

AN ANALYSIS OF THE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE ACHIEVEMENT AMONG
AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS

A Dissertation

by

TIFFANY OLIPHANT JACKSON

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2007

Major Subject: Educational Psychology

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ABSTRACT

An Analysis of the Factors That Influence Achievement Among African-American Students. (December 2007)

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The landmark case, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, ended segregation in public schools—changing the educational system in the United States forever.

With the educational system constantly changing and incorporating new laws such as No Child Left Behind, African-American students struggle to achieve excellence. Many question if our educational system is truly failing our African-American students--contradicting the No Child Left Behind Act as many African-American students are left behind with no way of catching up.

The Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) report produced by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) indicated that African-American students scored lower than other ethnicities on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test, the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), and the American College Test (ACT). The lack of

achievement by African-American students could possibly change if they were treated equally and if quality educational opportunities were present through instruction.

The school system is key in building, as well as lowering the self-image of students. According to Kuykendall (1989), approximately 80% of African-American students have a positive image of oneself when they enter school, 20% still have this image by the time they reach fifth grade, but only 5% have a positive perception of themselves by their senior year in high school.

The qualitative case study method was exercised in this study because it allowed the researcher to build a holistic picture of the phenomenon being studied. The participants in this study were four African-American students that have continuously excelled throughout their academic years. The primary instrument for this study was the human form.

Emergent themes surfaced throughout the study. The themes included (I) Fear of being perceived as acting white, (II) More African-American educators are needed to act as role models, (III) Teachers' attitudes affect achievement, and (IV) Parental involvement is key.

This research provides framework that is essential for African-American students, parents, and educators. It serves as a survival guide to ensure that all African-American children have the opportunity to be successful.

DEDICATION

This piece of work is dedicated to:

Austin Ryan Jackson

You are the light of my life. You were my strength throughout this entire process.
I love you dearly.

and

Jeffrey Jackson

Your love and support has been my constant guide.

and

Robert & Gladys Oliphant

I am who I am because of you. Thanks for teaching me to believe in myself.

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I must first give thanks to God, who is the head of my life. Without Him, this journey would not be possible. Proverbs 3:5-7 was my guide. It says, “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths.”

To my beautiful son, Austin Ryan Jackson, you have been my strength throughout this entire process. During difficult times, it was your face that I looked to for comfort. Those big, bright, brown eyes gave me the strength I needed to move forward. I love you so much.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

All children are entitled to the best education possible. Educators are responsible for preparing students to become critical thinkers, life-long learners, and to face life's many challenges so that they will be successful, productive citizens. Many students desire to be successful, but there are many road blocks that barricade them from obtaining this goal. Of all ethnicities, African-American students struggle most. The purpose of this study is to examine why some African-American students are more successful than others and what factors play a role in their achievement.

The study will focus on the following objectives:

- A. To determine what factors influence the academic achievement of African-American students.
- B. To investigate the role parents, teachers, and peers play in the achievement of African-American students.
- C. To establish strategies that prove effective in motivating African-American students.

Statement of the Problem

The landmark case, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* was the catalyst for drastic changes in the educational system in the United States (Gardner, 2001). The ending result was desegregation of public schools. This case opened the door for African-American achievement, but still today, many students are not performing to

This dissertation follows the style of *The Journal of Negro Education*.

their highest potential. The essential key to success for African-American students is to possess a formal education. Educational excellence, equality, and equity are linked to classroom instruction. African-American students have experienced damaging effects because of the lack of equity in the classroom. Their educational goals can not be obtained without advocates for excellence and equity.

According to the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) report produced by the Texas Education Agency (TEA), African-American students scored lower than other ethnicities in all testing areas of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test, the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), and the American College Test (ACT). Testing areas of the TAKS test include: Reading/English language arts, math, writing, science, and social studies. In seven of the nine grade levels tested, African-Americans scored lower than 70% on one or more areas of the test. Overall, only 82% of the African-American students in the state of Texas met the 2006 Standard for the Reading/English language arts test, 61% in mathematics, 89% in writing, 54% in science, and 81% in social studies. The 2006 TAKS Exit-level cumulative pass rate for African-Americans was 78%, which is significantly lower than all ethnicities as well as the state. The mean SAT score was 855 and the mean ACT score was 17.0. Both scores were lower than all ethnicities and the state of Texas (Texas Education Agency).

Teachers should regard two things when instructing African-American children. The first is that “change is good.” Although our society is constantly changing, teachers often resist change. Teachers enjoy doing what has worked in the past in their classroom

forgetting that there has been a drastic change over the years. The change includes a vast amount of African-American students. Also, “Those who dare to teach must never cease to learn,” penned by Anderson. Teachers must be open to new ideas and concepts to enhance instruction in the classroom. Educators should also address their instructional process to enhance the learning of African-American children (Young, 2005).

A vast majority of literature focusing on African-American children usually focuses on issues such as economic despair, poverty, poor health, crime, violence, and inadequate education. Middle class African-Americans are exempt from some of these issues, but without appropriate support and intervention, the success of these students could be jeopardized. The middle class African-American family formed due to the Civil Rights Movement. Ford (1997) described the black middle class as a diverse population encompassing individuals who vary in class standing from lower middle and upper middle to the elite social strata.

Minorities that engage in behavior that are perceived to be characteristic of a white person are labeled as “acting white.” When psychologist Angela Neal-Barnett asked students to identify behavior that was known as “acting white,” students stated, “Speaking standard English, enrolling in an Advanced Placement or honors class, wearing clothes from the Gap or Abercrombie & Fitch (instead of Tommy Hilfiger or FUBU), and wearing shorts in the winter” (Fryer, 2006). “Being smart” and “doing well in school” has come to be associated with being and acting white (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard III, 2003). Senator Barack Obama views this as a national concern. At the 2004 Democratic National Convention, Obama stated, “... children can’t achieve unless we

raise their expectations and turn off the television sets and eradicate the slander that says a black youth with a book is acting white” (Fryer, 2006).

A case study of a 10th grade African-American, middle-class female student proved that although the student did not worry about the hardships of poverty related issues, she was still ostracized by her peers. Her African-American peers isolated her because of her socioeconomic status and her ability to shine academically, which they equated to “acting white.” Her white peers viewed her based on the stereotype that all African-Americans were “criminals involved in the drug trade.” This student was ridiculed by both races, which left her feeling dejected and alienated (Day-Vines, 2003). Tatum (1997) & Wily (1992) indicate that although middle-class status creates greater economic advantages, an extensive assortment of personal choices, and a shield from poverty, it does not provide complete protection from the often inevitable experiences with racism in a racially ambivalent society.

Black students also fear labeling and dejection from their teachers. Perry, Steele, & Hilliard III (2003) tell the story of how an African-American student is rejected by her teacher. Gwendolyn Parker worked extremely hard writing an original poem. She was anxious for the teacher to grade and return her assignment. When she received her paper, she saw that it was a C-minus, “which to her was just as bad as failure.” With tears in her eyes, she told her teacher, “This can’t be right.” Gwendolyn recounts the incident as it happened. “He starred at me as if he regretted my birth. It was a look filled with contempt and with anger,” stated Gwendolyn. “There is no way that you could have written this poem,” Mr. Bollen said. “I searched all weekend, looking for where you may

have copied it from If I'd been able to find out where you plagiarized it from, I would have given you an F. But since I couldn't find it, you are lucky I gave you a C-." Gwendolyn was stunned, but managed to say, "But I wrote it, I didn't copy it. I would never do that." Gwendolyn added, "He looked at me again with an expression so disdainful that it made me mute and invisible and impossibly small. Mr. Bollen was certain that I couldn't have written that poem because it was too good and a Negro couldn't possibly write that well."

The Oppositional Culture Theory, developed by Fordham and Ogbu, demonstrates observed differences between blacks and whites from a particular high school as follows: 1) white people provide blacks with inferior schooling and treat them differently in school; 2) by imposing a job ceiling, white people fail to reward blacks adequately for their academic achievement in adult life; and 3) black Americans develop coping devices, which, in turn, further limit their striving for academic success. Fordham and Ogbu suggest that the problem arose because "white Americans traditionally refused to acknowledge that black Americans were capable of intellectual achievement and partly because black Americans subsequently began to doubt their own intellectual ability, began to define academic success as white people's prerogative, and began to discourage their peers, perhaps unconsciously, from emulating white people in striving for academic success (Fryer, 2006).

Since the standards movement in education has included preparation programs for educators, much attention has been focused on the impact of teaching when our public schools are becoming more and more diverse. African-American teachers are

essential in the public schools to be role models for African American children. A teacher of the same ethnicity of a student helps build a sense of self-worth for these students (Stephens, 2002).

African-Americans also learn early in life about code switching. According to Celious and Oeperman (2001), code switching is a practice in which individuals alter their behavior patterns to conform to the current environment. For example, an African-American child will speak in the Black English vernacular when interacting with students of their race, yet they change their dialect and behavior patterns to coincide with students of other ethnicities. For some black children, code switching can bring about distress in settings such as home, school, church, and the neighborhood. These students must determine which communication style to use according to the setting. The consequences of the style of communication and when and whether one mode should take precedence over the other, is extremely vital.

The lack of achievement by African-American students could possibly change if they were treated equal and if quality educational opportunities were presented through instruction (Young, 2005). The school system plays an important role in building, as well as lowering the self-image of students. Approximately 80% of African-American students have a positive image of oneself when they enter school, 20% still have this image by the time they reach fifth grade, but only 5% have a positive perception of themselves by their senior year in high-school (Kuykendall, 1989). Teachers play a pivotal role in molding a child's self-perception. A teacher and child psychologist came to the following realization:

I've come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or deescalated and a child humanized or dehumanized.

Negative stereotypes such as low teacher expectations and cultural bias provide a negative experience for African-American students. Teachers who have negative attitudes toward black children contribute to their failure. When teachers take a positive approach and focus on the child's strength, their self-perception becomes positive and gives them the confidence they need to be successful (Kuykendall, 1989). The success of African-American students strongly depends upon their learning style. There are two preferential styles of learning, global (right brain) and analytical (left brain). The global learner is visual, tactile, and kinesthetic. This type of learner has to visualize, touch, and move around to learn. The analytical learner can process information written or orally. Students of this sort excel in math, science, and history because the information is sequenced in the two styles. Most African-Americans relate to the global style. To better serve the needs of African-American students, teachers should incorporate movement, provide opportunities for personal, oral expression, create learning activities that are energetic and lively, and if possible, incorporate outdoor activities as well (Young, 2005).

Purpose of the Study

This study will examine the factors that play a pivotal role in the achievement of African-American students. The findings of this study will give insight as to how and

why the academic performance of African-American students is lower than students of other ethnicities. Themes will be identified according to the data collected from the participants. The results of this study will provide parents, teachers, and students supplementary information that indicates how to foster a positive learning environment that is conducive for all African-American children.

Research Questions

1. What factors contribute to the achievement of African-American students?
2. What role does parents, teachers, and peers play in the achievement of African-American students?
3. How can educators promote more positive learning to ensure the success of African-American students?

Limitations

A limitation to the study is that the participants will be taken from one school district in East Texas. The district has approximately 6000 students, therefore, the participants only represent a small fraction of the state.

Definition of Terms

Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) – Report that illustrates the performance of every public school, district, and region in the state of Texas.

Acting white - Minorities that engage in behavior perceived to be characteristic of a white person.

Advanced Placement (AP) course - A course designed for students that excel in a particular subject; the class is more challenging than a regular course.

Analytical learner – A learner that processes information in a linear manner and functions using the left brain.

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas - The landmark case that resulted in the desegregation of public schools.

Case Study – A detailed analysis of a person or group.

Code switching - A practice in which individuals alter their behavioral patterns to conform to a current environment.

Cultural inversion – Method where symbols and behaviors of a dominant culture are considered inappropriate for a subordinate culture.

Global learner – A visual learner that processes information in an intuitive and simultaneous way; the learner functions using the right brain.

High achieving student - A student that has a strong desire to learn and beyond their potential; the student sets goals and makes preparation to obtain them.

Involuntary minority – A Minority that is forced to the United States by slavery or colonization.

Naturalistic inquiry – Research that focuses on the behavior of individuals in natural settings.

No Child Left Behind Act - Federal law passed in an effort to improve the performance of students in the United States by increasing accountability standards.

Purposive Sample – Sample that is subjectively chosen by the researcher because of certain characteristics.

Qualitative Research – An inquiry process that explores a social or human problem.

Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test - A test given to students in Texas to ensure that they are in compliance with Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS).

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) - Curriculum mandated by the state of Texas.

Underachieving student - A student that does not perform to their potential; the student has low expectations of oneself.

Voluntary minority – A minority that has come to the United States voluntarily.

Design of the Dissertation

The dissertation for this study contains five chapters. Chapter I includes the introduction to the study of the factors that influence achievement among African-American students. This chapter also provides a succinct explanation of the need for this study, the purpose of the study, research questions that pilot the study, limitations of the case study, and the definition of key terms using a qualitative approach. Chapter II provides the reader a review of the literature that relates to the research study. Chapter III is comprised of the methodology and procedures utilized to conduct the study. It also includes the research design, a concise outline of the subjects, an explanation of instruments used in the study, and an analysis of the data collected. Chapter IV embraces the interviews and observations conducted throughout the research. The researcher writes in first person in this chapter in an effort to paint a vivid picture for the reader. The final chapter, Chapter V, includes a summary, discussion, recommendations, and conclusions.

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Separate--but Not Equal

Racial segregation in public schools across America was the norm in the 1950's. Although all schools were supposed to be equal, most African-American schools were not treated the same as their counterparts. Linda Brown, an eight-year-old African-American, had to walk a mile through a railroad switchyard in Topeka, Kansas to get to her elementary school although a white elementary school was only a few blocks away. Oliver Brown, Linda's father, attempted to enroll her into the white school, but the principal refused her admission. Brown pleaded for aide from McKinley Burnett, head of Topeka's branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The NAACP was eager to assist the Browns (Cozzens, 1995).

The Plessy v. Ferguson decision set the legal precedent for the concept of "separate but equal." However, schools in the south were indeed separate and far from equal (Robinson, 2005). The United States District Court of the District of Kansas heard Brown's case for two days. At the trial, the NAACP argued that:

segregated schools sent the message to black children that they were inferior to whites; therefore, the schools were inherently unequal." Dr. Hugh W. Speer, one of the expert witnesses, testified that, "... if the colored children are denied the experience in school of associating with white children, who represent 90 percent of our national society in which these colored children must live, then the colored child's curriculum is being greatly curtailed. The Topeka curriculum or any school curriculum cannot be equal under segregation.

The Board of Education's defense was "because segregation in Topeka and elsewhere pervaded many other aspects of life, segregated schools simply prepared black

children for the segregation they would face during childhood.” The board also argued that “segregated schools were not necessarily harmful to black children; great African-Americans such as Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, and George Washington Carver had overcome more than just segregated schools to achieve what they achieved.”

The judges agreed with the expert witnesses and in their decision, they wrote, Segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the colored children...A sense of inferiority affects the motivation of a child to learn.” No Supreme Court ruling had overturned the Plessy v. Ferguson ruling, therefore the court felt compelled to rule in favor of the Topeka Board of Education. Brown and the NAACP appealed to the Supreme Court and combined their case with other cases that challenged segregation in schools in South Carolina, Virginia, and Delaware (Cozzens, 1995).

The Supreme Court ruled unanimously to overturn the Plessy v. Ferguson decision. On May 17, 1954, Chief Justice Earl Warren read the court’s decision:

Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society. It is required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities, even service in the armed forces. It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms. We come then to the question presented: Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other “tangible” factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities? We believe that it does” (Brown v. Board of Education, n.d.).

The court’s decision was based on dehumanizing effects of segregation:

Segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the colored children. The impact is greater when it has the sanction of the law, for the policy of separating the races is usually interpreted as denoting the inferiority of the negro group. A sense of inferiority affects the motivation of

a child to learn. Segregation with the sanction of law, therefore, has a tendency to [retard] the educational and mental development of negro children and to deprive them of some of the benefits they would receive in a racial[ly] integrated school system (Brown v. Board of Education, n.d.).

The basis of the decision stems from the Equal Protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, which “applies the standard of equality to the actions of the state as well as the Federal government in a concept known in legal circles as incorporation.” Warren wrote:

We conclude that, in the field of public education, the doctrine of “separate but equal” has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated from whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment (Brown v. Board of Education, n.d.).

This decision was a “powerful affirmation of America’s principle of freedom.” “We look upon this memorable decision not as a victory for Negroes alone, the NAACP announced, “but for the whole American people and as a vindication of America’s leadership in the free world.” Many African-Americans compared the Supreme Court’s ruling to an earlier historic event. “My inner emotions must have been approximate to the Negro slaves’ when they first heard about the Emancipation Proclamation,” Robert Williams recalled. “Elation took hold of me so strongly that I found it very difficult to refrain from yielding to an urge of jubilation ... On this momentous night of May 17, 1954, I felt that at last the government was willing to assert itself on behalf of first-class citizenship, even for Negroes. I experienced a sense of loyalty that I had never felt before. I was sure that this was the beginning of a new era of American democracy” (Takaki, 1993).

Pre-Civil War Achievement

Many decades ago, African-Americans were unable to articulate the true meaning of the African-American philosophy of schooling, of learning, freedom for literacy, and literacy for freedom. Frederick Douglass puts his thoughts in words:

From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom. It was just what I wanted, and I got it at a time when I least expected. Whilst I was saddened by the thought of losing the aid of my kind mistress, I was gladdened by the invaluable instruction which, by merest accident, I had gained from my master. Though conscious of the difficulty of learning without a teacher, I set out with high hope and fixed purpose, at whatever cost of trouble, to learn how to read. The decided manner with which he spoke, and strove to impress his wife with evil consequences of giving me instruction served to convince me that he was deeply sensible of the truths he was uttering. It gave me the best assurance that I might rely with the utmost confidence on the results which, he said, would flow from teaching me to read. What he most feared, that I most desired. What he most loved, that I most hated. That which to him was a great evil, to be carefully shunned, was to me a great good, to be diligently sought, and the argument which he so warmly waged, against my learning to read, only seemed to inspire me with a desire and determination to learn (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard III, 2003)

Learning to read had an enormous impact on Douglass. He stated,

As I read and contemplated the subject, ... the very discontent which Master Hugh had predicted would follow my learning to read had already come to torment and sting my soul to unutterable anguish. The silver trump of freedom had aroused my soul to eternal wakefulness. Freedom now appeared, to disappear no more forever. It was heard in every sound, and seen in everything... I saw nothing without seeing it, I heard nothing without feeling it. It looked from every star, it smiled in every calm, breathed in every wind, and moved in every star.

Douglass' vision was that "learning to read and write would eventually enable him to write himself a pass, to be used in his escape to freedom." Douglass' description of his learning reflected on his gratifying experience of teaching other slaves to read and write and confirmed that "he indeed saw education as tied to the liberation and racial uplift of his people." He indicated, "They were great days to my soul. The work of instructing my

fellow slaves was the sweetest engagement which I was ever blessed... I taught them because it was the delight of my soul to be doing something that looked like bettering the condition of my race” (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard III, 2003).

Post-Civil War Achievement

Perry, Steele, and Hilliard III (2003) assert that achievement for African-Americans in the post-Civil Rights era is considered more complicated than before for the following reasons:

- Schools or spaces in schools are not intentionally organized to forge identities of African-American students as achievers.
- Schools provide few spaces that are intentionally designed to buffer African-American students from the day-to-day experience of racism in school, and from the explicit and subtle impact of the ideology of Black intellectual inferiority.
- Schools are not likely to have a narrative that is counter to the “narrative of openness and opportunity,” one that talks about Black achievement in the face of constraints and limits.
- Schools make few attempts to systematically organize occasions to create desire to inspire hope, to develop and sustain effort optimism, or to intentionally create multiple contexts that socialize students to the behaviors that are necessary for them to be achievers.
- There is a conspiracy of silence about how racism in and out of school blunts effort optimism.

- African-American parents, as the first generation of African-Americans to experience racism and its impact on achievement in an allegedly “open and integrated” society, might possibly not have figured out how to develop institutional formations and pass on psychological coping strategies to their children that respond to this new context.

Perry, Steele, and Hilliard III (2003) pose that the roots for the dilemma of African-American achievement is tied to: (a) their identity as members of a caste like minority group; (b) the larger society’s ideology of Black intellectual inferiority and its reproduction in the mass media and in everyday interactions; (c) their identity as members of a group whose culture is seen by all segments of the society, even other people of color, as simultaneously inferior and attractive; and (d) their identity as American citizens.

In a study of racism experienced by black professionals conducted by Benjamin (1991), she found that 93 percent of the participants “believe that double consciousness leads to identity confusion and inherent contradictions in the collective psyche of peoples of African descent.” The following reflections were made during Benjamin’s study:

Informant No. 1

It presents a divided loyalty of wanting to belong, to love one’s country, and wanting to be proud of it, but always being somewhat a stranger about one’s own experience here. It forces Blacks to choose between [being] Black or American and being forced to choose is destroying part of one’s self.

Informant No. 2

When you think of yourself as an American, America doesn't think of you as an American. That's the problem. Sometimes you are forced to go back to your blackness, because America won't let you be an American, even though that's the way I grew up thinking. I am going to be smart. I am going to school and make it in society. You get a lot of knocks on your head by Whites in society, reminding you after all you are Black. Everything that's for me isn't for you as a Black. That's the real problem—a Catch-22.

Informant No. 3

I'll never forget that experience when I was in Brazil at an international festival for the arts, where they brought Black folks from seventeen different countries. And we were in the hotel and different people were talking about their countries. As things developed, a Nigerian said, "I love my country." A Cuban said, "I love my country." A Panamanian said, "I love my country." I couldn't say that, and I have been here all my life. I've accomplished and I've suffered, but I would be hesitant to say I love my country.

Informant No. 4

Not since my early impressionable elementary school stage have I really felt pride and patriotism. The rude awakening of the need to constantly struggle for constitutionally guaranteed rights leaves a very bitter taste and permanent sense of alienation and insecurity. Blacks constantly face issues of racism at home. This reality is so draining (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard III, 2003).

Ogbu (1991) indicates that minorities adapt to society differently depending on how the minority group entered into the United States. He believes that there are two types of minorities--voluntary and involuntary. Voluntary minorities come to this country voluntarily with hopes of living the "American Dream" and involuntary minorities are those forced to become members of American society through slavery or colonization. Ogbu suggests that the lack of academic success in African-Americans is partly because of their socio-historical experience in the United States. African-Americans were involuntary minorities during slavery; they were placed into a subordinate caste system in society. Ogbu stresses that "a ceiling was put in place that denied African-Americans access to upward social mobility; therefore, many developed a belief system and coping mechanisms that discounted formal education as a tool for social mobility." Involuntary African-American adults have been denied jobs and placed into subordinate positions where they were forced to develop coping mechanisms to make sense of the situation for many decades. Ogbu suggests that "an oppositional identity and culture has developed based on the history of most blacks in the U.S." He uses the term cultural inversion to describe this concept. Ogbu defines cultural inversion as "the process whereby symbols, whether it be dress or language, and behaviors that are associated with a dominant culture are deemed inappropriate for a subordinate culture." Cultural inversion eventually leads to an "alternate cultural frame of reference meaning some African-Americans have a different set of values than Whites." Ogbu strongly believes that the failure of many African-American students is based on the Black experience in the U.S. He thinks that parents have passed on their historical experiences

to their children stressing that society will not reward black student educational accomplishments as much as they do for white students. According to Ogbu, “many African-American students do not see any point in working hard or maintaining their efforts long enough to achieve academically (Fisher, 2005).

Dilemma in Achievement

The cultural-ecological theory of minority schooling “takes into account the historical, economic, social, cultural, and language or dialect situations of minority groups in the larger society in which they exist.” According to this theory, launched by Ogbu, two sets of factors outline minority students’ school adjustment and academic performance. The first factor is the way society and its institutions treat or have treated minorities. This part of the problem is known as the system. The other factor rises on the basis of how minorities interpret and respond to their treatment. For example, “their adaptation to U.S. society and to their minority status, which depends on their unique history or how they become minorities in the United States.” The second part of the problem is known as community forces. The system functions at two levels. The first level is the general treatment or mistreatment of minorities by society at large and in local communities. This treatment includes instrumental discrimination, or barriers in opportunity structures (e.g., economic, political, educational barriers, etc.), relational discrimination (e.g., social and residential segregation, violence and threats of violence, deceit, etc.), and symbolic discrimination (e.g., denigration of minority cultures, languages, and intellectual abilities). Ogbu refers to these discriminations as the collective problems faced by minorities, which affect minority education directly and

indirectly. This theory considers three types of treatment of minorities in education that impacts their school performance. The first type is the educational policies and practices (e.g., school segregation, unequal school funding, and staffing of minority schools). The next type is how minority students are treated in the school and classroom (e.g., low teacher expectations, tracking, etc.). The final type of treatment is how minorities are rewarded for achievement academically, especially in the job market and in terms of wages. Discrimination in society, as well as the educational system, is considered a factor in the low performance of minority students, but it is not the sole reason. All minorities experience discrimination to some degree, but some are affected and others are not (Ogbu, 2003).

Schools play a pivotal role in shaping a students' self-image, while criticism and rejection lower it. When African-American students first enter school, 80 percent of them have a positive self-image and by fifth grade, 20 percent still do. However, by the time black students reach their senior year, only 5 percent possess a positive image. African-American students feel that academic achievement will not improve their status nor their benefits by early adolescence. These students acclimatize to this perceived definition of reality by devoting less time and energy to school work. Teachers spend the most concentrated time with students and they shape a students' self-image either deliberately or inadvertently. Silberman stated, "It is the failure to develop self-respect, not the failure to teach subject matter, that is the real problem in education." Silberman stresses that low-income children should, "... see themselves as people of worth, capable of dealing with their environments. This will provide a base on which other objects can

be built. Therefore, teachers must respond to children in ways that convey a sense of trust and affection. They must also give children a sense of competence but structuring classroom activities which gives every child frequent experiences of success.” Ham Ginott, teacher and child psychologist, observed the following:

I’ve come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child’s life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or deescalated and a child humanized or dehumanized (Kuykendall, 1989).

The 1999 National Teacher of the Year suggests that “A nurturing classroom and school involve an environment where students feel safe...and one that encourages adventure, exploration and discovery...where each child’s needs for understanding and attention are understood and met, where they feel loved and treasured.”

The Perception of African-American Students

Factors such as negative stereotypes, low teacher expectations, and cultural bias in schools offer a defeating and discouraging experience for African-American children. When black children sense disapproval, their energy is possibly channeled into an aggressive behavior toward the academic environment. Once students feel accepted, rapport is established, one-on-one guidance is provided, group learning takes place, body movement, and nonverbal communication are accepted, and students are encouraged to do their best, their attitudes, behavior, and self-image improve tremendously. Just as other children, African-American children positively relate to people who show strong appreciation of their strengths and uniqueness, praise and respect their efforts and accept

and work with their shortcomings. There are several indicators of low academic achievement observed by educators. These characteristics possibly exist because:

- Children who fail to complete work ... might have a high fear of failure.
- Children who are hostile, disruptive, delinquent and/or defiant in speech ... might have a fear of other people.
- Children who frequently use excuses to justify poor performance ... might be afraid of what teachers think of them.
- Children who daydream or show a poor attention span ... might be bored or not motivated to succeed.
- Children who utilize little or no contact ... might feel that direct eye contact is a sign of disrespect—particularly if the speaker is an adult or member of the majority racial or cultural group.
- Children who are afraid to try and who give up too easily ... generally have a fear of failure.
- Children who dislike school, the teacher, or both ... might eventually develop such painful hostility or fear that they will withdraw from school.
- Children who don't volunteer or participate ... might fear failure or success.
- Children with repeated and deliberate tardiness or absences ... might have a fear of failure and/or a fear of people which causes them to do anything to avoid being in a situation where embarrassment, pain or failure is imminent.

- Children who tend to be withdrawn and isolated ... often behave this way when they are not treated with respect.
- Children whose facial expressions and body movements tend to show pain, frustration, and anxiety ... are probably really hurting (Kuykendall, 1991).

Fisher (2005) provides a list of characteristics of high-achieving and low-achieving African-American students. High achieving black students possess the following characteristics:

- The student shows effort in class.
- The student is prepared for tests, presentations, and daily discussion.
- The student achieves high grades.
- The student takes responsibility for work that needs to be done, whether it is during school or coming after school for assistance.

Underachieving black students exhibit the following characteristics:

- The student shows a lack of effort and sets low goals.
- The student has a lack of concern or interest in performing well academically.
- The student is irresponsible and lazy.
- The student has low self-worth.
- The student has a difficult living and/or social environment.
- The student has no parental support.
- The student has no traditional or academically related plans for the future.

In Ogbu's study at Shaker Heights, parents complained that most teachers did not believe that African-American students could academically perform on the same level as Caucasian students. Teachers came in with a preconceived notion about black students. They expected black students to behave differently, not pay attention in class, and not do class work or homework like their white counterparts. One African-American reported how his daughter was humiliated in front of her classmates by her teacher. His daughter and her friend had trouble keeping up with other students in the class. The teacher stated that some people in the class were stupid. The teacher then diverted her attention to the young girl and told her that she was stupid. Students in this study felt just as strong as the parents did. One student indicated that teachers "just put you down so much that it makes you ... feel really bad." Another student indicated, "If you walk into classes and a teacher's not expecting an A from you, what are the chances your gonna work for that A ... And like, I don't necessarily think there are teachers who are outright racist, but it might even be like a subconscious thing, like that's just what they expect you know, just how society expects that you know. That's what they, the pattern has been with their black students. So why should they expect anymore from these [students], you know. So I think that's that. It's an expectation thing, maybe (Ogbu, 2003).

Good (1981) produced a summary including behaviors that teachers possess toward students that are viewed as low achievers. These behaviors include:

1. Providing students with general, often insincere praise.
2. Providing them with less feedback.
3. Demanding less effort of them.
4. Interrupting them more often.
5. Seating them farther away from the teacher.
6. Paying less attention to them.

7. Calling on them less often.
8. Waiting less time for them to respond to questions.
9. Criticizing them more often.
10. Smiling at them less.

A study was conducted using responses from over 2,000 teachers. The teachers provided characteristics of low academic self images of African-American children and of high social self images. These characteristics are listed below in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Low Academic Self Image and High Social Self Image

Characteristics of Low Academic Self Image	Characteristics of High Social Self Image
Failure to complete work	Confidence in performing before others
Hostility/Disruptive behavior or defiant speech in class	Unique ability in social skills, such as sports, dancing, playing the dozens or rapping
Frequent use of excuses	Mutual support system with peers
Daydreaming, poor attention span	Keen interest and preoccupations such with social activities, such as listening to music, dancing, playing sports or doing artwork
Little or no eye contact	Nonverbal communication and eye contact
Fear of failure and trying	Persistence in learning and performance of social skills (e.g. bike riding, card playing, music, or sports)
Dislike for school, the teacher, or both	Desire to be liked in social functions/notice of others
No volunteering or participating; repeated and deliberate tardiness or absences	Extensive desire for interaction with those most encouraging and supportive
Tendency to be withdrawn and isolated	Friendly, sincere behavior

TABLE 1 Continued

Facial expressions and body movement tend to show visible pain, frustration, and anxiety

Facial expressions and body movements reflect enjoyment

(Kuykendall, Crystal. A study of the responses of over 2,000 teachers surveyed 1984-1987 in Washington, D.C.)

In the study conducted by Ogbu (2003), African-Americans compared themselves with whites in Shaker Heights and the U.S. as a whole. The blacks concluded that they were worse off than the whites in jobs, income, housing, political power, and education due to their minority status. They felt this inequality has existed since blacks were emancipated from slavery. They indicated that it took the decision in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* to end de jure school segregation and inferior education in the South, however that did not necessarily put an end to segregation. Blacks still considered themselves as segregated and at a disadvantage in means of education. They also compared themselves politically. One middle school student stated that no African-American had ever served as President of the United States. The students also believed that black people were judged by their skin color and not their ability. On the basis of performance, they felt as though black people had to work twice as hard as white people for the same societal reward although they had the same educational level and qualifications. Black employees felt as though their white employers had low expectations of them and felt as though for that reason alone they had to prove themselves. The students also felt that in order for a black person to successfully compete with a white person for a job, the black competition had to be twice as good as the white person (Ogbu, 2003).

State Testing for African-American Students

The Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test, a statewide standardized test, was implemented in 2003 to replace the existing Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test. The goal of the TAAS test, introduced in 1997, was to measure “excellence in student achievement” that ensures “all students are prepared to meet the challenges presented by the changing world.” Assessment of education in Texas is based on a “system of statistics that does not problematize institutionalized tracking.” The TAKS test is designed to assess student attainment of reading/English language arts, writing, math, science, and social studies. The test complies with the No Child Left Behind Act. Each spring, students in grades 3-11 take the TAKS test. The test measures student performance in reading in grades 3-9, in writing in 4th and 7th grade, in English language arts in grades 10 and 11, in math in grades 3-11, in science in grades 5, 8, 10, and 11, and in social studies in the 8th, 10th, and 11th grade. As of 2005, students are required to pass the Exit TAKS to get their high school diploma. Third and fifth grade students must pass the test to ensure promotion to grades 4. As of the 2004-2005 school year, fifth graders were required to pass both reading and math to secure a spot in sixth grade. The TAKS test assesses the skills outlined in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) learning standards, implemented by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) in 1998. The standards outline the curriculum of what should be learned by students in the state of Texas. Some special education students do not take the TAKS test, but instead the State-Developed Alternative Assessment (SDAA). Qualified students take the test version that is most characteristic of their admission, review, and

dismissal committees (ARD). The alternative test assesses the student's knowledge in reading, writing, and math to measure annual progress (James, 2006).

According to the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) 2004-2005 State Performance Report, African-American students in the state of Texas scored significantly lower than students of all ethnicities in all areas tested with the exception of social studies. In reading/English language arts, 76% of the African-Americans tested met the standard in 2005 compared to 91% Caucasian and 77% Hispanic. In mathematics, 57% met the standard versus 84% Caucasian and 64% Hispanic. In writing, 86% met the standard, 94% of Caucasian students, and 87% of the Hispanic population met the standard. In social studies, 82% of the African-American and Hispanic students met the standard, whereas Caucasian students surpassed them both with 94%. Overall, only 47% of the African-Americans tested met the 2005 standard compared to 77% Caucasian and 53% Hispanic (Texas Education Agency, 2006).

Criterion-referenced testing was designed to equalize educational measurements, improve instruction, and raise achievement, but evidence shows that it continues to produce the same ethnic (white and black) achievement gap in the past. Griffin believes that standardized testing in the United States is biased by an educational philosophy "based mainly on the Anglo-Saxon ideal." Horn posed the question, "Is Texas failing to equitably educate minorities" (Stephens, 2002)?

Federal funding is tied to systematic restructuring based on standardization. It reinforces marginalization with more white students being accepted into higher education programs and a higher number of minority students excluded because of

standardized measurement scores and lack of academic preparation (Stephens, 2002). The 2004-2005 Accountability Report for Texas indicates 59.9% of African-American students completed the Recommended High School Program (RHSP) compared to 69.9% of their white counterparts. Of the high school courses completed in 2004, 9.2% were advanced among black students and 21% among white students. More alarming is that 60.9% of African-American students took the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or American College Test (ACT), but only 7.6% met the standard. The mean SAT score for black students was 843 compared to 894 for Hispanics and 1047 for white students. The mean ACT score for black students was 17.1, 17.9 for Hispanic students, and 21.8 for white students. African-American students were outperformed on both standardized test by all races (Texas Education Agency, 2006). Although the standards movement ensures that all students that graduate from high school attain basic skills, standards fail to guarantee graduation for all high school students. Also, accountability testing does not give black students the opportunity to take more rigorous curriculum such as advanced placement courses. These problems can be “traced back to the use of special education classes to separate and unequally track many minorities in low-level teaching (Stephens, 2002).

The Fordham report, *State Standards 2000*, graded each states’ standards. In the report, five states, including Texas, were placed on “The Honor Roll” status for having “Solid Standards.” The report stated:

These five states exemplify the theory and practice of standards-based reform and, in so doing, prove that it is possible to put all the essential elements into place. Note, though, how tiny this group is, and contrast it with this excerpt from the “action statement” agreed to at the 1999

“summit” on standards-based reform: “The commitments made by the nation’s governors and business leaders at the 1996 National Education Summit-commitments to higher standards, better assessments, and tougher accountability measures-have clearly become central elements in a nationwide campaign to improve school performance.” This is most charitably described as wishful thinking. We don’t believe it’s right for America’s governors, education leaders, and business tycoons to claim that the country has embraced standards-based reform when only five states have managed to match good standards with real accountability. As for the fact that four of the five of our “honor roll” states come from the South, this has the makings of an interesting study. Why have Southern states embraced standards and accountability with more enthusiasm than others? We suspect the good work of the Southern Regional Educational Board has played a role, as has the early (mid-1980s) recognition by a number of southern governors that prosperity would come to their states only when education reform preceded it. (It is also a fact that many Southern states have been less smugly complacent about the performance of their public schools and, politically speaking, are sometimes less beholden to the forces of the “education establishment” that wield so much clout in chillier climes (Stephens, 2002).

Stephens, Sadler, and Moss question the credibility of the Fordham Foundation, which honors the state of Texas with “an above average grade of B when the statistical data of the Texas Accountability Reports indicate that the state continues to promote inequities in education” (Stephens, 2002).

Sadler, an educator in East Texas, states that,

Students have to pass the TAAS, now the TAKS, to graduate from high school. From my perspective and what I can see about them, minority students who are confronted with trying to pass the state test, view it as a major concern! I feel that students who have difficulty with the test come to realize that somehow they have missed out on what should have been a sound education. Often times as a school system, we want to say-and it’s probably true to some degree-that nothing or little is happening at home or parents are not doing their part educationally. I can appreciate that thought and for many of our children, maybe little or nothing is happening at home. However, I don’t think that this can be used as an excuse for minority students not fairing well on standardized tests. Many parents are not formally educated and are not providing educational

opportunities for their children. This is a given. It's the school's job to educate children.

Sadler went on to say,

“Many of our students do come from dysfunctional families. That is no excuse for the disparity between African- American and White scores. The school is not dysfunctional, or it should not be. Teachers are not a group of people who have walked in of the street and said, “I believe I’d like to teach a day or two to see if I can do something constructive.” We have people in schools who are qualified, who are certified, and who have passed all of the required tests to work in this position. I feel that we have been put under the gun because the gap between the racial groups is too great. We’re going to have to close those gaps. The last two or three years, guess what we have been doing? We’ve been closing these gaps. Now, if we can close the gaps at the high school, just think how more readily and effectively we could do something at the kindergarten, the first, second, third grade level” (Stephens, 2002).

Many Americans discredit racial differences in test performance on the basis that all cognitive tests are either racially or culturally biased. One of the many types of bias is selective bias. Selection system bias arises when three conditions are met: 1) performance depends partly on cognitive skills and partly on other traits; 2) it is easy to measure cognitive skills but hard to measure the other traits that determine performance; and 3) the racial disparity in the other, unmeasured traits that influence performance. When these conditions are held constant, both educational institutions and employers have “strong incentives to adopt a selection system that emphasizes test scores.” A selection system of this sort is “unfair to anyone whose competitive rank on the cognitive test is lower than their rank on the other unmeasured determinants of performance.” This puts African-Americans, as well as Hispanics, at a greater disadvantage than a selection system that is based on performance. Blacks and Hispanics

are forced to “pay for the fact that social science is better at measuring the skills they lack than the skills they have” (Jencks, 1998).

Many use the terms “intelligence” and “innate” interchangeably. However, psychologists can all agree that a person’s developed capacity for intelligent behavior often differs in predictable ways from their innate potential. Many nonpsychologists assert the following about race and intelligence: “If intelligence means innate ability to learn, and if blacks and whites have the same innate ability to learn, and if blacks score below whites on tests that claim to measure intelligence, then intelligence tests must be biased against blacks.” This explanation “makes clear not only why blacks think that intelligence tests are culturally biased, but also why they object to endless repetition of the fact that they score below whites on such tests (Jencks, 1998).

The case of *Larry P. v. Riles* paints a picture as to how problems arise when psychologists who equate intelligence with developed ability confront nonpsychologists who equate intelligence with innate ability. A group of African-American plaintiffs sued the San Francisco Unified School District in a federal court in 1971 arguing that “IQ scores should not be used as a criterion for assigning black students to special classes for the educably mentally retarded (EMR).” In 1972, Judge Robert Peckham made the injunction that intelligence tests are culturally biased against blacks. He concluded that “if a test both claimed to measure intelligence and was used to label children as retarded, it ought to measure innate rather than developed ability.” Peckham believes that innate ability of blacks and whites are the same. He then inferred that the test must be biased to

African-Americans. The state argued that intelligence tests measure developed competence, not innate ability, which left the judge unmoved (Jencks, 1998).

Many psychologists perceived Peckham's decision as "shooting the messenger." They believed that Peckham was "blaming psychological tests for a much deeper social problem, namely, black students' difficulties both in school and in other areas of life that require abstract reasoning of various kinds." The psychologists misunderstood the argument of the case. The case of Larry P. was not to challenge testing in general, but intelligence testing. The plaintiffs did not "ask the court to bar the use of achievement tests that measured children's reading comprehension of their ability to solve arithmetic problems, even though such tests often show racial disparities as large as those on the Stanford-Binet or the Wechsler." The plaintiffs in the case pleaded for Peckham to bar the use of test that claimed to measure intelligence and that is what he did. The plaintiffs as well as Judge Peckham zoomed in on intelligence tests because they felt that these tests stigmatize African-Americans in ways that other tests did not. The statement that "blacks cannot read as well as whites makes many blacks uncomfortable, but it is widely accepted as correct and seldom denounced as racist." The statement that "blacks are less intelligent than whites is very different. It implies that black-white differences in skills such as reading and mathematics are, or at least may well be, innate and irremediable. The fact that professional psychologists no longer think intelligence tests measure innate ability does not change how most people interpret such a statement because professional psychologists have neither the legal authority nor the political power to redefine the words they appropriate from everyday language" (Jencks, 1998).

African-Americans are known to score less than Caucasians on standardized tests for reasons such as differences in family background, economic resources, school resources, neighborhood poverty, teacher qualifications, and academic background (Myers, Kim, and Mandala, 2004). Lower performance by blacks on standardized test can be associated with black children having fewer opportunities and incentives to expand their vocabulary not that conventional tests underestimate the amount of words that African-American children know. The significantly large difference in the scores of blacks and whites indicate that “race must play a much broader and deeper role in depressing black scores than many critics assume.” Culture is not a body of knowledge and skills but can “affect people’s willingness to think about unfamiliar questions, their strategies for seeking answers that are not obvious, their motivation to persist in the face of frustration, their confidence that such persistence will be rewarded, and their interest in figuring out what the tester thinks is the right answer” (Jencks, 1998). An example of cultural bias in testing is the following SAT analogy:

RUNNER: MARATHON
(A) envoy: embassy
(B) martyr: massacre
(C) oarsman: regatta
(D) referee: tournament
(E) horse: stable

The answer is “oarsman: regatta.” One would only know if they knew what both marathon and regatta meant. A black child from an inner city would not have heard of regatta. This shows that the test could be biased against people from disadvantaged backgrounds. A critic of testing states, “Clearly, this item does not measure students’ ‘aptitude’ or logical reasoning ability, but knowledge of upper-middle class recreational

activity.” The critic believes that culturally loaded items generate some of the black/white difference (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994).

It could possibly be that the nature of cultural bias does not lie in predictive validity or in the content of test items, but in what could be called” test willingness.” It is hypothesized that the typical African-American student comes to a test with a frame of mind different from a Caucasian student. “He is less attuned to testing situations (from one point of view), or less inclined to put up with such nonsense (from another). Perhaps, he just doesn’t give a damn, since he has no hopes of going to college or otherwise benefiting from a good test score. Perhaps he figures that the test is biased against him anyway, so what’s the point. Perhaps he consciously refuses to put out his best effort because of the peer pressure against acting white in some inner-city schools.”

Studies conducted to measure motivation have found that blacks are at least as motivated as whites. If this were so, why shouldn’t motivation be just as inaccurate as the measures of cognitive ability are alleged to be (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994)?

Consequences of No Child Left Behind

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is known as the “single largest nationalization of education policy in the history of the United States.” It is considered a paradox for politicians in the sense that it seeks to do something good such as setting standards for student achievement (Causey-Bush, 2005). It aims at providing students with competence in basic-skills development, but it also minimizes the academic excellence for all children ignoring issues such as quality, equity, and academic achievement for all students. The plan persecutes minorities. It ignores the educational resources forced

upon African-American students and other minorities because of their socioeconomic status, nor does it propose a remedy. Dr. Christopher Dede stated, “No Child Left Behind’s heart is in the right place but its head is in someplace else” (Gray, 2005).

Gray (2005) poses several threats associated with the No Child Left Behind Act.

The threats include:

Threat 1: NCLB was a marketing tool for the administration to anchor a legacy using education as the vehicle. It was, therefore, a mass-appeal tool without all of the components carefully delineated.

In the third presidential debate of 2004 held in Tempe, Arizona, President Bush stated that the No Child Left Behind Act was a jobs act when questioned about our domestic home situation. Six weeks after signing the bill, administration submitted a budget to stop six years of steady progress in federal funding increases for school districts.

Threat 2: NCLB has the potential to victimize minority parents and students and to commute low morale leaving embarrassment, and a negative set of goals.

Threat 3: NCLB is presented as a panacea for raising the achievement gap through the deficit model. It does not take into account the much lower educational resources that poor African American students start out with, nor does it propose to remedy the discrepancy.

Threat 4: NCLB flies in the face of good pedagogy, which portends that for the well-educated citizen, social acumen, social skills, and content are as important as access and literacy.

Threat 5: NCLB's promise in relationship to funding is woefully inadequate.

Threat 6: NCLB potentially raised false hopes that are playing a cruel hoax in the minority community.

Many minorities were under the impression that the act would uncover ineffective schools and teachers that did not accurately instruct minority youth.

Linn (2002) outlines problems in the NCLB accounting system:

1. The NCLB accountability system set unrealistic expectations for students achievement-so unrealistic that almost all schools will fail to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) targets within a few years. If proficient achievement is set at a high level, as it is now in many states, then no school that does not have highly selective admissions standards will be able to meet the goal of 100% proficient or above in 2014. More realistic expectations for determining AYP need to be set that are based on accomplishments of high-performing schools rather than a target set without regard to what is feasible.
2. The definition of the proficient level of academic performance set by state schools is so variable that the concept of "proficient" performance has become meaningless and certainly lacks comparability from state to state. A more uniform definition is needed.
3. Separate reporting for subgroups of students is an important feature of the accountability system that needs to be continued. It is desirable,

however, that schools be allowed to combine results over two or three years as well as reporting them every year so that they are not found wanting simply as the result of random year-to-year fluctuations.

4. The safe harbor provision sets a criterion that is too stringent and consequently few schools are saved by the provision. The criterion needs to be made less stringent using gains of high-performing schools to establish the needed reduction in the percentage of students who perform below the proficient level.
5. AYP currently stressed only status in comparison to a performance target. As a result, many schools that show substantial achievement gains still fail to make AYP. A change should be made that will allow schools to make AYP either by meeting a current performance target or by meeting an improvement target.

Threat 7: NCLB has the potential of locking public schools into a permanent grade system so that innovation cannot work with the realization of “real time.”

Threat 8: NCLB’s stringent concentration only on reading and math literacy, whether by design or intent has the potential of leaving a segment of the minority population behind.

The NCLB Act ignores the learning style of millennials, which are children born 1987-1998. The learning styles of children in this era are media-based. Freshman college students entering an institute in the year 2005 are the oldest of this group and the youngest are current second graders.

Threat 9: The goal of assessment changes from deriving useful information for effective decision making to that of simply reporting.

Threat 10: NCLB does not address a significant population among the Black constituency of Black males within the criminal system.

“The prospect of failing and additional problems in high-stake testing correlate with the high school dropout rates.” Students that dropout out of school are likely to fall into the realm of unemployment or crime. Statistics show that there are more men in correctional facilities than enrolled in universities. “By the year 2000, there were an estimated 791,600 Black men incarcerated compared to 603,000 in our institutes of higher learning (Harrison & Beck, 2003).

Instructing African-American Students

All children can learn, however, it is the responsibility of the teacher to know how students learn and what style of learning best fits each child. According to Dunn, Dunn, and Price (1978), “a learning style is the way an individual begins to concentrate on, process, internalize, and remember new and difficult academic information or develop skills.” Many students aren’t aware of their learning style because teachers aren’t aware of how children learn. Many teachers teach their students “the way they were taught” not realizing that this was harmful even when they were students.

According to Torrance, the two preferential styles of learning are global (right brain) and analytical (left brain). The global learner is a visual, tactile, and kinesthetic learner. This type of learner has to “visualize what is about to be learned, and the learner must move to learn.” The global learner sometimes takes a while to visualize instructions given by

the teacher although the teacher has moved on. When the student raises his or her hand to inquire what he or she should be doing, the teacher usually responds by saying, “You were not listening!” However, this is not true of the global learner and it leaves the student feeling lost and fearful of asking questions. The fear of asking questions tends to follow this learner throughout their educational career. The analytical learner can sort out information that is written (textbooks) or orally (lecture). These learners tend to excel in math, science, or history because information in these courses are often sequenced. Analytical learners “recall facts and dates with relative ease as well as process information linearly.” This learner responds to “logical appeal helping them to pose more questions to understand what is reasonable or logical,” (Young, 2005).

Of the two preferential styles, according to Anderson, global learners are more prevalent in the African-American race. Boykin (1986) found that black children performed better when teachers included activities with “verve inducement and high sensate stimulation.” Black children sometimes experience the concept of verve in the home, church, and community. When these students go to school, they are told to sit in their seats and are provided information less stimulating than they’re accustomed to. Irvine (1991) poses the importance of including movement in the classroom for black children because: “If the lack of instructional variability is descriptive of the majority of our schools, then it seems fair to speculate that his dismal situations is intensified in schools that serve students who are African-American. In these schools, the overwhelming preoccupation seems to be with control--particularly controlling physical movement and anticipated and perceived aggression of African-American children.

Given these conditions, all children, particularly African-American children, would welcome verve inducement in these classrooms.” The involvement of physical activity contributes to the achievement of black children. To assist African-Americans in their achievement, “teachers should create movement, provide opportunities for personal oral expression, create learning activities that are energetic and lively, even if they have to move outside the walls of the classroom” (Young, 2005).

Before beginning the instructional process for an African-American learner, a teacher should administer an inventory comparable to the reading level of students in the classroom. After determining how they learn, the teacher should get acquainted with the students, then prepare to instruct students using both styles of learning and instruct in a way the students can learn. To assist the global learner in the classroom, “the teacher could employ more group work, give students options of completing an assignment, and make correct grammar a practice in the classroom.” Although teachers want their students to work individually, it would be beneficial if the global learner worked with someone. The teacher of a global learner can foster independence by “incorporating cooperative learning groups, classroom discussion, experimental learning, student’s evaluating each other’s work.” Adjustments made for black students can help them regardless if they are analytical or global learners (Young, 2005).

Identities of African-American Students

Boykin & Toms (1985) indicate that African-Americans are forced to take on three distinct identities. These identities are known as “triple quandary,” which “reflects three interlocking arenas of experience or consciousness that include a) mainstream

American, b) minority, and c) African-American identities. First, the socialization experiences of African-American children are based upon their existence within the dominant culture. These socialization experiences could possibly include “a prediction for television, computers, and peer involvement as well as the adoption of certain American cultural values such as individualism, competition, and the accumulation of material goods.” This often derives from one’s upbringing in American culture versus membership in a specific ethnic group. Second, for black children, socialization occurs based on their minority status as members of an ethnic group that suffer from victimization and oppression. Many African-American children learn early of their status as a minority as well as reminders of their place in a society that devalues blackness. For example, when white children are invited to a social function, black children are often excluded because of the color of their skin. At school, many African-American children are not encouraged to take advanced level courses, but instead vocational type courses. Black children remain over-represented in special education programs and underrepresented in gifted and talented programs. Third, socialization experiences encourage African-American children to become aware of their status as African-Americans with a heritage that is linked to the West African culture. Some black children are exposed to African-American history in their home, church, social organizations, Kwanza, learn about history that has been excluded from school curriculum, or surround themselves with images that affirm the African-American experience (Day-Vines, 2003).

Boykin & Toms (1985) argue that “a healthy identity rests upon successful, simultaneous negotiations” of the triple quandary. “Negotiating two or more opposing cultural forces can create tension, inner turmoil, and psychological distress for some African-American adolescents... Recognition of the identity issues students confront permits counselors to recognize healthy and unhealthy identity functioning, provide more accurate case conceptualizations of students’ concerns, facilitate students’ self-understanding, and promote self-acceptance” (Day-Vines, 2003).

Enrollment of African-Americans in Honors/Advanced Placement Courses

Many black students shy away from honors and Advanced Placement (AP) classes because they feel that they are hard and the majority of the students in these classes are white. Another explanation was that they were pressured from other blacks not to take those difficult courses, but instead take the easier ones. The black students in these classes have a difficult time fitting in. They are often criticized by other black students that imply that they are “acting white.” To fit in, intelligent black students avoid these classes and fail to strive for excellence. One student stated, “... nobody wants to be an outcast and then like they do label people as acting white. I see one Black student who does do well and, of course, they say they’re acting White, because the majority of Black students aren’t achieving like that. They see that the White students are the ones doing well, so they label it as acting White...” Many students feel that the relationship between the two races is uncomfortable in the classroom. One student indicated, “It ... was difficult because I could not relate to them as far as socially. Now when it came

with dealing with the work that was assigned to us then I could relate. But when we had a lot of social time, I was in the corner to myself” (Ogbu, 2003).

It is challenging for black students to show their true intelligence in fear of being ridiculed by other students. Ogbu defined smart students as “those who paid attention during lessons, raised their hands to answer questions, always got the answers right, and did their schoolwork and homework.” Black students that exhibited these characteristics were considered to be “Acting White.” An example of an intelligent student that would not put his hand up was reported by a school counselor (Ogbu, 2003).

School Counselor: He was very bright. And I go and evaluate classes all the time. He sat in front of me in one of our science classes. The teacher asked a question. He didn’t put his hand up. I heard him mutter under his breath the right answer. I poked him, and said, “Hey. What’s going on here? Why don’t you put your hand up” “Oh, duh duh, I don’t know, duh duh.” The class was over. He’s walking out, and I said, “Come to my office. I know you’re smart. I’ve seen you in the office. I’ve seen you in class. Why didn’t you answer any questions?” He said to me, “You don’t understand.” I said, “You’re right. I don’t. That’s why I’m asking you, so I could understand.”

School Counselor: He said, “You don’t have to ride home on the bus like I do.” I said, “You’re right. I don’t.” “You don’t have to play in the neighborhood with all the other kids.” I said, “You’re right. I don’t understand.” He said, “I don’t want ’em to know I’m smart. They’ll make

fun of me. I won't have any friends." I said, "So you'd rather sit there and pretend that you don't know than face kids who might say you're smart." And he even said, "Worse than that." I said, "Well, what's worse than that in your world?" He said, "Where I live, they're gonna say I'm White." I said, "Oh!" I said, "Now I think I understand. I don't agree with you, but I, now I hear what you're saying: I don't want 'em to call me names." "I want 'em to think I'm just like everybody else, and if that means sitting in class and not raising my hand, and not doing better in school, I have to live here. And that's my world. So don't think that you can say, "Oh, you should be proud of being smart," he says. "I am, but I can't let anybody know that, and that's coming from one of the, one of the fourteen year old youngsters."

Pressures from other students prevented bright African-American children from performing at the ability they are capable. The level of peer pressure to underachieve makes it difficult for bright African-Americans who want to excel by making good grades (Robinson-English, 2006).

In the black community, it is not acceptable to hang out or have too many white friends. This seems to be more prevalent at the junior high level. They considered good grades to be associated with the white race and so were those students that made good grades. One student commented:

You'll see some, I mean very few Black kids with White [students], you know, acting like [a] White group. And they be like the only Black kid in the White group. Those [Blacks] are the ones who be getting' good grades with them. 'Cause, you know, White people like ... to learn and stuff like that. You know

what I'm sayin'? So, like if [Black kids] hang around with them then they be getting, you know, the education they need.

Making good grades wasn't the issue, but "Acting White" was (Ogbu, 2003).

Intelligent African-American students struggle to fit in socially and academically. Day-Vines' (2003) case study of Tiffany, an African-American female student, proves that black students are often ostracized by peers of their race as well as outside their race. Tiffany is a member of the orchestra and gymnastics team. She is also enrolled in three AP courses. She lives in an upper middle-class neighborhood with both parents who are attorneys. There are other black children in her neighborhood, but most are either older or younger, or attend private school. Tiffany made an appointment with her counselor, who was Caucasian, to meet about being removed from two of the AP courses because of a statewide gymnastics competition. The counselor was stunned by her request, and knew there was more to the story. The counselor asked Tiffany if her request was related to the lack of other minorities in the class. Tiffany began to cry and stated that her "African-American peers teased her for working hard to obtain good grades, speaking standard English, participating on the gymnastics team, and living in an affluent community." Tiffany expressed how overwhelming the situation was. She went on to say that her white peers were only cordial to her when they needed answers to homework questions or when other white peers weren't around. Her white peers also accused her parents of selling drugs to accommodate their lifestyle and her teacher implied that her paper was so well-written that it may have been plagiarized. The counselor realized that Tiffany was isolated by her black and white peers, and was "truly an outsider within two desperate peer groups" (Day-Vines, 2003).

The counselor consulted with two African-Americans, the only other black counselor and a local minister who served on the guidance department's Advisory Board, about Tiffany's problems. The African-American counselor was crucial in shedding light on issues such as "the competing demands that African-American youngsters negotiate and the simultaneous pressure that students often experience from their same race peers." She recommended to the white counselor that Tiffany get involved in a civic organization which could help in resolving her identity issue. The minister recommended that the counselor question Tiffany's church affiliation and encourage her to join a youth group so that she could interact with other conscientious black students (Day-Vines, 2003).

The Caucasian counselor encouraged Tiffany to join a small group titled, "Sisters on the Move." The club is "a support group for academically successful African-American adolescents." The following years when preparing Tiffany's schedule, the counselor ensured that Tiffany would not be the only minority in her AP courses. The counselor was concerned that the climate for African-American students was unhealthy, therefore she approached the school improvement team and the principal about workshops to address cultural awareness in the classroom. In the remaining counseling sessions, the counselor made Tiffany realize that she did not have to "sacrifice academic performance for peer acceptance." Tiffany seemed to be happier for the remainder of the year (Day-Vines, 2003).

Parental Involvement

The benefits of parental involvement are astounding, therefore it is believed that a high level of parental involvement can be beneficial to African-American children. Research proves that children are more likely to do their homework, improve their skills in language, have higher attendance rates, and have stronger skills in music. Hara (1998) believes that increased parental involvement is the key to mending the academic achievement of children. Many studies indicate that parental involvement is prominent when determining the academic outcome of students at all levels. However, there are claims that involvement at the elementary level can have greater effects in the end (Jeynes, 2005). Deslandes, Koyer, Thurcott, and Bertrand (1997) suggest that the parenting style also plays a key role at the secondary level.

Despite the development of research on parental involvement, there is limited information on how it influences African-American youth. This lack of knowledge is due to: (a) few studies have focused either exclusively on African-Americans or, if they have examined a large general sample, specifically highlighted the impact of parental support on African-American children, (b) most social scientists who have examined this issue as it pertains to African-Americans have used very limited or isolated samples, and (c) most researchers have studied only underprivileged African-Americans, and have not presented results that can communicate about the effects of parental involvement across social classes or socioeconomic levels of the African-American population (Jeynes, 2005).

Parental involvement and socioeconomic status (SES) are known to be closely related. First, parents with a high educational level and occupational level have a vast amount of drive and determination. This drive trickles down to their children. Secondly, high-achieving SES parents instill in their children that a good education is the key to living the American dream. Parents of this stature are willing to do whatever is necessary to ensure their child's education. Thirdly, research shows that parental involvement is also related to family structure and availability. Single parents and poverty stricken families are confronted with underemployment which limits the support of their family (Jeynes, 2005). Dixon (1994) stresses that poor, single parents work more hours each week than families with two-parent families. The amount of time spent at work makes them less accessible to their child. Also, the absence of one parent in the home and the other forced to work, the overall participation in the child's education is significantly low" (Dixon, 1994). Fourthly, "to the extent that involved parents try to address the educational needs of their children, these parents may also try to purchase educational aids for their children." The educational aids could possibly include supplementary textbooks, educational videotapes and audiotapes, tutors, desks, and additional supplies." As parental income rises, the more accessible these items are to their children. Fifthly, an increased SES can possibly be an "expression of parental involvement." Many parents seek a particular occupation, income level, or educational or occupational accomplishments strictly for the benefit of their children. These parents believe that their educational and occupational level effects the well-being of the child by providing them with living a wonderful life as well as a better education (Jeynes, 2005).

Assistance from the African-American Community

To increase the academic performance of African-American children, black families as well as the black community, must be proactive. The community should incorporate an educational system that mirrors the schools in their district. If the system is parallel to the schools, then parents are forced to teach their children that academic success is defined by effort and personal responsibility. In a study conducted by Ogbu (1998), parents were asked what they did to ensure that their children were successful academically? They almost unanimously agreed that they held their children, as well as themselves, responsible rather than teachers. Parents were also asked how their child adjusted based on their attitudes, skills, and behavior? Again, they agreed that they encouraged their children to pay attention in class, take good notes during instruction regardless of their feelings toward the teacher, always be willing to learn and be self-motivated, and to finish their homework everyday (Ogbu, 2003).

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) implemented a program in 1977 to recognize the accomplishments of African-American high school students. The program was called the Afro-Academic Cultural and Scientific Olympics (ACT-SO). Students received medal awards for their accomplishments in architecture, biology, computer science, chemistry, dance, music, painting, physics, poetry, sculpture, and many more. Ogbu believes that a replica of this program at the local level would enhance the performance of African-American students. He believes that programs should be established in the community to “help children learn how to be self-motivated, work hard, and persevere in their schoolwork” (Ogbu, 2003).

Recommendations for the School System

In Ogbu's study at Shaker Heights (2003), he noted that the school district implemented many programs to find solutions for their low performing students. The programs included staff development, tutoring centers, all-day kindergarten, school reforms, accelerated schools, Comer's program, the Minority Achievement Committee (MAC), special educational services, programs for low and underachieving students, an English as a second language program, Learning-to-Learn project, mathematics labs, and Proficiency Review of Basic Essentials (Ogbu, 2003).

The Minority Achievements Committee is effective because of its three positive features. The first is collective identity. The MAC program "integrates Black collective identity with academic identity." This is evident in the MAC pledge:

I am an African American and I pledge to uphold the name and image of the African American man. I will do so by striving for academic excellence, conducting myself with dignity and respecting others as if they were my brothers and sisters.

The second feature is positive peer pressures which are "directed toward making good grades." The third feature is educational strategies. The strategies include, "discussions of study habits, taking notes during lessons, preparing for examinations, time budgeting, and the like" (Ogbu, 2003).

The MAC program has proved to be popular among black students as well as effective in boosting their academic achievement. MAC meetings implemented in communities should focus on the following themes: (a) Future-oriented or pragmatic education; (b) Academic responsibility and effective school strategies; (c) Role models

and their academic influence; (d) Internalization of beliefs about Black intelligence and its educational consequences; (e) Teacher expectations and factors that shape them; (f) Leveling or tracking; (g) Identity, culture, language, and the curriculum; (h) Peer pressures; and (i) Discipline and its effects on academic work (Ogbu, 2003).

Teacher expectations are proved to be a key factor in academic disengagement and low performance. Teachers are encouraged to attend workshops that concentrate on teacher expectations. The focus should be “why and how race, socioeconomic status, and other distinctions, such as gender and handicap, shape teacher expectations (Ogbu, 2003).

The school system should also involve parents in their plan. Programs should be put in place to involve parents as well as churches and other organizations in the Black community. Three specific programs are:

1. *Parent workshop on leveling or tracking.*

Parents will be given a handbook on tracking when their child is in elementary school. The workshop will shed light on what leveling or tracking entails.

2. *Parent workshop on class level differences*

This workshop will explain the details of honors and advanced placement courses. Many black parents do not prepare their children for these types of classes because they are unaware of them.

3. *Working with teachers and monitoring children's work.*

This workshop educates parents on how to monitor their child's education. Once a parent understands how, they are more willing to get involved in their child's learning (Ogbu, 2003).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to identify the factors that attribute to the achievement of African-American students. It will specify successful tactics and strategies proven effective for these learners. A qualitative investigation was exercised in this study in an effort to better understand this issue employing first hand accounts through the use of interviews and observations. The data collected in the study allowed the researcher to develop emergent themes throughout the continuance of the study.

Research Design

The qualitative case study method was chosen for this study because it allows the researcher to build a holistic picture of the phenomenon being studied. Case studies best achieve the purpose because “they may be epistemologically in harmony with the reader’s experience” because it allows the reader to build on his or her knowledge, enables the reader to attain personal understandings in the form of “naturalistic generalizations,” and it permits detailed probing of an instance in question rather simple surface description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Other advantages to the case study include:

- The case study is the primary vehicle for emic inquiry.
- The case study builds on the reader’s tacit knowledge.
- The case study is an effective vehicle for demonstrating the interplay between inquiries and respondents.
- The case study provides the reader an opportunity to probe for internal consistency.

- The case study provides the “thick description” so necessary for judgments of transferability.
- The case study provides a grounded assessment of context.

The case study may also be written to record history, to teach (as in the case studies used in educational psychology), to provide vicarious experience for the reader in the context being described, to chart future directions of an organization, to facilitate change, and to review issues for future consideration (Erlandson, Harris, Sipper & Allen, 1993).

Subjects

The participants for this case study include four African-American students. The students were purposively selected from an Eastern town in Texas because they met the following criteria: (a) African-American; (b) Motivated to achieve; (c) Maintain an A/B average; and (d) Completed at least eight years in a diverse student population. The respondents are from a district that serves approximately 6400 students. In qualitative research, the researcher is more concerned about quality than quantity, more for richness of the information than the volume. The basic rule for sample size is that, “There are no rules...” Piaget’s findings of understanding how children think were discovered using his own two children in-depth and at length. Freud’s psychoanalysis was based on less than ten cases. Patton also believes that “by using the directed power of a small purposive sample, and not by attempting to overgeneralize from it, the researcher can do much to allay fears about inadequate sample size” (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993).

Purposive sampling is favored because it maximizes the discovery of heterogeneous patterns and problems that coincide with the study. Purposive sampling in

collaboration with human instrumentation widens the range of data and allows the researchers to identify emergent themes that arise in the study (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993).

The participants were chosen based on their successful academic achievement. The students were eager to partake in the study. The researcher interviewed each student individually. Observations of their surroundings were also noted at the time of the interview.

Instruments

The primary instrument for this investigation is the human form. The human instrument is not new to the field of research. Humans are (a) responsive to environmental cues, and able to interact with the situation; (b) they have the ability to collect information at multiple levels simultaneously; (c) they are able to perceive situations holistically; (d) they are able to process data as soon as they become available; (e) they can provide immediate feedback and request verification of data; and (f) they can explore atypical or unexpected responses. Lincoln & Guba (1985) explain why naturalistic researchers prefer humans as the instrument of choice in gathering data for the following reasons:

Because it would be virtually impossible to devise a priori a nonhuman instrument with sufficient adaptability to encompass and adjust to the variety of realities that will be encountered; because of the understanding that all instruments interact with respondents and objects but that only the human instrument is capable of grasping and evaluating the meaning of that differential interaction; because the intrusion of instruments intervenes in the mutual shaping of other elements and that shaping can be appreciated and evaluated only by a human; and because all instruments are value-based and interact with local values but only human

is in a position to identify and take into account to some extent those resulting biases.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that the case study is the reporting mode of choice for the naturalistic study. “The case study allows for thick description that puts the reader vicariously into the context and allows him or her to interact with the data presented” (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993). Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicate that “the description must specify everything that a reader may need to know in order to understand the findings; findings are not part of the thick description, although they must be interpreted in the terms of the factors thickly described...”

Procedures

To execute this naturalistic inquiry, the following steps were taken:

1. The researcher reviewed literature searching for information relating to the achievement of African-American students. The literature review was used as the basis for formulating the interview questions.
2. The researcher examined data and state records pertinent to the study.
3. The researcher conducted structured and unstructured interviews with participants in the study. These individual interviews included questions about their perception of the academic achievement among African-American students. Data was gathered through the use of one structured 90-minute interview per participant and one unstructured follow-up interview lasting no longer than 20 minutes to address additional questions that emerged as the data was analyzed. The interview questions are listed in Appendix A, and the subject permission letter is in Appendix B.

4. The researcher made observations at the time of the interview. All of the interviews were conducted in the homes of the participants with the exception of one participant who chose for us to meet at her church. The interview time and location was determined by the participants.

Analysis of Data

The constant comparison method of data analysis was employed. The researcher identified emergent themes based on interviews and data collection. The data was coded by highlighting transcribed interviews and using the margins to notate suggestions of how the data aligned with previous statements. Then, the researcher grouped the data into categories and reviewed for overlapping. In some cases, the categories were combined. The data was read repeatedly to ensure that the statements were grouped accordingly.

Trustworthiness is an important aspect in a naturalistic study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that four questions should be posed before interacting with participants. They include:

1. Truth value: How can one establish confidence in the “truth” of findings of a particular inquiry for the subjects (respondents) with which and the context in which the inquiry was carried out?
2. Applicability: How can one determine the extent to which the findings of a particular inquiry have applicability in other contexts or with other subjects (respondents)?

3. Consistency: How can one determine whether the findings of an inquiry would be repeated if the inquiry were replicated with the same (or similar) subjects (respondents) in the same (or similar) context?
4. Neutrality: How can one establish the degree to which the findings of an inquiry are determined by the subjects (respondents) and conditions of the inquiry and not by the biases, motivations, interests, or perspectives of the inquirer?

To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher exercised the use of prolonged engagement. This technique helps the researcher build trust and develop rapport with participants. Having interacted with all of the participants prior to the study, a level of trust was previously established. As an educator, the researcher was able to witness the attitudes of teachers, administrators, and students toward African-American students. It allowed the researcher to see how these students struggled to fit academically and the challenge of cultural peer acceptance.

Member checks were conducted at the end of each interview. The researcher interacted with the respondents numerous times verifying that their perspective was accurately represented.

Triangulation allows the reader to take appropriate steps to verify information between sources. As I obtained data from one respondent, I was able to listen for verification of similar incidents and concerns from other respondents.

Summary

The study was conducted using the case study method, which Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe as the vehicle of choice for reporting results in a naturalistic study. Findings from this study will serve as a framework for parents, educators, and students. Themes were formulated based on data collected from the respondents, as well as observations at the time of the interviews. These themes were aligned with literature associated with the topic. Data was analyzed and discussed in an effort to provide parents, educators, and students information that is vital to the African-American community.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The individuals in this study are exceptional African-American students. They were open and candid in sharing experiences, as well as challenges they faced in an effort to help others that will possibly travel this same path. They unselfishly allotted time from various activities to partake in this research study, a study noteworthy to many children in the African-American community.

This study has enlightened me in various ways. It has given me the opportunity to truly understand the hardships that African-American children face in today's society. I was fortunate to learn details about these individuals that have been hidden for years-- incidents that have changed them and gave them reason to continuously strive to be successful. The information shared during the interviews put many uncertainties into perspective. Each participant was willing to share their experiences including significant details and various outcomes. They finally had the chance to communicate their experiences and voice their concerns without being judged or feel as though they had to be selective with their words.

This research study is personal because it delineates the feelings of many children that are not given a voice. The stories of individuals in this study will change the way that you view a black child, interact with a black child, and the way you teach a black child. I am ecstatic that I, the researcher, can reveal their experiences.

Jaila Johnson

As I drove to my first participant's house, I was greeted with construction. Jaila lives on the outskirts of town where construction is a constant problem. Construction crews and equipment filled the roadway. I turned down Manor Road and arrived at Jaila's home to find a newly modeled SUV sitting in the driveway. Jaila's home was built seven years ago but looked as if it were just built. The yard was neatly manicured and flowers surrounded their home. I was welcomed by her mother. Jaila's mom offered me to come in, as well as a cold drink. Before I could take my seat, Jaila walked in with a big smile. She is a beautiful girl, neatly dressed with long, flowing brown braids, and big, bright brown eyes. She was relaxing in her room after being at cheerleading practice all evening. We decided to meet in the family room. The sound of a reality show blared from the television. The dining room was neatly decorated with expensive furniture, a computer, and accents to enhance the room's beauty. The bookshelf was filled with books--mostly Christian books. The room was also decorated with family pictures. Jaila's mom took a seat on the couch periodically correcting Jaila's grammar when she felt it was incorrect.

Jaila Johnson resides with her mom. Her parents divorced when she was a toddler, but her dad has always been active in her life. Her father lives in a small town about 45 minutes away and she has contact with him approximately three times a week. They also attend the same church. Her dad is remarried and Jaila has three younger step-siblings. She also has an older sister and a nephew. While interviewing Jaila, her dad stopped by to visit. I explained the study to both of her parents. They seemed intrigued

and grateful that Jaila was included. Mr. Johnson's interest was peaked so he decided to stay for the duration of the interview.

Jaila, as well as her parents, were all born in the same town. Her family is extremely close and she is walking distance from her maternal grandparents. Her grandparents have played a key role in her upbringing. Anytime her mom has to work late or has class, she stays at her grandparents' home. Jaila's older sister and her family live next door allowing her to see her nephew on a daily basis. Seeing him every evening is the highlight of her day.

Education is definitely valued in Jaila's home. Her father attended college for two years and her mom has a master's degree in counseling and educational administration. Her parents constantly preach about the importance of education and the choices it allows you to have as an adult. It is understood that school work comes first, then extracurricular activities. Her mom constantly reminds her to keep her grades up so that she can one day attend the university of her choice.

Jaila remembers her childhood as being a happy one. She most remembers how active she was in her church. Most of her childhood revolved around the church. Her mother is extremely active in the church and her father is a deacon, therefore many weekdays and every Sunday were spent at church. When Jaila was not at church functions or school, the remainder of her time was spent at her maternal grandparents. She thoroughly enjoys spending time with them. During her spare time, Jaila enjoys reading, watching television, and shopping.

She describes herself as a quiet student that pushes herself to achieve self-set goals. She indicates that she does not say much in class. Her attention is focused on the teacher and ensuring that she has accurate notes. She states that her teachers perceive her as being a student of few words, but extremely intelligent. Teachers have e-mailed her mom to explain how great of a student Jaila is. Numerous teachers have indicated that they wish they had more students like Jaila. One teacher stated, "I wish I could clone Jaila so that all of my students are like her." She feels that most of her peers view her as someone that is funny and easy to get along with. If some of her African-American peers were asked to describe her, some of them might say that she's different and somewhat snobby. They perceive her to be snobby because she is particular when choosing her friends and associates. At home, Jaila is a different child. Her parents think that she is quite a talkative child that spends lots of time in her room. "Overall, I think that both of my parents consider me to be a good kid," stated Jaila.

The 14-year-old freshman admits that she is a good student but faces some struggles as an African-American. She finds it difficult to "keep up" with her white peers, and even more challenging to change the stereotype that many Caucasians have about African-American students and their behavior. She feels that white students have a specific stereotype about black students forcing Jaila to push herself harder so that she can prove them wrong. "Most people do not feel that black students are capable of the same potential as white students," admits Jaila. She insists that she will not be perceived this way. This is difficult for Jaila because she feels that she is sometimes viewed negatively by her black peers as well. She thinks that some African-American students

are jealous of her. She contributes the jealousy to some of her possessions. Jaila carries a Coach or Dooney & Bourke purse to class everyday, dressed in the latest fashions and footwear. Although she does not boast, many view her appearance and standoffish behavior as arrogant. She believes that some of her peers are happy about her accomplishments and wish that they could study and be as successful as she is, whereas some would rejoice in her downfall. Many black students at her school perceive smart black children as “stuck up.” They also make comments like, “She wants to be white.” The black students tell Jaila, “You talk like a white girl and why are you so proper?” recalls Jaila. “They would mimic me constantly, but it didn’t really bother me,” stated Jaila. Many black students view making good grades and focusing on their academics as acting white.

Making her parents happy and proud is Jaila’s motivation to strive for excellence. “I am concerned about letting my parents down, which is something I don’t ever want to do,” stated Jaila. She wants to make her accomplishments in life a story of success. Jaila’s parents are exceedingly committed to her education. Her parents consistently e-mail and call her teachers regarding her progress. They inquire about completed homework, class assignments, and if Jaila actively participates in class by asking questions and following instruction that is presented. If she falls behind in any class, her parents immediately take action by requiring her to relinquish her cell phone and she is grounded from activities that are not school related.

Jaila’s parents encourage her to be proactive in her learning. They expect her to take responsibility if she encounters problems in her classes. Jaila struggles with all

facets of math, especially algebra. For her to truly grasp the concept, she says that she must have a good teacher that can break it down to her level of understanding. If Jaila does not understand material presented in class, she remains after class to ask her teacher to review the lesson. Jaila feels comfortable asking her teachers questions except for her world geography and integrated physics and chemistry (IPC) teacher. Jaila senses that her IPC teacher does not like children. The teacher made a point to explain to her students that she was supposed to be employed with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), but landed a teaching assignment first. In her world geography class, Jaila stresses that her teacher has favorite students and they include only males. “She makes a point to form conversations with them concerning their family or various activities or events happening in their lives,” admits Jaila. “It is very obvious that Mrs. Tucker does not like girls.”

Although her world geography and IPC teacher were not encouraging, she found acceptance and motivation from her Spanish teacher. Spanish is not particularly Jaila’s strength, but refreshing remarks from Mrs. Rayford made her work extremely hard in her class. “Mrs. Rayford encourages me to go to college because she knows that I want to work in the medical field,” exclaimed Jaila. Mrs. Rayford is aware of how important it is to develop a relationship with her students. She made an effort to learn Jaila’s interests and goals, which is important to Jaila. She describes Mrs. Rayford as a young, kind, and truthful teacher that can easily relate to her students. Jaila states that Mrs. Rayford is a good teacher.

Advanced Placement (AP) classes are offered at Jaila's school, but the class has an insufficient amount of minority representation. Jaila informed me that teachers solicit AP courses to white students, but not black students. Jaila credits the lack of minority representation in these classes to the stereotype that many have about African-American students. "I do not feel as though black students are encouraged to take AP courses because most teachers do not feel as though black students will work hard because of the stereotype about them," elaborates Jaila. "There's a fear that they will act ghetto. White people view some African-Americans as loud, crazy, over-exaggerated, and uneducated. Just because some black students act this way, they expect all black people to act like that."

The environment of the school is instrumental in Jaila's learning. If she could choose a learning environment that best suits her, it would most likely be outside, possibly in a greenhouse. "I would want to be in a classroom with lots of windows—a classroom that makes me feel really comfortable," elaborated Jaila. "I would want to be outside because it's so peaceful—so much to look at. I think being outside allows you to open your mind and gives you lots more to think about. It would be so much better than being closed in."

Once Jaila completes high school, she plans to attend college in Texas. Her plans are to become a registered nurse or a physician's assistant. "I want to be able to help people," states Jaila. "It is rewarding to say that you helped save someone's life."

Keaira Smith

Traveling to meet my next participant made me realize that this was my first time to sit down one on one with a preacher's kid, or PK as most children refer to. I pulled up to the church where Keaira Smith's stepfather was the pastor. The lawn at Lakeview Missionary Baptist Church was neatly cut and the flowers were trimmed to perfection. Many cars filled the parking lot this warm Wednesday evening. Members were there to attend the weekly Bible study. Keaira arrived to the church with her mom and younger sister, Sade. Her family headed inside the sanctuary as Keaira and I went to the cafeteria located at the back of the church. The cafeteria was neatly arranged and extremely clean. I noticed a small television at the back, which was put in place for the cafeteria committee so that they could prepare the food as well as view and listen to the sermon. The background was filled with small whispers of bible verses, Reverend Paxton teaching, and members asking the Pastor questions about the lesson. A low, sibilant sound in the cafeteria made a deacon of the church suspicious. He tiptoed to the back to find out where the conversation was coming from. He peeped in and stated, "I just wanted to make sure everything was okay back here." We indicated that everything was fine and continued conversing.

The politeness exhibited by Keaira was extremely impressive. Every question ended with yes ma'am or no ma'am. Keaira is often complemented on how polite she is. She was dressed as if she had been to an important event, but stated that she had only been to school. Keaira is involved in many activities at her school. She is a member of the Student Council, Key Club, the school choir, and she serves a Freshman Mentor.

When the active sophomore is not at school, she enjoys reading mystery novels, singing, talking on the phone, and spending time with her friends.

Keaira's fondest memories of her childhood include birthday parties thrown each year by her mother. The entire neighborhood would attend the bash. "I had a happy childhood," stated Keaira with a big smile. "Mama was always doing whatever possible to make me and Sade happy!" Keaira was born in Texas, but resided in Arkansas most of her childhood until her family decided to come back to the Lone Star State. After moving back to Texas, her mom married Rev. Paxton. Keaira and her family immediately became active in the church. Years later, Rev. Paxton became the pastor of Lakeview. At church, Keaira is an usher and she also sings in the youth choir. She admits that it is difficult being a preacher's kid. "People look at us different and they expect more out of us," Keaira explained. "Basically, they expect us to be perfect." However, the best part about being a PK is the traveling. Keaira enjoys traveling with her stepfather to different churches in different cities because it enables her to meet new people.

Keaira also enjoys going to school and perceives herself as a hard-working student that tries to do her best in all of her classes. I asked Keaira how her teachers view her. She stated, "As a quiet, sweet student that is helpful to other students. My teachers would also comment on how polite I am." Keaira said that her peers would differ describing her as talkative and energetic—full of life! If her parents were asked to describe their daughter, Keaira states that they would say that she is a respectful and obedient child.

As any student, Keaira has encountered a few hardships. “Sometimes, white students get more attention than black students,” Keaira admits. “For example, if I need help with something, white teachers just look over me, but immediately help a white student when they raise their hand.” She reminisces back to when her English teacher ignored her. She stated that after keeping her hand up for a while, and her teacher did not come, she eventually had to go to the teacher’s desk for help. Keaira knew that her teacher saw her hand, but she failed to offer assistance. Keaira said that incidents like this make her feel like her teachers do not expect a lot from her.

Despite the feelings of her teachers, Keaira receives her motivation from home. She wants to make her parents proud. “I want to be something in life!” Keaira exclaimed. “I don’t want to be a failure!” Keaira’s mom is extremely involved in her education. “She constantly tells me to keep my grades up so that I can get a good college education and then, find a good job so that I can take care of myself.” Keaira’s mom stresses independence to her daughters. She considers her mom to be her role model. “My mom is a hard-worker,” elaborates Keaira. “She wants the best in life for me. She gives me everything I want even though I do not deserve it.” Keaira maintains her grades because she recognizes that if her grades drop, she will be grounded, her phone will be taken away, and computer usage will be alleviated. Basically, she will not be allowed to do anything.

Acceptance is not an issue for Keaira. She feels as though she is accepted by all of her peers—African-American and white. She attributes acceptance by her African-American peers to being a preacher’s kid. “Some feel that they have to be careful with

their word choice around me because I am a PK, but some don't care," explained Keaira. Some students are often taunted because of their intellectual ability, but Keaira is eliminated from this category. She admits that African-American students are notorious for teasing other African-Americans about being smart and making good grades, but they do not tease her. She feels it is because some of her peers think that she is mean so they would not dare attempt to taunt her. Keaira does not believe that she is mean, but many of her peers perceive her to be. She views this as an advantage so that no one will bother her.

The subject that is most difficult for Keaira is world history. She admits that she does not like keeping up with dates or sequential order of key events. "It's not interesting to me," elaborates Keaira. However, if she has questions or does not understand material presented, she remains after class to talk to her teacher. She also takes the initiative to attend tutorials if she feels the need. Many of Keaira's teachers do not encourage her to go above and beyond what is expected of her. She states that most of them do not have any encouraging words to say. Only a few of her teachers have mentioned taking Advanced Placement classes. According to Keaira, their reasoning for encouraging students is because it looks good on your transcript. The only teacher that speaks words of triumph to Keaira is her choir teacher, Mrs. Marshall. "She tells me to give it all I got," smiled Keaira.

Keaira enjoys learning, but she really enjoys it when it is interesting and fun. "My geometry teacher makes learning fun!" she exclaimed. "She's young, vibrant, and when she teaches, she gives examples of what she's explaining and if it is something

that we don't understand, she slows down to review it. Once everyone understands, she moves on." Keaira also enjoys her choir class. The singing is enjoyable because it is a change from sitting in class listening to lectures. She enjoys the active participation. The one regret that Keaira has about her school is that there are not many African-American teachers and she feels that there should be. "I would prefer a black teacher because we are the same race and a black teacher could better understand me," she explained.

If she could create her own learning environment, she would have lots of colors on the wall. She would also limit the number of students in each class. "It's hard when there are lots of students because there are so many distractions," Keaira indicated. "I want an environment where the teachers do not discriminate and all students are treated equal!"

Keaira has big plans after high school. She plans to attend Baylor University and study to be a pediatrician. "I love kids and would love to be able to help them in any way."

Christian Ashley

As I pulled into the long concrete driveway, I noticed Christian mowing the lawn with his Cub Cadet riding mower. He had quite a job because their yard was huge. The two-story brick home sat on more than three acres. Several hound dogs greeted me as I got out of my car. It was such a beautiful day that Christian and I decided to remain on the porch. His cheeks were red from being outside for so long. The hard-working young man sat down and began to tell me about himself.

Christian, 13, was born and raised in Texas. His living arrangements are unique. He lives with his aunt and uncle, which is next door to his father's house. His mother lives in the same town about fifteen minutes away. Christian's parents divorced before he was a toddler. His mom landed a great job out of town and to make the situation easier for Christian, he remained with his dad. His aunt has cared for him since he was a baby and with her footsteps from his dad's house, he decided to live with her. Christian states, "My childhood was great!" He recalls being spoiled by everyone—his mom, dad, aunt, and uncle. He admits that his mom's move did not affect him. He just remembers being loved by everyone. When he is not at school or working with his dad, he enjoys reading, bowling, playing tennis, basketball, surfing on the Internet, and playing video games. Christian also enjoys spending time with his family.

Christian describes himself as a good student who works hard to make good grades. "I would say that I am an auditory learner, who constantly listens to what the teacher has to say," states Christian. Everything becomes clear to him when the teacher explains the directions. He states that if any of his teachers were asked to describe him,

each of them would state that he is extremely bright and has the potential to go to any university of his choice. Christian feels that his parents consider him to be a good student. Both parents encourage him to make good grades. “My mom tells me that she’s proud of me on a daily basis,” states Christian. “My dad includes me in various tasks with his business and he directs any technological questions to me.” Christian values the fact that his dad includes him in decision-making for his business. Helping his father makes him feel extremely intelligent. Christian’s parents are essential in motivating him to achieve, but he is also motivated by plans for his future. “I want to start now by working hard so that I can have a successful life,” states Christian.

Although motivated at home, Christian receives opposite treatment from his peers at school. There are times when Christian feels more accepted by his Caucasian peers than by the African-American students. He insists that it is because of the way he dresses—wearing mainly Polo by Ralph Lauren. They say, “Man, dude you need to get some Roca Wear or Sean Jean instead of wearing those white boy clothes like Polo.” Christian responds by saying, “Don’t worry about me. I can wear what I want to!” He also attributes the negative treatment to his living environment. Most African-American students at Christian’s school live around the same neighborhood and he does not live anywhere near them. “I feel that some black kids are kind of jealous because they sometimes treat me different than people of their own caliber,” states Christian.

Being intelligent is also an issue that Christian constantly tackles with not only his peers, but teachers as well. “It is challenging for black kids to step up and be smart because most Advanced Placement students are white and this is how teachers feel it

should be,” explains Christian. “So it’s hard to prove them wrong knowing that they probably feel this way. The teachers don’t just come out and say they feel this way, but it is just understood by their actions. I think it’s mainly because some black kids don’t try and they think that all black kids are this way, which is not true,” elaborates Christian. African-American students that are not in AP classes say, “They think they’re something because they’re in classes with the white people.”

There are numerous intelligent African-American students at Christian’s school, but he insists that it can not be credited to encouragement from teachers. He can not recall any of his teachers encouraging him to take AP classes. His enrollment in AP classes is not because of the efforts of his teachers, but his parents. “They tell everyone about the classes, but no one specifically encourages black students,” states Christian. He also feels that some African-American students do not want to be in the classes because they are aware that they will not be with other black students due to the significantly low number in Advanced Placement classes.

Another difficulty Christian has to face is math. He has struggled with this subject since his childhood. “It didn’t help that I had five math teachers this year,” stated Christian. His teacher at the beginning of the year was fired and a coach replaced her. Then, a substitute replaced the coach. The substitute then had to leave for a long-term assignment and was replaced by another coach. Finally, a substitute was hired for the remainder of the year. Christian feels that he did not learn anything the entire school year.

When Christian encounters a problem in any class, he remains after class to consult with his teacher. He usually requests a pass to attend tutorials. When completing assignments at home and he has a question, he attempts to solve the problem himself. If he can not conquer the problem, he usually calls one of his friends for help.

Christian feels somewhat comfortable asking his teachers for assistance, but admits that they have not been encouraging this school year. “They don’t encourage me at all,” admits Christian. “They act as if they don’t care about their students and as if it is a burden on them when you need their assistance.” When students seek help from Mrs. Regan, Christian’s science teacher, she says, “Okay,” in a sarcastic tone. Mrs. Regan has made Christian question his intelligence numerous times this year. “For example, Mrs. Regan told me that my measurement was wrong during a science lab and I knew it was right,” recalls Christian. “She kept telling me I was wrong in front of the entire class, but in the end, I was right.” Christian indicates that situations such as this have occurred numerous times. He states that Mrs. Regan has a sarcastic remark for every question asked.

One class that stands out in Christian’s mind is his language arts class. Mrs. Lewis differentiated assignments based on the needs and abilities of her students. “For example, everyone is assigned a project, but she allows room for change for each student,” recalls Christian. If Christian could create the perfect learning environment, it would include classes similar to Mrs. Lewis’ class. He would also make each class one hour long. “After ten minutes, you lose interest,” states Christian. The school would also include qualified, nice teachers that do not base everything on the TAKS test. Christian

admits that this school year revolved around the TAKS test. He feels that everything he did in class stemmed from the state test.

Christian also recommends that more African-American teachers should be present in all schools. "I don't feel comfortable talking with any of my teachers," states Christian. "It is as if they don't understand, nor do they want to understand. It's like they don't care." He believes that African-American teachers listen to you and act as if they really care. "In class, black teachers stop to make sure that their students understand," elaborates Christian. "They act as if they truly care." He feels that a black teacher could relate better to him because of their ethnicity. "I also like their style of teaching," said Christian referring to black teachers. "It seems as though Mrs. Coleman, an African-American teacher I had last year, really understood my learning style." He went on to say, "Black students need black teachers, especially for guidance. They need black teachers because they understand the way black students learn."

Christian plans to attend college after high school. He hopes to major in general business so that it will provide the framework for his future plans. Christian's dream is to continue his family's legacy by operating his father's business; he knows that this will make his father extremely proud.

Jacob Lee

The drive to Jacob Lee's house was a peaceful one. The scenery was absolutely beautiful. The road was surrounded by tall, East Texas pine trees. I pulled into his yard synchronized with his mother. She greeted me and told me to enter through the front door. Jacob opened the door and welcomed me to his home. I thought, "What a polite young man!" He led me to the family room. His brother, Joey, was at the computer checking his grades and to see if his professor had emailed him. The television was down to a whisper. Books and magazines covered the coffee table. It was evident that lots of reading took place in their home.

Jacob, a 17-year-old junior, is an extraordinary young man. He participates in football, basketball, and track and still maintains good grades. The gifted and talented young man was recently nominated by Senator Steve Ogden to attend a ten week program at National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). The program is known as the NASA High School Aerospace Engineer Program. Only the best of the best are chosen to attend.

Jacob and his two siblings were raised by both parents. His childhood memories include his brother and sister teasing him because of his weight. It bothered Jacob when they teased him. "I would get so frustrated!" exclaimed Jacob. "But looking back, they were just being brothers and sisters." He also remembers playing outside; he enjoyed playing with his brother. Growing up, Jacob and Joey were different than most brothers. They interacted well without lots of fighting. Jacob's childhood also includes lots of books. His mom read to them morning, noon, and night. Once they learned how to read,

she made them read to themselves. Jacob admits that he did not like to, but knew he did not have a choice because it was mandatory. They usually read the popular children's magazine, *Highlights*. She also introduced Jacob and Joey to the Harry Potter collection. She read the first book to them and they continued reading the sequels alone. "I remember one day when we were outside playing and she told us to come in," remembered Jacob. "We didn't want to, but knew we had to." She said, "Sit down for twenty minutes and read!" She told them that if they did not want to read, then just look at the book. "But it was a trick because who is just going to sit there?" continued Jacob. "We were forced to read it." Jacob and his siblings were not allowed to watch much television. The only channel they could watch was Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), Channel 8. Cable was not installed in their home until the Lee children were much older. Jacob was not allowed to play video games. He was forced to use his imagination to create games and other activities. He received his first video game when he was in the eighth grade. His mom would also give he and his siblings problem solving activities forcing them to find a solution.

Jacob's mom is a principal with numerous degrees in the field of education under her belt. Her educational values have paid off with all of her children. Jacob's older sister is a teacher and is now pursuing a Master's degree in school psychology. Joey attends an Ivy League University double majoring in African-American history and psychology. Jacob has no choice but to continue to walk in the path of success.

"I am an extremely hard-working and dedicated student," describes Jacob. "I have been in school so long that I have figured out how to manage my time in and out of

class.” Teachers would agree that Jacob is a good student, although he does not always complete his homework. “They know that I know how to do it,” Jacob elaborated. “I do my homework when I know it’s for a grade.” However, Jacob realizes that he should complete his homework. His peers know that he works really hard. As a matter of fact, some would say that he works too hard. “Sometimes when my friends go to the movies, I can’t go because I tell them that I have school work to do,” stated Jacob. “They think I work way too hard!” Jacob indicates that his parents feel as though he is a good student as well. “They don’t ride me because they know that I am responsible and that I will get my work done,” explained Jacob.

The motivation for Jacob’s success are his futuristic goals and responsibilities. The fact that one day he will be finished with school and can support himself and live comfortably is what continuously makes him go above and beyond what is expected of him. “I know some people live pay check to pay check, but I want to see the greater reward!” explains Jacob referring to deferred gratification. “I am now able to look ahead, which a lot of young people my age do not do. I know that it will be better in the long run.”

Jacob’s parents actively participate in his education. He sometimes feels that they are too involved. “I can’t even sign up for my own classes,” states Jacob. Registration falls under the duty of his mother. Jacob states that his dad stands behind him, but stresses the fact that his mom is an educator and knows what is best for him. His parents expect him to make all A’s. Jacob is aware of the consequences he faces if his grades decline. “If my grades drop at all, Mom wants to know why and the reason must be

valid,” declared Jacob. “And I must tell her what my plans are to bring them up.” They first take his cell phone, then his Play Station. “It’s a rule unspoken,” stated Jacob. Having his parents stay on top of him is much worse than having his possessions taken away.

Jacob’s intellectual and athletic abilities do not excuse him from typical struggles of a teenager. The questions about his learning ability started at an early age. Children would often ask, “Why are you trying to be so smart?” Caucasian children would ask Jacob, “Why are you trying to be white?” Both African-American and Caucasian students would question why he talked white referring to Jacob’s articulate speech. “The white kids would laugh and say that they were blacker than me,” stated Jacob. He believes that some students dislike him because he is good at sports and he is extremely smart. He gets more disapproval from females than males. His male friends do not give him a hard time. Jacob states that most of the negativity now comes from Caucasian students. Most black students say, “Man, you’re smart!”

The students were not Jacob’s only problem, but some educators played a role as well. He recalls wanting to be in the gifted and talented program at his school, but he knew that he struggled with his multiplication tables. His second grade teacher, Mrs. Sample, destroyed his hope of getting into the program. She did not take time to work with him concerning his multiplication tables, but instead she said, “You’re bad and there’s nothing that I can do with you.” One day, Mrs. Sample sent Jacob out of the class. He sat in the hallway beside the door. As he sat, he noticed the principal, Mrs. Wilson, slowly approaching. He distinctly remembers their conversation. Mrs. Wilson

stated, “You’ve been in school for three years and you’re still getting in trouble. You’re bad just like your brother.” Jacob thought, “As if my fifth grade brother had been in jail or killed someone. I just sat there. I could not believe what she said.” Jacob indicated that he just shared this information with his mother last year. He kept it bottled in for more than ten years. When he told his mom, she was livid that a teacher or a principal would say that to any child. Mrs. Lee knew that Jacob was gifted, but convincing his teachers was a difficult task. As an educator, Mrs. Lee thought the other teachers would see what she saw, but they did not, or maybe they did not want to. Many of Jacob’s friends were in the gifted program, which made him question why he was not? He wanted to be in the program, and although his teacher knew he was bright, she still did not nominate him. After finally getting into the program because of his high test scores, Jacob seemed to fit right in.

Jacob finds difficulty in history. It is not the work that he has a problem with, but he feels that history should be excluded from the curriculum. “I can always use math, language arts, and science because you can apply them to everyday life, but not history,” states Jacob. He also finds fault in Black History Month. Jacob states, “I hate Black History Month because everybody cares about black history for one month and that’s it. The teachers tie curriculum in so that we discuss black history in February and after that no one cares.” Jacob recalls movies shown in class of slaves picking cotton excluding all of the other horrible things that his ancestors went through. “I think it’s just a big front!” exclaimed Jacob. He credits his knowledge of black history to his mother verbally sharing history with him as well as taking him to significant historical sites.

One class that encourages Jacob to think critically and go beyond his potential is physics. “Most teachers wait until the end of the year to express words of encouragement,” stated Jacob. However, Jacob’s physics teacher enforces critical thinking and speaks words of encouragement the entire year. “Mrs. Brown basically inspires us because she gets us into a system of thinking--teaching us to think differently,” said Jacob. “For example, a test question is worth one point, but if you provide an explanation of how to obtain the answer, you receive additional points,” explained Jacob. He indicates that everyone in the class has the mind to do great things.

When asked if Advanced Placement classes were advertised to African-American students, Jacob stated that these classes were only offered to some black students. “If you are making amazing grades, some counselors will encourage you to think about AP classes, but it’s usually initiated by parents,” indicated Jacob.

One teacher that Jacob feels comfortable talking to is Mr. Bailey. “He’s like a concerned student that happens to be teaching,” smiled Jacob. He admits that Mr. Bailey is extremely nice and Jacob enjoys his style of teaching. Jacob states that all of his classes are fun and exciting, but he praises the curriculum. When Jacob encounters a problem in any of his classes, he will attempt to solve it rather than asking a teacher. “I will usually ask a friend before asking a teacher,” affirmed Jacob.

If Jacob could design a learning environment that best fits his gifted needs, the class schedule would change to block scheduling. He feels that more is accomplished in a class that is 1 hour and 30 minutes versus 45 minutes. Smaller classes do not appeal to Jacob. He feels that more attention is brought to an individual if the classes are smaller.

A class size of 20-25 students is ideal. Another change that should be addressed, according to Jacob, is that schools do not help students develop their social skills. He insists that a program should be implemented to help students develop social skills and make more of an effort to try and get kids to mesh more instead of setting ethnic and status clicks.

Jacob credits his achievements to the environment created by his mother. “Mom made me read a lot when I was younger whether I wanted to or not, even if it was just a magazine,” exclaimed Jacob. “And she made me watch educational shows such as *Reading Rainbow*.” He also kept a famous quote from his mom in the back of his mind at all times. She would often say, “Jacob, you’re a smart boy!” In knowing his mom felt this way, Jacob was willing to do whatever it took not to disappoint her.

The soft spoken, well-mannered young man has big plans for the future. Whether it is Stanford, Rice, or Oklahoma State, Jacob will definitely be an asset to their Engineering Department.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

The intent of this chapter is to provide an analysis of the research study. This chapter includes answers to the research questions that guided the study. The findings are organized and presented as emergent themes. The chapter concludes by providing recommendations for further research in the factors that influence achievement among African-American students.

The researcher met the objectives by investigating the lives of African-American students and focusing on their struggle to function in the educational realm of society. The researcher outlined the hardships and struggles of successful African-American students in an effort to provide an understanding of their everyday challenges. Their candidness in articulating their stories allows the reader to walk in their footsteps. It gives the reader the opportunity to see first-hand accounts of the challenges that these individuals have faced.

Finally, it should be noted that the students in this study are extraordinary and instrumental in revealing the hardships of many African-American students whose stories have remained silent.

Summary

Emergent Themes

The progression of the study allowed emergent themes to surface. The themes were captured from interviews with the participants. The following themes exhibit an understanding of the similarities of the participants in the study: I) Fear of being perceived as acting white, II) More African-American educators are needed to act as role models; III) Teachers' attitudes affect achievement; and IV) Parental involvement is key.

Emergent Theme I: Fear of Being Perceived as Acting White

African-American children strive to be successful academically, but fear that they will be looked down upon by their peers. Barack Obama states that we must "...eradicate the slander that says a black youth with a book is acting white" (Fryer, 2006).

Participants in the study indicated that many of their peers perceived making good grades, taking AP classes, wearing a particular brand of clothing, and speaking correct grammar were clear indications of acting white. One participant recalls numerous statements made because of her intelligence. Students would state, "Why are you trying to be smart" and "Why are you trying to be white?"

Taking Advanced Placement classes are not viewed positively by some African-American students. Many of the participants' peers fear being enrolled in AP classes because of the lack of minority enrollment. The students hope to be in classes with their friends, but they are aware that it is unlikely for African-Americans to be in AP classes. Many intelligent students feel as though they are not welcome to take such classes.

Minority students that deliberately underachieve in an effort to avoid social sanctions provide a clear indication of why the academic performance of 17-year-old African-Americans has deteriorated since the late 1980's while nine-year-olds have improved (Fryer, 2006).

Questions about articulate speech and correct grammar usage are also key issues attributed to acting white. Students told one respondent, "You talk like a white girl and why are you so proper?" Caucasian students constantly asked one participant, "Why are you trying to be white?" These students would also laugh and make comments indicating that they were blacker than one participant.

Appearance and designer clothing has an alarming effect on how African-American students are treated by their peers. One study proved that some African-American students felt that wearing clothes from The Gap or Abercrombie & Fitch (instead of Tommy Hilfiger or FUBU) and wearing shorts in the winter was a clear indicator of acting white (Fryer, 2006). African-American students told one participant, "Man, dude you need to get some Roca Wear or Sean Jean instead of wearing those white boy clothes like Polo."

Emergent Theme II: More African-American Educators are Needed to Act as Role Models

African-American teachers are needed in the public schools to serve as role models for black children. These teachers "help to build a sense of worth in those students" (Stephens, 2002).

Students agree that having an educator of their ethnicity would be beneficial in their school environment. “I have not ever had the opportunity to have a black teacher,” one participant commented. “If I had to choose, I would be more comfortable with a black teacher because I feel like she can better relate to me.”

Having someone to relate to and truly understand their challenges is what is desired. One respondent states, “I would prefer a black teacher because we are the same race and a black teacher could better understand me.” Another participant indicated that African-American teachers possess qualities like none other. He felt as if he had a connection with his African-American teacher that was different from his other teachers. “In class, black teachers stop to make sure that their students understand,” indicates one respondent. They act as if they truly care.” He felt as if a black teacher could relate better to him because of their ethnicity. “I also like their style of teaching. It seems as though Mrs. Coleman, an African-American teacher I had last year, really understood my learning style.” He went on to say, “Black students need black teachers, especially for guidance. They need black teachers because they understand the way black students learn.”

Emergent Theme III: Teachers’ Attitudes Affect Achievement

Power of Positive Attitudes

When teachers acknowledge that they genuinely care about their students, children respond by exerting greater effort to reach their potential. The Pygmalion effect, or self-fulfilling prophecy, proves that when teachers continuously demonstrate their belief in their students’ abilities, almost all students respond with

greater effort. Teachers that care will nurture relationships with their students by affirming each child's efforts and talents. An example of a caring teacher is Anne Sullivan, who believed Helen Keller could read and write although others felt it was impossible for a deaf and blind person. Caring teachers build relationships with their students making it known that they "believe in each student's ability to achieve and shape the teaching-learning process by placing the learner at the center" (Lumpkin, 2007).

The following comments reassured participants in the study that some of their teachers truly cared:

- "Mrs. Rayford encourages me to go to college because she knows that I want to work in the medical field."
- Mrs. Marshall says, "Give it all you got."
- "My geometry teacher makes learning fun," a participant stated. "She's young, vibrant, and when she teaches, she gives examples of what she's explaining and if it is something that we don't understand, she slows down to review it. Once everyone understands, she moves on."
- "Mrs. Brown basically inspires us because she gets us into a system of thinking—teaching us to think differently."

Power of Negative Attitudes

Factors such as negative stereotypes, low teacher expectations, and cultural bias in schools provide a defeating, discouraging experience for black students. Teachers that show negative attitudes toward their students contribute to the failure of these

students. Alvin Poussaint, renowned black psychologist, indicates that black children “have strong needs for achievement and approval.” When needs of achievement and approval are not met, students’ self-concept suffers (Kuykendall, 1989).

One participant senses that her IPC teacher does not like children. The teacher made a point to tell her students that she was supposed to work at Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), but she found a teaching assignment first. This indicated to her students that teaching was not her career of choice.

Children are also cognizant of teachers that have “favorites.” One student states that her world geography teacher’s favorite students are males. “She makes a point to form conversations with them concerning their family and various activities or events happening in their lives. “It is very obvious that Mrs. Tucker does not like girls,” remarks a participant.

Several participants feel that they are not encouraged as much as Caucasian students. “I do not feel as though black students are encouraged to take AP courses because most teachers do not feel as though black students will work hard because of the stereotype about them,” admits one student. “Sometimes, white students get more attention than black students. For example, if I need help with something, white teachers just look over me, but immediately help a white student when they raise their hand.” Students expect encouragement from their teachers. However, one respondent feels as though her teachers do not encourage her to go beyond her potential. She indicates that most of them do not have any encouraging words to say.

Conversations between a child and an educator are embedded in that child's life forever. One student will not forget what his elementary teacher and principal told him. She said, "You're bad and there's nothing that I can do with you." Then, the principal added, "You've been in school for three years and you're still getting in trouble. You're bad just like your brother."

Many of the students shared the struggles of being black and intelligent. "It's challenging for black kids to step up and be smart because most Advanced Placement students are white and this is how teachers think it should be," a student explained. "So, it's hard to prove them wrong knowing that they probably feel this way. The teachers don't just come out and say they feel this way, but it is understood by their actions. They act as if they don't care about their students and as if it is a burden on them when you need their assistance."

Emergent Theme IV: Parental Involvement is Key

Increased parental involvement is the key to improving the academic achievement among children. The success of children at the elementary, as well as secondary level is determined by the involvement of their parents according to various studies (Jeynes, 2005). Dr. John Ogbu believes that black parents, in particular, should become more involved in their child's education (Burdman, 2003).

The parents of one student made an effort to correspond with her teacher via e-mail and by phone. They inquired about completed homework, class assignments, and if their daughter actively participated in class by asking questions and following presented instruction. They expect their daughter to be proactive if she encounters

problems with assignments. If her grades begin to deteriorate, she is grounded by her parents and she has to give up any activities that are not school related.

“She constantly tells me to keep my grades up . . .,” a participant recalls of her mother. The student maintains her grades because she is aware that she will be grounded, her cellular phone will be taken away, and computer usage will be alleviated.

Parental involvement begins at home and is extended to the school setting. One mother made her children read regardless how they felt. She would say, “Sit down for twenty minutes and read!” She told them that if they did not want to read, then just look at the book. “But it was a trick because who is just going to sit there? We were forced to read . . .” These children were permitted to only watch educational television shows and video games were not allowed. “If my grades drop at all, Mom wants to know why and the reason must be valid,” recalls a respondent. “And I must tell her what my plans are to bring them up.”

Discussion

Research Questions

1. What factors contribute to the achievement of African-American students?

Self-Confidence/Desire to Succeed

Confidence is a key contributor to the academic success of African-American children. Self-confidence of a child can be fostered through the development and recognition of the child’s strengths, whether they are academic or non-academic (Kuykendall, 1989). Participants indicated that their confidence was first instilled at home. Their parents fostered a positive environment built on love, motivation, high

expectations, and the determination to succeed. A child's self-image is formed based on how significant adults in their lives perceive them. Praise and acceptance strengthens a child's self-image while criticism and disapproval lower it (Kuykendall, 1989).

Many students encountered their first teacher in their home. One student credits his achievement to the learning environment created by his mother. "Mom made me read a lot when I was younger whether I wanted to or not, even if it was just a magazine." He kept one quote, that his mother often told him, in the back of his mind at all times. She would say, "You're a smart boy!"

Each participant possessed the will and determination needed to be successful. They perceived themselves as hard-working individuals that believed no task was too difficult to achieve. One student describes herself as a quiet student that pushes herself to achieve self-set goals. Another participant perceived herself to be a hard-working student that tries to do her best in all classes. "I am an extremely hard-working and dedicated student," one student admitted.

Minority Educators in a School Setting

Although the participants in this study are high-achievers and will succeed regardless, each of them desire to have minority educators in their school setting. One participant indicated that she has not had the opportunity to have an African-American teacher, but desires to because she feels that the teacher could better relate to her. One respondent admitted, "I would prefer a black teacher because we are the same race and a

black teacher could better understand me.” African-American teachers “help to build a sense of worth in those students” (Stephens, 2002).

“In class, black teachers stop to make sure that their students understand. They act as if they truly care ... It seems as though Mrs. Coleman, an African-American teacher ... really understood my learning style. Black students need black teachers, especially for guidance. They need black teachers because they understand the way black students learn,” a participant explains. In a study conducted by Lewis (2005), a secretary admits that she remained at her school for numerous years despite the long commute because she felt that she had to remain there to point out racism and protect the African-American children. She referred to the students as “my African-American children.” She perceived the students to be her responsibility rather than “other people’s children.” She did not feel as though she could trust white educators with her black children’s well-being. Her “sense of responsibility for these children was partly about her identification with them—they looked like her” (Lewis, 2005).

Positive and Caring Learning Environment

African-American students are taught by their parents to appreciate certain skills that are not usually valued in the classroom or reflected as the school’s norm. These skills include nonverbal communication, dance and rhythmic movements, and learning through cooperation and verbal interplay during instruction. Many African-American youth develop negative attitudes and behavior patterns when the school fails to appreciate the values and norms of their culture. Their attitudes, behavior, and self-image improve when these students feel accepted, rapport is established, one-on-one

guidance is provided, group learning takes place, body movement and nonverbal communication are accepted, and students are encouraged to do their best (Kuykendall, 1989).

“Mrs. Rayford encourages me to go to college because she knows that I want to work in the medical field,” admits one participant. Although Spanish is not this respondent’s strong point, she makes an effort to exceed beyond what is expected of her because she found acceptance and motivation from her teacher. African-American children positively relate to individuals that appreciate their strengths and uniqueness, praise and respect their efforts, and accept and work with their shortcomings” (Kuykendall, 1989).

Students desire to know that their teacher is interested in their learning. They want to know that their teachers believe in them and genuinely care about their well-being. A teacher commented to one participant, “...give it all you got!” When students understand that their teachers genuinely care, they respond by “exerting greater effort to reach their potential.” Caring teachers “nurture relationships with students through affirming students’ efforts and talents” (Lumpkin, 2007).

It is imperative that African-American children are offered a learning environment that makes them feel successful. “Mrs. Brown basically inspires us because she gets us into a system of thinking—teaching us to think differently,” remarks one participant. Students are more likely to meet and sometimes exceed course expectations if they are actively engaged in their own learning. Connecting new

information to existing knowledge allows students to see the relevancy of what they are expected to learn to their current and future lives (Lumpkin, 2007).

Parental Involvement

All of the participants share one commonality—the involvement of their parents in their learning. Each of them indicates that their motivation and determination to succeed stems from their parents. Their goal is to make their parents proud of their accomplishments. Having highly involved parents contributes to the academic outcome of African-American students (Jeynes, 2005).

Parents of the respondents encouraged their children to become involved in their own learning by completing homework, class assignments, and actively participating in class. They were encouraged to be proactive in their learning. Nothing is more critical to a child's education, regardless of their skin color, than their parents' emphasis on educational success (Tucker, 2002).

Many students received their educational values from their parents. One parent taught her children how to be creative and think critically at a young age. She refused to allow them to play video games forcing them to create games amongst themselves. She would also give them problem-solving activities and they had to determine the solution. This parent knew that her involvement was essential in the lives of her children. Research indicates that parental involvement fosters positive attitudes toward school, improves homework habits, reduces absenteeism, reduces student's risk of dropping out of school, and enhances academic achievement (O'Bryan, 2006).

Parents of the participants in the study proves that being involved in a child's life is crucial and equally important at home and school. Their efforts made the difference in the lives of their children. Sui-Chu & Willms (1996) identified four dimensions of parental involvement which include home discussion, school communication, home supervision, and school participation.

2. What role does parents, teachers, and peers play in the achievement of African-American students?

Parents of the participants set the foundation for their children. Parents must be involved in the lives of their children adhering to the following behaviors: parental aspirations, parental rules around educational matters, communication with children and teachers about educational matters, and participation in school functions (O'Bryan, 2006). Parents of the participants took an active role enforcing good grades, completion of assignments, and active participation. This stand forces children to make their education a top priority. One student admits that his parents expect him to make all A's and he is cognizant of the consequences if his grades decline. Hara (1998) believes that increased parental involvement is the key to mending the academic achievement of children.

Teachers are key in the success of children. They set the tone for their classroom, which affects every student they encounter. Making an effort to let students know that you care is essential in student performance. When they realize you are interested in them and their education, they will make an effort to work to their potential and possibly exceed it. One student excelled in her Spanish class because her teacher made an effort

to let her know that she was concerned and interested in her life goals. She describes her teacher as being a young, kind, and truthful teacher that can easily relate to her students.

Peers play a significant role in the achievement of African-American students. Some African-American students do not perform to their potential in fear that they will be labeled as “acting white.” Despite negativity, the confidence and determination possessed by participants motivated them to exceed beyond what was expected of them. They were often criticized by their African-American and Caucasian peers for “acting white” because of their achievements. Not only were they scrutinized for their intellectual abilities, but also for articulate speech and dress attire. Caucasian students asked one participant, “Why are you trying to be white,” referring to his intelligence. These students made comments as if being smart were only for students of their ethnicity. They also told the participant that they were blacker than him. The level of peer pressure to underachieve makes it difficult for intelligent African-American students that want to excel (Robinson-English, 2006).

3. How can educators promote more positive learning to ensure the success of African-American students?

Teachers must make an effort to let their students know that they care and are genuinely interested in their learning. One participant strived to do well in her Spanish class, not because it was her favorite subject, but because she knew that her teacher was interested in her learning which forced her to push herself harder. When students are aware that a teacher cares about their learning, “they respond by exerting greater effort to reach their potential” (Lumpkin, 2007).

Teachers should develop a relationship with their students. Dr. James Comer states, “No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship.” Building rapport is essential in a child’s learning. As indicated with participants in the study, it drives students to excel when they know that their teacher cares.

Students require positive feedback; it encourages students to exceed what is expected of them. Words of encouragement remain with students for a lifetime. One student keeps in mind that her choir teacher constantly told her to give all she got. This student applied this to every aspect of her life.

Teachers should ensure that students are their top priority. One student felt that it burdened his teacher when he asked for assistance. It is important that educators make it known that they are there to promote learning. Teachers that care “believe in each student’s ability to achieve and shape the teaching-learning process by placing the learner at the center” (Lumpkin, 2007).

Teachers must enjoy teaching realizing their responsibility as an educator. One participant enjoys his teacher’s style because the teacher makes an effort to let students know that he enjoys educating children. The participant states, “He’s like a concerned student that happens to be teaching.” Teachers must be cognizant of the control that they have in their classroom. As Haim Ginott, teacher and child psychologist, states, “I’ve come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child’s life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can

humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or dehumanized (Kuykendall, 1989).

Recommendations

Further research is recommended to investigate personal experiences of other African-Americans including parents, educators, and community leaders. This study will allow them to share the hardships they have also faced as an individual of color. It will provide additional research indicating possible commonalities that students have faced in society.

It is also recommended that research is extended beyond public school providing the researcher with data on the collegiate level. The research would allow participants to share their experiences on both levels revealing progressions and regressions of the educational system.

Additional research would require that students in the study keep a journal recording real-life experiences on a daily basis. Students would be encouraged to document data, including comments and observations, relating to the achievement of African-American students.

It is further recommended that additional research include a comparison of a predominantly African-American public school versus a school with a diverse population. It would provide insight as to how the two learning environments play a role in the performance of African-American students.

It is also recommended that researchers investigate the academic achievement among different socioeconomic groups. This information will be meaningful because it will determine how their ethnicity and socioeconomic status play a role in the achievement of African-American students.

Additional research is needed to determine how being raised in single parent households affect achievement. It would be fascinating to know how their achievement compares to African-American children that are raised by both parents.

It is also recommended that there is additional research that studies the academic achievement of students in single gender classrooms. The data could possibly change how students are grouped in a classroom.

It is further recommended that researchers provide reading material for African-American students and parents. The data will make students aware of the struggles they face as African-American children and how they can overcome these obstacles. It will be a survival guide that promotes academic achievement—teaching children how to be successful and how to retain this status. Parents will become cognizant of the possible challenges their child will face and what preventative measures they can take to ensure their child's success.

Conclusions

This study was enlightened by the participants who took time to share their experiences in an effort to reach out to other students with similar circumstances. The lives of successful African-American students were examined through participant interviews and observations. The experiences and details revealed by each participant allows the reader to walk in their shoes comparing it to their own life.

This study encompassed the challenges faced by successful African-American students. Each student encountered hardships in an attempt to succeed. I used the case study method in an effort to interact with participants, which allowed them to share their experiences. “Case studies will often be the preferred method of research because they may be epistemologically in harmony with the reader’s experience and thus to that person a natural basis for generalization” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The participants willingly shared moments of happiness and frustration, which provides an authentic experience for the reader.

Most enlightening to me was the fact that incidents that took place when I was growing up still exist today. While listening to these students, I was able to put myself in their shoes because I was once there. When participants admitted that they were ridiculed for their articulate speech, I had to smile because I have heard many comments about my speech.

What surprised me most was that one participant kept a negative comment that his teacher and principal made to him for several years before sharing it with his mother. It was amazing that this child was able to recall exactly what they said to him. It was

alarming to me as a parent and as an educator that anyone in the field of education would belittle any child. I am so glad that he had such a great support system at home that this did not affect him, but what if it was another child who was not as fortunate?

I was touched by how open and truthful the participants were when sharing their experiences. Their experiences shed light on an issue faced by many African-American students. These individuals provide the blue print of success for all African-American children. The commonalities in their experiences provide insight to parents, teachers, and students with similar situations. The emergent themes depict common needs and strategies that influence achievement among African-American students. As a parent and an educator, it is my hope and prayer that this study serves as a guide for all individuals that encounter African-American children realizing that they are the force that shape and mold their lives.

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APPENDIX A

An Analysis of the Factors That Influence Achievement Among African-American Students

Interview Protocol for Participants

1. Tell me about yourself. Who raised you? What do you remember about your childhood? What do you like to do? How do you spend your time when you are not in school?
2. Did your parents read to you when you were younger? What do you most remember?
3. Do you enjoy reading? What topics interest you?
4. What motivates you to achieve? Explain.
5. How involved are your parents in your education?
6. How do you view yourself as a student? How would your teachers, parents, and peers describe you as a student?
7. What struggles do you face as an African-American student?
8. Do you feel as though African-American students are encouraged to take honors or Advanced Placement (AP) courses? Why or why not?
9. Do you feel accepted by your peers? Explain.
10. Are you looked down upon by your African-American peers for being successful and making good grades? How do African-American children perceive smart African-American students?
11. What subject is most difficult for you? Why?
12. Do your teachers encourage you to be successful? Explain
13. Do your teachers encourage you to go beyond your potential? Explain.
14. Do your teachers make learning fun and interesting? Explain.
15. If you do not understand something presented in class or you have a question about your homework, what do you do? Explain.
16. If you fail a class, what type of punishment would you receive?
17. Is there one teacher that you feel more comfortable with? What makes this teacher different?
18. Has there ever been a time where a teacher made you feel that you were not smart? What happened?
19. Are you more comfortable with a African-American or white teacher? Why?
20. Do you feel as though your learning environment is friendly? Explain.
21. Describe a learning environment that best fits your academic needs?

APPENDIX B

PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM

An Analysis of the Factors that Influence Achievement Among African-American Students

Your child has been asked to participate in a research study designed to analyze the factors that influence achievement among African-American students. Your child was selected to be a possible participant because of his or her successful academic achievement. A total of four students have been asked to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to examine the factors that play a key role in the achievement of African-American students.

If you agree to allow your child to take part in this study, lasting approximately three months, he or she will be asked to participate in an interview. During these months, the researcher will interview your child at least one time, but could possibly ask for a follow-up interview to answer additional questions or to clarify statements in the previous interview. Each interview will be approximately 90 minutes. You can be present at the time of the interview, although it is not required. Also, observations noted by the researcher will take place at the time of the interview. There are no risks associated with this study. The benefits of participating in this study are to make educators aware of the factors that influence African-American student achievement.

Your child's participation in this study is voluntary and there will be no monetary benefits.

This study is confidential and names of the participants will be replaced with pseudonyms. Data obtained by the Texas Education Agency website, primarily the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS), will be reviewed and used in this study. The data paints a clear picture of the school district. The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking your child to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be securely stored at the residence of Tiffany Oliphant Jackson. Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate in this study will not affect his or her current status or future relations with Texas A&M University or any other institute of learning. Your child's participation does not require that he or she answer all questions during the interview. Your child can refuse to answer any question(s) at any point. Your child can also withdraw at any time during the study. You can contact Tiffany Oliphant Jackson, at (936) 291-2033, with any questions about this study.

This research study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board – Human Subjects in Research, Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding subjects' rights, you can contact the Institutional Review Board through Ms. Melissa McIlhaney, IRB Coordinator, Office of Research Compliance, (979) 458-4067, mcilhaney@tamu.edu.

Please be sure that you have read the above information, asked questions, and received answers to your satisfaction. You will be given a copy of the parental permission form for your records. By signing this document, you consent to your child's participation in this study.

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

VITA

Tiffany Oliphant Jackson received her Bachelor of Arts degree in English with a minor in history and secondary education from Sam Houston State University in 2000. She enrolled in the counseling program at Prairie View A&M University in May 2002 and received her Master of Arts degree in August 2003. She entered the Educational Psychology program at Texas A&M University in August 2004 and received her Doctor of Philosophy in December 2007. Her research interest includes the academic achievement among African-American students.

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