An exploration of the relationship between personal motivation, academic achievement, and social concepts among select groups of African-American high school males

Eddie L. Morris
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ABSTRACT

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

MORRIS, EDDIE L. B.A. CENTRAL MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY, 1991
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AN EXPLORATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERSONAL
MOTIVATION, ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, AND SOCIAL
CONCEPTS AMONG SELECT GROUPS OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL MALES

Advisor: Richard Lyle, Ph.D.

Dissertation dated May 2008

This study explores the relationship between personal motivation, academic concept and social concepts and academic achievement among select groups of African-American high school males. Ninety-one respondents were selected for the study. They were comprised of 45 students from the Advanced Placement track with grade point averages of 3.00 or higher and 46 from the General Education track with grade point averages of 2.00 or lower. The Achievement Motivation Profile (AMP) was administered to assess student motivation and the Multidimensional Self-Concept Scale was administered to assess their academic and social concepts.

Findings from the study revealed that there were significant differences in motivation and academic concepts between the two groups and both correlated with academic achievement. There was no statistically significant relationship between social concept and academic achievement.
AN EXPLORATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERSONAL MOTIVATION, ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, AND SOCIAL CONCEPTS AMONG SELECT GROUPS OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL MALES

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

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ATLANTA, GEORGIA

MAY 2008
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First and foremost I would like to give praise and worship to the Spirit that resides in mankind and myself. I am grateful for my wife, Kimberly Morris, who is truly a gift from the Spirit. I love you with all my heart and will never fail you. I am beholden to my mother, Yvonne Cox, who is my reason for existing. I thank you for your love, wisdom and prayers. This dissertation is my gift to you! I acknowledge my children, Taylor Morris, Morgan Morris, Myles Morris and McCaleb Morris, for bringing me purposes and great joy. I acknowledge my father, Fred Cox, for teaching me responsibility and making me a man. I acknowledge my sister, Mirinda Cox. I acknowledge my uncles and aunts, Nan Williams, Naomi and Ezel Gladden, Howard Jamison, Mary-Ann Bright, and Wells Jamison for nurturing me and molding me into the person I am today. I am indebted to Professor Naomi Ward and Hattie Mitchell for being a compass that kept me on the right path. I love you both and thank-you for introducing me to the world of books. I acknowledge Mrs. Claudette Rivers-King for giving me hope to succeed in life. I acknowledge Dr. Lyle, Dr. Waymer and Dr. Amos Ajo for being a great support and making believe in my intellect. I acknowledge Dr. Downs, for sharing his brilliance during the process of this work. Finally, I am thankful for my grandfather, Rev. Howard Jamison for leaving me a priceless inheritance of love and wisdom. I hope that I serve my people and community as well as you. My mission in life is to give a voice to those whom have none and too serve those whom can never repay.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Two decades of major reforms in public education has thus far, failed to produce the anticipated improvement in the quality of our urban schools or the academic achievement of black males. Few issues in education are of greater concern to policymakers, educators and the general public than the plight of African-American male students in the nation’s urban schools. Many of these students receive high quality education, achieve at admirable levels, and complete high school equipped with the knowledge and skills needed for further education or entry level employment. However, an alarming number of these students achieve at significantly lower levels than their white counterparts and leave school either through dropping out early or at graduation, lacking the skills and knowledge required for entry to employment, colleges and trade schools.

Research indicates that collectively, black males by sixth grade, trail their white peers by more than two years in reading, mathematics and writing skills, as measured by standardized achievement test (Lomotey, 1989), and this disparity continues or widens in later school years. The average performance of black students on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) is more than 50 points lower than the average performance of white students (Bates, 1990). In most urban areas, 20-30% of black males drop out of school prior to graduation (Taylor-Gibbs, 1988). Nationally, black males are four times more likely than
white males to be suspended or expelled from school, and nine times more likely to be placed in special education classes (Meier, Stewart, & England, 1998). From 1973 to 1977 there was a steady enrollment in college, from 39% to 48% of all high school graduates, for the first time equaling the graduation rate for whites. However, since 1977 there has been a sharp decline in black college enrollment which has disproportionately impacted males. Moreover, at colleges and universities throughout the U.S. fewer than 40% of black males admitted to college, graduate within six years (Noguera, 2002).

One would assume that the above indicators are correlated with poverty and urban schools. This could be further from the truth for this cultural phenomenon is not just relegated to poor urban schools but transcends across socioeconomic boundaries. In an important study published in 2003 by Professor John Ogbu of the Shaker Heights, Ohio School System, where virtually all youngsters come from upper class households, African-American student achievement lagged behind their white classmates in every measure of academic success: grade point average, standardized test scores and enrollment in advanced placement courses. On average, black students earned a 1.9 grade point average (GPA) while their white counterparts maintained an average GPA of 3.45. Other indicators where equally dismal; it made no sense (Ogbru, 2003).

Professor Ogbu (2003) conducted exhaustive interviews with school personnel, black parents, and students. His research yielded an unexpected conclusion: It was not socioeconomics, school funding or racism that accounted for the students' poor academic performance; it was their attitudes. He concluded that the average black student in Shaker Heights put little effort into schoolwork and was apart of a peer culture that
looked down on academic success as “acting white.” Although he noted that other factors also play a role, and does not deny that there may be antiblack sentiment in the district, he concluded that discrimination alone could not explain the gap.

The educational reform debate has intensified. While school systems and communities implement new reform initiatives, new curriculums and creative pedagogy, the achievement gap between whites and blacks continues to increase. The question that must begin to be asked is, “why are black students regressing and not achieving?” The answer to that perplexing question can only lie within the student, for poverty and race can no longer be utilized as prevailing rationales or the only rationale for low achievement. The literature is replete with research, hypothesis and theory regarding the education of black males. Such research is generally deficit oriented; fails to provide the problem’s true historicism; depicts minorities as pathological products of oppression; and marginalizes African-American males from mainstream society (Downs, 2006; Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus, Harpalani, & Vinay, 2001).

Much time has been devoted to discussing the educational plight of African-American males rather than developing potential solutions to mitigate the crisis (Garibaldi, 1992). This area of study has indeed been scrutinized and several factors have been identified and associated with low academic achievement. They include, but are not limited to poor academic skills, lack of parental involvement, few opportunities for recreation, low social status, peer rejection, association with delinquent peers, impulsivity, and poor problem/conflict resolutions skills (resulting in aggressive behavior) (Downs, 2006).
Historically, less attention has been given to ecological, social, and psychological factors that contribute to African-American students' academic success (Downs, 2006; Miller-Cribs, Cronen, Davis, & Johnson, 2002; Newman, Myers, Newman, Lohman, & Smith, 2002). Despite barriers, academic success is achievable (Miller-Cribbs et al., 2002). Newman et al. (2002) identify peer association, family, school and community micro-systems effecting student success. Miller-Cribbes et al. also identify the following as contributors to academic failure: no self-confidence, incompletion of homework, family obligations, not understanding class concepts and inadequate study skills. Reversal of these factors, then, should result in opposite outcomes-academic success. In total, the overall influence of these variables or factors contributes to a positive or negative self-concept, a derivative of and to some degree equal to self-esteem (Downs, 2006).

Academic and social concepts are subcategories of self concept. According to Cokely (2000), academic concept is how a student views his academic ability in comparison to others and consist of attitudes, feelings and perceptions about one's academic skills (Lent, Brown, & Gore, 1997). Social concept refers to how one relates to other people (Huit, 2004). Strategies that enhance these concepts should also result in increased academic achievement. The influences, risk factors, and barriers previously noted either enhance or diminished self-concept, particularly academic and social concept, and are contextual within the school, home and community environments. However, it is in the school environment whereby these influences, risk factors and barriers are most likely to manifest in either academic success or failure for students.
This success or failure, often, foreshadows future success and failure in adult life (Cokely 2000).

Also, notably muted from the debate on educational reform has been discussion of the engagement and motivation of the students themselves. As schools raise standards and improve the quality of instruction, the result may be little or no improvement unless black students increase the level of their effort. Motivation is a characteristic that is integral to learning or just participating in life in general. The student cycle of failure has to be broken in order to boost his or her motivation and achievement. Black students can get trapped in a continuous cycle of failure, which lowers self-esteem (Heacox, 1991).

Academic motivation is defined as (a) academic drive, (b) attitudes toward school and learning, and (c) enthusiasm for academic achievement. Academic drive involves measuring items such as work habits and scholastic expectations. Attitudes (academic concept) toward school and learning involve students’ opinions of the classroom environment and self-efficacy in learning (Entwistle, 1968; Francis, Goheer, Dieter, Kaplan, Kertetter, Kirk, Liu, Thomas & Yeh, 2004). Finally, enthusiasm for academic achievement involves the degree to which students possess certain behavior characteristics (social concept) related to motivation (Francis, Goheer, Dieter, Kaplan, Kertetter, Kirk, Liu, Thomas, & Yeh, 2004; Hawng, 2002). The continued under achievement of black males will place a heavy burden on society as a whole and requires a dramatic paradigm shift in the educational arena to empower African-American children for academic and social success under any socioeconomic conditions that exist in their lives (Tucker, Zayko, & Herman, 2002).
This researcher hypothesizes that black students are not achieving and have poor
ing school attendance because they lack motivation and are experiencing nihilism. They also
lack a positive academic and social concept. Therefore, for the purpose of this paper the
key to educating black children is to improve or develop their academic and social
concepts and to motivate them to achieve academically and socially.

Statement of the Problem

African Americans have reasons to worry about black students being educated in
public schools. The academic achievement data for African-American students’
performance in U.S. schools paint a bleak picture of their performance. The National
Assessment of Educational Progress data from 1994, 1996, and 1998 reveal persistent
underachievement in critical subject matter areas such as reading, math and science
(Howard, 2002). Some scholars have suggested that the academic difficulty many
African-American students experience manifest itself in a plethora of behavioral and
social maladjustments (Howard, 2002; Kohl, 1999). African-American students make up
approximately 16.2% of the entire K-12 school population and constitute nearly 30% of
all education students (Howard, 2002; Patterson, 1997). Furthermore, as overrepresented
as African-American students are in special education, they are equally underrepresented
in the gifted population (Howard, 2002).

Eighty nine percent of African students plan to further their education in college;
however 50% graduated from high school in 2004 and for African-American males the
graduation rate was less than 50% in many metropolitan communities (Downs, 2006;
Smith, 2005). Before they finally drop out or are pushed out, the psychological process
of mental drop-out begins long before they enter secondary school. African-American males are disproportionately suspended, and expelled in comparison to white males. Also, they are introduced to the legal system at a rate triple that of white males (Downs, 2006; Monroe, 2005; Noguera, 2003). More African-American males received their GED from correctional facilities than graduate from college (Downs, 2006; Smith, 2005).

The plight of educating African-American males seems to be nihilistic but all students are capable of educational success. However, the skills and knowledge needed to achieve success in the educational arena are not privileged to all. Therefore, those who lack the skills must be identified and brought to standard by specific interventions targeting their particular deficits. While academic intellect is an important variable in determining academic achievement, confidence and motivation/efficacy specific to academic concept and social concept are key elements to academic success (Howard, 2002).

The fortunate tragedy regarding the academic and social underachievement of African-American males is that it occurred amidst a myriad of research that has examined factors such as poverty, socioeconomic status, and testing involved in their educational process. Thus while important research has examined critical variables in the educational achievement of African-American student progress, many researchers ponder why the underachievement still remains. In order to be successful in the academic arena and turn the tide of social failure, African-American males must learn to accommodate their intellectual and survival skills for the academic environment—that is become motivated and develop academic and social competencies (Downs, 2006). Exposure to a culturally
sensitive and creative curriculum would provide such an opportunity for African-American males to develop and enhance these competencies (Downs, 2006).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if a relationship exist between the independent variables, academic concept, social concept levels of motivation and the dependent variable academic achievement for African American male teens between the ages of 14 and 16 who attended Banneker High School. The assumption is that students' who are motivated and possess a positive social and academic self concept is correlated with academic achievement in the educational milieu.

Research Questions

The research questions of this study are as follows:

RQ1: Is there a statistically significant difference in motivation between academic achieving and academic nonachieving students?

RQ2: Is there a statistically significant difference in academic concept between academic achieving and academic nonachieving students?

RQ3: Is there a statistically significant difference in social concept between academic achieving and academic nonachieving students?

RQ4: Is there a statistically significant relationship between motivation and academic achievement?

RQ5: Is there a statistically significant relationship between academic concept and academic achievement?
RQ6: Is there a statistically significant relationship between social concept and academic achievement?

Hypotheses

The null hypotheses for the study were as follows:

$H_01$: There is no statistically significant difference in motivation between academic achieving and academic nonachieving students?

$H_02$: There is no statistically significant difference in academic concept between academic achieving and academic nonachieving students?

$H_03$: There is no statistically significant difference in social concept between academic achieving and academic nonachieving students?

$H_04$: There is no statistically significant relationship between motivation and academic achievement?

$H_05$: There is no statistically significant relationship between academic concept and academic achievement?

$H_06$: There is no statistically significant relationship between social concept and academic achievement?

Significance of the Study

Few studies have looked beyond family and socioeconomic demographics to examine how student held variables influence their academic achievement. Such studies are important if educators, policy makers and researchers are to understand barriers that affect matriculation of African American males. Few systematic solutions have been offered to address realistically the problem that at least one-third of young African-
American males experience (Garibaldi, 1992). More research is needed to determine, in more definitive terms, variables contributing to the academic success of African-American males.

The results of this study could be used to further enhance educators’, clinicians, and policymakers awareness of the variables associated with academically achieving African-American males, thereby reversing the trend of academic failure among so many African American males. It is imperative that educators look beyond the plight of African-American males to explore questions of why some African-American males achieve academically while others do not.

Definition of Terms

In order to facilitate the readability of the study, the following terms have been identified and defined as they initially appear in the literature review:

*Academic achievement:* Maintaining a grade point average of 3.0 or better.

*Academic concept:* How a student views his academic ability in comparison to others and consists of attitudes, feelings and perceptions about one’s academic skills (Lent, Brown, & Gore, 1997).

*Achievement Gap:* The academic achievement of black student is compared to the achievement of white students even when their socioeconomic status is equal (Rothstein, 2004).

*African American:* One whose ancestry can be traced to Africa and who now resides in America may also be referred to as black or of Negro descent.
Afrocentrism: A view from which African values, beliefs and customs are central and perceived as “strength” and as a means of self determination and self direction in the advancement of African Americans (Ward & Mitchell, 1994).

Motivation: Internal state or condition that activates behavior and gives it direction; desire or want that energizes and directs goal oriented behavior; influence needs and desires on the intensity and direction of behavior (Kleinginna & Kleinginna, 1981).

Self-esteem: A combination of one’s cognition and affective state in relation to self.

Self-concept: Refers to how we feel about or how we value ourselves (Huitt, 2004).

Social concept: Refers to how one relates to other people.

Underachievement: Occurs when an individual’s performance does not measure up to their level of cognitive ability or the educational system’s standardized performance level or grade level.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of presenting this review of the literature was to lay a scholarly foundation in order to establish a need for the study. The objectives of this review are (a) to research the literature on the achievement gap between white males and African-American males and provide a brief description of the characteristics of underachievers and achievers; (b) to discuss the different theories of motivation and their relationship with academic achievement; and (c) to explore the differential processes of self-esteem, social concept and academic concept and their relationship to academic achievement amongst African-American males.

Achievement Gap

There is a definite struggle in education between African Americans and white students across the nation. This phenomenon is generally referred to as the achievement gap. The achievement gap is defined as the difference between the achievement of all lower-class students and that of middle class students (Rothestein, 2004). However, there is also a more distinct definition for the achievement gap; in this definition, the academic achievement of black students is compared to the achievement of white students even when their socioeconomic status is equal (Rothestein, 2004). Research sates that black students do not perform as well as white students, even when socioeconomic status was equal to that of whites.
Factors Contributing to the Achievement Gap

A question that could be debated is what factors have caused the achievement gap? Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu (1989) believed teacher expectations, tracking, parental involvement, student self-esteem, curriculum, learning styles, test bias and peer pressure are variables that contribute to the achievement gap. While Goodwin (2000) does not disagree with Kunjufu, he believes the lack of diversified content in the curriculum is the major factor contributing to minority students’ academic failure when compared to their white peers (Goodwin, 2000).

There are various other factors suggested in the research that also affect the academics of African-American students. Other researchers found these factors to be unequal funding and lack of rigorous school curricula, lower teacher expectations, disproportional expulsion and suspension, lower levels of African-American parent involvement, and even segregation (Denbo, 2002).

Hopkins (1997) stated that, “Because of educational failures, black American youth face high rates of drug use, homicide, teenage pregnancy, crime, poverty, and unemployment” (p. 3). He further elaborates that “Inadequate preparation in unequal schools and continued racial prejudice have trapped more than a third of African Americans in a cycle of poverty and a quality of life comparable to the Third World Countries (Hopkins, 1997, p. 2).

Another factor that cannot be overlooked is stereotyping. Denbo (2002) stated that, “Minority boys, more so than other adolescents, must cope with the dual stresses of academic challenge and stereotypes about their group and these stresses can undermine
their endorsement of achievement values” (p. 22). African-American boys are seen by their peers as leaders, good athletes and trendsetters; however, they are also viewed as the super athlete, criminal, gangster or hyper sexed male. Therefore, this group can be considered the most highly stigmatized and stereotyped group in America (Denbo, 2002). Denbo continued, “Societal stereotypes, together with a wide variety of social, political, and economic forces interact to place African American males at a disadvantage in the educational system” (p. 22).

Hopkins (1997) concurred by stating that the condition of African-American males has reached horrifying proportions, and if they are to have a future, it is greatly dependent on their education. Therefore, it is important to find the source of their academic inaccuracies as early as possible.

*The Contributions Educational Institutions Provide to the Achievement Gap*

In *Educating Black Males*, Hopkins (1997) stated that:

Rather than serve as a vehicle to promote liberations, public schools have become structured to support systems assuring social, political, cultural, and economic inequalities for African Americans. Report after report painfully describes the inefficiency of traditional public schools in the United States. (p. 4)

Feinberg (1998) stated that, “Historically schools were justified as critical in bringing different peoples together to participate in a common shared identity, one in which every person was recognizable to every other person as a citizen of the same nation” (p. 3). It
was stated that in today’s society schools are being used to promote only those from the dominant group (Feinberg, 1998). According to Feinberg:

Instead of working towards closing the gap between Asian Americans and whites and all other ethnic groups, schools are making premises on why only two groups have pulled ahead. Instead of focusing on a solution for improvement in the institution, schools are being used to stabilize the economic position of the students’ lineage. (p. 5)

Hopkins (1997) continued, “Rather than serve as a vehicle for liberation for African-American males and other people of color, public schools serve, at best, as agencies of social, economic, political, and cultural reproduction” (p. 2).

A second contribution made by educational institutions is the large amount of inexperienced teachers hired to teach secondary school students. According to Thompson (2002), “Numerous studies have found that a higher percentage of middle school teachers tend to be under prepared for teaching responsibilities” (p. 5). Ingersoll (1999) stated:

Nearly one-third of secondary teachers who teach math, one-fourth of secondary English teachers, and one-fifth of secondary science teachers did not major or minor in the subject that they were teaching, nor did they major or minor in a related subject. These numbers increased in schools that were of high poverty. (p. 59)

Jawanza Kunjufu (1989) believed, “Teacher expectations, tracking, parental involvement, student self esteem, curriculum, learning styles, test bias and peer pressure
are all factors impacting academic achievement” (p. 1). Kunjufu (1989) does not believe that absentee fathers, family income, and lacking the ability to speak standard English are more significant than the former. Kunjufu stated, “Many teachers believe that the reasons for the academic performance gap between white and black students lie in ability” (p. 2). Kunjufu opposes this belief. His doubt stems from the fact that “There is a larger number of National Basketball Association starters that are black men and only a small handful of black engineers” (p. 2). This teaches our African American students that they have the ability to be a National Basketball Association starter but they do not have the ability to be an engineer.

A third contribution is the relationship between extra curricula activities and the educational institution. Kunjufu (1989) believed the amount of time Asian Americans and whites spend on academic activities is a large factor for their advanced placement in the achievement gap. The amount of time Asian Americans and whites spend studying has everything to do with their educational success and their success on the SAT. Out of the three ethnic groups, African-American students spend the least amount of time studying, and therefore have the lowest test scores. Kunjufu stated the amount of hours spent studying is 12, 8, and 5, respectively. African Americans study the least amount of hours and watch more television, which can be reflected in their scoring 720 on the SATs, while Asian Americans are scoring 920.

Achievement Gap Effect on African American Student Identity

By middle school African-American males begin to notice that society benefits whites more than it does blacks. According to Aronson (2004), by the time a person
enters into kindergarten, they have developed awareness for various cultural stereotypes. The consciousness of a particular ethnic group’s stereotype will cause that person to have preconceived notions about members from the stereotyped group, therefore causing the person to treat members from the stereotyped group differently (Aronson, 2004). African-American males begin to realize that mediocrity is expected from them. Aronson also found from his research that even when students entered college with the same grades and SAT scores, black students fared worse than white students did. He also stated that even when students start out matched in terms of parental income and education and the quality of schools the students attended, a significant achievement gap remains between black and white students (Aronson, 2004).

The achievement gap has a definite affect on the identity development of African-American males. Thompson (2002) stated that, “For African-American males, middle school poses a unique set of circumstances . . . the specter of racism affects their identity and self concept and can result in anger and confusion” (p. 66). Tatum (1997) agreed: “The anger and resentment that adolescents feel in response to their growing awareness of the systematic exclusion of black people from full participation in U.S. society leads to the development of an oppositional social identity” (p. 60).

Oppositional social identity can be described as a protective armor used by African-American students to protect one’s identity from psychological assault of racism and keeps the dominant group at a distance (Tatum, 1997). When an African-American student has experienced an event that causes them to develop an oppositional identity, the academic success of these students may begin to decline. Tatum (1997) suggested that
when students' academic achievement decreases, educators should not blame the students but ask, "How did academic achievement become defined as exclusively white behavior?" (p. 64). This question stems from the onset of the oppositional identity development stage, which according to Tatum (1997), may have been created by an experience with racism in a student's educational environment.

Polite's (1999) research on African-American adolescents' struggle with ethnic identity is similar to Tatum's (1997) exploration of identity statuses. Each contained four stages. Polite suggested that students choose either, to assimilate, alienate, withdraw and/or integrate themselves with/or from other students, predominantly white. Polite (1999) suggested that many African-American males find comfort in the withdrawn stage. In this stage; African-American males disassociate themselves with the Eurocentric culture. Polite said, "Their focus is solely on associating with members of their own culture" (p. 69).

Tatum's (1997) research on the oppositional social identity stage and Polite's (1999) research on ethnic identity phases, both suggested that African Americans enter the oppositional social identity or the withdrawn phase as a way of detaching and protecting themselves from the majority culture who has in one way or another harmed them. Kunjufu (1990) described numerous ways in which schools destroy the self-esteem of black boys. In their home environment African-American boys display high self esteem; however, in the school environment, starting after their kindergarten year, their level of self esteem begins to decrease (Kunjufu, 1989).
Characteristics of Underachievers

Many African-American students are capable of achieving academically but do not show any indication of their abilities or lack of interest in school, and therefore perform below their capabilities. Over two decades ago, according to Mandel and Marcus (1988), “Underachievement varies from grade to grade, from one school to another, and even from one teacher to another” (p. 2-3). Underachievement is defined as “A discrepancy between a person’s intellectual capacity and performance on standardized achievement test” (Mandel & Marcus, 1988, p. 2-3).

According to Smith (2002), “Academic achievement is not meeting expectations and academic potential” (p. 2). He defines academic achievement as “A student being successful when they have met the class expectations for a particular subject area” (p. 2). Therefore, underachievement occurs when an individual’s performance does not measure up to their level of cognitive ability. Their level of performance can be affected by such things as “setting, individuals, and situations” (Mandel & Marcus, 1988, p. 2). Mia Keller-Pringle (as cited in Montgomery, 1988) has referred to underachievers as “Able misfits (p. 30). She reports that underachievers as a group demonstrate the following characteristics:

1. A feeling of failure and limited desire;
2. A dislike for school work and book learning;
3. Poor study habits;
4. Inadequate relationships with peers;
5. A high occurrence of emotional problems.
As early as 1977, Felton and Briggs stated that, "It has been shown that underachievers reduce or prevent their achievement by their negative attitudes and inappropriate behaviors" (p. 65). Underachievers expect to fail, generally set their goals too high or too low, and have an external locus of control (Felton & Briggs, 1977). Underachievers do not believe they are in control of their own success and learning by the types of choices they make. Hence their problem solving skills are unsuccessful because they do not ask themselves questions about the assignments or material presented to them. Underachievers believe there is only one correct answer. As a result, when they participate in academic activities, they often feel frustrated and this reinforces their belief that they are not good enough and do not have the capabilities to complete the task (Roberts, 2004).

Underachievers can be characterized as lacking in self-confidence and motivation, and generally having social difficulties and family problems (Roberts, 2004). As early as 1988, Mandel and Marcus researched sources and conducted various personality tests to determine the characteristics and personality traits of underachievers, achievers and overachievers.

As shown in Table 1, it is obvious that underachievers appear to view themselves and others negatively. This type of thinking, behavior or attitude will influence a person's level of performance in academia. This type of behavior tends to become a self-fulfilling prophecy.
Table 1

*Characteristics of Underachievers and Achievers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Underachievers</th>
<th>Achievers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low self-concept</td>
<td>Higher self-concept of ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative self attitudes</td>
<td>Positive attitude towards achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More self critical</td>
<td>Concerned with positive relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reported more family conflicts</td>
<td>High sense of self responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rated teachers negatively</td>
<td>Positive images of teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less accurate at self evaluations</td>
<td>Increased self confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater connection to peer values</td>
<td>Resourceful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Mandel & Marcus, 1988, p. 16-17)

Where do these negative characteristics originate from and what factors influence underachievement? Montgomery (1988) reports that some children believe that school is not the place for them and that school cannot meet their needs. These students have trouble understanding the relevance of the school subjects in their lives. Montgomery says that there are other children whose bad experiences at school negatively affect their beliefs and understanding about what it means to be in school.

Motivation of African-American Males

Most of the chronic school failures of African-American males are understood to reflect problems in motivation. Far too many minority children perform poorly in school because they have low expectations, feel hopeless, lack interest or give up in the face of potential failure, not because they lack basic intellectual capacities (Berry & Asamen,
1989). Educators not only influence student’s achievement and cognitive development, but their self efficacy and attitudes as well (Irvin, 1990). Many students feel that their teachers do not positively receive them and as a result, they do not like school. Some students feel isolated, discouraged and eventually fail academically (Irvin, 1990). However, not all children, including African American males, share these attributes.

Many African-American males remain invested in academic pursuits and are academically successful (Braddock, Royster, Winfield, & Hawkins, 1991). Many remain committed to conventional educational goals despite the occasional obstacles they encounter. These students seemingly make a personal investment and commitment to a predetermined goal of which educational attainment is key. While there are a number of factors that affect performance in school, one of the most influential is motivation.

Academic motivation is defined as (a) academic drive, (b) attitudes toward school and learning, and (c) enthusiasm for academic achievement. Academic drive involves measuring items such as work habits and scholastic expectation. Attitudes toward school and learning, involves students’ opinions of the classroom environment and self-efficacy in learning (Entwistle, 1968). Finally, enthusiasm for academic achievement involves the degree to which students possessed certain specific behavioral characteristics related to motivation (Hwang, Echols, & Vrongistinos, 2002).

The literature revealed that motivation is referred to as academic engagement, which refers to “Cognitive, emotional and behavioral indicators of student investment in and attachment to education” (Tucker, Zayco, & Herman, 2002). It is obvious that students who are not motivated to succeed will not work hard. In fact, several
researchers have suggested that only motivation directly effects academic achievement; all other factors affect achievement only through their effect on motivation (Tucker, et al., 2002). However, it is not easy to understand what motivates students.

Numerous studies have investigated student motivation specifically among African American students. Tucker, Zayco, and Herman (2002) studied the motivation of 117 African-American students mostly from low income families in first through twelfth grade. They found that teacher involvement was the strongest predictor of student motivation. However, other studies have shown that African-American students, as well as other ethnically diverse and low income students, feel that they receive significantly less support from their teachers than European-American students (Tucker et al., 2002). Students’ perceived relatedness and perceived autonomy also directly influenced academic engagement, while perceived competence and teacher structure affected perceived relatedness and teacher autonomy support affected perceived autonomy.

Hwang et al. (2002) interviewed 60 high achieving African-American college students about their reasons for choosing their majors and for studying and about their educational values. They found that, contrary to predictions of other researchers, the students did not hold an intrinsic goal orientation (Task goal orientation). Instead, the students integrated a combination of intrinsic, extrinsic (performance), future and social goals. For instance many of the students who were extrinsically motivated wanted to perform well so they would have better career opportunities, and were thus incorporating a future goal orientation.
Geary (1988) conducted an ethnographic study to investigate factors in the experience of African-American inner city 10th and 11th graders that enabled them to achieve academically in spite of the often debilitating factors and circumstances that surrounded them. She reasoned that the dominant theories; cultural deprivation, genetic deficits and culture conflicts in the education of minorities were "...originally, generated to describe the underlying reasons for the apparent failure of minority students to succeed in educational settings" (p. 3). She argued that while these theories did offer predictions, statistical and correlation data, these theories were inadequate because they failed to offer pertinent insights into the personal educational process of minorities as well as stereotyped minorities based on perceived disparities in minority students' cognitive and linguistic behaviors.

The site of the study was selected by the National Center on Effective Secondary Schools, University of Wisconsin-Madison, as part of a multi-site national study. Lincoln High School, located in Madison, Wisconsin was selected because it had received some recognition from the community and press for its innovative programs aimed at "at risk" African-American youths.

The participants were college students enrolled in a preparatory program called "Expanded Horizon." They were selected for participation in the program on teacher recommendations because standardized test scores were low. Nineteen students were selected for participation in the study: 7 African-America males and 12 African-American females.
Data were collected using interviews, field notes and documents from administrators, teachers, and students. The methodology chosen for this study incorporated the specific students’, teachers’ administrators’ and school system personnel’s situations, experiences and perceptions about schooling as well as how these individuals ordinarily functioned and behaved in school settings.

Results of the preliminary analysis of the ethnographic data indicated that teachers and students differed in their understanding of success and how best it is achieved. Geary (1988) indicated that:

Teachers viewed the academic success of students impinging on the students’ ability to demonstrate positive attitude and hard work. Teachers do not view students’ lack of success as a reflection on them, their beliefs, their knowledge or their pedagogical techniques. According to the teachers, academic success or failure rests solely with the individual student and his/her good attitude and willingness to work hard. (p. 21).

Geary concluded that factors contributing to the success of college preparatory students at Lincoln were an end rather than a means to an end. Geary further concluded that students generally agreed with teachers that a good attitude and hard work were needed for academic success. Students reported that believing in themselves, participating in class, participating in extracurricular activities, coping with a variety of situations and individuals, being friendly and deferring to all, possessing interior motivation and determination and being the best they could be as critical factors and attributes contributing to their success.
Thus, personal educational aspirations and academic investment may be indicators of students’ attitudinal and behavioral attachment to conventional academic values. These measures appear to be based on students’ own decisions about what they will strive for academically, how their previous investments have paid off socially, and whether they believed continuing to invest in academic pursuits is worthwhile (Geary, 1988).

According to Wilson-Sadbbery and Winfield and Royster (1991), plans and aspirations are related to later educational attainment, particularly among African American males. Geary (1988) found that those African-American students who defied the odds, and were academically successfully in high school expended a great deal of effort in academic pursuit and displayed a positive attitude. They also participated in class and extracurricular activities, exhibited good coping skills, demonstrated determination, self motivation and belief in themselves.

Summary

In summary, the literature on motivation relating to African-American males suggest that many African American males have personal educational goals, make commitments to educational goals and remain invested in their educational pursuits. Many African-American males exhibit locus of control, participate in extracurricular activities, demonstrate positive coping skills, have self efficacy and expend effort toward a predetermined goal of which education is the key. The motivation of African-American males who achieve academically despite environmental circumstances, seemingly makes an internal investment to which education plays a major role.
Self-Esteem and Self-Concept

The notion of building healthy self-perceptions in individuals is mired in the self-esteem controversy that has been the subject of intense dialogue and ridicule (Riding & Rayneys, 2001). Fortunately, there has been a shift in focus as regards the issues critical to human functioning, and students’ self beliefs have once again become the subject of research on academic motivation. Grahm and Weiner (1996) claim that the self is on the verge of dominating the field of motivation. This focus on the student’s sense of self as a principal component of academic motivation is grounded on the taken for granted assumption that the beliefs that students create, develop and hold to be true about themselves are vital forces in their success of failure in school (Riding & Rayneys, 2001).

By self, we generally mean the conscious reflection of one’s own being or identity, as an object separate from other or from the environment. There are a variety of ways to think about self. Two of the most widely used terms are self concept and self esteem. Self-concept is the cognitive or thinking aspect of self (related to one’s self image) and generally refers to the totality of a complex, organized and dynamic system of learned beliefs, attitudes and opinions that each person holds to be true about his or her personal existence (Purkey, 1988).

Self-esteem is the affective or emotional aspect of self and generally refers to how we feel about or how we value ourselves (one’s self worth). Self-concept can also refer to the general idea we have of ourselves and self esteem can refer to particular measures about components of self concept (Huit, 2004). Some authors even use the two terms interchangeably.
Franken (1994) states that there is a great deal of research which shows that the self concept is, perhaps, the basis for all motivated behavior. It is the self-concept that gives rise to possible selves, and it is possible selves that create the motivation for behavior. This supports the idea that one’s paradigm or world view and one’s relationship to that view, provide the boundaries and circumstances within which we develop our vision about possibilities. This is one of the major issues facing children and youth today (Huit, 2004).

Franken (1994) suggests that self-concept is related to self-esteem in that people who have good self esteem have a clearly differentiated self concept. When people know themselves they can maximize outcomes because they know what they can and cannot do.

Individuals develop and maintain their self concept through the process of taking action and then reflecting on what they have done and what others tell them about what they have done. They reflect on what they have done and can do in comparison to their expectations and the expectations of others and to the characteristics and accomplishments of others (Bringham, 1986). Self-concept is not innate, but is developed or constructed by the individual through interaction with the environment and reflecting on that interaction. This aspect of self concept (and, by corollary, self esteem) is important because it indicates that it can be modified or changed (Huit, 2004). Franken (1994) states that there is a growing body of research which indicates that it is possible to change the self concept. Self change is not something that people can will but rather it depends on the process of self reflection. Through self reflection, people often come to
view themselves in a new, more powerful way, and it is through this new, more powerful way of viewing the self, that people can develop possible selves.

There are several different components of self concept: physical, academic, social, and transpersonal. The physical aspect of self concept relates to that which is concrete: what we look like, our sex, height, weight, what kind of clothes we wear, what kind of car we drive; what kind of home we live in; and so forth. Academic self-concept relates to how well we do in school or how well we learn.

There are two levels: a general academic self concept of how good we are overall and a set of specific content related self concepts that describe how good we are in math, science, language arts, social science, and so forth. The social concept describes how we relate to other people and the transpersonal self-concept describes how we relate to the supernatural or unknowns.

Self-Esteem, Self-Concept, and Academic Achievement

Many authors in the literature use the terms self-esteem and self concept interchangeably. For the purpose of this section both terms will be utilized. Although academic achievement has been linked to self-esteem, studies do not indicate that self-esteem is affected by achievement. It has not been found that inability to perform academically leads to low self-esteem. In fact, Steele (1992) found that African-American children with low academic achievement do not identify academic outcomes as a factor of their self-esteem. The dis-identification hypothesis indicates that although African-American students may have low performance, their global self-esteem remains intact. Osborne’s (1995) analysis of self-esteem revealed that correlation between
African-American children’s self esteem and academic achievement decreases after middle school years particularly for males between 8th and 10th grades.

Borman and Overman (2004) found that self-esteem is not a strong predictor of academic achievement. However, they found that students of low socioeconomic status, regardless of race, were more resilient if they had high self esteem and were, thus, more academically successful despite their impoverished status. A distinguishing feature of their self was found to be the dimension of control having a greater effect on achievement following the formative years.

A longitudinal study by Ross and Broh (2004) found similar results of Borman and Overman (2000). Ross and Broh used the National Educational Longitudinal Study, 1988, 1990, and 1992 data to determine the relationships between academic achievement, self esteem and personal control. They found that academic achievement in the 8th grade contributed to self esteem and personal control in the 10th grade, but that only personal control contributed significantly to academic achievement in the 12th grade.

Marsh (1992) showed that the relationship of self-concept to school achievement is very specific. General self-concept and nonacademic aspects of self concept are not related to academic work; general academic achievement measures are related moderately to academic success. Specific measures of subject related self-concepts are highly related to success in that content area.

Using linear discriminant analysis, Bryne (1990) showed that academic self concept was more effective, than was academic achievement in differentiating between low track and high track students. Hamachek (1995) also asserts that self concept and
school achievement are related. The major issue is the direction of the relationship: does self concept produce achievement or does achievement produce self concept. Gage and Berliner (1992) state the evidence is accumulating. However, to indicate that level of school success, particularly over many years, predicts level of regard of self and one’s ability (Bridgemean & Shipman, 1978), whereas level of self-esteem does not predict level of school achievement. The implication is that teachers need to concentrate on the academic successes and failures of their students. It is the student’s history of success and failure that gives them the information with which to assess themselves”.

Exposure to early success creates positive efficacy belief that one is capable or confident. This efficacy is, yet, another crucial component in the development of self and academic achievement. Efficacy is a determining factor in the challenges and tasks in which individuals engage as well as the persistence, effort and resilience of the individual. The individual with high efficacy expects academic success. Furthermore, in the face of adversity, setback or failure, efficacy allows the individual to reassess, strategize and continue to seek accomplishment/completion of a given task or tasks. Those who do not attain adequate success and are subjected to continuous negative feedback from their reference groups and assaults on their psyche are not likely to establish self efficacy without appropriate intervention. Thus, they are at greater risk for academic disengagement, academic failure, and social failure (Pajares & Schunk, 2001).

Summary

Self-esteem is the value one places upon himself and is most often referred to globally. Self-esteem and self-concept are interrelated and interchangeable with one
another. Self-esteem is a value representation of self concept which is more context specific. For example, when speaking about one's self-esteem in the academic setting then it would be more appropriate to speak in terms of academic concept instead of global self-esteem (Huit, 2004).

Self-esteem and self-concept have been linked to academic achievement in some studies but there has been inconclusive evidence, at best in others. According to Steele (1992), dis-identification with academic achievement allows some students to maintain high global esteem despite low academic achievement. Osborne (1995) did not find that self-esteem and academic achievement were strongly correlated. Findings by Overman and Borman (2004) were similar. Ross and Broh (2000) found that the effect of self-esteem on academic achievement during the 12th grade academic year was not evident although academic achievement in the 8th grade contributed to self esteem in the 10th grade. Marsh (1992) showed that specific measures of subject-related self-concepts were highly related to success in that content area. Findings by Byrne (1990) showed that academic self-concept was more effective than was academic achievement in differentiating, between low track and high track students. Hamachek (1995) also asserted that self-concept and school achievement were related.

Development of Social Concept

The importance of a strong or positive social-concept is paramount to academic achievement and life success. In fact, this process of development is evident in the various theories of life stage development as proposed by Freud, Erickson, and Piaget, and moral stages of development proposed by Kohlberg (Meyers et. al., 2006). Social
skills are an outcome of these developmental stages and become more complex with age. Appropriate development of and use of social skills is paramount to academic achievement. As students matriculate through the educational process from primary to secondary education and beyond, their knowledge and use of social skills becomes more demanding. Social competence, then, shall be defined as the complex system of social learning, social motives, and social abilities, skills, habits, and knowledge (Zsolnai, 2002). Social concept is how well one uses his social competence to relate to others.

Deficiency in social concept is related to addiction, decreased economic ability, family dysfunction, immorality, criminal behavior, and socially irresponsible behaviors. Whereas positive social concept contributes to resiliency, esteem, coping skills, and reduced risk of psychopathology (Aronen & Kurkela, 1998).

In the educational context, social skills that are most relevant to success include: communication, cooperation, decision-making, goal-setting, respect for self and others, respect for rules and norms, timeliness, dependability, responsibility, and obedience. It has been found that teachers and peers and more likely to develop positive relationships with students with high social concept which has also been correlated with academic achievement. Furthermore, display of prosocial behaviors in the educational environment is conducive to learning. The literature regarding social concept development is not vast. Furthermore, much of the research focuses on early childhood; nevertheless, such studies provide valuable information pertinent to the foundation of citizenship, character, and academic achievement.
Social concept is largely influenced by parents or significant caregivers primarily, community and home environments, social interaction with peers, and the educational environment. However, it is important that the context of the individual remain a primary focus, as behaviors that are appropriate, meaningful, and strategic in one environment may not be applicable in a different environment. For African-American youth outside of mainstream America, knowledge of the competencies required for academic success is vital and they must be able to transfer and add to their current competencies.

Social Concept and Academic Achievement

Wentzel (1991a) reviewed the literature on social responsibility and academic achievement. Suggesting that social responsibility is integral in the acquisition of knowledge, this research asserts that social responsibilities (social concept) are a catalyst for achieving learning objectives by students. Relationships between student and peers, student and teachers and others provide motivational and incentive effects for academic achievement. Other outcomes of social responsibility include: following social rules and norms; establishing moral character and citizenship; improving the educational environment; and creating an atmosphere conducive to academic achievement.

Historically, the teaching of social responsibility (social concept) has been an objective of the educational system. Wentzel (1991a) references the Twelfth Annual Report on Education, written by Horace Mann in 1848, which identifies social concept as an objective of education. Wentzel cites similar education objectives in Adler’s Padeia Proposal written in 1982 and Boyer’s High School written one year later. Adler identifies promotion of personal growth, citizenship, non-specialized and non-vocational
skills while Boyer emphasizes similar concepts—critical thinking, culture and heritage, work preparation, social and civic education. Although teachers, students, and parents rank social competency with high importance, little time is spent in teaching such skills.

Wentzel's (1991a) review notes that there is a connection between parental attachment and home environment that is directly related to the inability of low achieving and minority students to transition expectations from home and community to classroom and school. Parenting techniques, level of family dysfunction, marital discord, and other family considerations correlate with negative social behavior.

Relationships are notes of significance in terms of social competence. Wentzel (1991a) notes that as students progress to higher grades, behaviors become more problematic requiring teachers to spend more time on classroom management. Peer relationships are noted to become more influential on student behavior as students become older. Negative peer relations lead to increased antisocial behaviors.

In keeping with expectations, Wentzel's (1991a) review of the literature reflects that social responsibility (competency) is significant in academic achievement. Wentzel cites several correlational studies linking academic outcomes with pro-social behavior, positive peer interaction, appropriate classroom conduct, and obedience as well as meta-
analysis of factors pertinent to socio-emotional development. Grade retention in elementary school is correlated with academic problems and classroom misconduct while academic failure in secondary schools is associated with classroom misconduct and other behavioral problems. Research indicated that social competencies, however, increases academic achievement and decrease behavioral inappropriateness.

From as early as the 1970s there has been research suggesting that pro-social behavioral have a positive influence on academic achievement. Wentzel (1991b) examined three aspects of social competency in relation to academic achievement: socially responsible behavior-cooperation, respect for others, and group participation while in adherence to social rules and expectations; peer relationships, and self-regulatory behaviors such as goal setting, interpersonal trust, and problem solving.

Socially responsible behaviors in the classroom are associated with transitioning children to adult responsibilities, work behavior and appropriate civic behavior. For example, children are taught to be punctual, obedient and dependable. Furthermore, socially responsible behaviors such as cooperative, pro-social and nonaggressive behavior were determined to be a significant factor in the quality of peer relationships that are also significant in academic achievement.

Peer relationships are significant in that positive peers serve not only as social resources but also as academic resources having a direct impact on achievement outcomes. For example, peers can serve as members in study groups, provide clarifications regarding assignments, and provide motivation to each other. Also, peers may provide a system of monitoring behaviors.
Self-regulatory behaviors such as interpersonal trust and problem solving have been associated with lawfulness, civic duty, morality, “positive” peer acceptance, and increased social competence. Utilizing a study sample of 423 sixth and seventh grade students and 11 teachers from a Midwestern working class community, Wentzel (1991b) concluded that socially responsible behaviors, peer relationships, and self-regulatory behaviors were significantly related to academic achievement as measured by grade point average (GPA).

Esposito (1999) investigated the relationship between school climate and academic and social development. An initial sample of 189 kindergarten students (80% African-American, 18% Hispanic, and 2% Caucasian), were followed throughout the second grade. The setting was urban and females headed 40% of the families. Slightly less than 60% of the parents were employed. Findings revealed several correlations as follows: parents perceived a relationship between school climate and academic competence in the first grade but not in kindergarten or second grade. Teacher/student relationship was found to be significant for academic competence. Overall, school climate and social development/skills were found to be either significant or approaching significance for cooperation, self-control, and assertiveness in kindergarten and first grade. For second grade, no relationship was evident between school climate and social development except for teachers/student relations and assertiveness.

Hawkins, Guo, Hill, Battin-Pearson, and Abbott (2001) did a follow-up study to the Seattle Social Development Intervention. Focusing on school bonding trajectories, they found changes in school bonding from ages of 13 to 18 and final level of school
bonding were significantly related to social and behavioral outcomes. School bonding serves as a protective factor against drop out, violence, delinquency, teen pregnancy, and substance abuse and dependence. Students who had been provided full interventions in grades 1-6 had higher school bonding at age 18 than students provided intervention in grades 5 and 6 only and than students who were not provided any intervention.

Zsolnai (2002) sought to determine the relationship between (a) social competence, learning motivation, and academic achievement and (b) to identify what components of social competence influence learning motivation and academic achievement. The sample consisted of 438 Hungarian children 12 and 16 years of age and in the 6th and 10th grades. Five basic personality factors were noted: energy or extraversion; friendliness or agreeableness; conscientiousness or impulse (internal) and attitude (external); emotional stability and openness and internal motivation, academic concept, and academic achievement increased with age. Regression analysis indicated that extraversion, friendliness, and openness have the largest impact on each other. Age did not significantly influence personality between the two groups. Learning played a stronger role than heredity in regards to conscientiousness, openness, cooperative and polite behaviors. Resistance to change may be accounted for by hereditary factors for emotional stability and extraversion. Internal and external control was not age significant. At both age groups, four to five attachments with significant others were noted. Attachments decreased with age and teachers were never mentioned as an attachment figure. Parental, peer, and teacher motivation were found to be stronger among the 12-year-old group than the 16-year-old group.
Summary

Regardless of ethnicity or race it is postulated that some relationship between social concept and academics does exist. The importance of a strong or positive social-concept is paramount to academic achievement and life success. Deficiency in social concept is related to addiction, decreased economic ability, family dysfunction, immorality, criminal behavior, and socially irresponsible behaviors, whereas positive social concept contributes to resiliency, esteem, coping skills, and reduced risk of psychopathology (Aronen & Kurkela, 1998). Social skills that are most relevant to academic success include: communication, cooperation, decision-making, goal setting, respect for self and others, respect and rules and norms, timeliness, dependability, responsibility, and obedience.

Parenting techniques, level of family dysfunction, marital discord, and other family considerations correlate with negative social behavior. Social concept is largely influenced by parents or significant caregivers primarily, community and home environments, social interaction with peers, and the education environment (Wentzel, 1991b).

Socially responsible behavior—cooperation, respect for others, and group participation while in adherence to social rules and expectations; peer relationships, and self-regulatory behaviors such as goal setting, interpersonal trust, and problem solving have been identified by Wentzel (1991b) as necessary for development of social concept.
Academic Concept

Lane, Pierson, and Givner (2004) identified social skills that middle and high school teachers believe to be necessary for student success within the educational setting. Lane and others sought to (a) examine the effect of teacher type (general or special education) on teacher perception of skills or critical for success, (b) explore the effects secondary level and program type (general vs. special education) on teacher perspectives regarding self control, cooperation, and assertions skills, and (c) examine the extent to which teacher characteristics predict teacher perceptions of hierarchy pertaining to cooperation, assertion, and self-control. Participants for this study included 240 secondary school teachers from Southern California.

Overall, middle school teachers identified six social skill competencies critical for success whereas high school teachers identified eight competencies. Five skills, appropriate response to aggression from peers; attention to instruction; controlled temper with peers; controlled temper with adults; and appropriate response to peer pressure were rated as critical by middle and high school teachers. General and special education teachers at both levels identified four common skills for success; appropriate response to aggression by peers; attention to instruction; controlled temper and compliance with instruction.

Comparison of secondary level teacher perspectives of students varied. Neither group rated assertion skills as critical for success; however, assertion was found to be of greater importance for middle school and general education teachers. Perspectives on self-control varied. General high school teachers rated self-control as more significant
than their special education counterparts. There was no difference between special education and general education teacher perspectives of self-control at the middle school level. General education teachers rated cooperation to be more important for success than special education teachers.

Further, Lane, Pierson, and Givner (2004) found that teacher characteristics were predictive of teacher perspective for assertion and cooperation skills but not for self-control. General education and middle school teachers rated assertion as critical success factor. General education teachers, non-credentialed teachers, and middle school teachers placed a high value on cooperation. Teacher characteristic was not associated with self-control as a predictor of student success.

Academic Concept and Academic Achievement

Valentine, Dubois, and Cooper (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of 55 longitudinal studies on self-beliefs and academic achievement. Their research identified faulty methodology, failure to account for intrusive factors and other errors confounding outcome data. Specific problems noted include but are not limited to: lack of clarity in regards to self-beliefs (self-concept, self-esteem, self-efficacy); failure to specify the dimension of self beliefs in relation to the variable(s) of interest; recruitment procedures (age of participants; academic ability of participants; gender of participants; socioeconomic [SES] of participants); and appropriate selection of statistical procedures accounting for changes in time. Nevertheless, meta-analysis revealed a positive statistical significance of .08 between concepts of self-belief and academic achievement. The significance is higher when domain specific beliefs are indicated such as academic
self-concept as a predictor of academic achievement as opposed to global esteem as a predictor of academic achievement. Valentine and colleagues indicate that such research is relevant particularly as there are some who argue that self beliefs are irrelevant and who would rather not invest educational resources on intervention programs targeting enhancing constructs of self to improve academic outcomes.

Marsh, Trautwein, Ldtke, Killer, and Baumert (2005) sought to determine if there were reciprocal effects between academic concept and academic achievement. Participants consisted of 5,649 seventh grade students in study 1 and 2, 264 seventh grade students in Study 2. The students were of German descent and included males and females. The study found substantial evidence that prior academic self-concept predicted academic achievement. Of even greater significance, this longitudinal study evidenced reciprocal effects between academic self-concept and academic achievement. A third closely related variable, student interest was not found to be significant in regards to academic achievement. Academic self-concept was more significant for school grades than for standardized test scores in terms of achievement.

Similar results of reciprocation were found by Silverman, Dubois, and Crombie (2005). Over a three-year period, 342 African American students, beginning in the 8th grade, participated in a longitudinal study that sought to determine the relationship between academic achievement and academic concept in the subjects of Math, English, and Science. Also, the researchers sought to determine the most appropriate model of measurement for examining trait and state components of the two concepts as previous research had been limited in this respect. Of particular interest, it was found that
established academic concept and academic achievement were significant during years of transition, for example from middle school to high school. Also, reciprocity, in keeping with previous research, was found to exist between self-perceptions of ability (academic concept) and academic achievement.

Summary

Middle and high school teachers identified five social skills that they believe are essential to student success. These skills are (a) appropriate response to aggression, (b) attention to instruction, (c) appropriate response to peer pressure, (d) controlled temper with peers, and (e) controlled temper with adults (Lane, Pierson, & Givner, 2004). A reciprocating effect has been found between academic concept and academic achievement and a significant positive relationship has been found between self-belief and academic achievement (Marsh et al., 2005; Silverman et al., 2005; Valentine, Dubois, & Cooper, 2004).

Self-Esteem and Academic Achievement in African-American Male Children

African-American male children have been an anomaly in the educational system. They are disproportionately placed in behavior disorder classes, learning disabled classes, alternative school placements and suffer high rates of high school dropout (Austin & Rolle, 1990). These factors further led to fatherless homes, female headed households, lack of male role models, unemployment and underemployment, and a continuation of poverty related problems which have shown to negatively impact academic achievement and hinder academic self-esteem in African-American communities.
Self-esteem in the African-American male child is the sum of his total perception of life events and his ability to effect substantive outcomes in various contexts ranging from physical to academic self. Although very little recent literature is available on self-esteem in African-American male children as it relates to academic achievement, several studies have been conducted over the past 15 years. Franklin (1982), Osborne (1995), Steele (1992), Taylor (1976), and others have conducted studies.

Taylor (1976) found that the general attitude of significant persons toward the black child is a most important factor in the development of self-esteem. Her findings are congruent with the reflective appraisal principle of Rosenberg and Pearlin (1978). Significant figures include those closest to the black child or who have major influence in his development. Parent, teachers, and other family members are critical sources of praise or criticism/punishment or negative reinforcement contributing to self-concept (Kunjufu, 1986). Taylor (1993) supports the notion of key persons influencing self-concept and academic achievement. In a study of self perception among a group of socio-economically at-risk students, Taylor found that these selected mentees identified mentors, and teachers and family members as being influential in their positive outcomes.

Family members, particularly parents are significant in the development of positive self esteem among African-American adolescents. Swenson and Prelow (2005) hypothesized two pathways. Pathway one asserted that supportive parenting was related to ethnic identity that in turn was related to perceived efficacy that in turn was negatively related to problematic behavior and depressive symptomology. Pathway two asserted that supportive parenting was related to self esteem which in turn was related to
perceived efficacy which in turn was negatively related to problematic behavior and depressive symptoms. The study compared pathways of supportive parenting between 133 and 110 African-American and European adolescents. Both pathways were only partially supported in European Americans. In terms of pathway comparison, for African Americans the first pathway was significant for depressive symptoms but was less significant for problem behaviors. Pathway two was partially supported for depressive symptoms and was not significant for behavioral problems. Data indicated that for African-American adolescents, supportive parenting was related to ethnic identity, efficacy and fewer problems of psychological adjustment. Furthermore, supportive parenting was positively related to self-esteem.

Bean, Bush, McKenry, and Wilson (2003) conducted a comparative study to examine the relationship between parenting styles and (a) self-esteem and (b) academic achievement. In their reviewing of research, prior to previous research concluded that high behavioral control, and low psychological control styles of parenting positively influenced self-esteem and academic achievement for European Americans. Previous research, however, aggregated the effects of parenting styles and failed to account for the differential impact of each parenting dimension. Furthermore, findings of previous research did not find that such relationships existed in regards to parenting styles and outcomes for African-American adolescents. Nevertheless, in their comparative study Bean and colleagues found differential impact of parenting styles and also found differences specific to the gender of each parent. Bean, Bush, McKenry and Wilson’s study (2003) included some 75 African-American adolescents and 80 European-
American Adolescents. Their findings are as follows. Academic achievement and self esteem were found to be significantly and positively related. All three maternal parenting dimensions were significant for self esteem and academic achievement for European-American adolescents. However, paternal significance for European Americans was noted for self-esteem at all three parenting dimensions and for academic achievement only at the behavioral control parenting dimension. There was no significant relationship between: paternal support and academic achievement/self esteem or paternal behavioral control and academic achievement/self-esteem for African-American participants. The same was found for maternal behavioral and psychological control and academic achievement/self-esteem for African-American adolescents. For African-American adolescents, significant positive relationships were found for maternal support and academic achievement, maternal support and self esteem, and paternal psychological control and self-esteem.

McBride, Brody, McNair, Lou, Gibbons, Gerrard, and Willis (2005) conducted experimental research and found a correlation between increased self-esteem, racial identity and sexual concept among children whose parents were provided the Strong African-American Families program curriculum. This curriculum targets four parenting processes: parental involvement with youth; parental articulation of expectations (values) regarding substance use to youth. This study included an experimental group of 182 and control group of 150 African-American, working poor families in rural Georgia counties. Each family had at least one child who was on average 11.2 years of age. Despite
impoverished conditions, parenting processes geared towards resiliency and strong values encouraged strong self-valuation among youth.

Greene and Way (2005) conducted an extensive longitudinal study in which they sought to examine the trajectory of self-esteem over time. Although several studies have been conducted with European-American youth, findings cannot necessarily be generalized to minority adolescents. Furthermore, studies of change in self-esteem have focused on the group rather than the individual. Also, the combined effects of family, peer, and school relationships had not been previously analyzed although identified by previous studies as significant.

This study was conducted over a four year period from 1996 – 2000 with 9th and 10th grade minority students from an urban Lower East Side New York school. Ninety percent of the students qualified for free lunch. Two hundred and five students participated and the racial break down was as follows: 24% black, 48% Latino, 18% Asian, and 10% bi-multiracial students.

Unexpectedly, school relations did not evidence the perceived effect on self esteem as expected; however, the researchers contribute this finding to the fact that some of the students graduated and their continued participation required retrospective responses in reference to questionnaire items measuring school environment significance on self-esteem. In general, findings indicated that over time self-esteem increased with age; gender was not relevant to self esteem; ethnicity was significant to self esteem; and the conjoint effects of family, peer and school relations were significant.
Of most salient interest for this author are findings of Greene and Way (2005) that related to black participants. Self-esteem was found to be highest among blacks initially and in general partially as a result of family and community relations, including peer group significance. In keeping with previous research, this study found that family/parental relationships were most significant in self-esteem.

In comparison of two black elementary schools, it found that teacher perception and methodology may be a barrier to self-esteem despite the inherent philosophy of the institution to create a positive and self-affirming environment. Tyson (2003) found that teachers, black and white, stifled the behaviors of black children in an effort to impose and produce mainstream behavior they perceived to be more indicative of future success. However, Tyson reveals that teachers seemed unaware of verbal comments intended to modify behavior but instead dealt blows to the esteem. For example, one teacher responded to a child’s behavior by telling him that “He would not make it to age 11. Someone is going to wipe the street” (p. 330) with him. While the other students “Would be something;” he “Would be out on the street corner somewhere like other homeless people” (p. 330). Although such statements were the exception, the need to impose strict rules of behavior for conformity sake and the negative attributions of black students in comparison to “others” were subliminal racially polarized messages effecting self-esteem.

**Summary**

Thus the literature pertaining to black male self esteem indicates that self-esteem is consistent although contextual/conceptual (Huitt, 2004). Secondly, self-esteem is
influenced by environmental factors, particularly the presence or absence of committed, supportive adults in an atmosphere allowing for developmental tasks to be achieved or not achieved (Swenson & Prelow, 2004). Furthermore, the literature indicates that high global self esteem developed from successes, praise and support shields one from developing negative concept when faced with failure (McBride, Brody, McNair, Lou, Gibbons, Gerrard, & Wills, 2005). Finally, it has been established that failure to focus on individual strengths, negative self reflective appraisal, and lack of a nurturing environment contribute to low self-esteem (Tyson, 2003).

Theoretical Framework

The anomaly of educating African-American male youth is the result of various factors ranging from social inequity, poverty, family structure and lack of community infrastructure at the macro level to negative student/teacher relations, school safety issues, inadequate classroom management, transportation, and discipline at the micro level. Furthermore, local, state and national political agenda often fail to assess academic issues and implement policy for advancing the education of students at highest risk. Finally, the African-American male student, whether he is high or low achiever, resilient or not resilient, must be able to successfully navigate the process of education.

The complexity of educating African-American males is systemic, multi-faceted and multi-directional. Hence the need for an eclectic approach to seek resolution which will take into account the complexity of socio-political agendas, economic agendas, and racial agendas as while also allowing for mental, physical, spiritual and social well being. Given this context, no one theory qualifies to analyze the problem(s) or offers
comprehensive solutions. Several theories and a perspective form the theoretical framework. Among them are the Afrocentric Perspective and Humanistic Values as defined by the Atlanta University School of Social Work (1971), Clark Atlanta University Whitney M. Young, Jr. School of Social Work (1988), Strength Based Perspective, and Ecological/System Theory and approach.

Afrocentric Perspective

The Afrocentric Perspective as developed and defined by the Atlanta University School of Social Work (1971), encompasses the history and culture of African Americans and can be utilized by other ethnic groups where their cultures are taken into consideration. This has been further emphasized by Asante. Molefi Kete Asante (1990) who describes the Afrocentric Perspective as a view from which African values, beliefs and customs are the center. Strategies and customs emphasize relative strengths rather than pathology, survival rather than oppression derived from pre and post slavery which have endured despite the hardships of African Americans are central to the Afrocentric perspective. It is a matter of self determination and self direction in the advancement of African Americans and the resolution of issues confronting the African-American point of view.

This point of view takes into account the environmental, historical, social and economic ramifications of African-American life in the resolve of education and other critical issues such as violence, integration, affirmative action and welfare reform. This point of view is one of truth which identifies with current and past genius and accomplishments of Africans and African Americans. Furthermore, the Afrocentric
perspective is humanitarian and places emphasis on the betterment of all people. “As such the Afrocentric Perspective is a framework that allows for use with people of other ethnic backgrounds when viewed in the context of their respective culture, history and adaptive patterns with enculturation in an oppressive . . . and stratified society . . .” (Ward & Downs, 2002, p. 15).

The view is that strengths of African Americans have evolved into recognizable behaviors and strategies which continue to serve them in their efforts toward development of a people (Ward & Mitchell, 1994) and resiliency attained as a result of enduring hardships and injustices throughout their history in America. The Afrocentric perspective recognizes the culture, history and conditions of black people. Hence, the meaning of events, experiences and behaviors must be viewed through their culture and history. When viewed in its full context, this perspective avoids defining or interpreting the behaviors, beliefs actions and other cultural manifestations by blacks with meanings in the tradition deficit model applied to all cultures (Ward & Downs, 2002).

Humanistic Value System

According to Ward and Downs (2002) adapted from Yabura (1971), the humanistic values in this belief system are:

Rooted in the fundamental and unqualified view that people are subjects of the world and not objects of the world. It is a view, which in essence, believes that people are capable and willing to influence their world both dialogically (in human communication exchange) and dialectically (in critically assessing objective reality). It is a view of people as subjects
who act upon and transform their world; and in so doing move toward ever new possibilities of a fuller and richer life individually and collectively. The world to which people are related is not a static and closed order, a given reality to which they must accept and adjust; rather, it is a problem to be worked on and solved. It is a view that people are not just a result of history (objects), and that people’s ontological vocation (life work) is to become ever more human (Ward, 2002, p. 14; Yubura, 1971).

A synopsis of humanistic values by Ward and Downs (2002) drawing upon Yubura (1971) are as follows:

1. Love (Agape) is essential to collective human development;
2. All people are created with equal ability potential;
3. Society is responsible for the satisfaction of basic human needs and society’s resources should be distributed as such;
4. There is value in the perceptions and life experience of everyone;
5. Confidentiality is an inherent right of everyone;
6. Everyone has the right to significantly influence and make decisions that affect their lives; and
7. Cooperation is a requisite for developing human communities. (Atlanta University School of Social Work, 1971)
**Strengths-Based Perspective: Major Framework**

Akin to the Afrocentric Perspective and the rationale for the Humanistic Value System, both of which are paradigm shifts from pathological deficit models, the Strength Based Perspective views individuals, families and communities from an asset enumerated as follows (Ward & Downs, 2002):

1. *Empowerment*—a means of assisting . . . individual youth, their families and aspects of specified communities . . . in discovering the resources and tools within areas around them.

2. *Resilience*—the skills, abilities, knowledge and insights that accumulate over time, a people struggle to surmount adversity and most challenges. Successes of youth against the odds sometimes among peers, in their families, at school, and in societal perceptions is a major focus for further growth in academic and social skills. Recognition of their cultural heritage and accomplishments of other in the midst of adversity incorporates the meaning of resilience. The parents/guardians perception of their accomplishment, family/community networks and strengths are other dimensions of emphasis.

3. *Membership*—suggests that people need to be citizens—responsible and valued members in a viable community. To be without membership is to be alienated and to be at risk of marginalization and oppression. In the context of the history of African Americans and other people of color, individuals and communities of these population groups have, and still, experience alienation from obstacles of society’s decision-making entities. However, meaningful
membership and leadership within their families, socio cultural groups, organizations including schools become salient for re-enforcement. (p. 16)

Overarching Connecting Theory Systems

Ecological Social Systems Theory explains individuals, families and small groups as subsystems connected to various other macro and mega systems and unifies the Afrocentric, humanistic, and strengths-based frameworks. The nature and quality of the interactions and transactions is significant to the growth and strengths of the youth. The conditions of all of the systems that interact and transact with each other lends to determining whether or not they are heuristic. The phenomena become significant in applying the strengths based perspective. Of prime concern is the quality of the youth as a system and other systems relative to (a) energy (capacity for action or power to effect change); (b) the synergy (ability to use and/or create energy); and (c) entropy (losing energy faster than energy is created (Ward & Downs, 2002).

Relevance of Theoretical Framework

In keeping with the theoretical framework, the social worker works from the strengths of the individual, family, school and community. In terms of the Afrocentric and strengths perspective, he or she expands current and creates new relationships and support for the school from the families served by: (a) identifying commonalities; (b) acknowledging values, beliefs, and customs of the population; (c) acknowledging and empathizing with the current status of the families; (d) praising their survival skills and resiliency; and (e) increasing their knowledge and awareness of the educational process (rights and options) in order that self-determination will be informed leading to enhanced
competence or academic achievement. With this informed and competent constituency, more impacting dialogue regarding community concerns in reference to school policy, commitment and overall progressive and pro-active involvement resulting in greater school support is expected. Parents are more empowered; their resiliency is acknowledged and appreciated, and they gain membership, responsibility and accountability in the educational process which is correlated with academic achievement. From the humanistic values perspective, the community becomes assumes dialogical and dialectical involvement. It (community-individuals, parents, families, businesses, faith organizations) becomes subjectively engaged in as opposed to objectively determined by the educational process.

When it comes to educating African-American males, the American educational system needs an overhaul. Black males have been maligned by this system. Afrocentric education, along with a significant reorientation of the American educational enterprise, seeks to respond to the African person’s psychological and cultural dislocation. By providing philosophical and theoretical guidelines and criteria that are centered in an African perception of reality and by placing the African-American male in his proper historical context and setting, Afrocentricity may be just the escape hatch, African-American males so desperately need to facilitate academic success and steal away from the cycle of mis-education and dislocation (Asante, 1991).

Individuals, families and small groups are connected to the mezzo and micro systems effecting youth, the systems/ecological theory. The social worker is in tune with the impact these systems have on students. Such organizations include the juvenile
justice system, mental health agencies, clinics, day care centers, recreational facilities, and the like. In this process of connections, the social worker's main objective is to build relationships and support from the community resources and to temper need with mandates as some involvement with these agencies, particularly schools is not always voluntary and non-compliance creates strain on the system. It is these different systems that interact in student lives that either positively or negatively impact academic achievement amongst African American males.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to determine if there is a correlation between levels of motivation, academic concept, social concept and academic achievement among selected African-American male students. The purpose of this study is also to determine are there differences in the levels of motivation, academic concept and social concept between the two groups.

This chapter presents the methods and procedures that were used to assess these relationships. The chapter is divided into the following sections: Research Questions, Instrumentation, Sample Population, Data Collection, Data Analysis, and a Summary including the Limitations of Study.

Research Design

A quantitative, correlation design was utilized for this study. Correlation designs determine if there is a statistically significant relationship between academic achievement and the three aforementioned dependent variables. Also, the researcher sought to determine if there are statistically significant relationships among the dependent variables. Correlation research allows for the researcher to describe existing relationships between variables and is a type of descriptive research because it describes and examines existing relationships between variables as well as allows the researcher to investigate the
degree of the relationship between the variables (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). When studying the exact degree of the relationship between two or more variables a correlation coefficient should be used (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1993). Two groups of African-American male students were selected for inclusion in this study. One group consisted of 10th grade male students who possessed a grade point average of 3.0 and above and were enrolled in one or more honors classes, or one or more advanced placement classes. The other group included 10th grade male students who possessed a grade point average of 2.0 or below and were enrolled in general high school curriculum. A survey was administered to students that measured their levels of motivation, academic concept, and social concept.

The second phase of the study was qualitative. It attempted to clarify understanding and supplement findings presented in the quantitative portion of the study. This component of the study looked at African-American males who achieved academically and those who did not. The findings were taken from focus groups between the two groups.

Description of the Site

The population for this study was drawn from the urban Fulton County, Georgia high school with the following demographics for the previous six semesters—academic years 2002-2003, 2003-2004, and 2004-2005. Enrollment averaged 1,293 students with an approximate ethnic/racial breakdown of 96% African-American students, 1% Asian students, 1% Hispanic students, 1% white students, and 1% multiracial students. Students with disabilities comprised 16% of the student population while .33% of students were not proficient in English. Almost half (49%) of students indicated
eligibility for free or reduced meals. Over the past three years the average composite SAT score has been 802 for males and 805 for females. The average composite SAT score for the school over the past six semesters was 803 compared to 1,054 system wide, 983 statewide and 1,018 nationally, while the average composite ACT score was 16.1 compared to 21.3 system-wide, 19.9 statewide, and 20.9 nationally.

Data for the 2004-2005 academic year indicated that compensatory program enrollment comprised 17.2%, 1.3%, and 17.6% in Special Education, English to Speakers of Other Languages, and Remedial Education. On the other hand, 3.5%, 43.9%, and 0.3% of students were enrolled in the Talented and Gifted, Vocational Labs, and Alternative Programs for the same year, 2004-2005. A total of 1,338 students were enrolled at the school during the 2004-2005 academic year. Of the 179 graduates, approximately 41.9% or 75 students were eligible for HOPE scholarships.

Sample and Population

The sample was purposeful in the selection as respondents were chosen from one Fulton County, Georgia high school. Ninety or more African-American male students, 10th graders between the ages 16 and 17 were solicited to participate in the study. The 10th grade counselors were asked to provide the names of all tenth grade male students, and to assist in getting the students to the auditorium for completion of the survey.

Instrumentation

Participants were assessed on three independent variables: levels of motivation, social concept, and academic concept. The Multidimensional Self-Concept Scale which has a coefficient alpha of .90 and reliability score in excess of .97 was used to assess
social and academic concepts. The Achievement Motivation Profile (AMP) will be utilized to assess student motivation. The estimated test/retest reliabilities for the AMP scale scores range from .61 to .89 (median .83). They are well within acceptable psychometric limits (Nunnally, 1978). The Achievement Motivation Profile is designed to measure a student’s motivation to achieve and related personality characteristics (Nunnally, 1978).

Treatment of Data

The surveys were administered by the writer and another Master level social worker. Prior to having students complete the questionnaires, written permission was obtained from their parent/guardian and students were provided an explanation of the purpose for their participation and debriefed following completion of the survey. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the school principal. Approval of the survey instrument was sought from the Clark Atlanta University Office of Graduate Studies and Human Subject Review Board.

Analysis of the data was conducted utilizing the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Specifically, SPSS was used to determine (a) if there is a relationship between and among the variables and (b) the strength of the relationships between and among the variables.

An explanatory research design was utilized. Explanatory designs determine if there is a statistically significant relationship between the independent variable and dependent variable. Also, the researcher sought to determine if there were statistically significant relationships among the independent variables. Correlational designs
determine if there is a statistically significant relationship among the independent and dependent variables. Correlational research allows for the researcher to describe existing relationships between variables and is a type of descriptive research because it describes and examines existing relationships between variables as well as allows the researcher to investigate the degree of the relationship between the variable Fraenkel and Wallen (2000). When studying the exact degree of the relationship between two or more variables a correlation coefficient should be used (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1993). A Multiple Regression and a Pearson $r$ were utilized to determine the strength of association of the independent variables on the dependent variable. Also, an independent t-test was utilized to look for differences between the two groups of students in terms of motivation, academic concept and social concept.

**Limitations of the Study**

The limitations of this study are enumerated below.

1. One perceived limitation of this study is that no control group is used, as the experimenter, it cannot be assume that the change between the pre-intervention and the post intervention is brought about by the experiment treatment or independent variable. There is always the possibility that some extraneous variables account for all or part of the change. Therefore, this research study may lack internal validity.

2. A second perceived limitation of this study that may come into play is history. The researcher has no way of controlling outside events or forces that may impact academic achievement. For example, illness or family
problems could impact academic achievement as well as the implementation of new programs system wide.

3. A third perceived limitation of this study is that it is impossible to determine causality. The performance can not really be attributed to the independent variable or treatment. There could possibly be multiple variables that may be a factor.

4. Socioeconomic factors may have bearing on the participants.
CHAPTER IV
PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The objective of this study was to determine if a relationship exist between the independent variable academic concept, social concept, and levels of motivation and the dependent variable academic achievement for African American male teens between the ages of 16–17 who were enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP) courses versus General educational courses. This chapter presents an analysis of data obtained from 91 African-American students enrolled in either AP courses or general educational courses. Forty-five students were enrolled in AP courses and 46 students were enrolled in general educational courses. These students attended a suburban Georgia High School.

Data were collected via survey. The academic concept and social concept subscales of the Multidimensional Self-Concept Scale and Motivation for Achievement subscale of the Achievement Motivation Profile were administered to participants. Academic achievement, defined as GPA, served as the dependant variable.

The aforementioned subscales of the Multidimensional Self-Concept Scale each consists of 25 questions with a Likert scale and numerical scoring as following: 4 = strongly agree, 3 = agree, 2 = disagree, and 1 = strongly disagree for positively stated items. Negative items in the survey were reversed scored as follows: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = disagree, and 4 = strongly disagree. The Motivation for Achievement scale consisted of 11 questions with a Likert scale and numerical scoring: 1 = always true,
2 = mostly true, 3 = sometimes true and sometimes false, 4 = mostly false, and 5 = always false, for positively stated items. Negative items in the survey were reversed scored as follows: 5 = always true, 4 = mostly true, 3 = sometimes true and sometimes false, 2 = mostly false, and 1 = always false.

To summarize and analyze the data collected in this study, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used. Statistical procedures used for the analysis include frequency distribution, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression tested at the .05 level of significance. Demographic data, results, and analysis of the statistical test in relation to the six research questions are presented. The research questions are:

RQ1: Is there a statistically significant difference in motivation between academic achieving and academic nonachieving students?

RQ2: Is there a statistically significant difference in academic concept between academic achieving and academic nonachieving students?

RQ3: Is there a statistically significant difference in social concept between academic achieving and academic nonachieving students?

RQ4: Is there a statistically significant relationship between motivation and academic achievement?

RQ5: Is there a statistically significant relationship between academic concept and academic achievement?

RQ6: Is there a statistically significant relationship between social concept and academic achievement?
Demographic Data

A statistical analysis of the responses of 91 African-American male students is provided in this chapter. Results of frequency distributions, Pearson $r$ correlation, and multiple regression tested at the .05 level of significance are provided.

Table 2 presents descriptive analysis of participant age, grade level, grade point average, grade level, number of students in AP courses and the number of students in General Educational courses.

Table 2

*Participants' Age, Grade level, GPA, Number of Students in AP and General Education Courses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>63.00</td>
<td>95.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP Students</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-AP Students</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Questions and Hypothesis

RQ1: Is there a statistically significant difference in motivation between academic achieving and academic nonachieving students?

Research Question 1 was addressed by testing the following null hypothesis:
H₀₁: There is no statistically significant difference in motivation between academic achieving and academic nonachieving students.

A t-test was used to determine if there was a difference in the level of motivation between academic achieving and academic non-achieving students. The results of the t-test as shown in Table 2 indicate a p value of .000 which is significant at the .05 level. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected.

RQ₂: Is there a statistically significant difference in academic concept between academic achieving and academic nonachieving students?

Research Question 2 was addressed by the following null hypothesis:

H₀₂: There is no statistically significant difference in the level of academic concept between academic achieving and academic nonachieving students.

A t-test was used to determine if there was a difference in the level of academic concept between academic achieving and academic non-achieving students. The results of the t-test as shown in Table 3 indicate a p value of .000 which is significant at the .05 level. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Samples Test</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation (MOT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Concept (AC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade Point Average (GPA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Concept (SC)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RQ3: Is there a statistically significant difference in social concept between academic achieving and academic nonachieving students?

Research Question 3 was addressed by the following null hypothesis:

\[ H_03: \text{There is no statistically significant difference in the level of concept between academic achieving and academic nonachieving students.} \]

A t-test was used to determine if there was a difference in the level of social concept between academic achieving and academic nonachieving students. The results of the t-test as shown in Table 3 indicate a p value of .144 which is not significant at the .05 level. Thus, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Pearson r Findings

RQ4: Is there a statistically significant relationship between academic concept and academic achievement?

Research question four was addressed by the following null hypothesis:

\[ H_04: \text{There is no statistically significant relationship between academic concept and academic achievement.} \]

A Pearson Correlation was used to determine if there was a correlation between the independent variable academic concept and academic achievement. The results of the Pearson Correlation as shown in Table 4 indicate a Pearson r score of .643 significant at the .01 level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected.
Table 4

*Pearson r: Correlation of Variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Academic Achievement</th>
<th>Academic Motivation</th>
<th>Academic Concept</th>
<th>Social Concept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Achievement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.622**</td>
<td>.643**</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
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<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.622**</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.383**</td>
<td>.139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.190</td>
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<td>N</td>
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<td>91</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Concept</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.643**</td>
<td>.622**</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RQ5: Is there statistically significant relationship between motivation and academic achievement?

Research Question 5 was addressed by the following null hypothesis:

\[ H_0^5: \text{There is no statistically significant relationship between motivation and academic achievement.} \]
A Pearson Correlation was used to determine if there was a correlation between motivation and academic achievement. The results of the Pearson Correlation as shown in Table 4 indicates that motivation and academic achievement have a significant level of correlation as the Pearson \( r \) score of .662 is significant at the .01 level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected.

RQ6: Is there a statistically significant relationship between social concept and academic achievement?

Research Question 6 was addressed by the following null hypothesis:

\[ H_06: \text{There is no statistically significant relationship between social concept and academic achievement.} \]

**Summary of Pearson r**

In summation, there is a statistically significant correlation between the following variables: academic concept and academic achievement and motivation and academic achievement. There is no statistically significant correlation between: academic achievement and social concept.

**Regression Analysis Findings**

A series of regression analyses were completed to determine the effect of the individual variables on the dependent variable. Multiple regression allows for the variation in the dependent variable academic achievement to be explained or predicted by the independent variables academic concept, motivation, and social concept. The results of the regression analysis are in Table 5.
Table 5

Regression Analysis (Stepwise)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model 1t</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R Square</th>
<th>Adjusted R Square</th>
<th>Std. Error of the Estimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>.643</td>
<td>.414</td>
<td>.407</td>
<td>6.6812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>.761</td>
<td>.579</td>
<td>.570</td>
<td>5.6907</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Predictors: Intercept, Academic Concept
b. Predictors: Intercept, Academic Concept, motivation

table

ANOVA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>2801.781</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>448.281</td>
<td>14.201</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>3972.835</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>31.567</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6774.615</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>3924.820</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>299.616</td>
<td>10.130</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>2849.795</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>29.577</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6774.615</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Predictors: Intercept, Academic Concept
b. Predictors: Intercept, Academic Concept, motivation
c. Dependent Variable: Academic Achievement
Table 5 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Unstandardized</th>
<th>Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>Beta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Intercept</td>
<td>27.929</td>
<td>6.677</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>.657</td>
<td>.083</td>
<td>.643</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Intercept</td>
<td>12.615</td>
<td>6.254</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>.485</td>
<td>.077</td>
<td>.474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>.680</td>
<td>.115</td>
<td>.441</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dependent Variable: Academic Achievement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model 4</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>T Value</th>
<th>Sign T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Concept</td>
<td>.474</td>
<td>6.335</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>.441</td>
<td>5.889</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Concept</td>
<td>-.011</td>
<td>-.156</td>
<td>.877</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 5 the model summary provides the R square values of the independent values. R square values indicate the proportion of variance accounted for by the combination of the variables. The variables are regressed beginning with the intercept or constant and academic concept followed by addition of the independent variables motivation, and, finally, social concept is added. The variation increases with each regression as follows: .414, and .579. In essence these variables account for 57.9% of
the variance on the dependent variable, grade point average, leaving 42.1% of the variance accounted for by other variables not identified in this study.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) indicates F-values as follows: academic concept (.474) and motivation (.441). Each is significant at the .05 level. However a negative relationship was found to exist between social concept and academic achievement.

The results of the regression analysis indicated that academic concept and motivation, with Beta coefficients of .643 and .296 respectively, tend to explain or have the strongest effect on grade point average. Independent variable, social concept, with a Beta coefficient -.303 does not have a strong effect academic achievement.

*Summary of Regression Analysis*

The independent variables academic concept and motivation account for 91% of the grade point average variance. These dependent variables were found to significantly correlate with academic achievement at the .05 level of significance per their respective F-values: academic concept (Beta .474) and motivation (Beta .441) were noted to have the first and second strongest association with academic achievement.

*Focus Group Findings*

To determine a more concise explanation of the effect of the independent variables: motivation, academic concept, and social concept on the dependent variable, academic achievement, a voluntary focus group was conducted with ten students. The sample included five students that were identified as AP students with a GPA of 3.0 or higher and five students as non AP with a GPA of 2.0 or lower. The students were asked about their thoughts and experiences on the following issues: (a) what helped students do
well, (b) why students did not do well, (c) who is supportive of academics, (d) what it takes to be successful?

*What Helped Students Do Well*

Advanced Placement (AP) students and non-AP students generally disagreed on this subject. AP students stated that hard work and determination was the reason for their academic success. They also commented that having good study habits, seeking help from teachers, and focusing was also key to their academic achievement. Non-AP students stated that doing the work and easier work was a route for academic achievement. They also replied that academic achievement was not a requirement to becoming successful in life.

*Why Students Did Not Do Well*

The two most common explanations for AP students, were the need to study more and problems with teachers. Other themes mentioned by the AP students were that they did not like their classes, lacked motivation for a particular class, were bored or the work was too easy and therefore they had trouble staying awake. These comments suggest that some AP students were not being fully challenged. The non-AP students stated that they did not understand the material or the classes were too hard and therefore they gave up on trying to succeed. Some stated that they did not pay attention or were negatively influence by their friends. Non-AP students also commented that they had low motivation because they had a negative view of school.
Who Is Supportive of Academics

The students were asked to name the people who were supportive of their academic work. The average response was the same for both groups. AP and non-AP students mentioned that their mother provided them with support but only the AP students stated that teachers also provided them with support.

What It Takes to Be A Successful Student

The most common answer overall was hard work. AP students said hard work was necessary for success and non-AP students said doing assignments was necessary for success. These sentiments reflect the different pictures of the path to academic success help by both groups. AP students emphasized self regulation, including studying, dedication, determination, doing the best one can, focusing, prioritizing, having motivation to succeed and having a positive view of school. Non-AP students mentioned behaviors that might be considered minimal requirements for academic achievement, such as doing assignments, liking your teacher and going to class.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of chapters one through five. Relative to each research question, findings and conclusions are provided. The theoretical framework is provided as a reference point to better understand focus groups responses. Implications are presented based upon study outcomes.

Summary of the Study

The variables associated with the academic success or failure of African-American males are varied and complex. An educational common ground for many of these youth is their attitudes or their initial desire to achieve academically. Thus, this study sought to determine the relevancy among academic concept, social concept, and levels of personal motivation on academic achievement. As hypothesized, the data indicated a relationship among the aforementioned variables.

Six research questions were examined to determine the relationships among the variables. An explanatory research design was utilized. Explanatory designs determine if there is statistically significant relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Also, the researcher sought to determine if there were statistically significant relationships among independent variables. A Pearson $r$ and a regression analysis were
used to determine the strength of association of the independent variables on the
dependent variable. Also, an independent t-test was utilized to look for the differences
between the two groups of students in terms of motivation, social concept, and academic
concept.

Summary of Findings

The research questions under study were as follows:

RQ1: Is there a statistical significant difference in motivation between academic
achieving and academic nonachieving students?

Research Question 1 was addressed by testing the following null hypothesis:

\[ H_01: \text{There is no statistical significant difference in motivation between }
\text{academic achieving and academic nonachieving students.} \]

A t-test was used to determine if there was a difference in the level of motivation
between academic achieving and academic nonachieving students. The results of the t-
test indicate a p value of .000 which is significant at the .05 level. Thus, the null
hypothesis is rejected.

RQ2: Is there a statistical significant difference in academic concept between
academic achieving and academic nonachieving students?

Research Question 2 was addressed by testing the following null hypothesis.

\[ H_02: \text{There is no statistical significant difference in the level of academic }
\text{concept between academic achieving and academic nonachieving students.} \]
A t-test was used to determine if there was a difference in the level of academic concept between academic achieving and academic nonachieving students. The results of the t-test indicate a p value of .000 which is significant at the .05 level. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected.

RQ3: Is there a statistical significant difference in social concept between academic achieving and academic nonachieving students?

Research Question 3 was addressed by the following null hypothesis:

\[ H_0^3: \text{There is no statistical significant difference in the level of social concept between academic achieving and academic nonachieving students.} \]

A t-test was used to determine if there was a difference in the level of social concept between academic achieving and academic nonachieving students. The results of the t-test indicated p value of .145 which is not significant at the .05 level. Thus the null hypothesis is accepted.

\textit{Summary of T-test}

In summation, there is a significance difference in the level of the independent variables between academic achieving and academic non-achieving students. Motivation and academic concept was found to have a significance difference between the two groups. There was no significant difference between the two groups for social concept.

RQ4: Is there a statistical significant relationship between motivation and academic achievement?

Research Question 4 was addressed by the following null hypothesis.
H₀₄: There is no statistical significant relationship between motivation and academic achievement.

A Pearson Correlation was used to determine if there was a correlation between the independent variable motivation and academic achievement. The results of the Pearson Correlation indicated a Pearson $r$ score of .662 significant at the .01 level of significance. Thus the null hypothesis is rejected.

RQ₅: Is there a statistical significant relationship between academic concept and academic achievement?

Research Question 5 was addressed by the following null hypothesis.

H₀₅: There is no statistical significant relationship between academic concept and academic achievement.

A Pearson Correlation was used to determine if there was a correlation between the independent variable academic concept and academic achievement. The results of the Pearson Correlation indicated a Pearson $r$ score of .643 significant at the .01 level of significance. Thus the null hypothesis is rejected.

RQ₆: Is there a statistical significant relationship between social concept and academic achievement?

Research Question 6 was addressed by the following null hypothesis:

H₀₆: There is no statistical significant relationship between social concept and academic achievement.
Summary of Pearson $r$

In summation, there is a statistically significant correlation between the following variables: motivation and academic achievement and academic concept and academic achievement. There is no statistically significant correlation between academic achievement and social concept.

Regression Analysis Findings

According to the regression analysis (Table 4, Chapter 5), the independent variables accounted for 57.9% of the academic achievement variance, leaving 42.1% of the variance accounted for by other variables not identified in the study. Although all the dependent variables were found to be significant with academic achievement at the .05 level of significance per their respective $F$-values, academic concept (Beta .474) and motivation (Beta .441) were noted to have the first and second strongest associations with academic achievement. Independent variable, social concept with a Beta -.303, was found to have a negative relationship with academic achievement. Social concept (Beta -.303) was found to negatively correlate with academic achievement.

Summary of Qualitative Data

To ascertain a better understanding of the relationship between motivation, academic concept, and social concept, qualitative data were obtained from the focus group. Advanced Placement (AP) and non-AP students had different views on what it takes to be academically successful. AP students knew they needed to apply themselves to their studies, focus their attention on school assignments, and manage their time in order to maintain good grades. They also seemed to be more critical of their own levels
of performance, saying they needed to work harder. They saw academic achievement as within reach if they put forth effort and they were willing to make good grades a primary goal. Thus, AP students displayed the concrete perceptions that are predictive of academic success (Mickelson, 1990). AP students also recognized the need for determination and good study habits. They named lack of motivation, negative view on a particular subject of school and boredom as reasons behind poor grades.

Non-AP students had fewer notions of what is necessary for academic success. They did not seem concerned about their low academic achievement. Many stated that they could do the work if they put forth the effort. When asked why they did not put forth effort, they stated that they were too far behind, unmotivated and school was boring. It also appeared that non-AP students were disconnecting from school due to their low academic achievement. Some students stated that they had a negative view towards school because of negative experiences during their academic career.

Literature Review Revisited

Summation from the literature affirms that motivation and academic concept is found to have significant differences between achieving and non-achieving students and is correlated with academic achievement. Social Concept was not found to have significant differences between achieving and non achieving students and was correlated with academic achievement.

Motivation

Academic motivation is defined as (a) academic drive, (b) attitudes toward school and learning, and (c) enthusiasm for academic achievement. Academic drive involves
measuring items such as work habits and scholastic expectation. Attitudes toward school and learning, involves student’s opinions of the classroom environment and self efficacy in learning (Entwistle, 1968). Finally, enthusiasm for academic achievement involves the degree to which students possessed certain specific behavioral characteristics related to motivation (Hwang, et al., 2002).

Also, in the literature, motivation is referred to as academic engagement, which refers to cognitive, emotional and behavioral indicators of student investment in and attachment to education (Tucker, Zayco, & Herman, 2002). It is obvious that students who are not motivated to succeed will not work hard. In fact, several researchers have suggested that only motivation directly effects academic achievement; all other factors affect achievement only through their effect on motivation (Tucker et al., 2002).

**Academic Concept**

The literature also affirms the correlation between academic concept and academic achievement. Marsh, Trautwein, Ldtke, Killer, and Baumert (2005) sought to determine if there were reciprocal effects between academic concept and academic achievement. Participants consisted of 5,649 seventh grade students in study 1 and 2,264 seventh grade students in study 2. The study found substantial evidence that prior academic self concept predicted academic achievement. A third closely related variable, student interest was not found to be significant in regards to academic achievement. Academic self-concept was more significant for school grades than for standardized test scores in terms of achievement.
Similar results of reciprocation were found by Silverman, Dubois, and Crombie (2005). Over a three-year period, 342 African American students, participated in a longitudinal study that sought to determine the relationship between academic achievement and academic concept in the subjects of math, English, and science. It was found that established academic concept and academic achievement were significant during years of transition, for example from middle school to high school.

**Social Concept**

Social concept was found to negatively correlate with academic achievement. This finding was most surprising initially; however, upon revisiting the definition of academic achievement, having a grade point average of 3.0 or above, the researcher realized that this definition is not only limited but linear and fails to take into account the holistic learning style of African-American males.

First of all the definition is limited in that failure to attain a 3.0 grade point average does not necessarily indicate that one does not know, does not comprehend or cannot apply the knowledge. Secondly, many African-American male students disassociate with academic achievement because as stated by Ogbu (2003) it is not popular to be smart and it is often perceived by their peers as acting white. Finally, the cognitive process of many African-American males is not heuristic with the objective grading and teaching style of the classroom instructor.

African-American males are rhythmic, expressive and active learners. The negative correlation with academic achievement could be due to the stifling of his rhythmic, expressive, and active learning style by the “normalcy” of lecture, note taking,
and objective testing beginning at or about third or fourth grade. He then becomes alienated, marginalized, or displaced academically and fails to attain the level of academic achievement noted during the initial years of elementary education. Thus to ascertain a better understanding of the relationship between social concept and academic achievement would require a less objective process of defining academic achievement and identification/development of an appropriate scale of measurement.

Implications for Further Study

The implications of this study indicate a need for researchers to further investigate what factors lend to significance to the 42.1% of academic achievement that goes unexplained by the variables in this study. This study did not account for socioeconomic factors such as parental education, parental employment, household income, and number of parents in the home. Also, student attachment to the school, teacher student perception of each other, teacher experience, and leadership style of the principal may all be potential variables effecting student motivation, academic concept, social concept, and academic achievement.

Recommendations for School Social Work Practice

The person of expertise concerning growth and development and the effect that social issues and systemic barriers have on academic achievement is the school social worker. Ultimately the implication for policy makers and practitioners is to have a better understanding of the social workers various roles and how to best utilize the social worker to effectively serve students and create reciprocal relationship of support between
the school and the community rather than expecting the role of truancy officer to be primary.

While school systems and the United States government implement new reform initiatives, new curriculums and creative pedagogy, the achievement gap continues to increase between white and blacks. Americans must then ask themselves, “Why aren’t children achieving?” The answer to that perplexing question can only lie within the student and teacher, for poverty and race can no longer be used as the sole predictor for low academic achievement. It is apparent that most teachers are diligent in teaching the school curriculum, but students continue to have limited success. This researcher believes that students are not achieving and have poor attendance because they are not motivated and experiencing nihilism. They also have a negative academic concept which leads to students dropping out of school. Therefore, the key to educating our children is to raise expectations, improve self esteem and levels of motivations. This process will entail changing the culture of schools which is a role that school social workers could be utilized.

More often students who feel they have no place in school or suffering academically may disengage psychologically and often physically. The result is lower academic achievement and higher drop out rates. Schools with positive school cultures have higher academic achievement levels.

Social Workers can improve school culture by advocating for policies that promote rather than detract from the personal and educational development of students. They can do this by conducting in-service training of teachers and administrators to teach
them basic communication skills and methods of affirming student’s importance and providing encouragement to them. Social Workers can also help develop a positive school culture by sponsoring and conducting awards programs for academic achievement and good attendance. Many schools have incentives in place but unfortunately they are set up to honor only those students who are high in a given area. If incentives are to positively influence the culture, they should have an impact on a wide variety of students. Social Worker can reach out to those students at risk and provide them with incentives for effort and improvement.

Other direct interventions that can be implemented by school social workers include study skills groups, time management training and achievement motivation groups for students at risk. Research supports what educators have long understood: parent involvement is an important factor in student achievement (Brown, 1999). Parents who have a high level of commitment to their children, set high standards, maintain a stable home environment, support achievement and monitor their students’ progress, continuously have children who do better in school. But parents who accept the absolute authority of the teacher, maintain homes in poor and dangerous neighborhoods, have children who achieve at a lower level than other students. School social workers can involve parents thru consultation, parent education classes that teach parents how to support their children in schools as well as parenting skills, and by advocating for parents and students when students are not treated fairly by the educational establishment.

Furthermore, the school social worker must advocate for programs and resources that have a positive effect on student outcomes. As an advocate of these programs, the
social worker becomes a community liaison in his or her efforts to bring the support of community business, faith organizations, homes and families, and service agencies into the school to support and address the needs of students’ and families. Social workers also must become a coordinator and the developer of programs while also a proposal writer to secure funding for new and existing programs to promote youth development.

Finally, the school social worker is a researcher a provider of data. He or she must also report to his or her constituents at the state, central and building level problems identified, partnerships developed, funding opportunities and effect of interventions on the student at the macro, mezzo and micro levels. Schools reform from the outside in and only school social workers have the expertise of reforming surrounding communities which entail will mobilize to reform its schools.
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