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Factors for Educational Leaders to Consider That May Affect Teacher and Parent Perceptions of the Academic Achievement of Eight Grade African-American Male Students

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ABSTRACT

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FACTORS FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERS TO CONSIDER THAT MAY AFFECT TEACHER AND PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF EIGHTH GRADE AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS

Committee Chair: Barbara Hill, Ed.D.

Dissertation dated May 2016

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the factors that may affect teacher and parent perception of the academic achievement of eighth grade African-American male students. The independent variables were socioeconomic status, family structure, perceived self-esteem, peer affiliations, extracurricular activities, and student behavior. The dependent variable was student achievement. The qualitative case study method was specifically selected for this study to examine the similarities and differences of two groups of African-American male students. The researcher collected data and offered strategies and recommendations for school and district-level leadership to identify and better support African-American male students.

The study took place at an all-male charter school for boys in grades 6 through 11. This urban charter school is located in the southeastern region of the United States in a...
major metropolitan area. There were 20 participants involved in this study. While studying the participants, the researcher interviewed parents and teachers, conducted observations, and analyzed students’ report cards. The data collected were triangulated through interviews, observations, and document analysis. The limitations of this study included the number of people involved in the study, school setting, and age constraints of the students studied.

The findings of this study revealed that socioeconomic status, the level of parental engagement, peer affiliations, and student behavior had an impact on student academic achievement. The highlight of this study showed the influence parental involvement had on student achievement. Parents who were heavily involved and engaged in their son’s education performed well in school. Conversely, students whose parents were not involved and/or showed very little interest in their son’s education experienced some challenges in their academics and had low academic achievement.

Recommendations for educational leaders and suggestions for further research are included in the study.
FACTORS FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERS TO CONSIDER THAT MAY AFFECT
TEACHER AND PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT
OF EIGHTH GRADE AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
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THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

BY
TOMA REDMON

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly...; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper. (Psalms 1: 1-3)

First, I give honor and praise to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who has ordered my steps. To my wife, Tiffany Redmon, thank you for holding down the fort and taking care of my two little daughters while I went to class, studied, attended trainings and meetings, and took many trips to the library for my “quiet time;” you are truly my “good thing.” You never complained and always encouraged me; I love you. To my two little girls, Keziah and Neriah, thank you for excusing me from playtime to take on this journey. A special thanks to my chair, Dr. Barbara Hill; you were God sent. You went beyond the call of duty and did things that were not in your job description; thank you for your kind and quiet spirit. To my committee members, Dr. Trevor Turner, Dr. Sheila Gregory, Dr. Darrell Groves, and Dr. Wanda Gilliard, and to the staff of Clark Atlanta University, Mrs. Betty Cooke, thank you for mentoring, guiding, and enduring me. You are the best! I cannot end without thanking the faculty and staff of the school in which this research was conducted. Finally, I would like to thank my extended family and friends who offered encouraging words during this entire process.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, educators have advocated for the use of testing as a method for determining student success (Rana & Mahmood, 2010). Tests such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), End-of-Course Test, and the American College Testing (ACT) assessment are popular options. Grade point average is another common method for determining student success. However, some educators believe these types of measures are not appropriate for African-American male students. There are wide ranges of environmental factors that can lead to underachievement by African-American male students (Lewis, Butler, Bonner, Fred, & Joubert, 2010). Suggestions have been made to resolve this issue by using a village approach with members of the community supporting and advocating for African-American male educational achievement.

African-American males face a number of obstacles and barriers that can be detrimental to their academic success (Robert, Davis, James, & Adriel, 2010). This group continues to fall behind their cohorts with regard to successful educational experiences. Early failures in school can lead to academic withdrawal, classroom frustrations, and problematic behaviors (Harper & Davis, 2012).

School is the initial environment for many children to experience an opportunity to show competence and mastery beyond their family. The significant achievement gap between African-American males and other students has left educational scholars to
examine a wide variety of factors that may account for this difference (Joe & Davis, 2009). These factors include peer affiliations, student academic frustration, family socioeconomic status, student-teacher relationships, academic progress, and family structure. For older students, jobs may be important as well.

While significant progress has been made toward the rate of high school completion by African-American males in the past 25 years, there continues to be a divergence between this group and their cohorts (Robert et al., 2010). A closer examination of the situation indicates that African-American males are at a greater risk for not completing high school or achieving academic success. This group lags behind their cohorts in college attendance as well. Furthermore, African-American males are underrepresented in the gifted student programs and over represented in Special Education classes across the nation.

The situation involving African-American males and the educational institutions in the United States remains puzzling (Harper & Davis, 2012). Studies indicate that underachievement in the classroom results in increased chances for later socioeconomic injustices leading to emotional, mental, and physical disabilities later in life. Furthermore, African-American males tend to be less successful as young adults. Many times this is due to poor socioeconomic status, lack of parental involvement, and lower educational attainment (Joe & Davis, 2009). There is also a troubling tendency for African-American males to dominate the prison population in the United States. While people of color make up about 30% of the United States’ population, they account for 60% of those imprisoned. The prison population grew by 700% from 1970 to 2005, a rate that is outpacing crime and population rates. The incarceration rates
disproportionately impact men of color: 1 in every 15 African-American men and 1 in every 36 Hispanic men are incarcerated in comparison to 1 in every 106 white men. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, in 2013 one in three black men can expect to go to prison in their lifetime (Carson, 2014). Individuals of color have a disproportionate number of encounters with law enforcement, indicating that racial profiling continues to be a problem.

The problems in the United States with African-American and other males include violence, alcohol, and death due to involvement with illicit drugs (Robert et al., 2010). An important factor to be considered when contemplating the plight of African-American males in the United States school system is how they view education. Many young African-American males consider academic achievement to be a feminine consideration, or at the very least, irrelevant with regards to their masculine identity. They also may have negative attitudes toward their teachers. This can result in inappropriate behaviors that are not acceptable in the classroom setting (Harper & Davis, 2012).

In many African-American homes, obedience is stressed more for females as opposed to males. This means that African-American males are particularly likely to act out in classrooms with a female teacher. These African-American males tend to be confrontational with female teachers and have a negative attitude toward academic success and the educational system in general. The vast majority of the teachers are females and/or Caucasian. There are very few African-American males teachers. For example, an article in Education Week (2014) reported that African-American men make
up less than 2% of our country’s teachers. This rate is far below other minorities and African-American females (Harper & Davis, 2012).

**Statement of the Problem**

The images of African-American males are frequently associated with environments that include athletics, crime, drugs, and academic failures (Harper & Davis, 2012). Even the well-meaning research done in education regarding the plight of African-American males tends to emphasize disadvantages and remediation. There remains a bias of some teachers at many levels of education that have formed beliefs regarding African-American male students that are inaccurate, unquestioned, and unsubstantiated. Some of these beliefs are negative and may prove detrimental to the success of the black male students in their classrooms (Harper & Davis, 2012).

One way in which negative stereotypes can adversely affect African-American males in the classroom is the application of discipline (Lewis et al., 2010). Over the last 30 years, there have been a significant number of studies done regarding the academic experiences of African-American male students. Frequently, a discipline gap occurs in many school environments up to the twelfth grade level. This is especially true with regard to urban schools (Lewis et al., 2010).

Several studies have found that frequent targets of the unfair discipline practices are the African-American males. This has been found to be true despite African-American males often being no more inclined than their peers to engage in problematic behaviors within the classroom. Nevertheless, schools located in urban environments are particularly likely to engage in overly harsh discipline practices for African-American
male students. This problem is particularly troublesome when considering that it is generally unknown if these harsher punishments reduce the chance of African-American males succeeding in the classroom (Lewis et al., 2010).

Given these circumstances, it should be no surprise that there is a high level of underachievement and hopelessness regarding educational opportunities among some African-American males (Harper & Davis, 2012). Many of the schools these students are attending remain culturally unresponsive and have an insufficient amount of resources to alleviate this problem. African-American males tend to be unprepared for work at the college level and have low rates of completing high school. When they do attend college, their rates of completing a bachelor’s degree are low. They have social disengagement within the classroom as well as with the social environment of the school. Many African-American male students at the high school level or below will put forth significant effort toward being respected by their peers. This can involve focusing on athletic accomplishments at the expense of academic pursuits. Many of these factors have combined to lead society and the educational system to conclude that African-American male students do not value educational pursuits (Harper & Davis, 2012).

Despite the many factors that work against African-American male students succeeding in the academic environment, there are those who meet with outstanding successes (Harper & Davis, 2012). The problem being addressed by this study is determining the factors that lead many African-American males to be unsuccessful in their academic pursuits, while others have significant successes.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the factors for educational leaders to consider that may affect teacher and parent perceptions of the academic achievement of eight grade African-American male students and lead some to be successful, while others are not. One of these factors that had been postulated in a number of studies was parental influence (Joe & Davis, 2009). Several empirical studies have demonstrated that family characteristics can have an influence on the academic outcomes of children. This has been found to be especially true with regard to African-American males. There has also been considerable research done regarding the roles that parents can play in helping to prepare their children for successes in an academic setting. Several studies have found that aspects of parenting as well as parental involvement have an influence on the academic achievement of African-American males. However, it remains unclear how the social context and early school experiences of an African-American male influences their early academic successes (Joe & Davis, 2009).

Parents often have different beliefs regarding academic pursuits that are related to their ethnicity or socioeconomic status (Joe & Davis, 2009). Middle-class families tend to have a higher expectation regarding their children’s achievement in school as opposed to families at a lower socioeconomic level. The difference among parents from various ethnic minorities is not as consistent as the findings related to socioeconomic status. Many of the families from an ethnic minority actually have higher expectations of their children than Caucasian parents do. Nevertheless, teachers frequently have lower expectations for the African-American males in their classrooms relative to their peers (Joe & Davis, 2009).
Another factor that has been postulated to have an adverse effect on African-American male successes in the classroom is their possible lack of interest in education (Harper & Davis, 2012). This has been cited as a reason for the reduced level of African-American males who complete high school and later attend college. The level of African-American males graduating from high school is considerably below that of their peers and other ethnic minorities. The rate remains low even when compared to African-American females of a similar socioeconomic status.

Despite the relatively low rate at which African-American males tend to be successful in academic pursuits, there are still those who meet with astounding successes (Harper & Davis, 2012). These men not only graduate from high school and enroll in college, but many of them go on to earn academic and professional degrees beyond the bachelor’s level. Polls of academically successful African-American males reveal that the majority of them have interest in, and respect for, education. This begs the question of what factors lead these African-American men to their academic successes (Harper & Davis, 2012). The purpose of this study was to reveal select factors, which lead to success and those that hinder academic success of African-American males.

**Research Questions**

This study investigated six factors that influenced the academic achievement of middle school African-American males. These factors were family socioeconomic status, family structure, self-esteem, peer affiliation, extra-curricular activities, and student behavior in the classroom setting. The following six research questions were developed to support this study:
RQ1: What effect does *socioeconomic status* have on academic achievement of middle school African-American males?

RQ2: What effect does *family structure* have on academic achievement of middle school African-American males?

RQ3: What effect does perceived *self-esteem* have on academic achievement of middle school African-American males?

RQ4: How do *peer affiliations* affect academic achievement of middle school African-American males?

RQ5: What effect do *extracurricular activities* have on the academic achievement of middle school African-American males?

RQ6: What effect does *student behavior* within the school environment have on academic achievement of middle school African-American males?

**Significance of the Study**

The most significant element of this study was based on the lack of understanding, even by education professionals, regarding factors that could possibly lead to academic success among African-American males (Lynn, Bacon, Totten, Bridges, & Jennings, 2010). This lack of understanding often leads teachers to the belief that they are not qualified to teach African-American male students in a successful manner. This is true even when the teacher has qualifications and skills that go beyond that which is required. Even teachers who have extensive professional experience will often feel as though they are not qualified to teach this student group (Lynn et al., 2010).
The finding that experienced teachers may feel unqualified to teach African-American males is likely to be surprising to many education scholars (Lynn et al., 2010). This is in contradiction to the research that clearly shows that as teachers gain experience they become more successful with all students, including those who are from minorities. Teacher expectations regarding their ability to teach student groups can have an effect on the performance outcome of the learners. This is especially true with regard to African-American male students. Studies have indicated that high school students who are African-American males have decreased levels of success when they receive instruction from teachers who are not certain they are capable of teaching this group. It has been shown that Caucasian teachers tend to have negative perceptions regarding African-American students with regard to personality characteristics, ability, deviant behavior, initial impressions, and the potential for being successful in college (Lynn et al., 2010).

The lack of knowledge regarding factors that influence the success of African-American males in the educational setting includes disciplinary practices (Lewis et al., 2010). The number of African-American male students who are subjected to disciplinary actions in schools continues to be well above the average for their peers. A number of researchers have indicated that African-American males are more often targeted for especially harsh disciplinary actions. This is true even though there is a lack of evidence that African-American males have higher levels of disruptive behaviors relative to their peers. Many times, this rate is three times as high as other students (Lewis et al., 2010).

Researchers in the twenty first century found that African-American children compose about 17% of the total student population (Lewis et al., 2010). However, they account for roughly 33% of the suspensions. In a different setting, other researchers
found that African Americans made up more than 55% of the students who were referred to a principal’s office for infractions of the defiance type. This was true even though only about 30% of the total students in the setting were African Americans. In this same study, Caucasians made up about 5% of the defiance referrals, but they had a representation in the student body of more than 35% (Lewis et al., 2010).

While it is known that parents and the home environment can have a significant effect on the success of a student in the academic setting, this is not completely understood (Joe & Davis, 2009). It is known that there are benefits of parents becoming involved with their children’s education. Students who have parents that are involved with their school have better attitudes toward their education, increased levels of achievement, higher levels of socioemotional behavior, reduced levels of absenteeism, and overall higher levels of academic achievement (Joe & Davis, 2009).

The student’s home environment is believed to be a crucial part of their academic development (Joe & Davis, 2009). There are a number of social and educational activities, which parents engage in with students while they are at home. These activities include visiting museums and libraries, reading books, engaging in school related projects, and helping with homework. Some parents will also have similar rules at home as are present in the school, help their children prepare for school, and engage in cultural activities with their child. While most researchers agree that this involvement by parents with their child’s learning is beneficial, the exact nature and extent to which this involvement leads to academic success is not yet understood (Joe & Davis, 2009).

The personal literacy level and behavior of parents may have a significant effect on how children learn (Joe & Davis, 2009). For example, adults who have significant
amounts of reading materials at their home that are of an educational nature, will tend to have children who are more interested in studying educational material. These children also tend to have higher scores on readiness assessments for reading, read at an earlier age, and develop literacy skills more rapidly (Joe & Davis, 2009). Nevertheless, there are students from homes with few educational materials who are highly successful at their academic endeavors. This is true even for African-American male students who have parents that do not appear to be interested in their education. These students are exceptions to the rule and may be a source of important information regarding factors affecting student academic achievement that are not yet understood.

While it is important to understand the school conditions associated with African-American males having educational success, it is also important to account for other factors that may be important (Lynn et al., 2010). These factors may include economic, political, and social factors that have an influence on the lives of these students. This was the reason that this study examined other factors such as peer affiliation, family socioeconomic status, family structure, and even a student’s self-esteem.

Summary

This study primarily focused on the context of academic success. Other research indicated that many of the problems African-American males have in an educational setting were secondary to behavioral consequences (Lewis et al., 2010). This research was conducted to determine factors that led to African-American males being unsuccessful, or successful, in their academic pursuits. Even when two African-
American male students are from similar homes, some will be successful while others are not (Harper & Davis, 2012).

While it is known that there are certain factors that are likely to increase the success of these students, such as parental influence (Joe & Davis, 2009), the exact nature of these factors and their influence are not fully understood. This study involved research questions regarding the effect of six factors. These factors included family socioeconomic status, family structure, self-esteem, peer affiliations, extra-curricular activities, and student behavior. Some of these factors had a significant effect on the behaviors and ultimate academic success of middle school African-American males.

The study was significant as even education professionals were not fully aware of the factors that led to the behaviors and success of African-American males (Lynn et al., 2010). These findings can be used to establish policies that promote behaviors that increase the success rate of these students.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter is a review of the literature regarding African-American males and their academic achievement. It begins with the disparity between the academic achievements of male versus female African Americans. Then, it moves to a discussion on how the African-American community has traditionally viewed education as a method for improving one’s socioeconomic status. There is a trend of reduced education for the majority of African-Americans males. Further, the discussion focuses on some of the many problems that can interfere with the success of an African-American male in their scholastic pursuits. A number of risk factors such as poverty, systemic racism, poor quality schools and problematic relationships with educators, and violence are reviewed by the researcher.

Following the section on risk factors, the positive factors that can help the African-American male student achieve academic success warrant discussion. These factors include supportive parents (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013), racial identification and socialization, relationships, self-esteem, extracurricular activities, educational goals, a willingness to switch between different socioeconomic group, and resilience. Additional factors that enhance the chance that an African-American male student will be academically successful include self-efficacy, coping strategies, social connections,
appropriate school curricula, a supportive environment, social justice, adaptive resiliency, and academic efficacy.

The education level of an individual is closely associated with their income, quality of choices, and well-being throughout their life (Brinkley, 2013). This means it is essential to have a better understanding of factors that enhance or hinder educational attainment. The 21st century is a timeout globalization and requires workers to be able to solve problems as well as think independent. They must also have good decision-making skills. These essential cognitive abilities will determine if the United States remains a leader in the global marketplace (Belgrave & Brevard, 2014).

During 2001, the United States Congress enacted the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010). The NCLB requires that there be standards-based education reforms. High standards are set for measurable goals throughout the American educational system. Both administrators and teachers must discover new methods for connecting with teaching each student. There are both state and federal standards that mandate improvements for all learners. Furthermore, it is a necessity that all students receive education from teachers that are highly qualified. The NCLB allows federal funds for the reward of schools that increase their average test scores (Knowles & Smith, 2014).

African-American male students are still lagging behind their female counterparts and other groups in average test scores (Belgrave & Brevard, 2014). This means that the procedures and practices used to educate this group require reevaluation in order to meet with the NCLB the requirements. The performance indicators used to meet the NCLB requirements are in subgroups. Despite significant attention paid to all of these
subgroups, there remains a significant achievement gap for African-American males versus their female counterparts. Since the NCLB legislation focuses on student achievement, it is vital for the success of schools to enhance the source of African-American males (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Throughout the 21st century, there will be an employment market that becomes more competitive. This means it will be vital for African-American males to gain skills in order to be successful in the global marketplace (Brinkley, 2013).

The achievement gap that exists between male and female African Americans is not merely limited to the aggregate report of ethnicity and gender (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Problems with African-American male scholastic achievement are associated with the decline of families and weighs heavily on the American economy. The gender-related differences in the scholastic performance of African-American students suggest that females are achieving their educational goals more often than males. For more than a quarter of a century, the economic, educational, and social outcomes of African-American males have been declining more than other racial groups. Because of these problems, African-American males are more likely to be unemployed, have low levels of education, and suffer incarceration. There are significantly reduced numbers of African-American males who graduate from high school or enroll in any type of postsecondary education (Knowles & Smith, 2014).

Throughout the 21st century, there has been a gradual shift in power away from the African-American males and toward African-American females (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010). The interracial disparity between males and females in the African-American community is present at all socioeconomic levels investigated. This is true in
socioeconomically depressed urban settings, as well as professions such as physicians and attorneys. In the depressed urban settings, African-American males are more likely to attend segregated schools that have fewer resources than their female counterparts. Furthermore, African-American males make up a higher proportion of the students in all categories of academic failure. These males are commonly expelled or suspended from school and attend special education programs (Skiba et al., 2011; Losen & Gillespie, 2012).

A troubling finding is that African-American males are being suspended from schools or abandoning their educational pursuits at a higher rate than they are graduating or having academic success (Belgrave & Brevard, 2014). Nevertheless, it is possible for some African-American males to learn and be successful in their academic pursuits. The many African American professionals such as attorneys and physicians are a testament to this fact. The support needed by African-American males goes beyond mere academic assistance (Knowles & Smith, 2014).

Many African-American males need socioemotional support to assist in establishing positive self-images, resilience, and the development of character that will assist with their academic pursuits (Belgrave & Brevard, 2014). This requires that the community create a system for providing resources and support to African-American males who wish to succeed in their education. There needs to be intense and deliberate focus toward helping this group of students in order to help them achieve scholastic successes (Brinkley, 2013).

The socialization of African-American males is essential for them to achieve educational success (Lewis, 2014). This group of people often experiences self-hatred or
other negative effects that are residual to their history of slavery. Furthermore, African-American males are frequently stereotyped and viewed as having negative qualities such as irresponsibility and laziness. Many of these male students have internalized the negative stereotypes and this is evident in their abilities, appearance, and beliefs regarding culture. Inevitably, the stereotypes hinder their academic pursuits. There is often a community perception that there is a long history of well-deserved discrimination against African-American males. This is true even when these individuals are working hard and not receiving rewards equivalent to their Caucasian peers. This cultural situation can evoke self-defeating behaviors among African-American males in their school and other environments (Belgrave & Brevard, 2014).

Cultural influences can be problematic for the aspirations of African-American males as well (Lewis, 2014). These influences can contribute to self-destructive behaviors and beliefs. They are often singled out as being different, ridiculed due to their appearance, stared at, receive poor treatment, and be assumed guilty of criminal behaviors. This can result in stress on a daily basis. The ubiquitous stress level can have a negative impact on the worldview and psychological status of African-American males. Many inappropriate behaviors are secondary to this constant stress (Lewis, 2014).

Throughout the United States, African-American males face a multitude of economic and social barriers (Brinkley, 2013). The African-American male student is more likely to be educated in an environment that does not foster academic or economic success than their female peers. The environmental problems that are more common among these males include limited services and resources, inadequate education, constant mobility, homelessness, neighborhoods lacking resources, gang violence, unemployment,
and poverty. In many metropolitan areas, the African-American male attends classes by
teachers who are not certified. They may also have limited access to technology and
experience curriculums that are less rigorous. The combination of reduced involvement
with education, poor parental supervision, few social supports, and limited access to
technology can combine to be an almost certain recipe for academic failure. African-
American males also suffer from lower expectations by teachers and other educational
professionals (Knowles & Smith, 2014).

It is interesting to note that African-American males who attend classes in
predominantly Caucasian schools are more likely to be successful than their peers in
predominantly minority schools (Belgrave & Brevard, 2014). This should be no surprise,
as the primarily Caucasian schools tend to have challenging academic curricula, teachers
that are highly effective, better resources, and access to supportive administrators and
professionals. The quality of the schools includes the commitment, effectiveness, and
quality of the teachers. Teachers in the primarily Caucasian schools are often more
equipped for providing culturally responsive and rigorous instruction that leads to
improved outcomes for the African-American male students (Lewis, 2014).

Poverty tends to be more of a problem for African-American male students than
females. Poor socioeconomic conditions are consistently predictive of an achievement
gap between male and female African Americans (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010).
Many of the low-income African American families have reasonable and effective
parenting styles (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013. However, economic conditions
negate the benefit that appropriate parenting may provide. During 2010, roughly 37% of
African American children lived below the poverty line. This is an unfavorable
comparison to the roughly 11% of Caucasian children suffering from poverty. Poverty often reduces access to a number of quality resources. These can include both social as well as health services. There can also be a lack of transportation, education, healthcare, shelter, and food. Poverty can negatively influence the ability of parents to consistently monitor and supervise their children. It can also impair practices of active family management. There is usually a lack of educational and socially stimulating experiences in these families (Lewis, 2014).

A socioeconomically depressed neighborhood can adversely affect academic performance secondary to collective socialization processes (Belgrave & Brevard, 2014). African-American males are more likely than females to have an academic career that is intermittent and rarely completed. The African-American male often experience aggressive behaviors that are externalized representations of their inner frustration and conflict. They tend to have parents who are less involved with their education than the family of female peers (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013).

There is a wide range of risk factors for African-American males in economically depressed neighborhoods (Belgrave & Brevard, 2014). These factors include fewer constraints regarding problem behaviors, aggressive peers, inadequate activities and public resources, little adult supervision, and a necessity to resort to physical aggression. This creates a situation in which the African-American males’ incarceration rate is higher than any other time in history. Many of these males fail to complete high school and reject any responsibilities associated with fatherhood. The household responsibilities in many African American communities have almost entirely shifted to women. The problems for the African-American family are now nearly identical to the crisis faced by
African-American males. These males frequently have an inability to meet their family responsibilities (Knowles & Smith, 2014).

There are a number of statistics, which point out the plight of African-American males as compared to their female peers (Howard, 2013). For example, there are more than 10 times as many African-American males in prisons or jails than females (Darensbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010). During 2009, more than 10% of African-American males between the ages of 16 and 24 years old dropped out of school. The rate for female dropout was 8%. During 2010, nearly 16% of African-American males were unemployed. However, only 13% of female African Americans were in a similar situation (Lewis, 2014).

African-American males faced a dilemma of being in an inferior social and structural position while being encouraged to perform in a role leading to a positively evaluated social and structural position. This can result in the African-American male not having a realistic or clear goal. They may want to succeed, but do not have a plan on how to reach their goal. In fact, they may not have a clear goal other than a general feeling of success. This means that educators of male African Americans must understand the cultural and environmental factors influencing their students. These educators need to be aware of how the cultural and environmental factors lead to certain interpretations and perceptions by male African Americans (Knowles & Smith, 2014).

A supportive family culture is essential for a male African American to achieve academic success. This culture can provide a positive impact on the way in which the student views learning. The students form their ideas of appropriate social behavior from how their adult family members interact with one another. Male African-American
students with family support generally have fewer discipline problems and higher levels of academic achievement. A family that is supportive, encouraging educators, and perseverance on the part of the student can lead the African-American male to astounding academic successes (Lewis, 2014).

The risk factors such as lower socioeconomic status and a single-parent household tend to be more detrimental to male versus female African Americans (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013). The home environment is the primary point of socialization for these students. This environment can also have a substantial influence on how interested the child is in their academic pursuits. Unfortunately, the nuclear family is becoming less common in many African-American communities. Less than 50% of African-American families have a traditional nuclear structure with two parents. However, one should not assume that this means that African-American families no longer exist. Rather, there tends to be a greater variety of family members than in previous generations. For example, the family might include an aunt, grandmother, grandfather, uncle, or neighbor. Many of these changes are the result of increasing levels of urbanization (Lewis, 2014).

For male African Americans, the traditional nuclear family with two parents tends to result in better academic achievement (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013). This is not necessarily true for African-American females. Males who are raised in a traditional family structure tend to have lower rates of dropping out of school and higher rates of graduation. They also tend to be less likely to experience incarceration (Knowles & Smith, 2014).

Wealth is the most impactful factor for student achievement and male African Americans are no exception (Lewis, 2014). The socioeconomic status of the child’s
family is a vital determinant of the parents’ level of income, occupational status, and education level. Male African Americans raised in homes that have substantial financial resources are more likely to perform well in school. However, the male African-American students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds tend to have low-test scores and drop out of school more frequently. The family socioeconomic status is the most important factor for determining male African-American grade-point averages. The hardship created by a lower socioeconomic status can disrupt parenting. There can also be high rates of parental depression and family conflict. Both of these factors can have negative influences on a child’s academic achievement. Studies that focus on family structure as well as income have shown that the academic performance of male African Americans have found that even those students from single-parent families tend to do well if the socioeconomic status is higher (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013).

There are a number of maternal characteristics important for male African-American students with regard to their academic achievement (Howard, 2013). Roughly, 70% of the African-American children are born to unmarried mothers. If the mother of these children is not in the household, the grades of the children, especially males, will be lower. This is true regardless of whether the father is present. Children with mothers who are better educated tend to have higher levels of self-esteem and higher scores on their standardized testing. This is likely to be due to both genetic and environmental factors associated with the mother (Knowles & Smith, 2014).
Dependent Variable

Student Academic Achievement

African Americans of low income have traditionally viewed scholastic success and educational attainments as a method for upward mobility (Howard, 2013). The migrations of blacks to the northern United States from the 1940s until later in the 20th century was primarily fueled by a wish for better opportunities regarding education for children. While many of these African Americans faced adverse circumstances such as systemic racism, many were able to overcome these obstacles and improve their socioeconomic status through educational successes. Many African Americans moved north and transitioned from relatively low socioeconomic classes into middle or upper income. The Civil Rights Movement extended this opportunity to African Americans living in the South (Bergin & Bergin, 2012).

As an outcome of the quest by African Americans to achieve a better life, there have been considerable changes in the political, economic, and social landscape of American society (Howard, 2013). Many African Americans connect the cost for both social and economic success with education. The number of African-American college students during 2010 was roughly twice that of 1985. Within the group of African Americans who are 25 years of age or older, there are over 1,600,000 who have advanced degrees (Robert et al., 2010).

While there have been systematic obstacles to success in school for many African Americans, education has still been considered as an opportunity for success by African Americans (Tyler, 2014). This is despite the fact that many African Americans are unable to attain academic success sufficient to attend college (Robert et al., 2010).
Despite these difficulties, many African Americans have made valiant efforts toward improving their living conditions and socioeconomic status. Due to protective factors within institutions, communities, and homes as well as schools, some African Americans display the necessary self-efficacy to pursue professions in medicine, law, accounting, and other important pursuits (Delpit, 2012).

The achievement gap between African-American students and those who were Caucasian is even more pronounced among males as opposed to females (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). This achievement gap is foundational and is crucial for determining success in more advanced subjects that allow for upward mobility. By the time the average African-American male enters the eighth grade, they may be as much as four grades behind the average Caucasian student. This gap frequently increases as the student progresses through high school. This is perhaps the reason many African-American males do not complete high school (Tyler, 2014).

African-American males have less than a 50% chance of completing high school (Howard, 2013). This is a relatively low rate considering that Caucasians have approximately 80% of completing high school. There are likely to be several reasons African-American males have problems completing high school. One factor is that there is often little encouragement or support for their academic pursuits. African-American males are more likely to suffer suspension or expulsion (Skiba et al., 2011; Losen & Gillespie, 2012). They also tend to receive longer times of punishment for similar behaviors relative to their Caucasian peers. Even for the few African-American males who graduate from high school, less than 40% will go on to enroll in additional training or education (Tyler, 2014).
This achievement gap is directly linked to the flaws in our curriculum and pedagogy. According to Banks (1998), school districts throughout the United States should implement the five dimensions of multicultural education. Banks has laid out the five dimensions of multicultural education as follows: content integration, knowledge construction, equity pedagogy, prejudice reduction and empowering school culture and social structure. As it relates to content integration, Banks stated that more African Americans, Mexican Americans, and Asian Americans need to be added in the curriculum, and teachers have to get involved and include this diversity in their teaching. Also, teachers have to change their methods to engage kids from diverse racial groups and both genders so that all students can achieve. He explained that teachers and educational leaders must work hard to reduce prejudice in the classroom. The total school culture has to be evaluated to see how to make it make more equitable (Banks, 1998). Ladson-Billings (1995) concurs and sums it up by saying, “But that’s just good teaching!” (p. 1). According to Ladson-Billings, linking school to culture will bring academic success.

The context and culture of the school curriculum can be important when considering the success of African-American male students (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010). There is considerable documentation that inner-city students have negative feelings toward a Eurocentric focus in the curriculum. This type of curriculum highlights Western European achievements. It does not provide sufficient information regarding other cultures. This includes ignoring the African-American culture. Many times the curriculum represents the difference between the goal of the school and that of the family. Many of these inner-city schools can do a disservice to the African-American
community by devaluing the accomplishments and culture of African Americans. There is little, if any, integration of the culture of African Americans in this type of Eurocentric curriculum. This is irresponsible to both African-American students as well as those from other ethnic groups. Some view this as a method of providing misinformation that can contribute to the continuing of systemic racism (Knowles & Smith, 2014).

Most African-American male students are interested in curricula that are culturally relevant (Brinkley, 2013). They also tend to prefer a curriculum that is diverse, sensitive, and recognizes lifestyles of non-Europeans. It is also important that the curriculum acknowledge the contributions and values brought by non-Europeans throughout history. Many of these students expressed beliefs that teachers should acknowledge them as having information regarding the value and meaning of their own culture. It is especially helpful if the teacher incorporates the knowledge base of the students in their teaching process (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010).

Further evidence for the culture of the African-American students’ disconnection with many educational curricula is teaching strategies based upon Anglo-American values regarding autonomy and competition (Belgrave & Brevard, 2014). Some of these values are the antithesis of African-American views regarding the importance of group orientation and kinship. Several studies have indicated that African-American students benefit from cooperative learning strategies and are more group oriented. African-American male students have reported higher satisfaction levels when there is group interaction. They also tend to enjoy the tasks more and establish positive connections with other members of the group (Brinkley, 2013).
Despite the positive outcomes for African-American male students with Afrocentric teaching strategies, in most inner-city schools this approach is rare (Knowles & Smith, 2014). This is especially worrisome when one understands that the literature indicates that using a Eurocentric approach with predominantly African-American students can lead to increased chances of stereotyping and poor academic results for African-American students. In fact, research has demonstrated that cultural discontinuity between the learning process and the student’s background is a major factor in the lack of success for many African-American male students. In other words, the context, content, and quality of the education delivered to African-American male students does not support their natural abilities. This has resulted in decreased levels of graduation from high school and an increased incarceration rate (Knowles & Smith, 2014).

The plight of African-American males in the United States represents a substantial loss of resources for society (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010). There is a negative situation consisting of lost achievements and aspirations. In order for the United States to continue its leadership as a society that provides equal opportunities for all people, the current downward spiral for educational success among African-American males needs reversal. This will require identification of the individual characteristics, protective factors, support, and school processes that are beneficial for African-American males. This is particularly true with regard to students who come from backgrounds that are socioeconomically disadvantaged. There needs to be an increase in the knowledge base regarding the processes and factors that are most effective at promoting high levels of self-efficacy regarding academic success among African-American males. Increased
knowledge will allow programmatic interventions to focus on the most effective means of increasing African-American males’ success in school (Tyler, 2014).

Many African-American males from impoverished backgrounds have problematic relationships with teachers and other staff at the school. Many times these problems are secondary to misconceptions about the student and the teacher expectations (Lynn et al., 2010). This situation can result in a higher level of African-American males in classes that are less challenging academically (Tyler, 2014).

The lack of a close relationship between teachers and children is especially problematic for African-American males, as these types of relationships decrease academic success levels (Howard, 2013). The conflicted relationship between a child and their teacher is often present in many urban schools. This type of relationship often leads to the student being noncompliant, hostile, and angry toward both the teacher and the school in general. The African-American male student who has this type of relationship with one or more teachers will participate less in class, feel detached from the student body, and often avoid school altogether. These strained teacher-student relationships are another problem that is all too common among African-American males from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Delpit, 2012).

African-American male students throughout the United States are overrepresented in the lower tier classrooms and underrepresented in the more advanced programs (Tyler, 2014). There are few African-American male learners in gifted or advanced placement programs. African-American males tend to do less well academically than their African American peers who are female. The precise reasons for this discrepancy are elusive. One reason is that for African-American males, factors related to poor outcomes are more
important than for females. These factors include substandard learning facilities, poor relationships with teachers, and the lack of referrals to the more advanced programs (Bergin & Bergin, 2012).

Another problem for African-American male students is that they hear different messages from their school and home (Howard, 2013). Many black families in the inner city cling to the idea that education is a method for becoming upwardly mobile and provides reason for hope. Unfortunately, the urban school culture will frequently send a message to these African-American students that they are unlikely to be successful and there is poor support for academic achievement. An example of an outcome of these school messages is that there are more African-American males incarcerated than those attending college. Only about 20% of African American men pursue higher education, while 25% experience incarceration (Robert et al., 2010).

**Alarming Trends, Emergent Themes, and Independent Variables**

The tradition of African Americans using education as an opportunity to improve their socioeconomic status has continued to be problematic into the 21st century (Tyler, 2014). Some African Americans cannot transition from their lower socioeconomic status. Roughly, 54% of African Americans do not complete their high school education. The poverty rate in the African-American community remains relatively high. This group has a higher rate of family poverty than the majority of other racial minorities in the United States. The 21st century has not seen any significant gains in the socioeconomic status of African-American households (Bergin & Bergin, 2012). This is why Noguera (2009) stated that society should get out of the habit of blaming schools,
teachers, parents, and especially kids for the educational failures of inner-city public schools. In reality, there is a larger social and economic inequality at work in our society that undermines our ability to educate all children. Noguera shows how instead of recognizing the fact that poor children come to school with very different needs. Policy makers have become accustomed to condemning and humiliating urban schools and the poor and minority student who attend them (Noguera, 2009).

Another alarming trend that continues into the 21st century is the high rate of African-American men who are imprisoned (Darensbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010). African-American males disproportionately represent people who have difficulties with the United States criminal justice system. For example, approximately 14% of the male population in United States is African American. However, this group makes up more than 40% of most prison populations. In fact, roughly one-fourth of all African-American men suffer incarceration at any specific point in time (Darensbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010).

**Socioeconomic Status**

Being a member of a low-income family increases the probability that the African-American male will have negative outcomes in their life in general and school in particular (Howard, 2013). Racism further increases the rate of poor outcomes. African-American males living in impoverished areas often feel hopeless with regard to their chances of academic success. Even at the kindergarten level, many of these children show problems in relation to completing their schoolwork. This continues throughout
their academic career and often results in their not completing high school or even considering college (Robert et al., 2010).

Socioeconomic deprivation and poverty are stressors that directly have a negative effect on the family integrity as well as functioning of African-American families (Smith, Hung & Franklin, 2011). The poverty is not merely a lack of money. It also includes loss of hope and an increase in the level of despair. With regard to academic achievement and school functioning, the level of adjustment to the academic environment by African-American male students relies on the family’s ability to function and have a feeling of well-being. Poverty among these families represents a negative factor that is eroding, encompassing, and cumulative with regard to the dysfunction exhibited by the African-American male (Delpit, 2012).

Many African-American male students from impoverished backgrounds have needs that have remained unmet and never expect that their lives will change and they give up on their dreams (Tyler, 2014). Children that are attending schools located in low-income areas tend to have lower academic achievement levels. This is especially true for African-American males. An analysis of reading levels in the United States for 2010 indicated that sixth-grade African-American males from inner-city schools scored lower than peers who were living in the suburbs. Being unable to read properly, places the students had a higher risk for failing in other academic pursuits (Howard, 2013).

Poor quality schools are another problem. African-American males from impoverished family backgrounds often have problems with their educational systems (Tyler, 2014). Many times these children are attending schools that are at risk for losing their federal funding due to poor levels of academic achievement. The schools may be
deteriorating physically and this can add to the feelings of hopelessness. There can also be poor water quality and dangerous levels of asbestos in the air. Many urban school districts struggle, as they do not have adequate resources. They may have textbooks that are out of date and technology insufficient to teach students important computer skills (Howard, 2013).

Schools that are teaching African-American males from impoverished backgrounds can introduce a number of added risk factors (Bergin & Bergin, 2012). For example, a number of inner-city schools do not have environments that are structured and supportive. They may have also institutionalized low expectations with regard to academic achievement (Lynn et al., 2010). They will frequently have educational resources that are inadequate. The schools attended by many African-American males from lower socioeconomic backgrounds will often have academic standards that are lower. They can also have less funding for each student and rigid systems for tracking academic achievement. Many of these problems are systemic (Delpit, 2012).

Inadequate levels of funding results in too few inner-city schools (Howard, 2013). These schools are overcrowded. This environment may lead to poor relationships between the students and teachers as well as the staff alienation toward each other and the administration. Frequently, a lack of human and financial resources fosters institutional patterns associated with higher student failure rates. The rigid tracking procedures and application of rules is frequently secondary to the faculty being uninterested in the plight of their students (Tyler, 2014).

The statistics indicate that the African-American dream of improving socioeconomic status through academic success continues to be elusive for many (Tyler,
2014). In fact, the situation may be worse now than in previous generations. Formerly there were traditional types of protective factors that helped young African-American males avoid the full impact of certain adverse circumstances. For example, there are now fewer positive father figures for African-American males than in previous generations. Another example is the increasing likelihood of having a sibling incarcerated and the associated family resentment toward the justice system (Delpit, 2012).

Despite these problems for African-American males being successful in their academic pursuits, a few successfully achieve outstanding academic success (Howard, 2013). This raises the possibility of there being protective factors for the difficult situation in which many African-American males find themselves. These supportive and protective factors may have a substantial effect on the academic success of African-American males (Howard, 2013).

While there have been improvements to the educational opportunities for African Americans, problems still exist (Tyler, 2014). A few African-American students are from lower income families that managed to escape poverty through achievements in their academic pursuits. There is increasing disparity between the successes of African-American students versus Caucasians. African American children are not as likely to meet with the educational standards of a 21st-century society. This is particularly true for African Americans who are from socioeconomically disadvantaged families and attending classes in urban school districts. Data collected by the Education Trust over the first decade of the 21st century documented an increase in the skills gap for reading and mathematics between children who are Caucasian and those of African-American descent (Bergin & Bergin, 2012).
There are a number of risk factors which increase the likelihood that an African-American male will have a negative outcome regarding their academic pursuits (Howard, 2013). Evidence suggests that risk factors for African-American males persist throughout the socioeconomic levels, but more pronounced in families experiencing poverty. This is supportive of the idea that chronic stress in relation to racism can put African-American families at a higher risk level for being unable to take advantage of educational opportunities (Smith, Hung & Franklin, 2011). This means that African-American males, especially those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, are at a higher risk for marginalized success due to their membership in their racial group. Research consistently indicates that Caucasian male adolescents have fewer risk factors than their counterparts who are of African-American descent (Howard, 2013).

Research has also discovered that there is a correlation between the family income and the number of risk factors encountered (Delpit, 2012). Analysis of the data indicates that African-American families with lower incomes will have multiple risk factors that interact with one another to decrease the likelihood that an African-American male will have academic success. The interaction occurring between the students and the environment is a strong predictor of their achievement level in middle and high school settings (Tyler, 2014).

A factor that requires careful attention is the willingness of the African-American male to leave their present socioeconomic group and aspire to a higher social class (Lewis, 2014). This can prove to be a difficult decision. Many times exposure to other lifestyles and their outcomes is essential. Mentoring can also be important. Some view the decision to improve one’s socioeconomic status as a natural outcome of American
society. However, it is usually a decision requiring emotional fortitude and intellectual effort. Some may view the rise to a higher social class as abandoning one’s family and community. For nearly all African-American males who successfully navigate into a new socioeconomic class, they will suffer from feelings of loneliness and anxiety regarding their future (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010).

**Family Structure**

Parental expectations are a vital factor for the academic success of African-American male students (Bergin & Bergin, 2012). The attitudes that these parents have toward learning are crucial to the success of the student. Parenting styles that encourage learning and are supportive can provide a source of protection against environmental difficulties that may lead to academic failure. Parents who support their children and their academic pursuits are often able to help them overcome environmental factors that would otherwise be debilitating. Students living in high-risk areas are particularly in need of parents who provide significant levels of monitoring and supervision. Parents must also provide discipline that focuses on preventing problems. These parents will seek out supportive relationships with their children that act as a protective barrier against environmental stressors of the impoverished urban area (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011). These types of parenting practices can foster autonomy in African-American males and are essential for their success. The emotional support of these types of parents is crucial for helping the African-American male student have confidence when exploring academic pursuits (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013).
It is also important that parents of African-American male students not only support education through conversations and statements, but by specific actions as well (Cushman, 2010). These parents must be committed to actions that encourage further education for their child. An example might be making financial sacrifices from working longer hours in order to find educational opportunities for their child. In other words, the child must not only hear that their parents are supporting their education, but observe actions that prove that the statements are sincere (Cushman, 2010).

Some have argued that the influence of parents on their African-American male children’s academic pursuits decline as the child grows older (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013). However, despite the common rebellion of adolescents, many youth will internalize their family norms and values by the time they are old enough to enter a middle school. Therefore, the decreased parental influence is less important since the norms and values of the family have become internalized. Furthermore, a number of studies have indicated that the family who is supportive of an African-American male achieving academic success increases the likelihood of a positive outcome (Bergin & Bergin, 2012).

The emotional and psychological patterns of an African-American family can establish coping abilities in the African-American male that are vital to academic success (Cushman, 2010). One of these important coping abilities is self-control. Parents can instill this trait in their children by showing it in their own behaviors while parenting and engage in other important activities. Children who model their parents’ self-control tend to be more successful in school and exhibit higher levels of academic involvement and competence (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013).
A family that has the proper attributes for increasing the African-American male’s readiness for school is more likely to have scholastically successful children. The readiness level exists in the context of expectations by the school system and teachers regarding a student’s emotional and academic behaviors (Lynn et al., 2010). Important factors instilled in the child by the family include accepting responsibility, using Standard English, being quiet when appropriate, and maintaining good personal hygiene as well as appearance. The African-American male students who enter school with these attributes are more likely to learn and experience nurturing by education professionals. Students who enter school without these important attributes often experience decreased learning and are the subject of negative stereotypes (Delpit, 2012).

The lack of importance placed on academic achievement and education are particularly problematic for many African-American males (Bergin & Bergin, 2012). The environment in which many of these unfortunate students live does not provide incentives for academic success. Many times, academic pursuits are of more importance for other races and groups of people. In fact, there is frequent peer pressure placed on African-American males for failing in their academic pursuits. For example, some groups consider academic success to be a feminist pursuit. This may explain why there is a gap between the success of African-American males and females (Delpit, 2012).

Some studies have indicated there is an important difference between immigrants to the United States and those who are descended from slaves (Cushman, 2010). The immigrants frequently view difficult situations as temporary problems to be resolved. Many times, they see the education system as a method for improving their plight. However, many of the African-American families from socioeconomically disadvantaged
urban environments are distrustful of any formal institutions including those of education. This means that many African-American male children have no role models within their immediate community who value academic success (Belgrave & Brevard, 2014).

Racial socialization is also important (Bergin & Bergin, 2012). Even in the 21st century, it remains a fact United States that racial socialization can have a significant effect on many types of life outcomes. Systemic racism is still a problem in the United States. African-American male students continue to suffer from adverse circumstances in a disproportionately high number. Parents must prepare these students to live in American society (Hine & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013). This is especially true for parents of African-American males. It is the obligation of these parents to prepare and socialize the child for the possible use of discriminatory practices and harassment. Parents can be an important source of information for the young African-American male on how to deal appropriately with difficult situations involving other races and racism. These lessons can also help the student maintain their self-esteem so that they are more likely to be successful in their academic pursuits (Delpit, 2012).

Racial identification is important for African-American males as well (Cushman, 2010). This involves the individual feeling connected to other members of their race. The parents of these children need to help them develop a type of ethnic pride (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013). This type of pride can help the African-American male feel positive toward themselves as well as their racial group. This pride can serve as a protective factor supporting positive self-regard. This makes it more likely that the student will experience academic successes. Interestingly, it is more important for African-American males to feel connected to their ethnic group than for their female
peers. A lack of racial identification by many students in socioeconomically deprived urban neighborhoods maybe another reason that African-American females do better than males in relation to academic achievement (Bergin & Bergin, 2012).

**Self-Esteem**

African-American males can benefit substantially in their academic pursuits from higher levels of self-esteem (Brinkley, 2013). Individual high levels of self-esteem are closely associated with academic success. This is true even among students who have previously displayed problematic behaviors. Self-esteem is a factor that prevents the student from delving into behaviors that are progressively more troublesome. Levels of self-esteem are associated with reduced levels of aggression, anxiety, and depression. The high self-esteem can help the student have an orientation that is more resilient. The esteem affects how the student views their environment and educational situation. It helps them to make appropriate behavioral decisions that more often lead to success (Delpit, 2012).

A nurturing school environment can build a student’s self-esteem. For the African-American male student to be academically successful it is important that the school environment be supportive (Belgrave & Brevard, 2014). Despite the multiple difficulties faced by the students, a school environment that is supportive can make a positive difference in the lives of the students and ameliorate many of the problems associated with risk factors. This type of school environment provides available and responsive, as well as caring and competent, teachers. The school atmosphere should say and be conducive for higher levels of engagement with the students that enhances their
level of academic achievement. While having parents who are involved in their academic success is important (Hines & Holcomb-McCOy, 2013), having teachers that are supportive and feeling a sense of belonging with the school is even more important for the success of African-American male students (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010).

Studies have revealed that for African-American male students the perception that teachers are engaging and caring is one of the most important factors for their academic success (Brinkley, 2013). Most of the students find that an interactive approach to teaching encourages the development of their critical thinking skills. They also prefer teaching approaches that involve teamwork, cooperation, as well as self-direction. Resilient African-American males experience educational processes in circumstances as positive when the students often are involved with the school requirement and interact frequently with teachers and other staff members (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010).

The school culture serves as a way to communicate to the African-American male student how the system views their ethnic group (Mitchell, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2010). School climate that enhance the success rate of African-American males respect and value the interconnections existing between various ethnic groups that can help promote a positive attitude by the students. These types of school climates are associated with higher levels of academic achievement by African-American males. Schools that do not provide this type of support often have African-American male students that abandon the system through dropping out before they completed high school. Improved educational outcomes require the teachers to have higher expectations regarding their probable achievement levels. The school must also eliminate any substandard curricula and
change policies accordingly. There must be discontinuation of procedures that result in any student feeling as though they are alienated (Mitchell, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2010).

Many African-American male students have coping strategies that are limited (Cushman, 2010). While the risk factors are individual, the impact of cumulative risk factors affects African-American males as a group. Multiple risk models account for a number of possible situations that increase the likelihood of the student encountering academic difficulties. Some of these factors include poor access to services and goods, low parental education levels, a large family, single parents, and poverty. Of course, the models include personal variables such as family support and cohesion, communication styles, parenting (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013), and personality of the student.

Many interrelated factors can positively affect the success of African-American male in their academic pursuits (Cushman, 2010). These factors include the community, school, and family. There are also social influences such as the mass media and Internet. For some of these, African-American male students are insufficient for handling the environment in a way that leads to optimal academic functioning. In other words, the student does not have sufficient resiliency to overcome dysfunctional or invasive factors. They are unable to sustain a healthy level of functioning and recover from the many traumas they experience (Delpit, 2012).

Some African-American male students live in risky environments and are still able to thrive academically (Belgrave & Brevard, 2014). This suggests that there must be protective factors at work that allows these students to be successful. These protective factors can be external or internal. There are resources that can assist the student in modifying or reducing the negative effect of certain environmental factors. The student
is able to use these resources to better negotiate negative chains of events and avoid difficulties. This allows the student to function at a healthier level and more fully achieve their academic goals. Some identified protective factors include religious affiliations, family adaptability, a strong orientation toward academic achievement, good work ethics, and extended families that are supportive (Bergin & Bergin, 2012).

Educational goals are important as well. African-American males who are oriented more toward the future with regard to their behaviors and thoughts are more likely to be successful in school (Brinkley, 2013). The students frequently focus on attaining goals and acquiring the necessary resources. Many times this comes at the expense of immediate gratification. The students understand that in the long-term, delayed gratification will be more rewarding. These types of students have to believe that a successful future is realistic, worthy, and attainable (Delpit, 2012).

A high level of resilience is essential for the African-American male student to be successful (Brinkley, 2013). The stereotypes and environmental disadvantages with this group of students can lead to behavioral problems and poor academic performance. However, not all African-American males fail in their academic pursuits for a path of incarceration. Many of these children transcend difficulties and overcome difficult circumstances. The children who tend to succeed in the face of high levels of stressors are resilient (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011). This resiliency is usually the result of many factors. These factors can include the community, academic organization, social group, family circumstances, and individual characteristics of the student.

Several studies have shown that there are psychosocial factors associated with resiliency among African-American males (Lewis, 2014). These factors include
spirituality, social support, being goal focused, cognitive reappraisals, positive emotions, facing fears, optimism, and the ability to cope with situations. There are also characteristics among these resilient students used to overcome the problems associated with childhood trauma. These characteristics include morality, humor, creativity, initiative, relationships, independence, and insight (Delpit, 2012).

Academic self-efficacy and resilience are processes of adapting that reflect the African-American male child’s ability to regain and maintain equilibrium despite difficult circumstances (Brinkley, 2013). Developmental assets consist of personal qualities that contribute to the child’s ability to adapt. These qualities include high levels of self-esteem, internal locus of control, excellent language skills, and advanced cognitive abilities. There were also immediate external resources that are important in helping the African-American male be resilient. These are protective factors and include directive relationships, support and relationships with caring adults, family cohesion, as well as family stability. An important part of resilience is the economic policies and social structures of the environment. Some policies and structures enhance the individual’s resilience when applied to academic efforts (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010).

Many African-American male students who achieve academic success have significant levels of insight (Lewis, 2014). This insight develops through overcoming life difficulties and observing how these problems affected them and others. The students will work hard to achieve their goals even under the most trying circumstances. They frequently experience positive outcomes and this enhances their self-esteem as well as confidence. The students come to believe that they have the ability to solve problems as well as make changes to the impact of important events in their lives (Brinkley, 2013).
In some cases, systemic racism can negatively affect a child’s self-esteem. Systemic racism continues to be an insidious problem that affects African Americans. This is especially true with regard to male students. African-American youth experience a number of risk factors more commonly than their Caucasian peers do. These male children have a higher chance of living in poverty and witnessing crimes. They are also more likely to be the victims of crimes. These problematic environments can result in the African-American male having difficulties transitioning from adolescence into adulthood (Tyler, 2014).

Systemic racism has led to a wide range of negative outcomes and circumstances for African-American male students living in an inner-city environment (Howard, 2013). The students are subject to multiple risk factors. They tend to have high dropout rates, low academic achievement levels, and increased levels of repeating grades. Many of these children have no experience with adults who have used academic success as a method for improving their socioeconomic status. Frequently, this results in their being depressed, apathetic, or aggressive in their behavior within the school setting (Bergin & Bergin, 2012).

The success of an African-American male student relies on their adaptive resiliency, individual characteristics, protective factors, and environmental risk factors (Brinkley, 2013). Students exposed to multiple risk factors for failure in the classroom generally have lower social, mathematics, and reading skills. They often have behavioral problems as well. This is true for both middle school and high school students. The school ecology and that of the classroom effects student achievement levels for African-American males. The school climate can impede or encourage student learning in the
classroom (Mitchell, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2010). An orderly and safe school environment leads to educational outcomes that are positive. The school can also promote or stifle the resiliency of the student. Well-structured and functioning schools can enhance the resiliency of students. They can also mitigate factors that increase the risk for academic failure or dropout (Knowles & Smith, 2014).

Academic efficacy and resilience of African-American male students rely partially on expectations and self-perceptions (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010). In order to be successful, the student needs to have a reasonable amount of academic efficacy. This type of self-efficacy relies on experiences. It can be a crucial factor in ensuring that the student achieves academic success. Furthermore, it is important that supportive adults who encourage their academic pursuits influence the African-American male student. A positive school is important for the students as well. Many schools will need to enhance the level of caring adults available to mentor African-American males throughout their school experience. This might require tapping into community resources as well as available family members (Knowles & Smith, 2014).

Adolescent Caucasian males’ interracial social protocols tend to have higher levels of academic success than their adolescent African-American peers (Cushman, 2010). There is a positive correlation between grade-point averages and being aware of possible racial barriers. Students socialized regarding their racial group cope with difficulties and failures in a manner that maintains their self-esteem. This is important for reducing self-blame that can create a downward spiral for the African-American male student culminating in their not completing high school. Furthermore, African-American students who have a positive racial identity also tend to have attitudes as well as
behaviors towards their school that encourage academic success (Belgrave & Brevard, 2014).

African-American male students who have racial pride often experience a sense of obligation for improving the status of their race (Belgrave & Brevard, 2014). This can be a motivating factor for achieving upward mobility through academic success. This can lead to more positive outcomes than the idea that one is abandoning their race to be academically successful (Delpit, 2012).

**Peer Affiliations**

Many African-American males have problems with school and the criminal justice system due to their involvement with deviant groups (Howard, 2013). The violence and drug trade in the poor urban neighborhoods are often associated with social networks of gangs and other deviant groups. Merely for the sake of survival, some African-American males may feel compelled to associate with these groups. These groups tend to have little regard for academic performance and value aggressive behavior as a method for solving problems. These groups also further expose the African-American male student to social situations in which violence and a lack of respect for formal authority is encouraged (Cushman, 2010).

Many African-American male youth may believe their chances in life are better in the NBA, signing a rap contract, or becoming a drug dealer. This is further reinforced when African American youth observe African-American college graduates who are unemployed, underemployed, or underpaid. It becomes even a greater conflict when African-American youth observe drug dealers who earn much more money than African
Americans with college degrees. We must convince African-American youth that they have a much better chance in a classroom than on the streets. The question is, how will we convince them (Kunjufu, 2002)?

Research indicates that African-American males who associate with deviant groups have poor outcomes in relation to their substance abuse, behavior, and academic achievement (Belgrave & Brevard, 2014). Students who report having peers that engage in illicit drug use are more likely to have poor levels of academic achievement, missed school, and take illicit drugs. Many of these African-American male students having relatively low levels of self-esteem are vulnerable to the situation. These self-image problems can result in an individual being more susceptible to influence by deviant peer groups and self-medicating with illicit substances (Cushman, 2010).

For an African-American male student, the impact of peers could be a crucial factor in their success or failure (Cushman, 2010). For example, if the student has peers who associate academic success with trying to be Caucasian, this can discourage the student from achieving high grades. Alternatively, the child may have good grades but feel estrangement and isolation in their social environment. The African-American male students who have peers that support their academic success do not experience the negative impact of those who feel otherwise about academic success (Belgrave & Brevard, 2014).

Many times an important factor in the success of an African-American male student is the involvement of an adult who is interested in their success (Belgrave & Brevard, 2014). This adult might be a parent (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013), teacher extended family member, or sibling. The interaction and involvement by this adult in the
life of the student can make a significant difference. This is especially true when the African-American male student is attending classes in a difficult environment. While skilled mentoring is ideal, the most important factor for these relationships is that the student feels as though the adult cares about them and is supportive of their academic success. Some studies have found that having a caring adult involved with their education is the single most important factor for the success of an African-American male (Delpit, 2012).

Language and cognitive ability are important for the success of an African-American male student (Cushman, 2010). Good cognitive abilities can promote success with academic pursuits and serve as a protection against environmental difficulties that may otherwise impede academic success. Language skills are important as they also enhance academic achievement and the ability to deal with the social environment. Language skills are especially important for students who are attending classes in socioeconomically deprived areas. Advanced language skills can help the child navigate the educational system without experiencing stereotyping for their speech. Language abilities increase the chance of academic success and reduce the occurrence of major problems (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010).

Another important part of being a successful African-American male student is having connections to others in several environments (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010). When the student feels as though they are making a positive difference in the life of others, they will generally experience enhanced feelings of wellness, especially with regard to his mental health. The students come to believe that others who care about them notice their efforts. The idea that they are making a difference in their environment
is essential for the students to maintain their efforts through difficult circumstances. The feeling of making a difference enhances the student’s self-esteem as well as reduces problems with academic stress (Knowles & Smith, 2014).

African-American male students who feel connected in their community and supported by both school and family have a reduction in antisocial behavior. There is also an increase in their academic achievement scores (Brinkley, 2013). Feeling as though they are important and belong in the setting can be a vital part of the African-American males achieving academic success. While a number of negative, stereotypes exist regarding the students, an extensive social support system at school and at home can overcome these difficulties. Overcoming the problems can lead to academic success and avoiding incarceration (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010).

Strong feelings of family connections are important for the health and growth of any child (Belgrave & Brevard, 2014). However, due to the difficulties faced by many African-American males, this group is in special need of feeling connected. Healthy family attachments can serve as a protective factor and lead to an increased chance for improved academic outcomes. Those students who feel as though they have strong family connections that are supportive and encouraging of their academic success will be more successful than students that do not have this type of family support. The family support serves as a type of strength when dealing with multiple environmental stressors that could otherwise hamper academic achievement (Lewis, 2014).

Socioeconomically depressed urban neighborhoods are as problematic and can contribute to the deviant behaviors of citizens, especially African-American males (Belgrave & Brevard, 2014). However, a sense of community in these neighborhoods
can have a positive effect on the young people living in the area. Some of the African-American male students will feel connected to the community. This can have similar benefits to a connected family. Students in these neighborhoods have increased levels of self-esteem and an enhanced sense of belonging. The neighborhood cohesion can contribute to the feeling of belonging that enhances the academic success of the African-American male (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010).

While peers can have a negative influence on African-American males, they can also serve as a protective factor (Cushman, 2010). When the students interact with peers who value academic achievement, they are more likely to be successful in their scholastic pursuits. Many of these types of students have relationships with others who value persistence, strong work ethics, and a willingness to put considerable effort toward achieving academic success. Studies exploring successful African-American male students have discovered that they attribute some of their success to other students and groups. These groups might be honor classes, chess clubs, debate groups, or any other type of club that values learning in scholarly pursuits (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010).

**Extracurricular Activities**

Extracurricular activities are also important for the African-American male to achieve academic success (Belgrave & Brevard, 2014). Students who are involved with school-related extracurricular activities tend to be better adapted and gain positive personal development from participation. The additional activities can serve to complement the academic growth of the student by providing an important method for socialization as well as acquiring appropriate social skills. The students involved in these
activities also tend to feel as though they belong in the school environment. This feeling of belonging is usually associated with reduced levels of anxiety and depression. The activities can serve as a method for the student to achieve additional successes related to the school (Cushman, 2010).

Engaging in extracurricular activities with the school helps African-American males have a sense of achievement and belonging that fosters their self-esteem (Brinkley, 2013). The activities frequently allow the students’ exposure to additional social networks and different lifestyles. The activity can serve as an opportunity for learning and experiential fashion. These opportunities for learning provided by the extracurricular activities are an important part of the African-American male successfully negotiating their academic career (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010).

Extracurricular activities can be structured or unstructured. Technology may be considered a form of unstructured extracurricular activity. This generation invests a vast amount of time engaging in some form of technology. Digital technology is a crucial part of education in both the middle and high schools (Howard, 2013). Much of the 21st century education relies on Internet databases. These databases allow students to do their research and study from digital textbooks. For the most part, this technology has proven helpful to education. There are now applications for smart phones and iPads that can help children learn a variety of necessary skills. If these technological aids to learning were present in all schools, the situation would be ideal. However, this is not the case (Lewis, 2014).

Many schools, especially those attended by male African Americans, lack technological devices that provide opportunities for learning (Lewis, 2014). Many of the
schools in socioeconomically deprived neighborhoods lack sufficient technology to allow students to learn important computer skills that are a necessity in the 21st century (Wood & Hilton, 2012). The problem includes a lack of computers and technology in the child’s home. Studies have suggested that nearly 100% of students from upper income families have access to the Internet within their home. However, roughly 90% of students from impoverished families do not have consistent access to the Internet in their home (Knowles & Smith, 2014).

African-American male students, who do not have access to the Internet in their home, are especially in need of Internet access at their school (Howard, 2013). However, only about one third of teachers in low-income classrooms make use of technology in their courses. Many of these schools do not have the necessary resources for all students to have access to the Internet. This means that teachers design lessons that do not include this vital technology. Lack of access to the Internet at home, and at school, results in many African-American males from socioeconomically deprived backgrounds lacking skills using devices that access the Internet. Combining this low level of technology ability with a lack of academic achievement means that many African-American males are completely unprepared to do nearly any type of job in the 21st century. Even occupations such as automotive repair now require the mechanic to be familiar with computer diagnostics that interface with automotive electronic systems controlling the engine and other vital systems (Lewis, 2014).
Student Behavior in the Classroom Environment

Many African-American males witness violence (Cushman, 2010). This is a well-documented part of urban life in impoverished neighborhoods. This environment has a negative influence on academic achievement and the ability of students to learn. Some studies have indicated that in excess of 75% of children who live in poor neighborhoods witness violent acts by adults. As many as 65% of these students have violence perpetrated against them. The traumatic effect of the vicarious violence on the student leads to academic, behavioral, and emotional problems. Witnessing violence against others exacerbates this problem (Bergin & Bergin, 2012).

In addition to the violence perpetrated against them and directly observed, many African-American male students living in impoverished neighborhoods also experience violence through their families, rumors, and the media (Howard, 2013). This can lead to a feeling that violence is a ubiquitous part of their everyday life. The student then assumes a vigilant stance filled with anxiety. This can stifle both their creativity and memory. This is a poor environment for achieving academic excellence. Once the African-American male student feels threatened by their environment, they can suffer from increased substance abuse, aggressive behaviors, depression, free-floating anxiety, academic failure, and disengagement from the school and its faculty. Exposure to violence throughout their life can lead the African-American male to developmental problems and later issues with proper parenting (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013). This can lead to a cycle of poverty and poor academic achievement within the African American community.
Another unfortunate outcome of African-American males’ exposure to family, community, and societal violence is their relatively high dropout rate in middle or high school (Cushman, 2010). There is approximately a 55% dropout rate for African-American males living in socioeconomically deprived areas. The report of the students witnessing violence increases with their age. However, the negative effect of the violent environment likely begins when the child enrolls in public schools of the inner city. They may witness violence around them even in kindergarten (Howard, 2013).

African-American males also have substantial problems relating to substance abuse as well as the United States criminal justice system (Howard, 2013). The socioeconomically deprived sections of many neighborhoods and cities are home to flourishing illicit drug activity. This means that many African-American males living in these areas experience a variety of results related to the illicit drug trade. The children, who live in a family environment that does not provide sufficient support, stability, or cohesion, are unprotected from the drug activity around them. Many African-American males use, sell, or are involved with the illicit drug business. This environment combines with violence to produce a situation in which many African-American males are unable to avoid unfortunate altercations with the justice system and eventual incarceration (Delpit, 2012).

The situation for African-American male students is even worse when compared to messages in the mass media (Cushman, 2010). There are numerous stories involving African Americans being involved with socially unacceptable and aggressive behaviors. This can result in the African-American male student feeling as though aggressive behaviors are acceptable method for dealing with problems. Alternatively, the child will
internalize these problems and suffer from depression or anxiety. With internalized aggression, the student can develop a worldview that includes insurmountable barriers. This can foster dependency and a negative view of their life opportunities. This emotional and cognitive state is nearly always detrimental to academic performance (Bergin & Bergin, 2012).

African-American males who are successful in their academic pursuits generally have coping strategies that are flexible (Belgrave & Brevard, 2014). Coping is adapting to stressors in the environment (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011). The coping strategies are accommodative or avoidant as well as problem focused or active. The active strategies of coping rely on removing the source of the problem and changing the way the individual response to the stress. Coping strategies that use avoidance involve the individual disengaging themselves from the stressor and the related negative feelings and thoughts. The accommodative coping occurs when an individual uses cognitive reframing to accept the situation and maintain positive thoughts. The problem focused or active activities tend to be more effective for African-American males when dealing with stressors associated with academic pursuits (Knowles & Smith, 2014).

The coping strategies used by African-American males are important factors for emotional and social competence (Brinkley, 2013). These strategies help the student manifest appropriate behaviors, cognitions, and emotions. This leads to successful resolution of academic pursuits in a number of different settings. The ability to use coping strategies to deal with emotional and social situations is a primary determinant in the success of African-American male students in the classroom. If they have sufficient coping strategies, the behavioral difficulties leading to failure in academic pursuits are
less likely to occur. There is also a reduced chance of incarceration due to aberrant behaviors (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010).

**Summary**

This chapter was a literature review of the scholarly knowledge regarding African-American males and select variables relates to their academic achievement. Described were the many factors that can contribute to academic failure by this group. Some of these factors included violence, childhood trauma, poor quality schools, poverty, racism and contact with deviant groups, limited coping strategies, and negative messages from the environment. There was also a discussion of factors that increased chances of African-American males to become more successful with attaining their scholastic goals. These factors include high levels of self-efficacy, coping strategies, social connections, school curriculum which is appropriate and culturally sensitive. Other positive factors included themes of a supportive environment and social justice. The next chapter focuses on the methodology used for this research.
CHAPTER III
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Research Design

The research method in this study was a qualitative case study. The goal of a qualitative case study is to describe a specific population as seen through the lens of observations, data, and interviews. In this qualitative analysis of case study data, methods to analyze results included some elements that were different from a more traditional or quantitative method of research.

In this study, the voice of student participants was not included in the data-gathering process. The researcher, however, interviewed participants’ parents and teachers to gather their reflections and conducted observations to gather descriptions of various experiences.

Theory of Variables

According to the previous literature review, there were several emerging factors that surfaced related to African-American males’ academic achievement. Despite the lengthy list, this study was able to focus on a few significant variables which may impact the academic outcomes of African-American males. This research focused on six independent variables which could possibly impact the academic achievement of African-American males: socioeconomic status, family structure, self-esteem, peer affiliations,
extracurricular activities, and student behavior. Several theories were used to support this study: Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, Vroom’s Expectancy Theory, Epstein’s Overlapping Spheres of Influence Theory, and Lindsley’s Motivation Theory. Some of the selected theories overlapped and described one or more of the independent variables.

According to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory (1968), a student’s physiological needs must be met before one can learn. When basic needs such as food, water, and clothing have been met, a student will be able to move to the next step in reaching his goal of academic success. A student’s socioeconomic status is directly related to physiological needs when family income and resources are used to determine the family’s ability to purchase food, water, clothing, and other essential basic needs. Therefore, socioeconomic status can have an affect on a student’s academic achievement (Maslow, 1968).

As Maslow Hierarchy of Needs progresses, there is the esteem or ego need which has to be addressed. Before one can reach the highest need of self-actualization, the need for self-esteem must be fulfilled. Self-actualization is the level where the student may achieve his maximum level of academic success. The independent variable of self-esteem is connected to a student’s academic achievement. Research confirmed the theory that a student may not reach his personal achievement peak without fulfilling his need for self-actualization (Maslow, 1970).

Epstein’s (2001) Overlapping Spheres of Influence proves and supports how a student’s family structure will have an impact on student academic achievement. The family structure of African-American males may play a key role in impacting their level of academic success. Based on Epstein’s theory, a strong family structure that engages in
select spheres of influences may positively affect the outcome of a child’s success. Family structure in an African-American male’s home which supports children as students, creates a learning environment at home, continually communicates with educators on the child’s progress, and actively participates in the learning process are factors that will impact academic outcomes. In turn, the opposite effect may have a negative impact on student achievement; a poor disconnected family structure may decrease a child’s academic achievement. Family structure can positively or negatively impact a child’s success (Epstein, 2001).

Lindsley’s Motivation Theory (1957) supports a couple of the independent variables in this study of African-American males’ academic outcomes. This theory postulates the impact of peer relationships and extracurricular activities may have on the level of success that African-American male students may achieve in school. Lindsley stated that motivation is the combination of force that drives ones to conduct activities toward a goal. Further, motivation is the act or movement by the individual to satisfy an internal or external need. As a student seeks to fulfill his social needs, as defined in Maslow’s (1968) Hierarchy of Needs, which is the need for acceptance and belonging, he will act accordingly to meet those needs. One example that clearly outlines this motivational theory is provided in extracurricular activities, when the rule requires student participants to maintain a minimum grade point average. If an African-American male has a strong desire to play football, he will work to meet the academic requirements in order to do so. On the contrary, African-American males who associate with individuals who engage in smoking marijuana are more likely to partake in such illegal use because of the need to belong to a social group. Therefore, there is validity to
Lindsley’s Motivation Theory that peer affiliations and extracurricular activities affects student achievement (Lindsley, 1957).

Vroom’s (1964) Expectancy Theory supports the combination of family structure and student behavior and their affect on student achievement. This theory predicts that a student will be motivated when he/she believes that putting in more effort will yield better job performance; in turn, a better job performance will lead to a reward that he/she truly values. This theory provides support to outcomes for the support of a positive family structure and the impact on a student’s behavior which may then impact student achievement. Parents must motivate their children to perform better and reward them when the desired behavior has been accomplished. According to Vroom, high expectations have to be set for all students.

Relationship among Variables

Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

Definition of Variables

**Independent Variables:** For the purpose of this research, independent variables are defined as factors that may affect the academic success of African-American males.

**Dependent Variable:** The dependent variable of this study is African-American males’ Academic Achievement.
Student Academic Achievement: Academic achievement is the extent to which a student has achieved established educational goals or outcomes as measured by grades on the school report card in core content subjects such as reading, mathematics, science, social studies and other classes related to the core content courses. For the purpose of this research, the grades posted on the student’s report card were used to determine academic success.
Socioeconomic Status: Student socioeconomic status (SES) was determined by the student’s family income qualifying him for free or reduced lunch (Federal Program).

Family Structure: Family structure was defined as individuals living in the home with the student and their impact and/or engagement on the student’s education.

Perceived Self-Esteem: Self-esteem was determined by how well an individual displayed a favorable impression of himself as demonstrated by characteristics of self-respect.

Peer Affiliations: Social connections were determined by the student’s interactions with associates, friends, and those he communicated with on a regular basis.

Extracurricular Activities: Extracurricular activities referred to organized activities in which the student may be involved before, during, or after school hours including weekends, holidays, and extended vacations.

Student Behavior in the Classroom Environment: For the purpose of this research, behavior was defined as the positive or negative actions of a student. Individual student behavior was vetted to coping behaviors which related to individual actions observed during the class school observations.

Limitations of the Study

Size of the sample: The sample of the population used in this research was small. This size population does not represent the entire African-American male community (10 boys with proficient or excellent school grades and 10 boys with poor to failing school grades).
School Setting: This study was conducted in an all-male leadership academy and not the traditional heterogeneous setting typical of most public schools.

Age constraints: Due to the ages of students selected for this study, the researcher was not able to interview them. The researcher relied on the perceptions of parents and teachers for this study.

Definition of parental involvement: When interviewing parents, the researcher did not clearly define “parental engagement level” in their child’s education.

Summary

This research examined the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. In this study, the dependent variable was the academic achievement of African-American males. The academic achievement gap of African-American males was examined based on factors and theories presented in this chapter. In short, factors such as self-esteem, family structure, peer affiliations, extracurricular activities, and student behavior might have an impact on the academic success of African-American males.

The next chapter focuses on the research design, setting, population, and instruments used.
CHAPTER IV
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

According to Creswell (2012), there are five different approaches to qualitative inquiry: narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies. A qualitative case study analysis was selected for this research. Although the researcher is not a part of the selected student population, the researcher has lived with the impact of some of the variables facing this population today. This study was conducted on a select urban African-American male population attending a single-gender charter public school and focused on grades 6 through 11.

A further description of the type of qualitative research indicated a case study was best for the type of research conducted. Unlike narrative study which reports on the life of a single individual, a case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system. This study targeted a group of middle school African-American males. The study was conducted by collecting data through interviews, observations, and document analysis to develop a composite description of the essence of experiences for each of the participating individuals. The student male population that participated in this research was not included in the interview sessions and, therefore, this research cannot be considered a lived experienced (Creswell, 2012).
Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information. These types of qualitative case studies are distinguished by the size of the bounded case, such as whether the case involves one individual, several individuals, a group, an entire program, or an activity. These types of case studies may also be distinguished in terms of the intent of the case analysis. Three variations exist in terms of intent: the single instrumental case study, the collective or multiple case studies, and the intrinsic case study. In a collective case study (or multiple case study), the one issue or concern is again selected, but the inquirer selects multiple case studies to illustrate this issue (Creswell, 2012).

Description of the Setting

For the sake of anonymity, the school was given a pseudonym name of Smith Boys School. Smith Boys School (SBS) was selected for this study. It is located in the southeastern region of the United States in a major metropolitan area. Smith Boys School was established in 2011. This is an all-male charter school for boys in grades 6 through 11. This charter school is a tuition-free middle and high school campus with state funding support. The school has flexibility from the state to take necessary steps to meet the academic needs of its scholars. The administration has made science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) the main focus to transform the lives of these young men. Their mission is to help these young men “soar to greater heights.”

As for the physical site, the school is housed on the campus of a previously used church school. The school’s leadership team consists of one principal, one assist
principal, and two administrative staff members all providing support to 28 teachers. As of May 2015, the school had approximately 450 students. This number is expected to increase during the 2015-2016 school year as it has in previous years. SBS is a Title I charter school based on the data that indicated 90% of its students qualify for free or reduced lunch.

**Sampling Procedures**

This researcher selected students based on their academic performance which was determined by their current grade report card. This sampling technique provided the researcher with the basic data and trending that was relative to factors that influenced the academic achievement of African-American males. Participation was strictly voluntary. All of the targeted parent participants who agreed and met the basic requirements for this study were interviewed. The researcher continued to solicit participants until a predetermined goal was reached. The predetermined goal was to study 10 students who were performing well and 10 students who were having some challenges. The basic requirement for the interview was to be a parent of an eighth grade African-American male student enrolled in SBS.

In addition, this researcher reached out to teachers of participating students and conducted 14 classroom observations. All teachers of selected participating students were not interviewed. The teachers of the students who taught the four major content areas were targeted to participate in the study and selected to participate in the interview as well. Teachers who were interviewed were asked to give an account of a particular student’s academic status and classroom behavior. The main focus of the interview was
to gather additional information on the selected students in question. After interviewing the teachers, the researcher randomly selected teachers to observe select students in the classroom setting. All students who participated in the study were observed.

**Working with Human Subjects**

Participation in this study was strictly voluntary. Parents of the targeted students and teacher participants were asked to participate in an interview session to collect data for academic research. Twenty participants were interviewed for this study. The participants remained anonymous and confidentially maintained. The subjects of this study were middle school African-American males and as minors were not interviewed. The interviewees were notified of their confidentiality. No specifically identifying information was asked of the participants or of the participants’ child. All human subjects were placed in a category of students and their individual names were not mentioned. In this case, the researcher was able to honor the confidentiality of the participants’ name. Anonymity and confidentiality were granted to the institution and all human subjects involved.

This researcher interviewed a total of 20 parents. These participants were divided into two groups which were composed of 10 parents of the students who were performing with a grade point average of 2.5 or higher, and 10 parents of the students who were performing with a grade point average of below 2.5.

As for the classroom observations, this researcher observed students in their core content classes—reading, math, social studies, or science classes.
Instrumentation

Data collected on the variables were gathered through the interview of the participants’ parents, teachers, classroom observations, and document analysis. The participants were interviewed by the researcher. In order to develop a research tool that met standard protocols, the researcher collaborated with the members of the Clark Atlanta University research committee and developed a 21-question interview document for parents and a 20-question interview document for teachers. Both tools were used to obtain research data for this study. Essentially, the committee approved the interview questions and observation instrument. There were questions for each theme to effectively gauge their effectiveness on the dependent variables.

The interview questions were broad, general, and open-ended, allowing participants to construct meaning of their experiences. Each question in the interview was aligned with a research question. Therefore, this information was summarized, analyzed, and most importantly, answered the research questions.

In addition to the questionnaire, an observation instrument was used to document findings when observing the students in the classroom setting. Students were observed by the researcher during a 30-minute classroom setting. This researcher conducted observations in an effort to gauge the student’s self-esteem, peer affiliations, and student behavior during their interactions with peers. Depending on the day, time, or type of class structure, the researcher may or may not have been able to grasp this information in a 30-minute observation. Therefore, multiple observations were conducted. If the observation period provided meaningful information, the researcher was able to speak
directly from information obtained from the observation related to the student’s interactions.

The entire interview questionnaires and observation instrument results are available in the appendix. To further explain how these instruments and their questions link to the research questions, Table 1 was created to show a visual for each question in the instruments.

Table 1

*Alignment of Research Questions to Data Collection Instruments*

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<thead>
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<th>Question</th>
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<th>Questionnaire:</th>
<th>Observation:</th>
<th>Document Analysis:</th>
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<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Student in Class</td>
<td>Report Card</td>
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Participants/Location of Research

The participants were 20 parent(s) of middle school African-American males. Even though this school population consists of both middle and high school students, this researcher narrowed this study to only eighth grade middle school African-American males.

The participants were interviewed in a small conference room located at the facility and in classrooms. However, for the convenience of the participating parents, the researcher met them at a predetermined interview site. In some cases, interviews were conducted by telephone. For the sake of time and accuracy, each interview was audio recorded.

Data Collection Procedures

Once the interview questions and observation document were reviewed by the researcher’s dissertation committee and all changes and recommendation were submitted and approved, the researcher moved forward. The researcher completed the required documentation and submitted them to the Clark Atlanta University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Upon receiving approval of the research instruments, the researcher moved forward with the site director at the research site to obtain approval to begin the study. The researcher worked independently to contact the parents of selected male participants. Communications to parents were solicited by sending home letters of request with students. The teachers and administrators encouraged the students and parents to participate. This process was continued until the targeted number of 20 participants was
reached. After the required numbers of participants were interviewed, the researcher transcribed the interviews and analyzed the common themes for summarization.

**Description of Data Analysis Methods**

Data coding and analysis followed the case study research procedures of Moustakas (1994). First, words from the participants were reduced into significant statements that provide an understanding of how they were experienced. This step is called horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994). The statements were then combined, or clustered, to formulate meaning units or themes. Next, the themes were displayed in a table or chart. These themes were used to compose both a textual description of what the participants experienced as well as a structural description of how the participants experienced the behavior. Finally, an essence of the experiences were written using textual and structural descriptions to summarize the common experiences of the participants and detail the overall meaning of the experiences.

**Summary**

This chapter outlined the research framework for the study. It described the case study research design that was utilized while providing a rationale for the approach. A description of the setting along with how participants were selected was given. The researcher detailed the ethical and legal considerations that were employed in working with human subjects. Other areas of discussion included instrumentation, data collection procedures, description of data analysis methods and verification procedures.
CHAPTER V
ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

This qualitative case study included data collected from four different sources: interviews with parents, interviews with teachers, observations made by the researcher, and a document analysis of students’ report cards. Twenty parents of the select students were interviewed. A majority of these interviews were conducted by telephone. However, there were a few conducted in person. The individual interviews ranged from 20 to 40 minutes. A total of four teachers of the students were interviewed. All teachers participated in face-to-face interviews conducted in their classrooms which lasted approximately 30 minutes. The teachers were encouraged to talk openly and share freely their experiences of the students. Due to size of the total school population, the majority of the students shared common teachers. This researcher conducted a series of observations; each observation lasted a minimum of 30 minutes. Finally, an analysis of data obtained from the student’s report cards was conducted.

The focus of this research was to investigate and determine if there were any commonalities or differences between students who were excelling and students who were experiencing some challenges. To better understand this study and data collected during this case study, there were two groups of students studied for a period of time. The researcher targeted 20 eighth grade African-American male students from an urban charter school in the southeastern region of the United States and placed them in two
categories based on the students’ grade point average (GPA) from their most recent report card. Students who had a GPA of 2.5 or higher were placed in the “excelling” category; students who had a GPA of lower than a 2.5 were placed in the “challenges” category. During the data collection through interviews, observations, and document analysis, there were several emerging themes. The researcher was able to condense them into 27 themes.

The qualitative data collection occurred during the months of October and November 2015. Two separate sources of interviews, observations, and document analysis provided a depth of understanding regarding each interviewee’s experiences with the students. The use of multiple sources of data allowed the researcher to conduct triangulation. The process of triangulation for a multicase study helps to ensure that the audience has a clear understanding, relatively free of bias that could mislead the reader. According to Yin (2009), “Any case study findings or conclusions are likely to be more convincing and accurate if it is based on several different sources of information” (p. 116).

**Data Analysis**

In an effort to clearly analyze the information collected, the researcher created charts for reporting purposes. The charts below show how data were collected from four different sources. It lists select variables along with their emerging themes to show each theme and the source from which the information was obtained. For each variable/theme and each source, there were two groups of students: students who were excelling academically and students who were experiencing some challenges in their academics.
Socioeconomic Status

RQ1: What effect does socioeconomic status have on academic achievement of middle school African-American males?

The independent variable Socioeconomic Status was divided into four themes: free/reduced lunch, basic needs, school supplies, and supplies taken to class. According to the parents of the students who were excelling, 30% of those students qualified for free or reduce lunch, while 90% of the students who were experiencing challenges qualified for free or reduce lunch. One hundred percent of parents in both categories stated that they were adequately able to provide basic needs such as food, water, shelter, clothes, and other basic essentials to their child on a regular basis. Parents of the students who were excelling stated that they were able to provide their child with all of their school supplies; 70% of the students with challenges parents expressed that they were able to provide the same needs. According to the teachers, 100% of all students in both categories have all needed tools to be successful in their classes. Teachers expressed that these students brought their supplies to class on a regular basis. As it relates to the students being responsible and bringing their supplies to class on a regular basis, 70% of the excelling students do this, while only 50% of the challenged students brought their materials on a daily basis (see Figure 2).
Figure 2. Socioeconomic status of research participants.

Family Structure and Engagement Level

RQ2: What effect does family structure have on academic achievement of middle school African-American males?

When parents were asked to describe their live-in household, the data collected indicated that 80% of the excelling students lived with their mothers as a single parent and 80% of the challenging students lived with their mothers as a single parent. As for those with both parents (which includes mothers/fathers), 20% of the students in both categories had a father living in the same household. Ten percent of the students in both categories lived in the same household with multiple families. The researcher was able to
determine that 100% of the parents of the students who were excelling were highly engaged in their child’s education; while, only 20% of the parents of the students with challenges were highly engaged in their child’s education. The teachers of the students reported very similar results of the parents’ engagement level. The teachers reported 100% of the parents of the excelling students were highly engaged as opposed to 30% of the low engagement parents. This information was reported differently when gathered from participating parents. All parents (100%) in both categories stated that they were highly engaged and involved in their child’s education. Additional support in the area of mentorship outside of the home was gathered from the parents. Eighty percent of the excelling students had a mentor while only 30% of the challenging students had mentors (see Figure 3).

![Figure 3](image-url)  
*Figure 3. Family structure of research participants.*
Self-Esteem

RQ3: What effect does perceived self-esteem have on academic achievement of middle school African-American males?

Both parents and teachers were asked to describe the students’ self-esteem. One hundred percent of the parents of the excelling students stated that their child had high self-esteem and 70% of the parents of the challenging students stated that their child had high self-esteem. The teachers’ responses were a little lower but not much difference. The teachers reported 90% for the excelling students and 60% of the challenging students had high self-esteem.

**Figure 4.** Perceived self-esteem of research participants.
Peer Affiliations

RQ4: How do peer affiliations affect academic achievement of middle school African-American males?

The researcher’s goal in this area of data collection was to determine who students’ affiliate with and how often. According to the parents, 100% of the excelling students’ parents believed that their son had positive friends. On the other hand, 20% of the challenging students’ parents believed that their son had positive friends. The teachers’ account for positive friendships was relatively the same reporting 70% for excelling students and 30% on the challenging students. Parents were asked to provide an approximate number of times per/week their son had an opportunity to spend time with friends. As reported by parents, 10% of the excelling students spent a significant amount of time with their friends. Seventy percent of the challenging students spent a significant amount of time with their friends. Ninety percent of the excelling students spent supervised time with their friends while 30% of the challenging students reported spending supervised time with their friends. For purposes of this research, a significant amount of time was defined as more than three times a week. Ninety percent of the excelling students’ parents indicated that were acquainted with their son’s friend/s, while 30% of the challenging students’ parents revealed that they were acquainted with their son’s friend/s (see Figure 5).
***P-data collected from parents.  T-data collected from teachers  R-data collected from researcher’s observation

Figure 5. Peer affiliations of research participants.

Extracurricular Activities

RQ5: What effect do extracurricular activities have on the academic achievement of middle school African-American males?

Sixty percent of the excelling students were involved in extracurricular activities. Forty percent of the challenging students were involved in extracurricular activities. Zero percent of all students in both categories engaged in educational activities such as reading books during their spare time. On the other hand, 100% of the excelling students and 90% of the challenging students engaged in noneducational activities such as video games and playing outdoors basketball during their spare time. One hundred percent of all students in both categories spent a significant amount of time, more than an hour a
day, on their electronic devices (see Figure 6). For the sake of this study, electronics devices were cell phones, video games, computer, lap tops, and tablets.

***P-data collected from parents. T-data collected from teachers R-data collected from researcher’s observation

Figure 6. Extracurricular activities of research participants.

Student Behavior

RQ6: What effect does student behavior within the school environment have on academic achievement of middle school African-American males?

Parents reported that 100% of the excelling students were obedient to their parents while at the same time, only 50% of parents reported that challenging students were obedient to their parents. The data collected from the determination of students’ obedience to their teachers were taken from three different sources: student parents,
student teachers, and observation from the researcher. Seventy percent of the excelling students’ parents believed that their son listens to his teachers and 40% of the challenging students’ parents believed that their son listens to their teachers. The teachers’ report was in agreement with the parents perceptions: 70% of excelling students complied and 50% of the challenging students complied. For the brief time the researcher was able to observe the students, 100% of all students in both categories were obedient to their teachers. It was critical for the researcher analyze data from three different sources related to how well students associated with their peers. Parents reported, 90% of the excelling students had social skills and 60% of the challenging students had social skills. The participating teachers reported that 70% of the excelling students had social skills and 40% of the challenging students had social skills. Outcomes from the researcher’s observations indicated that 100% of the excelling students had social skills and 80% of the challenging students had social skills. Students’ engagement level in class was taken from three different sources as well. Engagement levels as reported by parents revealed that 80% of the excelling students were engaged in class activities and 10% of the challenging students were engaged in class activities. Engagement levels as reported by teachers indicated 80% of the excelling student and 20% of the challenging students were engaged in class activities on a regular basis (see Figure 7).
Figure 7. Student behavior of research participants.

Student Achievement

Students were placed in categories solely based on report card data. Therefore, according to the students’ report card, 100% of the students in the “excelling” category were doing very well and 0% of the students in the “challenges” category were doing well. In this research, excelling was defined as having a GPA of 2.5 or higher and challenges were defined as having a GPA or lower than a 2.5. The parents and teachers answered the same question but from different lenses. Both parents and teachers were asked to give an account on whether students were performing academically well in school. The excelling students’ parents believed that 80% of this population was doing well academically in school and the students’ with challenges parents believed that 40%
of this group was performing well in school. Teachers were asked the same information; however, they were only able to give an account for student participation in their individual classes. Therefore, the data collected from teachers may not be aligned to assessments reported by parents. According to teachers, 70% of the excelling students were performing well and 30% of the challenging students were performing well. Eighty percent of the parents of the excelling students were satisfied with their grades. Thirty percent of the parents of the challenging students were satisfied with their grades. Teachers were satisfied with 80% of the excelling students’ grades and 10% of challenging students’ grades. Parents and teachers were asked to identify the favorite or most liked subjects of their son(s) and or students. As for reading, parents of the excelling student believed 30% of them enjoy it and parents of the students with challenges believe 20% of them enjoyed this subject. Teachers of the excelling students believed 50% of them enjoyed reading and teachers of students with challenges believed none (0%) of them enjoyed reading. As for mathematics, parents of excelling student believed 70% of them enjoyed mathematics and parents of students with challenges believed 50% of them enjoyed this subject. Teachers of excelling students believed 100% of them enjoyed the subject and teachers of students with challenges believed 30% of them enjoyed mathematics. Additionally, for science, parents of excelling students believed 50% of them enjoyed scientific discovery and parents of students with challenges believed 50% of them enjoyed the class. Teachers reported that 80% of excelling students enjoyed science and at the same time, students with challenges were reported, as perceived by teachers, that 10% of them actually enjoyed this subject (see Figure 8).
The findings of this research were discussed in this chapter. The data and findings from this research were recorded by each research question. Based on this study, socioeconomic status had an impact on student achievement. This was not the case for family structure. Family structure was not a factor; however, the engagement level of the parent was a huge factor in impacting student achievement. Peer affiliations differed with the students based on their academic achievement. Self-esteem and extracurricular activities did not affect student achievement of African-American male students. Student behavior had an impact on student achievement. The researcher

Figure 8. Student achievement of research participants.

Summary

The findings of this research were discussed in this chapter. The data and findings from this research were recorded by each research question. Based on this study, socioeconomic status had an impact on student achievement. This was not the case for family structure. Family structure was not a factor; however, the engagement level of the parent was a huge factor in impacting student achievement. Peer affiliations differed with the students based on their academic achievement. Self-esteem and extracurricular activities did not affect student achievement of African-American male students. Student behavior had an impact on student achievement. The researcher
explained the data collected for each research question. For clarity, the data collected was charted for each research question.
CHAPTER VI
FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings

RQ1: What effect does socioeconomic status have on academic achievement of middle school African-American males?

Socioeconomic status does effect the academic achievement of middle school African-American males. According to this study, the majority (90%) of the students who were not excelling in their academics qualified for free/reduced lunch. Free/reduced lunch students have been identified by the state as students who are living below the poverty line. In other words, the income levels of these students fall below the established federal guidelines for poor or impoverished population. In contrast, 70% of students who were excelling in their academics did not qualify for free/reduced lunch.

However, in this research, the researcher was able to rule out the fact that these families were not in survival mode, which means that these students or their families were not able to focus on education because of their basic needs. According to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1968), students’ basic needs must be met before other needs or accomplishments can be considered. Therefore, a child cannot learn math (or family focus on any academic subjects) if his nutritional needs have not been met. In reading, a student cannot grasp the main idea in a story if his focus is on where they are going to reside for the evening. However, these concerns were not evident for the targeted
population of this research. All parents, including those who received free/reduced lunch stated that they were able to provide basic needs for their son. In fact, 100% of the participating parents stated that their sons had a personal mobile phone, collection of video games, and some type of computer with internet access (ipad, lap top, and tablet.) available to them. Mobile phones with apps and internet are a luxury not a necessity. Participating teachers were able to corroborate this information for the researcher.

RQ2: What effect does family structure have on academic achievement of middle school African-American males?

Family engagement level had a significant effect on the academic achievement of male students. In analyzing the data, students who had high levels of parental involvement also had high levels of student achievement and students with low levels of parental involvement had low academic achievement.

Another pattern indicated that the majority of students who were excelling had assigned mentors. On the other hand, the majority of the students who had individual challenges did not have an assigned mentor. The mentors worked with students who were excelling to encourage them and hold them accountable for their actions and behaviors.

RQ3: What effect does perceived self-esteem have on academic achievement of middle school African-American males?

Perceived self-esteem did not have an impact of student academic achievement. In fact, the majority of the students in both categories seem to have demonstrated high self-esteem as reported by both teachers and parents.
RQ4: How do peer affiliations affect academic achievement of middle school African-American males?

Peer affiliation, the amount of time a student spends with their friends, and if that time is supervised and/or structured has a great impact on student achievement. The excelling students were reported to have positive friends who they associated with on a regular basis. On the other spectrum, a significantly smaller number of students with challenges were referred to as having positive friends whom they associated with on a regular basis. Not only does the group of students with challenges associate with negative friends, they spend a significant amount of unsupervised and/or unstructured time with their friends. Parents of the students who were experiencing some challenges reported they did not know, in great details, their son’s friends.

RQ5: What effect do extracurricular activities have on the academic achievement of middle school African-American males?

According to this study, extracurricular activities did not have an impact on academic achievement. The results revealed that approximately the same number of students in both categories was involved in some type extra-curricular activities.

RQ6: What effect does student behavior within the school environment have on academic achievement of middle school African-American males?

Although there was a slight difference, student behavior seemed to have an impact on academic achievement. Students who were excelling seem to have less behavioral problems in terms of being more obedient towards their parents and teachers, better social skills with their peers and even a higher level of engagement in class. On the other hand, for the students who were having some challenges, they seemed to have
more behavioral problems in terms of less obedience’s towards their parents and teachers, a bit more anti-social with their peers and not as engaged in class.

**Conclusions**

There is no effect on academic achievement of middle school African-American males based on their family structure. The research revealed that the composition of the family structure made no impact on the students’ performance in class. The demographic data revealed a vast majority of the students in both categories did not have their biological fathers living in the home. In both categories, the majority of the students lived in a house with their biological mothers as head of household.

Socioeconomic status, the level of parental engagement, peer affiliations, and student behavior all had an impact on student academic achievement outcomes. Socioeconomic status is not in direct control of families. It is clear that parents/families are not able to change their socioeconomic status immediately. Although parents may have had an indirect or long term affect over their socioeconomic status, this issue is not in their immediate control.

Clearly, based on this study, there is a direct link between socioeconomic status and student achievement. Based on this researcher’s education, training, and experience, these families are not in survival mode which indicates they have the means to meet their primary needs. This researcher believes this is more related to mindset, a cycle of poverty and/or lack of valuing education. A person’s income level can be a direct reflection of their education. The majority of the population who had low income also had low levels of education. Many of them do not have a college degree and some of
them may not have completed high school. If this is the case, it is clear that these parents may not value education because of their experiences with the educational system.

This may also be the case with their involvement in their child’s education. Many of these parents shy away from the education system because they may feel intimidated. They may not be able to fully understand or cope as it relates to education. So in a fight or flight scenario, they have opted to flight. Because of their lack of concern or understanding of the education system, they may not understand the value of a great support system for their son. Therefore, they may feel finding a mentor or a better support system for their child may not be necessary or important. Many educated individuals understand the power, importance, or even the value of having a wraparound system in any given environment especially education would benefit their child.

As it relates to peer affiliations, students play a significant role in selecting their friends and engaging in risky behavior. However, the parent is ultimately responsible for the child’s actions. The type of inappropriate parenting skills existed were the sole commonality with the boys who had negative friends, they spent a significant amount of time with their friends, and spent the majority of their time with friends unsupervised and unstructured. The characteristics of this type of parenting behavior can be described as unengaged, irresponsible, reckless, careless or even in some cases foolish. Parents have to do a better job of supervising their son. Many of these parents of challenging students did not know who their son’s friends were, where they spent their time and/or what they were doing with their time. Some of these parents were not able to answer any of these questions. Student achievement will improve when parents take more responsibilities for their actions and do a better job at parenting their children.
Student behavior was not as evident as other select factors; however, there was enough difference for it to be considered. Student behavior ultimately falls back on parents’ responsibility. From day one, parents have to set clear and high expectations for their child’s behavior, social skills, and citizenship. After the expectations are set, they have to be maintained, enforced, and monitored by the parents. Children should not be responsible for policing themselves.

Implications

Implications for Educational Leaders

There are many factors that may influence student achievement. The one major issue that has been identified in this study is the one which educational leaders have very little control over and that is the parent’s responsibility to rear their children. There are a few things educational leaders should put in place to improve the parent in an effort to reach the student which will, in turn, improve student achievement. According to Reading Rockets (2015), research shows that parent involvement can improve students’ behavior, attendance, and achievement.

As pointed out earlier, the findings of this research are somehow linked backed to the parent. Although there should be some concentration on the student, there has to be a greater focus on the parent.

Implications for Educational Leaders at the School Level

At the school level, educational leaders have to provide better resources, training, and even education to the parents. School leaders have to invest in a parent liaison or a parent support specialist. This professional’s sole responsibility would be to assist,
support, and provide guidance for parents. Educational leaders have to provide parenting seminars for parent with a greater focus on the importance of their role as a parent in the child’s success in education.

Educational leaders have to capitalize on the eagerness parents have during the beginning of the school year. Educational leaders have to put a system in place to reach out to parents in the beginning of the school year. This can start as early as registration. Parents should be targeted during the registration process which is before the school year begins. According to a study conducted by Bystrynski (2014), the number one reason people cite for not volunteering: “nobody asked.” Parents must be asked, summoned, and felt needed. They must understand the importance of the educational partnership.

It is unfortunate but educational leaders have to find creative ways to get parents involve in their child’s education. In some cases, educational leaders may have to raffle off valuable door prizes to lure parents into Parent Teacher Association meetings, parent/teacher conferences, parent educational seminars, and other events which will enhance parents’ attendance. Educational leaders should increase their methods and streams of communication. Methods of communication cannot be limited to newsletters and websites. However, school leaders should branch out to include mass calling post, text messages, social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, post cards, emails, and old fashioned “word of mouth.”

At charter schools, educational leaders have a little bit more autonomy. Charter schools, such as the one in this study, should recommend that parents contribute a minimum of 20 hours of service during the school year. However, educational leaders will have to be creative in providing multiple opportunities for parents to fulfill this
recommendation especially for the working parents. Educational leaders should go as far as excepting hours from parent/teacher conferences, late evenings and weekend events, and virtual participations. The goal is to get parents involved and not make it difficult or nearly impossible for them to reach their 20 hours of parental involvement hours.

Educational leaders should tap into the few factors over which they do have a little more control: the teacher and the student. Educational leaders at the school level should encourage teachers to seek more parental involvement at the classroom level. Teachers should be trained and educated on the importance of parental involvement and, in turn, implement it in their classroom. Classroom teachers should be required to have at least one classroom parent in each classroom in order to rally other parents to get involved.

Mentorship was one single factor that seemed to be very high among the students who were excelling. Therefore, educational leaders should pick up the slack in this area. Educational leaders should provide mentors for the students at the school level. Every employee at the school, including custodians, should be encouraged to mentor a student. In cases where there are not enough employees, educational leaders should reach out to local nonprofit organizations such as Big Bother Big Sister, fraternities, churches, YMCA for sports coaches, and other volunteer organizations near the school.

Lastly, the educational leaders at the school level must not forget the student. Students have to take ownership of their education. Teachers, educational leaders and adults must pour into students to maximize their ultimate commitment. Students have to be encouraged and in some cases, mandated to commit to this process of educating them. Educational leaders should provide an elective class for all freshman and new incoming
students to educate them on the importance of their total commitment to the educational process. In this class, students would be taught strategies and ideas on how to stay engaged in the educational process. Students should be given resources and tools to help them be successful in holding themselves responsible. Most importantly, educational leaders will have to put a system in place to monitor students to ensure that they are maintaining the skills, resources, and strategies taught during the class. Especially considering the parental involvement of students who have challenges; this has to be an expectation and culture of the school. For example, students should be required to keep a journal, calendar, or an agenda to log in assignments and other reminders from their classes. In cases such as this school where the majority of the students have cell phones and other electronic devices, students could be directed to keep this information in their phone or tablet. These electronic devices can be programmed to send them reminders in the form of a text, email, and/or other alerts. The accountability and parenting piece should come from teachers checking to ensure that students have been maintaining this calendar.

**Implications for Educational Leaders at the District Level**

At the district level, educational leaders should add additional funding to the local schools to improved parental involvement. Principals and other leaders at the school level need funds to implement great ideas to get parents involved. Educational leaders at the district level should provide additional resources, personnel, and training to principals and other educational leaders at the school level. Just as every school gets at least one
assistant principal, one media specialist (librarian), and one counselor, every school should be funded by the district to receive a parent liaison or parent support specialist.

**Implications for Educational Leaders at the State Level**

State level educational leaders should encourage parental involvement. State leaders should summon and petition parents to actively participate in their child’s education. State leaders should partner with major companies and organizations in an effort to encourage more parental involvement. State leaders should educate employers on the importance of parents being involved in their child’s education. Hopefully, employers will be more supportive of their employees who are parents.

**Recommendations**

According to this study, educational leaders can imply that socioeconomic status, the level of parental engagement, peer affiliations, and student behavior can have a direct impact on student academic achievement. This research and its findings were in direct alignment with previous research conducted in the past. Howard concluded in a study published in 2013 that being a member of a low-income family increases the probability that the African-American male will have negative outcomes in their life in general and school in particular. As it relates to high level of parental engagement, Bergin’s research highlighted the positive outcome this factor may have. Bergin and Begin (2012) stated that a number of studies have indicated that the family who is supportive of an African-American male achieving academics success increases the likelihood of a positive outcome. Likewise, in this study, 100% of the students who were performing well had parents who were highly engaged and involved in their son’s education. Therefore,
parents, teachers, principals, and other educational leaders should conclude that if they were focus on socioeconomic status, high level of parental engagement, students’ peer affiliation and improve student behavior then student achievement will improve. Based on this study and other research conducted which was mentioned earlier in this document, parents and educators can imply and conclude what areas to focus on in order to improve student achievement. According to this study, it was implied that parents, educator, and educational leaders should focus on the following factors to improve student achievement.

**Recommendations for Parents**

Parents should:

- be highly involved in their child’s education;
- provide a mentor for their child for additional support;
- monitor and supervise their child interactions with their peers;
- encourage their child to follow the rules and have citizenship.

**Recommendations for Teachers**

Teachers should:

- provide additional support for students who are economically challenged;
- encourage parents to get more involved in their child’s educational process;
- involve and include parents in every step in the educational process.
**Recommendations for Educational Leaders**

Educational Leaders should:

- provide students with a mentor;
- monitor students’ peer groups and encourage students to choose positive friends;
- improve students behavior;
- provide additional funds, resources, and personnel to the school for those students who are economically challenged;
- provide training to educators and parents on peer affiliations;
- provide government programs and funding for students who are economically challenged;
- provide programs and training to encourage parents to get involved; it has been proven that these efforts will improve student achievement.

**Recommended Policies for Educational Leaders**

As for the parent, educational leaders may not be able to invoke policies on parents. In a charter school, educational leaders can write policy in the bylaws to encourage a 20 hour minimum for parent to participate and/or serve at the school. In all other schools, educational leaders can highly encourage and recommend that parent complete 20 hours within a school year.

Educational leaders have more control over their employees. Therefore, all educators must be required to have training and ongoing staff development on the power of parental involvement. Educators must also be given tools, resources, and ideas on how
to get parents involved. Also, there have to be some policies in place for non-negotiable for educators. For example, all educators should be required to communicate to parents ongoing and repeatedly. This may look different depending on the employee’s position. For example, a principal’s communication will look different from a classroom teacher. In turn, the district’s communication on board meetings and other events will look different from the communication at the school level.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This research would have been much more fruitful if the sample size had been much larger. This study could be conducted in the future but with a larger population of students. Also, students could provide valuable information on their success or lack of success. Future studies like this should include interviewing students. If educators could tap into the minds of students and understand their views, the information gained would be priceless.

**Summary**

In summary, there seems to be a pattern between the two groups of African-American male students. This research identified a few indicators which seem to be determining factors between African-American male students who were excelling and those who were having some challenges. Both groups had a few things in common: both were living in single parent homes without their fathers being in the same house, and both had high self-esteem and participated in extracurricular activities.

Students who were excelling came from families living above the poverty line identified by free or reduced lunch. Students who were excelling had parents who were
actively and highly engaged in their education. In other words, parents in this group were involved in their son’s education. Nearly all of the students in this group had a mentor who did not live in the household. These students’ friends were described as positive and/or acted like them. Students in this group spent very little time with their friends. The time they spent with their friends was kept at a minimum and supervised. These students were noted as to having very minimal behavior concerns.

On the other hand, students who were experiencing some challenges in their academics were different. These students came from families which qualified for free or reduced lunch. This researcher realized that the parents were not in tuned in their child’s education. They knew very little about their child’s grades and/or other related educational matters. In fact, these parents were not able to give detail information regarding their son’s friends and their whereabouts when they are together. Parents allowed these students to spend a large amount of time with their friends. Parents who gave information about their son’s friends described them as being a negative influence or likeminded. Although the gap was not much, these students seemed to have a bit more behavior problems than those who were excelling.

This researcher has concluded that African-American male students who are from households which qualify for free or reduce lunch stand a high risk of experiencing challenges in their academics. Also, students who have parents with very little or no involvement in their child’s education and personal affairs experience challenges. Parents must become involved, engaged, and active in their child’s education to improve African-American male students’ achievement.
Dear Prospective Participant:

Re: Factors for Educational Leaders to Consider That May Affect Teacher and Parent Perception of the Academic Achievement of Eighth Grade African-American Male Students

Thank you for considering participation in this study. I would like to introduce myself, inform you of what this study is about, and share how you will be involved. My name is Toma Redmon and I am a Doctoral student, at Clark Atlanta University, School of Education. My professional experience with education has contributed to my current interest in the academic success of African-American males and how they interact with teachers, parents and educational leaders.

This study seeks to examine the factors that affect the academic achievement of African-American males. You will be asked to do the following:

- Complete a voluntary consent form
- Participate in an interview which will last approximately 30 minutes in reference to some factors that may affect the academic achievement of your child.
- Grant the researcher permission to obtain and analyzed your child’s report card.
- Grant the researcher permission to interview your child’s teacher in reference to their progress in class.
- Grant your child’s teacher permission to speak to the researcher in reference to your child progress in class.

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with your participation in this study. You will not be asked for information that will identify you or your child. Only researchers will have access to individual survey responses, which will be coded to protect your identity and your child’s identity. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and refusal or withdrawal from the study will result in no penalty or loss of benefits. No monetary value is associated with this study for the participant or researcher. Feel free to contact me if you have questions or need further information. I can be reached at: Clark Atlanta University, School of Education, Clement Hall, 323 Rufus E. James P. Brawley Drive, S.W. Atlanta, GA 30314, Phone: 404-880-8505.

Alternatively, you may contact Dr. Barbara Hill, Department Chair of School of Education, at Clark Atlanta University, 404-880-8505.

Sincerely yours,

Toma Z. Redmon, Researcher
Cell Phone: 404-242-2510

APPENDIX A

Letter to Participants
APPENDIX B

Consent Form – Parents

The purposes of this research entitled "Factors for Educational Leaders to Consider That May Affect Teacher and Parent Perception of the Academic Achievement of 8th Grade African-American male Students" have been explained and my participation is voluntary. I have the right to stop participation at any time without penalty. I understand that this research has no known risks or monetary value, and I will not be identified. The signed copy of this consent form will be kept by the primary researcher. A copy of the consent form has been provided to me. By signing this consent form, I am confirming that:

1. I agree with the above statements.
2. I agree to the terms of my voluntary participation.
3. I agree to participate in this research study.
4. I agree to complete the confidential interview with the researcher.
5. I give Fulton Leadership Academy permission to release my child’s report card.
6. I give teachers permission to discuss my child’s progress in class with the researcher.

CONFIDENTIALITY
The absolute best efforts will be made to keep your personal information and responses private. Your privacy will be upheld to the extent allowed by law. All information that can identify you will be removed from the data collection instrument; your name is not required for this research study. It may become necessary to share information that you provide in relation to this research study to third parties but only for official research/data analysis purposes and publishing of the research, which will be summarized and reported in a grouping format.

If you have any questions now, or later, related to the integrity of the research, (the rights of research subjects or research-related injuries, where applicable), you are encouraged to contact Dr. Barbara Hill (404 880-8505) at Clark Atlanta University, School of Education.

________________________________________________
Participant - Printed Name

________________________________________________
Participant – Contact Phone (Please provide two numbers)

________________________________________________
Participant- Signature

________________________________________________
Witness

________________________________________________
Date

________________________________________________
Researcher Date
APPENDIX C

Dissertation Interview Questions for Parents

Independent Variables

Socioeconomic Status

1. Does your child receive free or reduce lunch in school?

2. Describe your ability or inability to provide basic essentials for your child (food, water, shelter, clothing, etc…).

3. In school, students often need a variety of resources and materials such as computer with internet access, reading materials, projects boards, writing equipment, or even materials to complete a science project. How would you describe your ability or inability to supply and/or provide support as it relates to such resources listed or other similar items to support your child’s education?

Family Structure

4. Describe your household family structure. Who lives in the same house as you and your son?

5. Describe your household engagement level in your son’s education. In other words, elaborate on who helps with homework and how often, who supervises the school work, and who ensures that your child has a quiet place to do school work and is not distracted by others in the home.

6. Who are the people (inside or outside the home) who play a significant role in supporting, encouraging, and mentoring your son?

Self-Esteem

7. How do you believe your child feel about his personal image?

8. In most cases, describe your child’s feeling about their self-worth.

Peer Affiliation

10. Describe your son’s friends’ usual activities and/or regular behavior habits.

11. How often does your son see his friends?

12. When and where do they spend the majority of their time?

Extracurricular Activities

13. Describe what extra-curricular activities your child is involved in (both organize and unorganized).

14. What does your child do during his spare time?

15. What electronic devices does your child use? And how much time, during an average week, does he spend on these devices?

Student Behavior

16. Describe the extent of success or lack of success as it relates to your child’s ability to cope in the school environment. Does he follow the rules and listen to his teachers?

17. Describe your child’s social skills or lack of social skills in school. Describe your child’s ability to successfully socialize and get along with his peers in school.

18. How well is your child able to function in their regular school environment?

Dependent Variable - Student Achievement

19. In terms of subject content, describe your child’s strengths and weaknesses.

20. What are the trends, if any, have you noticed in your child’s academic grades?

21. How would you describe your child’s success or lack of success in their academics?
APPENDIX D

Dissertation Interview Questions for Teachers

Independent Variables

Socioeconomic Status

1. Does the student have all of the basic materials he needs to be successful in class?

2. Does the student have other materials which may not be required but will benefit the student greatly if he had them? Do they bring them to class on a regular basis?

Family Structure

3. Describe your ability or inability to communicate with the student’s parents.

4. Describe the parents’ interest level in their child’s education.

5. How much can you speak about the parents’ participation level in their child’s education?

Self-Esteem

6. How do you believe this student feel about his personal image?

7. In most cases, describe this student’s feeling about their self-worth.

8. In general, describe this student’s self-esteem.

Peer Affiliation

9. Describe this student’s friends.

10. Explain how this student’s actions compare to his friends’ actions.

11. Describe this student’s judgment as it relate to selecting his friends.

Extracurricular Activities

12. Describe what extra-curricular activities this student is involved in (both organize and unorganized).
13. If so, explain how these extra-curricular activities have impacted this student’s academic achievement.

14. How has social media or any other technology impacted this student’s academic achievement?

**Student Behavior**

15. Describe the behavior of this student in school.

16. Describe the social aspect of this student’s success or lack of in school.

17. How well is this student able to function in their regular school environment?

**Dependent Variable - Student Achievement**

18. In terms of subject content, describe this student’s strengths and weaknesses.

19. What are the trends, if any, have you noticed in this student’s academic grades?

20. How would you describe this student’s success or lack of success in their academics?
APPENDIX E

Observation Instrument

1. Date of the Observation:

2. Time of the Observation:

3. Length of the Observation:

4. Illustration of the Venue (with the location of the observer/researcher)

5. Describe the venue:

6. Describe the physical arrangement of the room:

7. Describe the individuals in the room and their apparent roles:

8. Describe the purpose of this gathering:

9. Describe how this setting was catered to African-American males or males in general. (Can the observer tell that this is an all-male class/school without looking at the students?)

10. Describe how this lesson and activity was catered to African-American males or males in general:

11. Describe the student’s engagement level in this setting:

12. Describe the student’s social skills with his peers:

13. Describe the student’s interaction with the teacher:
REFERENCES


