytical approach. This was also

evidenced by the participants. Most stated they preferred group interaction as opposed to

independent study. In this way they could improvise and interact with their peers who

provided support for their beliefs. The students' grades were higher in those classes that

encouraged group interactive learning and especially in those classes that were culturally

oriented.

This point was also supported in the literature. For example, Osborn's (2001)

study results revealed that Denmark's students had the most positive attitude towards

schooling, learning, and teachers due to their cultural emphasis on collaboration and

consensus, and the cultural ideals of citizenship and democracy. Dutch students felt that

the purpose of school was to bring students into group situations, rather than to help them develop as individuals.

Feelings of alienation also influenced perceptions of educational experiences, according to the literature (Claes, 2003; Graybill, 1997; Thoma, 2003). Cultural discontinuity for students entailed, "a separation or distance among two or more entities and involved a sense of anguish or loss, resulting in a student viewing life and school as fragmentary and incomplete" (Paulsen, 2003, p. 4).

The participants in this study, however, did not feel that life and school were fragmentary and incomplete, as evidenced by their remarks during the interviews. Most of the participants did not show the behaviors that have been attributed in the literature to alienation. In a number of research investigations, it was found that alienation was tied to increased gang activity, poor peer relationships, poor school-student relationships, poor teacher-student relationships, violence, vandalism, absenteeism, truancy, and other forms of deviant behavior (Brown, 2004; Oerlemans & Jenkins, 1998; Paulsen, 2003; Thoma, 2003). However, most of the students in this study neither had poor peer relationships nor did they join in negative gang activities, violence or various types of vandalism. Thus it can be concluded from their behaviors that they did not generally feel alienated.

In addition, the participants did not mirror students in other cultures in this respect, although some did mirror the values of lower socioeconomic groups as first identified by Cohen (1955). For example, they found it hard to agree to delay gratification. Osborn's (2001) study results also revealed that French students sensed that teachers did not respect them and did not explain things sufficiently. Universalism and

republicanism are stressed in French schools, so there is a lack of differentiation among students. As a result, the French participants claimed that they didn't feel a social or personal dimension in their school experience and were subsequently alienated. This was not found to be the case with the students who participated in this study. They did not appear to be alienated. Perhaps it was because of their strong ties and relationships with their peers. Peers seemed to serve to bolster the participants' perceptions of having roots with their home territory and school. It is clear from the literature review that alienation from the school environment is considered to be negative and found in connection with other undesirable outcomes. The participants in this study did not appear to be alienated from the school environment and were not experiencing cultural discontinuity.

Of the five elements of alienation identified by Seeman (1959): (a) powerlessness, (b), meaninglessness, (c) normlessness, (d) isolationism; and (e) self-estrangement, few students appeared to be impacted by these issues. Perhaps this was because of their strong ties and bonding with their peers. It may be concluded that the participants did not feel isolated and estranged from their community nor their school. Also, they did not feel that they did not have control over their lives, as Lacourse et al. (2003) suggested in their study. In addition, the participants did not show a leaning in their attitude towards deviance, as suggested in the definition of normlessness by Claes (2003). Lacourse et al (2003) defined social estrangement/isolation as "related to a discrepancy between actual and idealized self" (p. 643). This was not confirmed by the students. In summary, none of the students in the study showed evidence of these elements and thus it may be concluded that the participants did not perceive negative feelings of alienation.

<u>How do the participants perceive peer influence? How do the participants perceive</u>

<u>elements of Black masculinity? (Research Questions #2 and #6)</u>

Results from the qualitative data revealed that all of the participants in the study had positive views of themselves as African American males. They all indicated that what they learned at school as well as from home and their participation in community activities would help them become successful African American men. The participants had a sense of personal dignity and respect for themselves as African American males which motivated their need to achieve. They understood and accepted the fact that African American men were held to a higher personal standard both internally (to the students) and externally (to the world). Each participant agreed that African American men must work twice as hard as everyone else in order to become successful.

Research has shown that for some African American men claiming an identity is often rooted in how they conceptualize themselves through the eyes of their peers, society and the media (Anderson, 1990, 2000; Cleaver, 1968; Ferguson, 2000; McCall, 1995). Peer influence, regarding their perceptions of Black masculinity, impacted the lives of all nine participants. For example, the manner in which participants dressed was very similar to their male peers. All the participants wore some of the same name brand clothing and as a demonstration of camaraderie and loyalty, they often discussed what they would wear to community events. On numerous occasions, most of the participants would put on a "do-rag" if they noticed that it was a headpiece that their peers were wearing. Furthermore, as a signal of loyalty and acceptance, all of the participants referred to their same ethnic group male peers as "my dogs" when they spoke to each other at school as

well as in the community. In an effort to maintain and protect their sense of community and identity, the participants realized through their associations with their "dogs" they could express themselves in their own way of speaking, thereby perhaps relieving the tensions of the outside world where they must use Standard American English (Ross, 1990).

Although parent(s)/caregiver(s) are often very influential in their child's life, the students' peer group and neighborhood are also very significant (Anderson, 1990, 2000). In African American neighborhoods stereotypes are abound. In addition, those who come from the so called "hood" or lower socioeconomic neighborhoods learn certain behavioral codes such as "acting tough" and using their sexual prowess (McCall, 1995) as an indicator of their manhood. This appeared to be true for some of the participants in this study. Acting tough was one way that some of the students in the study showed their Black masculinity. However, others did not need to act tough and use their sexual prowess to identify them as a Black male. Kevin, for example, was very gregarious and able to charm almost anyone. At school, young ladies in most of his classes competed for his attention, in part, because Kevin was a member of the school's basketball team. He was very popular in his neighborhood; both male and female peers congregated at his home. Not only did they come over to play basketball, but they also came over to work on projects and complete their homework. Thus, Kevin had no need to act tough to garner attention and prove his Black masculinity. The same was true of Patrick. He was a member of the school's basketball team and was often sought after as a leader. Because he was handsome and wore popular name brand clothing, he received a lot of attention

from his female classmates and therefore did not have to act tough to prove his Black

masculinity.

Casper was another student who did not need to act tough to prove his Black

masculinity. He was quite affable, paid particular attention to his school attendance, and

did not like to miss school. Casper's friends considered him "cool" because the seventh

grade girls swooned over him. Like Casper, Frank was not out to prove Black masculinity

by acting tough. His demeanor was always very serious; he rarely bantered with his

peers. Similar to Casper, Frank took pride in his school attendance and had not missed a

day of school since beginning Kindergarten. The same was true for Achey. He was well

respected by his peers and considered to be a leader. In most instances if other students

did not understand an assignment they would ask Achey for explanations. Of interest was

the fact that Achey was the only participant with a male (stepfather) who resided in the

home.

Frederick, on the other hand, did typify the learning of certain behavioral codes

such as acting tough as an indicator of his manhood. He felt alienated and distanced by

the school and the community. He was often angry and sullen and complained that he

was not treated fairly at school. He was often questioned about his behavior on the school

bus and considered by others in his school to be a bully. However, in the community,

Frederick played basketball on his recreational center's team and was well liked by most

of his team members. He explained that among his peers he was expected to have sex by

the age of thirteen or you were not considered "cool."

Similar to Frederick, Kyree was also considered to be a bully and a troublemaker by his peers. He was often the one who created mischief in the classroom because he did not respect authority, showing that he felt somewhat alienated from the educational process as a whole (Thoma, 2003). Lamar was also an angry and disrespectful student in most cases. He had very little supervision once he came home from school. On numerous occasions, Lamar often wandered aimlessly in his community seeking attention due to the fact that his mother worked away from home in the evening. He was one of the few who felt alienated in the school, home, and community environment. He was rather surly during class and throughout most of the interviews. Lamar rarely completed his homework nor did he act as if he cared. Wayne, on the other hand, ached for a father's love that was all too new to him and often lashed out at his peers and teachers. Wayne's father was incarcerated for eight of his thirteen years and had only reconnected with Wayne two years before he died. Wayne's father's death had a profound impact on his behavior. It is interesting to note that all three students from King Middle School were negative toward their educational experiences and felt that they had to prove their Black masculinity by acting tough in some instances.

<u>What are the relationships between peer influence, perceptions of educational experiences, feelings of alienation, elements of Black masculinity, and achievement motivation for these participants? (Research Question #7)</u>

According to the results of this study, achievement motivation has three contexts of learning: the personal context, the sociocultural context, and the academic context. It is within these three contexts that the participants of the study demonstrated their

achievement motivation. In the personal context, participants enacted their self concept, self efficacy, and Black masculinity. In the sociocultural context of learning, the family structure, the expectations of parent(s)/caregiver(s), and the affiliation with peers were significant. In the academic context, teachers' as well as counselors' interactions with participants as well as their self regulated learner behaviors which were sometimes affected by peer influence helped to define how they perceived their educational experiences. It is important to note, however, that the influence of peers appeared in all three contexts of learning.

In a theoretical sense, there are two distinct—that is, overarching—types of achievement motivation: the individual and the group-oriented or collectivist type (Canatan, 2001). Each has a strong and different type of influence on the student. The individual type of achievement motivation was demonstrated in the personal context and the academic context. Each of the participants had a strong sense of self. They believed in the value and rewards of education. They also felt that they were capable of learning and were good students, especially when they had been successful in specific content areas. While media perceptions of them were not always positive, they individually felt pride in whom they were as African American males. In the academic context, participants made conscious decisions about how teachers affected their learning and how, in specific ways, their learning could be made better by changes made in the curriculum (Allen & Boykin, 1992). Their positive feelings or their negative feelings about school which resulted in academic disengagement were demonstrated through their self-regulated learner behaviors.

The group-oriented or collectivist type of achievement motivation is influenced by loyalty of the group and the fulfillment of others' expectations. Participants were most loyal to their "dogs" or their same-ethnic group male peers. While they had good relationships with most of their friends, their African American males who were closest to them were the most loyal. Affiliation with peers within and outside the academic context was valued by all the participants. On another note, peers affected participants' feelings of alienation (cultural discontinuity), another factor of the study. Peers influenced negative or positive perceptions of educational experiences for some of the participants. For example, participants felt more comfortable in academic and social settings when their "dogs" were a part of the same group; however, if they were separated from their "dogs," participants felt alienated from their group, did not express themselves as much, and at times, became disengaged in activity (McCall, 1995; Paulsen, 2003; Pollack, 2001). In other words, "my dogs and me" represented for participants in this study a collective strength, a feeling that they were not alone no matter where they were.

In addition, peer influence evoked positive feelings of Black masculinity, especially when students hung out in their peer groups, which had a decided bearing on the student's achievement and motivation. Affiliation with peers promoted friendly competition in school work as participants strove to do better in school and in social activities as they wanted to be more competitive in sports, in being popular, and in seeking the attention of their female peers. Therefore, not only did the peer influence help to guide their development as adolescents (Erikson, 1968), it also served to define their Black masculinity (Anderson, 2000; Lundgren, 2004; McCall, 1995).

Expectations of immediate and extended family, another aspect of the collectivist-type of achievement motivation, affected participants' desire to achieve academically and socially. Family members wanted their children to do well in school and to seek higher educational attainment. The female presence, most often experienced in the participants' lives, encouraged such attainment because of personal experience and media representations of whom their male children represented. Such a presence did not mean that participants were disaffected by the male presence. In fact, the male presence was not totally absent from the lives of most participants; the female presence, however, was most constant. The men in the participants' lives, though fleeting, were subjected to situations beyond the participants' control; nonetheless, the men wanted for their sons better lives than they had.

In conclusion, this study showed that there is a symbiotic and interactive relationship between the achievement motivation of African American middle school males and peer influence, elements of Black masculinity, perceptions of educational experiences, cultural context of learning, and feelings of alienation (cultural discontinuity).

Implications

Implications of the investigative study may be divided into two categories: There are implications for classroom practice and implications for further research study. Each is discussed below:

Implications for Classroom Practice

From the findings and results of this investigation, several implications for classroom practice can be noted. These implications are as follows:

A. It was noted that both research and theory confirm that African American students have particular learning preferences as a result of cultural influences and that these must be addressed in the classroom in order for more positive learning to occur. Research also suggested that African American students were more likely to prefer experimentation, improvisation, and interaction within the classroom as opposed to a more analytical approach. Teaching methods must be somewhat revised and redirected to include increasingly more experimentation, improvisation, and classroom interaction, while at the same time reducing the time that is spent on analytic types of learning.

B. The investigative research also determined that an important part of student learning is how African American students process and organize information, which differs somewhat from the way in which the mainstream culture engages in these processes. This was not specifically addressed in this study and points to a further avenue of investigation.

C. Some teacher reform is also implied. While teaching in the traditional way has been somewhat successful, it is important that teachers are knowledgeable about the importance of each student's culture in the classroom and aware of the variety of strategies that they can use to teach and model for students as related to cultural identity. Famous and historical African Americans can

become an English project. African American achievement discussions can spark interest in all classes, and past African American heroes, can become a complete history lesson. The research has shown that a student's response to the curriculum has a decided affect on his learning. If the curriculum does not relate to the student's own cultural background, students lose interest and do not learn as well as expected. Clearly students are motivated to learn if good teaching methods are employed and references are made to all cultures represented in the classroom. Students respond to the curriculum in a variety of ways that indicate whether or not learning is positive. Scholars have suggested that effective teachers of African American students must engage in the following practices: (a) use African and American culture and history; (b) place the individual student within a historical and cultural perspective; (c) assist students in developing new understandings based on life experiences; and (d) treat knowledge as reciprocal (Kruger, 2005). As they teach, successful instructors also develop a community of learners, view teaching as an important part of their mission, and have a strong belief in the success of all of their students.

D. Classroom practices might also further relate to incorporating some sports activities in the instruction and learning. The students in the study were very interested in sports figures. For example, records of wins and losses could help students understand their math problems.

E. The literature explained that school environment, school climate, and teachers influenced student perceptions in terms of their overall educational experiences. The pedagogical influence referred to how the persuasive effects/efforts of teachers, other school personnel, and the overall educational environment in general influenced students' motivation to achieve or not to achieve. Overall, the student/teacher relationships in the study were very rewarding experiences for most of the participants. However, more could have been done to gain the attention and interest of all of the participants. More hands-on types of interaction and more group discussions, for example, could increase learning. Interactive, hands on experiences were seen as a personal catalyst for achievement in the literature. Teachers must engage students in order to enhance the learning process especially minority students. As previously noted, students who are not focused in the classroom tend not to be successful learners. By helping the students remain on task, become more disciplined in their work habits, and learn to listen to instructions, students will become more engaged and responsive to the learning.

F. Finally, there is another implication for the teaching method that should be mentioned – incorporating a new approach into the classroom that links the business world with the academic. Existing research studies regarding educational curriculum and programs to increase academic achievement of African American male students indicated that there are several common

attributes and approaches that can be included in these efforts. These attributes include the following:

A. Teaching African history and/or African American history and culture.

B. Involving mentors and role models in the learning process.

C. Inviting business leaders/companies in the community into the classroom as speakers and volunteers.

D. Encouraging family members' participation in the classroom.

Successful programs also usually include courses and experiences aimed at creating a positive identity through cultural consciousness, creating a sense of purpose and self-assurance, creating a link between the student and the business community, as well as providing knowledge and opportunities regarding potential career choices.

Implications for Further Research

In an effort to apply the findings of this investigative study, specific implications surface for future research study, as based on the analysis and conclusions of the study. These implications are as follows:

A. I recommend that future research in an effort to support the qualitative findings of the study conduct follow-up studies on a broader scale as regards to sample size, diversity of participants included in the study, and the number of schools included in the population. A study of more participants and/or more schools would almost certainly yield greater insight and perhaps an even closer convergence with the findings of this research. Such an investigation

would serve not only to further validate the findings of this study, but would also provide additional and substantial support to the growing body of evidence supporting the view that the perceptions of African American male students of their school experiences significantly influence their motivation to achieve in school.

B. A longitudinal study could follow the students in the study through their classes for all four years of high school to determine if further experiences within the school environment influenced their motivation to achieve either positively or negatively. This would also lead to a determination as to whether or not the school was accepting of the need to change and whether or not these changes actually occurred.

C. Another implication of the study for further research may also be noted. According to Kruger (2005), no educators have yet to formulate a method of measuring a teacher's culturally relevant beliefs for teaching African American youth nor systematically assessed the correlation between these beliefs and the achievement of African American students. Yet, it would seem that such an investigative study is more important today than ever before, especially in light of the fact that few courses at the schools included in this research study related culturally to the African American male participants. It was amazing to this researcher how few classes ever even mentioned African American achievers, whether it was in medicine, science, the political arena, or any other area of inquiry. The only time teachers and the school in general

became cognizant of African American contributions was during Black History Month. Even during that period the same people were continuously mentioned. However, there were many more achievers and heroes never mentioned who made important contributions to our society as a whole. New and fresh material in interesting and creative ways was not presented to the students.

D. It is important to mention a factor that commands further attention. The literature often glosses over the disconnected family, even though in some instances this type of family has an even greater influence on a student's learning, especially in terms of motivation and desire, than the connected family. While the burden of raising a child is often overwhelming for the parent(s)/caregiver(s) who is left with this task, it would appear from the findings of the study that children who have a sense of belonging tend to work harder and are often involved in positive activities. Students who were held accountable by their parent(s)/caregiver(s) were more often motivated to achieve then those who were allowed to wander aimlessly, or who were constantly left unsupervised. Some of the students in the study did have a sense of belonging and that has had a positive impact on their achievement motivation, even if handicapped by a disconnected family. Thus, it is the recommendation of this researcher that a future study take these factors into greater consideration in assessing the sociocultural factors influencing

achievement motivation among African American male seventh grade students.

E. The investigative study focused exclusively on African American males. However, would the same findings result from a study of females? Thus, there is a need for future study to be directed toward African American females as well. It is possible that factors influencing their achievement motivation may differ from their male counterparts and in significant ways. Perhaps they are not socialized the same way within their social structure (home, community and school) and thus do not aspire to achieve at the same level as their male counterparts. Factors that influence their achievement motivation might also be different from those identified in this investigation for African American males as, for example, peer influence.

F. Studying ethnic minority students in predominantly White school settings is yet another direction for future research. It is a well known fact that African American and Latino students achieve less than their White counterparts in school (Bankston & Caldas, 2002). This suggests that similar findings might result from a study of ethnic minority students in schools that are predominately White. It is therefore suggested that future research focus on the question as to whether or not achievement motivation in minority students in predominately White schools is higher, lower, or the same as their counterparts in schools that are comprised predominately of minority students. Research in the literature was scarce regarding this question.

G. Most studies found in the literature focused primarily on the positive or negative achievements of African American students in lower socioeconomic settings. This suggests that perhaps the same factors found in this investigative study might impact their achievement motivation if their parent(s)/caregiver(s) had a different socioeconomic status. Future research needs to ask the question as to whether or not the role of parent(s)/caregiver(s) as socializers of achievement-related values (and thus their impact on achievement motivation) is the same for African American students who are considered upper to upper middle-class students as compared to those who are considered as working-class students.

H. The purpose of this research study was to examine factors influencing achievement motivation among nine seventh grade African American males. The study recommends that future research, in an effort to support the findings of this investigation, examine factors influencing achievement motivation in Hispanics, Latinos, Native Americans and other minority groups. The purpose would be to determine if the same or different factors impact their achievement motivation. The most consistent finding in educational research literature has been that minority students perform worse than White students. However, there is not much research reported in the literature that examines factors influencing positive achievement.

Aftermath

Finally, a major finding that emerged from this study's data was the driving human force behind what motivated each of the nine participants to achieve. As supported by the literature, it is not unusual for students to look to parent(s), caregiver(s), or significant others in their lives as role models, and it became evident that these nine students found such a person in their lives.

Considering the Hinshaw, Sr. Middle School students, for Casper, that person was his mother. When she became pregnant with him, she had to drop out of college and was ostracized by her upper middle class family. However, she demonstrated her inner strength and perseverance by going back to college and pursuing a nursing degree after Casper was born. His mother, as well as his mother's significant other who was a local barber, inspired him to do well.

In the case of Frank, it was his grandmother, a 76 year old lady who worked two jobs to support him. She often stated that she only wanted to live long enough to see Frank graduate from high school and go to college. Frank had been living with his maternal grandmother for ten years. He was often picked him up by his grandmother and taken to and/or from school. He always spoke of his grandmother's influence in his life and wrote about her resolve in his English essays. Frank was well aware of his grandmother's expectations of him to do well. He wanted to honor her by being the best student he could.

For Kyree, the significant person of influence in his life was a school counselor who became his mentor. This was a person who Kyree felt he could confide in and who

motivated him to achieve in school. The school counselor instilled in Kyree the desire to

do well and stay focused in school. The counselor encouraged Kyree to remain engaged

in school so that he could go to college and become anything he wanted to be. Kyree was,

in fact, one of six students in the study who attributed their desire to learn to a teacher or

a counselor.

The participants from Johnson Middle School spoke of similar persons who

influenced them to achieve in school. Achey's mother and stepfather were significant in

his life. Achey was the only participant in the study with a stepfather who resided in the

home. The fact that both parents worked two jobs to support the family motivated Achey

to do well in school. Achey's stepfather was also one of the basketball coaches for his

church's team. Achey knew his mother and stepfather took pride in his learning and they

showed their desire for him to do well. They also told him that if you get a good

education you won't have to work two jobs. Achey believed them.

Kevin's mother influenced his desire to achieve. Kevin was 13-years old and

lived with his mother and older sister. He was motivated to learn because his mother had

gone back to business school to get a degree since losing her factory job. Watching his

mother transition from losing a job to returning to school was encouraging to him. As he

watched his mother "start over in her life," he saw that education was important to have.

This served to significantly influence Kevin's achievement motivation. He often said that

he knew that if she could go back to school and be successful, he could do it, too.

The significant persons in Patrick's life were professional basketball players.

Though these role models were not family members or close significant others in his life,

they, nevertheless, served as pictures of what Patrick could become. He often watched professional basketball players in the media and saw that they could do anything they wanted and be anything they wanted to be. He wanted that for himself as well, and saw that this path in life was through completing his education. Patrick was fully aware that most of these professional athletes graduated from high school and were attending or had graduated from college when they entered the National Basketball Association (NBA). There was no doubt that Patrick wanted to graduate from a college or university.

At King Middle School, Frederick was also motivated to learn by professional basketball players. Peers also had a significant impact on his achievement motivation. It was through the media that Frederick was motivated to achieve because he wanted the same thing – to become a professional basketball player - for himself. Similar to Patrick, Frederick saw the path to that goal was to complete his education. But his peers also served to motivate his desire to achieve and learn in school. In school, Frederick felt that he was not treated fairly by one teacher, but in the community where he played basketball on his recreational center's team and was well liked by most of his team members, he had a completely different attitude. The team members served as the peers of influence and his affiliation with them made him want to achieve and complete his education.

Achievement motivation for Lamar was significantly influenced by a local police officer who lived next door to him. Lamar's mother was a postal worker who worked the 3:00 pm -11:00 pm shift and was not home most evenings. The police officer became a substitute caregiver – one who was concerned about Lamar and what he did after he came home from school. The police officer watched out for Lamar when his mother was not

present, gave him advice, and served as a person with whom Lamar could talk to when he felt the need. Thus, this police officer was the male figure in Lamar's life that motivated him to achieve.

Wayne, an angry young man who was still grieving for his father, was motivated to learn by the memory of his father. Wayne's deceased father had instilled in him the desire to achieve before he passed away and his achievement motivation was based on what his father had told him – work hard and study hard. Although Wayne's neighborhood was infested with drugs, he clung to the advice and counseling that his father had so generously offered to him while he was alive. These memories kept his motivation to achieve and to have a better life alive in his heart and mind.

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Appendix A

Individual Student and Group Interview Protocol

Date: _____   Interviewee (or group) age(s):_____

No. in Group: _____   Grade level: _____

Tape No. _____   School: _____

1. What makes you want to learn in school?

    a. What are some of the things that happen at home or at school that really make you want to learn?

    b. What are some of the things that happen at home or at school that really make you <u>not</u> want to learn?

    c. How could you improve your desire to want to learn more at school?

2. In what ways do your friends influence your desire to learn?

    a. Do your friends think learning is important?

    b. Do your friends have positive or negative learning experiences at school? How do their experiences affect you?

3. How would you describe your feelings about the ways in which you learn at school?

    a. What types of positive learning experiences do you have at school?

    b. What types of negative learning experiences do you have at school?

    c. How do these experiences affect the ways in which you feel about learning at school?

    d. What would you include in the lessons in your classroom that would motivate you to want to learn more?

    e. What would you eliminate from the lessons in your classroom that would motivate you to want to learn more?

    f. If you could plan a perfect lesson, what would it include?

4. How would you describe the lessons in your classroom that makes connections with your home and community?

   a. How does your teacher include connections to your home or community?

   b.   If your teacher includes these connections, how does it make you feel?

   c.   If your teacher does not include these connections, how does it make you feel?

5. How does your teacher include information about African Americans in the lessons?

   a. Describe readings, videos or other items about African Americans that can be found in your classroom?

   b. How does it make you feel when African Americans are a part of the lessons in your classroom?

   c. How does it make you feel when African Americans are not a part of the lessons in your classroom?

   d.   What would you want your teacher to include about African Americans in the lessons in your classroom?

6. What does being a Black man mean to you?

   a.   Who taught you about being a Black man?

   b.   Describe a tough Black man.

   c.   In what ways do your friends' views of being a Black man influence you at school? When you are in class is it more important to be a tough Black man or to do the assigned lessons?

   d.   In what ways have you ever pretended not to know something in class when you were with your peers?

   e.   Can you define the meaning of a social reputation for Black men? Which is more important, to have a strong street, neighborhood, or peer group reputation, or to be known as an intelligent individual with book smarts?

7. Rank the following in order of importance to you (1 = Lowest importance to 6 = Highest importance).

     a. Social life?

     b. Girlfriend (Sex)?

     c. Hanging out at the mall?

     d. Education?

     e. Athletics (School or Community)?

     f. Fighting?

8. Describe what you would do if you were challenged to a fight in school in front of your girlfriend or friends and you knew that you would be suspended, or in another social area where there is an audience and people are going to talk about what happended.

9. If a friend or girlfriend calls and you are completing your homework, do you talk on the phone, or hang up and continue to do the assigned lesson?

10. If you were invited to a party or to join your friends when do you complete your assigned lessons?

Appendix B

Parent(s)/Caregiver(s) Interview Protocol

Date: _____   Parent(s)/Caregiver(s) No._____

Tape No. _____   School Represented: _____

1. What do you believe your son thinks motivates him to want to learn in school?

   a. What do you believe your son thinks are some of the things that happen at home or at school that really make him want to learn?

   b. What do you believe your son thinks are some of the things that happen at home or at school that really make him <u>not</u> want to learn?

   c. In what ways do you think your son believes his motivation to learn at school can be improved?

2. In what ways do you think your son believes that his friends influence his motivation to learn at school?

   a. Do you think your son believe that his friends consider learning important?

   b. Do you believe your son thinks that his friends have positive or negative learning experiences at school? How do you think your son believes that these experiences affect his learning?

   c. In what ways do you think your son believes his friends influence him at school?

3. How do you think your son would describe the ways in which he learns at school?

   a. What do you believe are some types of positive learning experiences that your son thinks he has at school?

   b. What do you believe are some types of negative learning experiences that your son thinks he has at school?

   c. In what ways do you believe your son thinks these experiences affect the ways in which he learns at school?

d. What do you believe your son would include in the lessons in the classroom that would motivate him to want to learn more in school

e. What do you believe your son would eliminate from the lessons in the classroom that would motivate him to want to learn more?

f. If your son could plan a perfect lesson, what do you think it would include?

4. How do you think your son would describe connections with his home and community in the lessons in his classroom?

a. How do you think your son would describe the ways his teacher includes connections to your home or community?

b. How do you think your son feels when his teacher includes these connections?

c. How do you think your son feels when his teacher does not include these connections?

5. In what ways do you think your son believes that his teacher includes information about African Americans in the lessons?

a. How do you think your son would describe the readings, videos or other items about African Americans that are found in his classroom?

b. How would you describe how your son feels when African Americans are a part of the lessons in his classroom?

c. How would you describe how your son feels when African Americans are <u>not</u> a part of the lessons in his classroom?

d. What do you think your son would want the teacher to include about African Americans in the lessons in his classroom?

6. How do you think your son would describe what it means to be a Black man?

a. How do you think your son would describe who taught him about being a Black man?

b. How do you think your son would describe what it means to be a tough Black man?

c. In what ways do you think your son believes it is more important to be a tough Black man rather than to do the assigned lessons? If, at all.

    d. In what ways do you think your son has ever pretended not to know something in class when he was with his peers?

    e. How do you think your son would define the social reputation for Black men? What do you think is more important to him, to have a strong street, neighborhood, or peer group reputation, or to be known as an intelligent individual with book smarts?

7. How do you think your son would rank the following in order of importance to Him? (1 = Lowest importance to 6 = Highest importance).

    a. Social life?

    b. Girlfriend (Sex)?

    c. Hanging out at the mall?

    d. Education?

    e. Athletics (School or Community)?

    f. Fighting?

Appendix C

Observations in Schools/Community Protocol

Date: _____ Student's Name: _____
 Subject: _____

Name of School: _____ or
Teacher: _____

Community Area: _____
Room #: _____ Time: _____

FACTOR	EVIDENCE
MOTIVATION Are there things that really appear to make this student want to learn and/or participate in class or the community? Describe.	
PEER INFLUENCE In what ways does it appear that this student's peers influence his desire to learn in school and/or participate in community activities? Describe.	

FACTOR	EVIDENCE
<u>EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES</u> Describe the student's reactions to learning experiences in the school or community.	
<u>ALIENATION/CULTURAL DISCONTINUITY</u> Does it appear that this student seems to feel valued as a member of his class or community? Describe.	

FACTOR	EVIDENCE
<u>CULTURAL CONTEXT OF LEARNING</u> Does the teacher include information about African Americans in the lessons? Are there readings, videos, or other items about African Americans found in the classroom? Describe.	
<u>BLACK MASCULINITY</u> Does the student exhibit gender-based behaviors? Does it appear that this student's friends' views of being a Black man influence him at school or in the community? Describe. Cues: *Anderson's* acting tough in class; *McCall's* defying authority in class, violent in class, and *West's* nihilism and peer pressure/influence in class.	

Appendix D

Children's Assent Form

I am doing a study to try to help me understand what makes seventh grade African American males successful students. I am asking you to help because I would like to know what motivates you to want to learn when you are in school.

If you agree to be in my study, I would like to interview you three times over a two month period for sixty minutes after school, and on days that you do not have scheduled activities. When I interview you, I am going to ask you some specific questions about things that make you want to achieve and learn when you are at school. For example, I will want to know about some things that you think motivates you to learn when you are in school and how could you improve your desire to learn in school. I will also want to know if your friends influence your desire to learn at school.

You can ask questions at any time that you might have about this study. Also, if you decide at any time not to finish, you may stop whenever you want. Remember, these questions are only about what you think. There are no right or wrong answers because this is not a test.

Signing this paper means that you have read this or had it read to you and that you want to be in the study. If you don't want to be in the study, don't sign the paper. Remember, being in the study is up to you, and no one will be mad if you don't sign this paper or even if you change your mind later. Thank you very much.

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

Signature of Investigator _____ Date _____

Appendix E

Parental Consent Form

Your child is invited to be in a research study about the achievement motivation of seventh grade African American male students. Your child was selected as a possible participant because he is a seventh grade African American male student. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to have your child in this study.

The study: The purpose of this study is to examine sociocultural factors affecting achievement motivation for middle grade African American males. This study will examine five factors influencing achievement motivation: (1) peer influence; (2) perceptions of educational experiences; (3) feelings of alienation (cultural discontinuity); (4) cultural context of learning; and (5) elements of Black masculinity.

Nine seventh grade African American middle school males will be selected to participate from three Guilford County Middle Schools. Data will be collected from an Individual Student and Group Interview Protocol; Parents/Caregivers Protocol; and Observations in Schools/Community Protocol. Students will be observed during their activities in the school and classroom. The home will be the location of parent/caregiver interviews. Student group interviews will take place in a non threatening environment.

Risks/benefits: There are no risks in this study. Each student participating in this study will receive a $25.00 Wal Mart gift card as a token of my appreciation regardless of whether he withdraws from participation early.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. Each participant will be ensured of anonymity because no real names will be used. Each respondent will be allowed to select a unique pseudonym (a false name). The data will be kept in a locked file cabinet in a locked office. Only this researcher will have access to the student's identity. Consent forms will be kept securely along with results for 7 years after completion of this study.

Voluntary nature/questions: Your decision on whether or not to allow your son to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Guilford County Schools or the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. If you decide to allow your child to participate, you are free to withdraw your child at any time without affecting your relationship with Guilford County Schools or the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Furthermore, your child may also discontinue participation at any time. The researcher conducting this study is Althea Sample Truesdale. If you have any questions now, or once the study has begun, I can be reached at (336) 854-0920 or (336) 209-2980. Thank you very much.

Signature of Participant _____ Date_____

Signature of Investigator_____Date_____

Appendix F

Specific Analysis of Data

Achievement Motivation Strand	Theme	Attribute	Unit	Data Points (no.) = no. of participants' responses to data points
Personal Context	Achievement and Identity	Black Man's Reputation	*Black man's reputation*	• A-A men have reputations as drug dealers, have nice clothes and/or cars, and are thieves (4)
				• Participants stated some African American men have reputations as not wanting to work for a living (5)
			Black man's reputation	• A-A men should not be judged based on the negative reputations that some A-A men have (7)
			Fighting	• Participants stated they would fight at school and in their communities if provoked by peers (6)

Achievement Motivation Strand	Theme	Attribute	Unit	Data Points
				(no.) = no. of participants' responses to data points
			Fighting	• Participants revealed they would not fight if someone called them a bad name, but would if someone talked about their mother or grandmother (4)
				• Participants maintained they had been in a fight in their communities while one explained that he had been in a fight at school twice (8)
			Perceptions of Black Men	• Participants stated that most of their teachers believed that some of the lessons in their classes were too hard for them. (4)
			Perceptions of Black Men	Participants noted A-A men were held to a higher personal standard (9)

Achievement Motivation Strand	Theme	Attribute	Unit	Data Points (no.) = no. of participants' responses to data points
			Perceptions of Black Men	• The ways A-A male youth are perceived by their teachers will often make it harder for them to do well in those teachers' classes (6)
			Sports	• The hallmark of success for all participants was becoming a professional athlete (9)
			Sports	• Participants noted that it was important to get a good education in case they did not become professional athletes (5) • Participants revealed in order to play basketball on their school and community centers' teams, they must have good grades (6)