

BLACK MALES' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR HIGH SCHOOL SUCCESS

By

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To my amazing husband Chris who never let me give up, our miracle little girl Alexandria, and my loving and supportive family and friends. May this dissertation represent all of the unconditional love and support you gave to me throughout this great journey.

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LIST OF DEFINITIONS

Black	used interchangeably with African American. This term includes individuals of African, non-Hispanic/non-Latino descent (NCES, 2012).
Career-ready diploma	a certificate awarded by the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) which allows graduates to seek competitive employment and/or enroll in a community college.
High school credits	earnings for individual courses in public high schools.
Junior /11th grader	a student who has earned between 10 – 15.5 credits and is in his third year of high school.
School Success	serves as a proxy for academic performance, as defined by participants. The cumulative grade point average (GPA) that a student has earned. The GPA is calculated on a 4.0 grade scale (where an A is equal to 4 points, a B is equal to 3 points, a C is equal to 2 points, a D is equal to 1 point, and an F is equal to 0 points).
Senior /12th grader	a student who has earned at least 16 credits and is in his fourth year of high school.
Sophomore /10th grader	a student who has earned between 4 – 9.5 credits and is in his second year of high school.
White	used interchangeably with European American. This term includes individuals of European, non-Hispanic/non-Latino origin (NCES, 2012).

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The purpose of this study was to examine various factors that influenced high school Black males' perceptions of their school success. Black males in grades 10 through 12 with a cumulative GPA ≤ 2.5 were interviewed to explore these factors. Giving voice to this group of students provided the researcher with insight to the factors that they believed influenced their school success.

The data was analyzed through constant comparative qualitative research methods. From the data, the researcher identified four major themes. The themes were School Success, Family Relationships, Educational Relationships, and Peer Relationships. Each of these contributed to the participants' perceptions of their high school performance.

The findings of this study support many of the tenants found in Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. An overview of these findings and how they could potentially impact future professional development for administrators, teachers, and teacher preparation programs are provided. These participants' voices should be heard. Changes in instructional pedagogy are critical in order for these Black males to achieve the greatest level of academic success.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

On the first day of school, Molly, a 22 year old White female, walked in to her classroom. She was filled with excitement while anticipating the ways that she could help her students learn to their broadest potential. The school she entered was not entirely unfamiliar to her. She had grown up in an upper-middle class predominantly White neighborhood and attended the local high school comprised of a similar population. Her desire to become a highly effective teacher never came to fruition that semester. Instead, she faced unremitting challenges as she worked to adapt instruction so that it would meet her students' learning needs. Molly had 98 students throughout the day; one White female and 97 Black males and females. Day-to-day interactions were difficult because she did not understand the slang words like “flawjin’, stuntin’, bobos, hot-bottoms, and shawty”, that her students used. Unable to identify the meaning of these words, Molly was unable to fully understand students' conversations. Their music, hairstyles, and dance styles were different from those that she knew. Overall, Molly could not connect with her students through classroom interactions.

This situation is not uncommon. The majority of United States teachers are White. Often, they do not share the ethnic, racial, social, or linguistic backgrounds of their students (Cross, 2003). Researchers have shown that sharing a common culture or other background characteristics influences Black students' school success (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Brand, Glasson, & Green, 2006; Cross, 2003; Mack, 2005; Tucker, Porter, Reinke, Herman, Ivery, Mack, & Jackson, 2005; Ware, 2006). This is especially true for Black males.

Purpose

Several studies have quantified the achievement gap between Black students and their non-minority peers. Data from the 2010 Children's Defense Fund showed that 39% of White

eighth-graders scored at or above grade level in Reading, whereas only 13% of Blacks and 16% of Hispanics scored at or above grade level in Reading (Children’s Defense Fund, 2010). The statistics were similarly disproportionate for twelfth-graders; 43% of White twelfth-graders scored at or above grade level in Reading, while only 16% of Blacks and 20% of Hispanics scored at or above grade level in Reading (Children’s Defense Fund, 2010). In addition, over 80% of Black students in fourth, eighth, and twelfth grade lacked grade level proficiency in reading and math (Children’s Defense Fund, 2010). Although research has focused on performance and academic achievement, studies that draw upon the beliefs of Black males have not been prominent. Listening to their voices may provide insight about factors that influence their school success. The purpose of this study is to describe how external, school, and peer-related factors influence the school success of high school Black males who are earning a grade point average of ≤ 2.5 on a 4.0 scale.

Research Questions

1. What are the factors that influence high school Black males’ perceptions of school success?
 - a. How do external factors influence high school Black males’ school success?
 - b. How do teachers’ teaching styles/characteristics influence high school Black males’ school success?
 - c. How do peer-based social interactions influence high school Black males’ school success?

Significance of Study

Up to this point, the majority of the research about Black males’ school success that has been conducted has focused on their grades, test scores, and teachers’ opinions. This study will provide an opportunity for this student group to be the focus of inquiry (Bennet, 2006; Blanchet, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005; Gay, 2002; Freeman, 2006; Smith, 2005). By directly seeking input from high school Black males, theoretical propositions might emerge to explain how

external factors, teaching, and peers influence students' school success (Creswell, 2005). The findings might also guide future teacher interactions with students. By acquiring a better understanding of students' cultural needs, teachers, administrators and teacher/administrator educational programs teach their students how to use those pedagogies that are responsive to these students' learning needs. Tucker et al. (2005) stated that:

By developing an understanding [of the] multiple external factors (e.g., social, cultural, economic, political, school, neighborhood, family, parent) [that may] impact the academic and social behaviors of children, teachers can come to appreciate that each child must be taught to achieve under whatever condition exist. Teachers and other school personnel can accomplish this by empowering their students with the skills necessary to become successful in school (p. 32).

When teachers become aware of students' cultural differences, they are more likely to respond to situations in an appropriate and effective manner (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Brand, Glasson, & Green, 2006; Cross, 2003; Mack, 2005; Ware, 2006). Teachers who are able to understand and respect the cultural behaviors and norms of their minority students, may also help students learn appropriate interaction styles as well as how to thrive and survive in the majority culture (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Mack, 2005; Neal, 2001; Tucker et al., 2005). Studying the factors that influence Black males' school success is critical to the efficacy of the U.S. educational system as well as society. By conducting interviews and focus group meetings with Black males in a local high school, this study will invite these participants to share how factors outside and inside the school affect their performance.

Limitations

Engaging adolescents in focus groups may cause students to feel vulnerable (Morgan, 1996/1997). As a result, they may be unable or unwilling to discuss or share their feelings regarding their school experiences openly or honestly. Because this study will be conducted at a single site, the generalizability of the findings was limited to the context where the study was

conducted (Creswell, 2005). The data collected relied upon the interpersonal skills of the researcher, her ability to listen unconditionally, and the authenticity of the participants' responses.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents an overview of research studies regarding the factors that affect Blacks in education. The topics presented are school-based issues, disciplinary action and placement in Special Education. In addition, their school success and its social impact are reviewed. Social impacts include drop-out, employment, and incarceration rates among Blacks. An overview of research that described the marginalization of Blacks precedes a description of the theory that served as the foundation for this study, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Factors Affecting Blacks in Education

School-based Issues

Data from the U.S. Department of Education (2011a/2011b) has shown that the combined proportion of eight-grade and twelfth-grade Blacks and Hispanics who scored at or above grade level, was less than or equal to one-third respectively. However, 39% of White eighth-graders and 42% of White twelfth grades scored at or above grade level (U.S. DOE 2011a/2011b). This information highlights the differences in academic achievement between minorities and their non-minority peers. The U.S. DOE (2011a/2011b) findings also revealed that over 80% of Black students in the fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades failed to acquire grade level skills in reading and math when evaluated. Approximately 25% of all first time ninth grade teenagers fail to graduate from high school within four years; that figure climbs to nearly 40% for Black students (U.S. DOE, 2010). According to Howell (2006), minority students have demonstrated academic gains in reading and mathematics over the past 20 years. However, these gains have not diminished the discrepancy between minority students' achievement and that of their non-minority peers. Nationally, schools that enroll predominately minority students frequently have

lower scores on standardized educational achievement tests (Sheppard, 2006). Lower test scores usually results in the designating these schools as academically unacceptable. High stakes testing and academic achievement tests also illuminate the achievement gap between minority and non-minority students. Low achievement scores have also been correlated with the dropout rates among Blacks, which consequently reduces the number of opportunities afforded them in the future (Sheppard, 2006). Black males historically have scored lower on these tests, thus tracking them in to lower level courses of study (Sheppard, 2006). Studies have shown that when compared to White students, there is of achievement among minority students (FLDOE, 2011; Gewertz, 2004; House, 2006; Jackson & Moore, 2006). In addition, research has shown that socioeconomic status (SES) is a key indicator of lack of success in school. However, it is erroneous to assert that SES accounts for the achievement gap within specific ethnic/racial student groups (Olneck, 2005). Because the findings have shown that the school success among Blacks lags behind other regarding minority groups, educators and policy makers have suggested that teachers need to empower all students. Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke (2003) supported this pedagogical need.

When teachers and students come from different cultural backgrounds, planned efforts to cross social borders and develop caring, respectful relationships are essential . . . to remember that caring also involves communicating high expectations and holding students accountable for high-quality work (p. 273).

In addition, researchers have found that teachers need to use particular methods during instruction to increase Black students' success. For example, researchers have suggested that teachers build positive interpersonal relationships that are culturally sensitive and demonstrate reciprocal respect (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Booker, 2006; Chism & Satcheer, 1998; Love & Kruger, 2005; Mack, 2005; Ware, 2006). Gay (2002) stated, "The best quality education for ethnically diverse students is as much *culturally responsive as it is developmentally appropriate*,

which means using their cultural orientations, background experiences, and ethnic identities as conduits to facilitate their teaching and learning (p. 614). Allowing all students to find academic success means that some teachers may need to critically evaluate their own beliefs, teaching practices, personal views and misconceptions about cultures/races outside of their own (Freeman, 2006; Weiner, 2006). Teaching so that all students can learn requires that teachers learn to teach in culturally relevant ways (Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003). Researchers have reported that minority students found academic success in classrooms when teachers believed that they could succeed regardless of students' home lives and peer-based interactions (Bondy & Ross, 2008; House, 2006; Tucker, et al., 2005). Schools intent on closing the achievement gap need teachers to foster culturally consistent communication with students and their families, create challenges, provide supportive academic opportunities, and advise students about how they can be academically, socially, and behaviorally successful (Booker, 2006; House, 2006; Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003). Students who have positive school experiences both socially and academically are more likely to find success in post-secondary life experiences (Bennet, 2006).

Frequently, teachers' assumptions about students' academic abilities are based on misconceptions or societal beliefs about racial or ethnic factors that only perpetuate negative experiences among Black students who attend public schools. Compounding this problem is that a disproportionate number of Black high school students' teachers either lack in-field certification or a college degree in the subject area they are teaching (Freeman, 2006). Inadequate college education and teacher training decrease the potential of teacher effectiveness in providing instruction to students at higher academic levels. Harry and Klinger (2006) found that teachers with advanced instructional skills had better classroom management and used

academically focused instructional practices more frequently. These findings suggest that many of the academic problems experienced by Black students are as much a result of instructional practices. Rossi Ray-Taylor supported this in Gewertz (2004) when she said, “Too often, such discussions take on a tenor that blames students for performing poorly, rather than looking squarely at the failings of the systems in which they function (p. 6),” or the quality of instructions that is provided.

Disciplinary Action and Placement in Special Education

Monroe (2005) reported that there is, “A clear and logical correlation exists between student discipline and academic achievement. Throughout the US, there is evidence that students who are disproportionately targeted for disciplinary action are the same pupils who perform poorly on most measures of achievement” (p. 48). Consequently, Black students are two to five times more likely to be suspended than their non-minority peers (Monroe, 2005; Neal, 2001). The discipline statistics for Black males are even more extreme considering Monroe’s statement. Black males comprise approximately 22% of the students who are expelled from school and 23% of the students who are suspended out of school even though they only make up approximately eight percent of the public schools’ population (Smith, 2005).

Studies about the current educational system issues, show that all too often Black students who are on the low end of academic achievement are also on the high end of both disciplinary action and placement in Exceptional Student Education (ESE) programs (Livingston & Nahimana, 2006; Monroe, 2005; Neal, 2001; Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Simmons, Feggins-Azziz, & Choong-Geun, 2005). Perhaps educators misunderstand culturally appropriate behavior among Black students. “African-Americans interject motion, movement, and emotional energy into their thinking, communication, social relations, and variability in the formats of their self-presentations may be misdiagnosed as hyperactivity, attention deficit, irritability, attention-

seeking, disruption, and being quarrelsome” (Gay, 2002, p. 616). Subsequently, Black students, especially males, are frequently identified as “trouble” students who need remediation and would be better served in ESE. Sen (2006) noted, “African American students comprise only 17% of the public school students, but 41% of the special education placements, 85% of which are boys” (p. 3). Some researchers argue that socio-economic status (SES) is the greatest factor in determining their lack of success in school and identification for ESE services. Nonetheless, the majority of students in ESE classrooms are Black. Heward and Cavanaugh in Gay (2002) stated that:

A disproportionate number of students from culturally diverse groups have been inaccurately labeled disabled. This happens because some of the attitudes, values, and behaviors that cause students from non-mainstream racial, ethnic, and cultural groups to be diagnosed and assigned to special education stem from misunderstood incongruences between their home and school cultural standards, rather than some biological malfunctions or intellectual limitations. (p. 616)

Since the 1980’s both the Office of Civil Rights and the National Academy of Sciences have investigated the overrepresentation of Blacks in the high incidence categories multiple times (Harry & Klinger, 2006). Many Black students exhibit behaviors that are commonplace within their culture. Yet, some of these behaviors are the same behaviors that teachers believe are indicative of the students’ needs to be referred for ESE testing eligibility (Livingston & Nahimana, 2006; Monroe, 2005; Neal, 2001; Weinstein, Curran, Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003;). These behaviors may include emotionally energetic body movements and communication styles. Some teachers respond by referring students to other classroom settings, while others respond by taking punitive disciplinary actions (Monroe, 2005; Neal, 2001). As a result of teachers who respond in castigatory ways, a disparate number of Black students receive disciplinary action when compared to their White and other minority groups (Monroe, 2005; Neal, 2001; Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Simmons, Feggins-Azziz, & Choong-Guen, 2005; Weinstein, Curran, &

Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003). Monroe (2005) postulates that, “although attempting to assert self-affirming identities in adverse environments, behaviors among African American youths often fuel pejorative stereotypes that distinguish Black males as troublesome and threatening” (p. 46). Researchers have suggested that it is important to raise an awareness among teachers and to help them recognize cultural differences among students, and to analyze their own beliefs and prejudices so they can experience and respond to situations in an appropriate and effective manner (Brand, Glasson, & Green; 2006; Cartledge & Dukes, 2009; Cross, 2003; Gay, 2002; Mack, 2005; Milner, 2009). The majority of teachers in the United States are White and do not share the same ethnic, racial, social, or linguistic backgrounds as their students (Cartledge & Dukes, 2009; Cross, 2003; Freeman, 2006; Milner, 2009). In addition, many of the methods used to place students in ESE programs are subjective and have been deemed unreliable (Harry & Klinger, 2006). For example, in the case of *Larry P. v Riles* (1979/1984) the court upheld that the disproportionate placement of students in special education was innately unfair for Black students. The court ruled that the IQ tests used to place children in the Educable Mentally Retarded (EMR) category were biased against Black children. Thus, it was more difficult for Black children to score adequately in academic ability and those findings only highlighted their lower academic achievement levels (Harry & Klinger, 2006). Neal (2001) reiterated these findings stating, “The public education system in the United States has over identified African American children as targets for special education. Research shows that over identification is related to ethnicity, poverty, inappropriate assessment tools used by schools, and teacher misperceptions” (p. 168).

Academic Performance and Social Impact

Drop-Out, Employment, and Incarceration Rates Among Blacks

Young Black males have the highest incidence among individuals who choose to drop-out; they are the most frequently suspended and/or expelled. They are overrepresented in special education and underrepresented in gifted programs (Jackson & Moore, 2006; Whiting, 2006). That Black students, especially males, are subjected to disproportionately high and more severe disciplinary action as well as over-identification for special education services has been well documented. Approximately 25 to 30% of teenagers in the United States do not graduate from high school with a standard diploma. Also, approximately 50% of Black males fail to acquire a standard diploma (House, 2006). Across the United States, only 40% of Black males graduate from high school, compared to 70% of White males (Gewertz, 2004; Sen, 2006). The state of Florida most closely mirrors these averages. According to a recent Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) Report, only 68.4% of Black, non-Hispanic students, compared to 89.3% of White, non-Hispanic students graduate from high school (FLDOE, 2011). These statistics raise concerns when one considers a worldwide Junior Achievement poll, in which 89% of Black youths planned to attend college (Smith, 2005). Data show that these aspirations are often unattained. “Through [the] observation of the educational inequities that plague them, African American males in particular surrender their dreams, goals, and aspirations, to a system that seems to be designed for their failure rather than success” (West-Olatunji, Baker, & Brooks, 2006, p. 8).

Employment opportunities are significantly determined by an individual’s education. “The experiences within school affect students’ motivation and aspiration, which impacts on their acquiring the skills to proceed to the labor market and also can impact on their experiences once in the labor market” (Freeman, 2006, p. 60). Students who drop out of school are often

faced with the harsh reality that lacking an education places them at a disadvantage in the labor market. Typically they must accept lower paying jobs or they are denied positions altogether (Foster-Bey, 2004; Lan & Lanthier, 2003; Legters & Balfanz, 2010). Statistics for the United States show that the unemployment rate among Black men is approximately twice that of White men (Freeman, 2006; Livingston & Nahimana, 2006). A significant reduction in employment opportunities is only one of the implications of dropping out of school. Incarceration rates increase significantly for individuals who lack a high school diploma (Freeman, 2006). “Students who drop out from school experience lower income, greater unemployment, are significantly overrepresented in the adult corrections population, and are more likely to require social services during their lifetimes compared to high school graduates” (Martinez, DeGarmo, & Eddy, 2004, p. 128-129). The dropout rate for Black students is 9.3%, which is nearly twice that of the 5.2% of White students (US DOE, 2011a/2011b) Criminal activity and dependence on social services are often attributed to the low or insufficient income among high school dropouts (Lan & Lanthier, 2003; Legters & Balfanz, 2010). These findings impact Black males because while they only make up six percent of the US population, they make up over 50% of the prison population (Livingston & Nahimana, 2006). Black students’ attitudes are impacted by societal assumptions and the public school system’s flawed methodologies and practices. For example, teachers often do not possess the cultural tools necessary to reach students of different races and/or religions (Cartledge & Dukes, 2009; Cross, 2003; Milner, 2009; Neal, 2001; Tatum, 2000; Tucker et al., 2005; West-Olatunji, Baker, & Brooks, 2006). Because of this deficiency, Black students are frequently punished for culturally learned behaviors that are misconstrued as defiant, disruptive, or quarrelsome (Gay, 2002; Monroe, 2005; Smith, 2005). Black males suffer the most. They develop their own perceptions and/or misperceptions about the value of education;

these views can negatively impact how they strive to perform in school (Booker, 2006; Livingston & Nahimana, 2006; Whiting, 2006).

Marginalization of Blacks

Jackson and Moore (2006) articulated some of the issues that Black males face; “It is apparent, based on the dismal national statistics on unemployment, education, incarceration, and mental and physical health, that African American males face numerous challenges in American society” (p. 201). Studies have shown that the needs of Blacks are not being met within the public school system (Smith, 2005). Low teacher expectations, overrepresentation in special education, under-representation in gifted programs, unequal disciplinary actions, high drop-out rates, low graduation rates, and poorly qualified teachers perpetuate the marginalization of Blacks (Bennet, 2006; Brown, 2004; Freeman, 2006; Harry & Klinger, 2006; Mandara, 2006). School failure has the most significant impact on Black males (Smith, 2005). They are the most likely to face a culture of exclusion created in and by the school system (Freeman, 2006). “Negative educational experiences, including low academic achievement and low school engagement among African American youths, are thought by some to be related to the alienation and marginalization that many African Americans experience in society at large” (Bennet, 2006, p. 198). The members within school systems fail to accept responsibility for the role they play in the lack of academic success that Black students experience (Blanchet, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005).

Low academic achievement among Blacks has historically and prospectively is an issue that impacts the individuals and society as well. Students who are unsuccessful in developing a sense of connectedness with school are significantly more likely to drop-out. Many Black students are unable to find a sense of belongingness within schools and their staff because the majority of schools in the United States do not represent or connect with their cultural, racial, or

ethnic backgrounds (Gay, 2002). The under achievement of Blacks, throughout all levels of public schooling, translates to problems within the work force. Freeman said,

At the point of entrance to schooling . . . the culture of Black populations undergoes a process of being discounted, whether through alienation or annihilation. This in turn leads to a culture of exclusion, where students are turned off from schooling, which limits labor market opportunities. (Freeman, 2006, p. 55)

The lack of higher level educational experiences and subsequently restricted work force opportunities further perpetuates the societal and economic marginalization of Blacks (Bennet, 2006; Brown, 2004; Foster-Bey, 2004; Freeman, 2006). Fewer opportunities in the work force decrease Blacks' chances for economic and social opportunities equal to those of Whites (Bennet, 2006; Foster-Bey, 2004).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework was used in this the study was Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), initially posited by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994). Gay (2002) explains CRP stating, "Culturally responsive teaching is a comprehensive endeavor that is engendered in all dimensions of the educational enterprise, including diagnosing students' needs, curriculum content, counseling and guidance, instructional strategies, and performance assessment" (p. 619). This instructional pedagogy encourages all teachers to look beyond their own culture and experience and to understand and utilize the cultural diversity and strengths among their students (Howard, 2003a/b; Livingston & Nahimana, 2006; Mack, 2005; Milner, 2009; Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clark, 2003). By using CRP teaching, researchers postulate that Black males will be given the skills and motivations necessary to fully reach their academic and social potential (Cartledge & Dukes, 2009; Love & Kruger, 2005; Mack, 2005; Milner, 2009; Neal, 2001; Tatum, 2000). CRP encourages Black males to not only be actively engaged academically, but also communally (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Engendering students' personal development is

believed to promote greater success in post secondary academic settings as well as workplace settings (Gay, 2002; Neal, 2001).

Culturally Sensitive Research Framework

The Culturally Sensitive Research Framework (CSRF) of Tillman, guided the methods that the researcher used. Tillman's research focused on only, Blacks. She asserted that using the Culturally Sensitive Research Framework (CSRF) permitted both the researcher and the group being studied to use their cultural views to guide the development of the research design, data collection and analysis (Tillman, 2002/2006). She has asserted that when research is conducted from a culturally sensitive standpoint, the researcher must recognize the group's culture by looking both at its history and present-day experiences. CSRF allows researchers to show the difficulties that Blacks have suffered, as well as their successes. Tillman utilizes four typologies for cross-cultural researchers that Banks (1998) developed. These typologies identify a researcher's position and experiences relative to the group being studied. The four typologies are the indigenous-insider, the indigenous-outsider, the external-insider, and the external outsider. The indigenous-insider is a member of the community being studied who shares the same values and beliefs; s/he is viewed by the community as a legitimate member. The indigenous-outsider is one who is a member of the group being studied, but shares the values and beliefs of someone outside community. In this instance, the researcher is viewed as an outsider by the community. The third typology, the external-insider is an individual who is not a member of the community, but is accepted by the community as an "adopted" member because his/her values and beliefs match those of the community. The least effective researcher to conduct culturally sensitive research is the external-outsider. This researcher is not a member of the community being studied, nor does s/he share the same beliefs and values. Therefore, many of his/her interpretations of the community are inaccurate. In order to successfully perform culturally

sensitive research, the researcher must be able to accurately identify and represent the values and beliefs of the community being studied.

Black culture has been described in a variety of ways. Tillman (2002/2006) describes Black culture as:

(a) differing from European American culture(s) in various ways that include individual and collective value orientations, language patterns, and worldviews; (b) having a shared orientation based on similar cultural, historical, and political experiences; and (c) possessing a 'cultural deep structure', suggesting a complexity of behaviors that undergird cultural distinctiveness (p. 3-4/p. 266).

These descriptions must be acknowledged if cultural research situated within Black communities is going to be conducted.

Tillman's (2002; 2006) CSRF uses culturally congruent research methods, culturally specific knowledge, cultural resistance to theoretical dominance, culturally sensitive data interpretations, and culturally informed theory and practice. Culturally congruent research methods enable the researcher to develop a holistic view of the everyday existence of Blacks. This may include social, political, economic, and educational situations experienced by individuals within the community. Researchers utilize culturally specific knowledge by using the self-reported experiences of Blacks. In addition, they take into consideration their own experiences within or outside of that community. CSRF attempts to identify, understand, and refute power relations that relegate Blacks to subordinate power positions. Regardless if the researcher is an indigenous-insider or external outsider, s/he must acknowledge the standpoints of the individuals who experience the unequal power relationships. The use of storytelling, narrative analysis, biographies, and family histories are frequently used to ensure culturally sensitive data interpretations. Blacks' experiential knowledge must be validated and respected throughout the data analysis process (Tillman, 2002/ 2006). By using culturally sensitive research methods, researchers are able to generate theories and practices designed to take into

account Blacks' experiences. Educational reform can be implemented once positive and culturally sensitive relationships are developed with the Black communities. "The Culturally Sensitive Research Framework places African-Americans at the center, rather than on the margin of the inquiry and allows researchers to situate themselves based on their own cultural knowledge" (Tillman, 2006, p. 271). Researchers who are able to critically evaluate their own values and beliefs while accurately reporting those of the community's members they are studying can provide rich information which may be used to impact theory and educational practices.

Summary

Research shows that Black males have had less academic success than their non-minority peers (Brand, Glasson, & Green, 2006; Mack, 2005). Lower academic performance has been attributed to an overrepresentation of Black males in ESE and excessive disciplinary action (Cartledge & Dukes, 2009; Gay, 2002; Harry & Klinger, 2006; Livingston & Nahimana, 2006; Monroe, 2005; Neal, 2001). Poor academic performance only exacerbates this already marginalized group. Black males who are not successful academically suffer higher dropout rates, which result in lower income, higher rate of poverty, and increased incarceration rates (Blanchet, Mumford & Beachum, 2005; Bennet, 2006; Booker, 2006; Freeman, 2006; Smith, 2005). To portray the experiences of Black males, a researcher must fully understand their culture as the individuals see it as well as the culture of their non-minority peers (Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Tillman, 2002/2006).

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

Research Method

This study will describe the factors that influence high school Black males' academic performance in high school. The information gathered from the participants will be used to give voice to an at-risk and frequently marginalized group of adolescent males (Bennet, 2006; Freeman, 2006). Qualitative research methods were used to collect and analyze data. This methodology allowed the research to learn about the Black males' perspectives and their experiences in their high school. The Culturally Sensitive Research Framework was the theoretical research perspective used to guide the data analysis in this study.

Gaining Access

In order to conduct this study, permission was obtained from the University of Florida's Institutional Review Board (UFIRB). Next, the researcher obtained permission from the Director of Research, Assessment, and Student Information at a local school board. Forms that meet the district's research requirements were completed. Once permission was obtained from the Director, the researcher contacted the Assistant Principal for Student Services (APSS) at a local high school. The APSS provided the researcher with a list of students who met the eligibility criteria for the study. The criteria were Black male, ≤ 2.5 GPA, 10th – 12th grade, and no documented disability. Seventy-one Black males met these criteria.

The Site

The site for the study is a local high school in North Central Florida (NCF). Lakeview High School (pseudonym) is the third largest, out of seven high schools, in the NCF Public School District (pseudonym name used for the school district to ensure confidentiality). This school houses three unique programs that are geared to the academic needs of the student

population. The racial makeup of classrooms varies dependent upon the program in which the students study. The magnet program houses a racially diverse group of students. The major program and the ESE program are predominately Black students. The administration and guidance department are representative of the overall student population. The faculty is predominately White with a significantly smaller number of Black teachers. The population of Lakeview High is shown in Table 3-1. The site is located near a major research university. The university's college of education provides little to no student support or professional development for local school personnel. The site houses twelve of the fourteen recognized gangs in the county. In addition, approximately fifty percent of the students qualify for free and reduced lunch. This site was selected by the researcher because of its large population of Black males and the positive working relationships that the researcher has with the school's faculty, staff, and administration.

Participants

The researcher randomly selected ten potential participants who met the designated study criteria by using a random numbers table (Creswell, 2005). Of the potential participants, seven were willing to participate in the study. The researcher met with each of the potential participants to discuss the study and to provide them with the parental consent and student assent letters. The researcher explained the purpose of the study and answered questions that the potential participants posed, such as "Will we be able to read it when it is done?" and "Will our teachers know what we say about them?" The researcher explained to the participants and the parents/guardians that they would be able to read the completed study and that their teachers would not be given access to their interviews and that their identities would be remain anonymous. The participants submitted both parent consent and student assent/consent forms.

Each participant was asked to select a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality. Table 3-2 outlines each participant's grade level and cumulative GPA. Due to the smaller number of participants, the researcher elected to use one focus group.

Participant Descriptions

Sean is one of three children living with his mother and stepfather. He does not participate in any sports or extracurricular activities. He likes to hang out with his friends. Both of Sean's parents work full-time and are gone from the home prior to Sean leaving for school. His mother works in childcare; his stepfather works in corrections. Both are enrolled at a local community college.

Junior is the only child currently living with his mother and father. He plays varsity basketball and works at his mother's job. His mother has attended college and earned a childcare director's license. Currently she runs her own daycare. His father attended college for a short period of time, but did not finish. He is a custodian at Lakeview High School (pseudonym).

Taylor is an only child, living with his mother and father. He works part time at a local fast food restaurant and enjoys hanging out with his friends when he is not working. When he is eligible, he plays football and runs track. His mom is a paralegal and attends a local community college. His father graduated from high school and is working full-time as a mechanic.

Tom is living with his 21-year-old sister. He participates in Naval Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (NJROTC). He frequently is checked out of school to take care of his sister's two children. Tom cares for her children on a regular basis. His mother is incarcerated and did not finish high school. His sister completed high school and works full time.

Tray lives at home with his mother, stepfather, and younger brother. He prefers to hang out with his friends. He has wanted to play football, but he is ineligible due to grades. His mom

graduated from high school; she started at a community college, but did not finish. She works full-time in retail. His stepfather completed high school and is currently managing a group home.

Billy is the older of two children living with his mother and stepfather. He enjoys hanging out with his friends and playing basketball. For the past two years, he was selected for the varsity basketball team, but was determined to be ineligible due to his grades. His mother works as an insurance customer service representative. She attends a local community college at night. Billy's stepfather graduated from high school and enlisted in the military.

Dee is an only child. He lives at home with his mother. His father resides in town, but has very little contact with him. Dee spends the majority of his free time hanging out with his friends. His mom graduated from high school and works full-time. His father graduated from high school. Dee does not know what his father does for a living.

Instrumentation

Prior to beginning the study, the researcher reviewed participants' cumulative folders to gain insight in to their past academic performance. The rationale behind reviewing the cumulative folders was aptly stated by Glesne (2006),

To understand phenomenon, you need to know its history. Think historically, you will seek documents (minutes, letters, memoirs, wills, etc.) and photos or other artifacts that you might not access otherwise . . . And having gathered historical data, you might see differently the patterns of behavior that were evident from current data and you might perceive a relationship of ideas or events previously assumed unconnected (p. 65).

The participants' GPA's, course schedules (current and prior), and standardized test scores were reviewed and documented. In addition, the researcher used the participants' current schedules and grades when analyzing their statements regarding the significant impact their teachers had on their academic performance.

Individual interviews were used as the primary method to learn about the Black males' beliefs and experiences as high school students. Formal interview methods guided these procedures. Thus, questions, times, and locations were selected prior to the interviews (Glesne, 2006). Table 3-3 provides a schedule of individual interview questions. Appendix D provides a complete transcribed individual interview with one of the participants. The researcher met with each of the participants individually to verify that the dates and times of the interviews were acceptable to them. A small, quiet conference room, within the school, was used for the individual interviews. This provided an appropriate and convenient location for the students. Interview questions were carefully developed to garner an understanding based on the goals of the research questions (Glesne, 2006). A larger, quiet conference room, within the school, was used for the focus group. Table 3-4 provides a list of focus group questions.

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher conducted individual interviews during times that were selected and agreed upon by the researcher, participant, and parent/guardian. Each interview lasted between 45 and 65 minutes (Table 3-3). The researcher maintained open communication with parents/guardians throughout the data collections process. This purpose of this communication was to inform the parents/guardians when their child would be individually interviewed and when their child would participate in the focus group. Prior to beginning the individual interviews, the researcher reiterated to the participants that if at any time they did not wish to answer a question and/or wanted to opt out of the study, they were free to do so. In addition, the researcher thanked the participants for working with her and encouraged them to ask questions/seek clarification at any time during the data collection process. Individual interviews were audio recorded. The tapes were transcribed verbatim.

In addition to the individual interviews, the researcher used a single focus group to gather additional data as well as conduct member checking (Table 3-4 for focus group questions). The decision to use a single focus group was made based on the final number of participants involved in the study. During the focus group session, participants were asked to: 1) describe the external factors that affect academic performance, 2) discuss how peer-based social interactions affect academic performance, and 3) describe how teachers' characteristics and teaching styles affect academic performance. The researcher also utilized the focus group to review the data collected during the individual interviews and to ensure that the findings were an adequate representation of their voices (Creswell, 2005; Morgan, 1996/1997). All of the participants were involved in the focus group. To ensure the accuracy of transcribing the data, the focus group session was recorded with permission of the participants and their parent(s)/guardian(s). The recorded sessions were transcribed verbatim after the focus group session. In addition, a peer graduate student observed two of the individual interviews and the focus group. The peer recorded the non-verbal behaviors of the participants and the researcher as well as the process of the focus group. The peer observer is a graduate student working on her doctorate. She has completed all of her coursework for her doctorate and is working on her dissertation. She has extensive experience with qualitative studies, including but not limited to working directly with tenured professors at the local university. A professional transcriptionist transcribed all of the interviews and the focus group session. The researcher reviewed each of the transcripts to ensure their accuracy.

Data Analysis

The constant comparative method was used to analyze the data. Creswell said, "Constant comparison is an inductive (from specific to broad) data analysis procedure...[used when the researcher is] generating and connecting categories by comparing incidents in the data to other

incidents, incidents to categories, and categories to other categories” (2005, p. 406). Using this procedure, the researcher was able to create and connect themes throughout the data by identifying specific factors/characteristics and placing them in to broader categories (Behar-Horenstein & Ganet-Sigel, 1999; Spradley, 1980). Categories were delimited during the coding process as they became theoretically saturated. As Glaser and Strauss (1995) point out, “After an analyst has coded incidents for the same category a number of times; he learns to see quickly whether or not the next applicable incident points to a new aspect” (p. 111). The constant comparative method enabled the researcher to code and analyze the data while considering the students’ perspectives and beliefs regarding factors that influenced their academic performance, while being mindful of their past school experiences and historical documents (Creswell, 2005; Glaser & Strauss, 1995; Morgan, 1996/1997; Spradley, 1980). The analysis was completed using NVivo 9.2. The research imported all of the individual interview and focus group transcriptions into NVivo. As the researcher read through each participant’s responses, open coding was utilized to document patterns as they arose in the data. The open codes were then organized in to nodes or central themes. The researcher constantly compared and reviewed the classification of data in to various themes and reorganized when appropriate. Subsequent analyses resulted in categories and themes coalescing. During the final data analysis, four major themes emerged: School Success, Family Relationships, Educational Relationships, and Peer Relationships. School Success included the subthemes: the participants’ definition of school success for themselves as well as descriptions of peers who they deemed to be successful and unsuccessful in school, participants’ study habits, and participant accountability. Family relationships is comprised of the subthemes: parent/guardian education and type of work, household members, parent/guardian involvement, parent/guardian rules, and daily routines/responsibilities.

Educational relationships include the subthemes: teaching/instructional methods, participants' strengths and weaknesses, participants' study habits, negative teacher student interactions and positive teacher student interactions. Peer relationships include the subthemes: peer interactions, positive peer influences, and negative peer influences.

Validity & Limitations

Using the culturally sensitive research methods, the risk of misinterpreting information is minimized. According to Spradley (1980), this type of research allows people to learn from the experiences of others, not merely study them. Creswell (2005) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) support the use of several techniques to validate qualitative research findings. Four of the techniques are triangulation, peer review and debriefing, clarification of research bias/subjectivity, and member checking. All of these techniques were utilized throughout the research process in this study. Triangulation, the use of a variety of data-collection methods, sources of data collection, or multiple analysts was used. For example, the researcher reviewed the students' cumulative folders, conducted individual interviews, and conducted a focus group. The interviews and focus group were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Peer reviews and debriefing were utilized during the first two individual interviews and the focus group. A graduate student observed the first two individual interviews and the focus group. She provided the researcher with feedback after their completion. The peer graduate student reported that researcher used appropriate pacing and participant appropriate language during the interviews. In addition, the peer graduate student provided the researcher with an outside perspective and reflection. Personal reflection and evaluation of the researchers subjectivity is essential on all aspects of the research process and data collected (Glesne, 2006). Glesne (2006) said,

Subjectivity, once recognized, can be monitored for more trustworthy research and subjectivity, in itself, can contribute to the research . . . being attuned to your subjective lenses is being attuned to your emotions . . . to reduce the risk of

incorrect data analysis, a clarification focus group was conducted to ensure that the researcher had accurately recorded the students' responses (p. 119-120).

By being aware of one's subjectivity, the researcher increased her understanding of her values, beliefs, and needs, as well as those of the group being researched. The researcher also used reflective memos to track her thoughts and feelings throughout the process as well as open her to new thoughts, viewpoints, and/or biases (Glesne, 2006). Finally, the member checking was conducted during the focus group. Creswell (2005) defines member checking as, "a process in which the researcher asks one or more participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account" (p. 252). All of the data collection, analysis, and reporting was done with a concentration on culturally sensitive research methods (Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Tillman, 2002/2006) as well as with a focus on the major tenants of CRP.

Researcher's Subjectivity

The researcher is in her twelfth year of teaching at a public high school in Alachua County, Florida. She taught Exceptional Student Education (ESE) mathematics and science for five years. She left Gainesville for one year to teach at a private school in Orlando, Florida. Upon her return to her former school in Alachua County, she taught ESE English and was responsible for the ESE consultation for three years. For the past two and a half years, she served as the Activities Director and a dean while working with high school students. During her time at the local high school, she has participated in numerous professional development programs (e.g., participated in clinical educational training, served as a mentor for interns, and worked on her graduate degrees). Her teaching and professional development experiences have provided her with a wealth of insight and understanding about working with diverse populations and the struggles that many students experience navigating high school.

Her experience working with high school students in particular have heightened her awareness about some of the behaviors and nuances that are common among students. These experiences contributed to making her an external-insider. It is from this perspective, the third typology, that the researcher collected and analyzed data. However, her passion for the topic and desire to see these students succeed could create researcher bias. The researcher employed several techniques to prevent researcher bias. She used memos to track her feelings and opinions during the research process (Glesne, 2006). In addition, a graduate student observed the focus groups. The researcher and the graduate student compared observations to check for agreement while they reviewed the data collection process and analysis. Additionally, the researcher utilized the theories and methodologies she studied in her graduate coursework. From her graduate coursework, she has acquired the skills that are necessary to conduct qualitative research, such as: interviewing, questionnaire/survey development, participant observation, transcription, and data analysis. The researcher employed these skills prior to conducting this study during coursework and while assisting professors. These experiences helped the researcher gain the requisite experiences to use the qualitative techniques in this study.

The researcher's interest in this study emanated from her past experiences at the site where she observed a high frequency of Black males performing below grade level and failing high school. Her curiosity led her to develop a better understanding of what factors accounted for this. Also in her role as the ESE Department Chair, teacher and ESE staffing specialist she had numerous interactions with this population and as a result began to see that several students were improving their academic performance. The students were willing to accept her feedback however, often rejected the same feedback from other teachers.

Table 3-1. Lakeview High School Demographic Statistics

Ethnicity	Male/Female/Total	Percentage
Black	333/362/695	42.9%
White	143/187/330	20.4%
Asian/Pacific Islander	55/54/109	6.7%
American Indian/Alaskan	0/1/1	<.1%
Hispanic	23/25/48	3%
Multiracial	9/10/19	1.2%
Undefined*	177/240/417	25.8%

Source: Lakeview High School (pseudonym) 2008-2009 database& Florida Department of Education Database (FLDOE) * At this time, families were not required to select race/ethnicity at the school level. Florida Department of Education database indicated Lakeview High School population was 73% minority students.)

Table 3-2. Grade Level and Cumulative GPA of the Participants*

Participants*	Grade Level	Cumulative GPA
Sean	10	1.63
Junior	11	2.00
Taylor	11	2.23
Tom	10	1.63
Tray	10	1.94
Billy	11	2.07
Dee	12	2.00

* Denotes pseudonyms used to protect identity of participants.

Table 3-3. Individual Interview Questions

Interview Questions

External Factors

1. Who lives with you in your home? Please tell me a little about them.
2. What level of school did your parent(s)/guardian(s) complete? Older siblings?
3. Tell me about your typical school day from the time you get up in the morning until when you go to sleep at night.
4. What responsibilities do you have when you get home after school?
5. Tell me about how your family helps you with your schoolwork. (Would you like to have them help you more?)
6. How much time do you spend after school on your homework? How much time do you spend on your homework during the weekend?

Teacher characteristics

1. What does the teacher need to do to help you be successful in a class?
2. What is your favorite class? Why?
3. Which class are you the most successful in? What leads to that success?
4. Which class are you the least successful in? What leads to that lack of success?
5. For you to like a class, what are the qualities that a teacher must have?
6. What are the qualities that a teacher has that cause you to dislike the class?

Table 3-3. Continued

Peer-based Social Interactions

1. Describe some of the people that you socialize with in school.
 2. What kind of activities do you do with your friends at school?
 3. What kind of activities do you do with your friends outside of school?
 4. How would you define being successful in school?
 5. Describe one of your friends who you think is successful in school. Tell me why you think s/he is successful.
 6. Describe one of your friends who you think is not successful in school. Tell me why you think s/he is not successful.
-

Table 3-4. Focus Group Questions

Focus Group Questions

Home/Family

1. Describe the support your parents provide you for homework. Do you feel like you need more help at home?
 2. For participants who live with their father/stepfather: Who is more involved with your education? For participants not living with their father/stepfather: "Is your father involved with your education? If so, how is he involved? If not, how does this impact your performance in school?"
 3. How many of your parents went to open house/parent-teacher night?
 4. Does mom/dad/anyone at home help your homework? How do they help? Do they check report cards/progress reports, meet with teachers? Describe
 5. How do the things outside of school/at home impact your ability to focus at school and complete your work?
-

Peers

1. Several of you stated that you have two different groups of friends, one group who is successful in school and one group that is not successful... Who do you spend more time with? Which group of friends has a bigger influence on what you do at school?
 2. Have any of you had an experience where your peers have teased you for doing well in school? Please describe.
 3. Re-check peer influence: Do your friends impact your academic performance? Explain
-

Teachers

1. Discuss teacher personality/teaching styles. Review key traits that participants listed: positive attitude, strict, know kids and where they come from, good relationship with kids, know their material and how to teach it. Are there any other traits that are important to you? Describe.
 2. Describe how the teacher's ability to manage classroom behavior impacts your ability to learn/be successful and/or your opinion of the teacher.
 3. Describe what happens when you do not understand material being taught in class and the teacher will not re-teach it.
 4. Is it more common to not like a class because you do not understand the material or because you do not like the teacher? Explain.
-

Table 3-4. Continued

5. What types of things do teachers do to motivate/encourage you? Is it more important to have teacher praise your hard work/accomplishments? Explain.
-

School

1. Reiterate your definition of being successful in school to ensure accurate definition.
 2. When did you start doing poorly in school? What happened at that time that caused your grades to drop?
 3. What kind of support do you need at school? What would help you more?
 4. Why aren't you completing your class work/homework? (Too hard/do not understand/do not have skills/easier to give up)
 5. If you know what you want to do and what you want to achieve (i.e., success in school), why aren't you reaching your goals?
 6. Tell me how the subject matter in the class impacts how well you do or do not do in the class.
 7. Several of you said that there was not anything else that people could do for you in school that you had to want it yourself. Do you want to be successful in school? Why or why not?
 8. Tell me about whether or not you have gotten in trouble in school. Describe what happened and how it impacted your grades.
 9. Tell me how the school that you attend impacts how you do in school. Do you think that you would do better if you attended a different school? Explain.
-

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings related to the research questions. Four major themes emerged from an analysis of the participants' interviews and focus group. These themes were School Success, Family Relationships, Educational Relationships, and Peer Relationships.

Research Question 1) How Do High School Black Males Perceive School Success?

The first theme, School Success, refers to the way in which participants defined how a student could be successful in school. They stated that one characteristic of school success was having a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.5. However, many students said that they personally would prefer to have a higher GPA than that. The participants said that if they were successful in school, they would be earning A and B letter grade averages. To the participants, a C letter grade average would be acceptable if they did not earn more than a few of them. Dee stated, "I feel like a C+ is average, but when I was in classes and stuff I would have killed for a C+ sometimes".

Taylor continued Dee's beliefs stating,

No I'm actually a C+. That's not, it's average like Dee says. I would love to be above average. Average in the world isn't going to get you being nothing. You would want to be the best in the world at whatever you do.

Many of the participants had developed their definition of success based on their personal goals. Extracurricular activities such as Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) and/or athletics and shaped the participants' definitions of school success. Participation in extracurricular activities requires a cumulative GPA of ≥ 2.0 , many of the participants desired to earn letter grade averages of a least a C or higher. Tom said,

ROTC is my personal goal, so when I say grades, that comes with the grades too because ROTC you have to get grades before the after school . . . you have to do and you have to pass the bookwork to be able to do after school activities so it's all part of it.

For Tom, ROTC and school were the only places in his life that allowed him to occasionally escape from the drama and chaos. He said, “Sometimes school is the only place that I can clear my head without all the drama. ROTC pretty much”. The participants agreed that their behavior in class impacted their final grades. Junior, an 11th grader said,

Being successful in school would include As and Bs [and] a few Cs here and there, but only if you were struggling in the classes. Really no Ds, no Fs. And behavior would be good, but periodically a little playful but your teachers would kind of keep you in line.

They also explained that another characteristic of school success depended upon interactions with teachers and specified that relationship should be positive. Tray stated,

I don't really know what success for me in school is like. I mean I'm not good, but I'm not bad either. It's like average. I want to be above, so I want As and Bs and then uh, it depends on your behavior too. Behavior has a lot to do with your grade.

When the researcher asked the participants to describe a friend of theirs who they considered to be successful in school, the participants provided the same definition of success. When asked to talk more about friends who they considered to be successful in school, the participants described friends who were maintaining A and B letter grade averages. They reported that these friends earned very few if any C letter grade averages. Tray said, “The one who is successful, he likes to sit in the front, and always paying attention to the teacher and answering questions and stuff”.

The participants reiterated that their classroom behavior was also an important factor in their success in school. Each of the participants expressed the need to exhibit classroom behaviors that were positive and respectful toward their teachers. They believed that their behavior was related in part to their ability to achieve school success. Junior summarized the participants' beliefs stating,

I'd like to have a good relationship with them because I know like my mom always taught me if you act up in the class and you don't get your grades, then when it's time for report cards to come out you need that grade you're going to need your

teacher . . . but if you act right and help yourself then when that time comes they can probably help you out.

This type of behavior helped them avoid discipline referrals. Dee stated, “With bad behavior you end up out of school and missing school and missing credits so you wouldn’t graduate”. Tom stated,

All these students in ISD missing like three and four days of class, . . .you might as well go ahead and suspend them because there is no way that you can make up all this work because you know ISS is not excusable and if you don’t get the work done, you can’t do it . . . OSS it’s bring people’s grades down literally. Like my classes I can miss two days and I can drop from a B to a D.

Several of the participants said that they too struggled at Lakeview because of what they believed about school policies regarding class work and school based consequences for behavior infractions. Dee commented that he felt very isolated. He said, “Probably like more of a push I would think, from anybody, teachers, guidance counselor, anything. My first year I think I just felt like I was here by myself, just hung out to dry I guess”.

When the participants were asked to describe friends that they believed were unsuccessful in school, they frequently talked about classroom behavior along with letter grade averages. Sean described one friend who he believed was unsuccessful in school, because he earned D and F letter grade averages. In addition, Sean stated that the boy was “talking during class while the teacher is talking, throwing stuff around, um, like cussing out people, yelling out random stuff”. The participants agreed that based on their personal definitions of school success, they were not currently experiencing success in school. However, all of the participants stated during their individual interviews and during the focus group that they did want to achieve school success.

After establishing their definition of success in school, the participants stated that they were somewhat responsible for their lack of school success. Taylor, an 11th grader stated:

Really the only class...really, I do be slacking in class was math so and now I can't blame it on the teacher because I know it was all me, you know I'm the only person that's doing it so I can't blame it on the teacher.

During the focus group, all of the participants agreed that they were not doing everything that they needed to do in order to reach their desired level of success. Their lack of success was partially attributable to poor study habits and failure to submit assignments in a timely manner. They acknowledged that these behaviors impacted their grades. Billy stated,

I did my work really in that class. If I didn't do my work or if I didn't turn my work in, it that was just my fault. I forgot to turn it in or left it in my backpack or left my stuff at home or whatever.

All of the participants stated that they did not spend a significant or consistent amount of time doing homework. Dee, Billy, Sean and Tray said they spent about 30 minutes to one hour on homework. Sean stated, "I didn't do any homework or studying over the weekend". The amount of time that Junior spent on his homework was based on his grades. He said,

Well to tell you the truth, most times I don't even do homework I'll be so tired and other times I'll spend probably, well if I'm really trying to get a good grade in a class I'll spend about two hours when I'm really focusing on home work I'll spend at least 1:30 and 2 hours.

Tom struggled to get any homework done with the added responsibility of caring for his niece and nephew. He said,

I couldn't do my work because of my nieces and nephew; they are a handful you can't. You can't work and watch kids at the same time, you just can't do it because they're so young and they get into a lot of things.

Another factor that influenced the participants' perception of school success was a lack of affinity for their school. Some of the participants struggled to find school success because they lacked a feeling of connectedness with Lakeview High School. Sean stated, "I didn't want to come to Lakeview because the environment I knew that if I was to come here that I was going to get Fs and that's what happened". Taylor expressed similar feelings stating, "I started doing

poorly from the time I set foot on Lakeview campus because I didn't want to be around, I wanted to be a wolf (pseudonym of school mascot)".

Research Question 1a) How Do External Factors Influence High School Black Males' Perceptions of School Success?

The second major theme was Family Relationships. These relationships influenced their beliefs about school success and how they worked toward that. Five of the participants lived in a two-parent home that included the biological mother and either the biological father or a stepfather. One of the participants lived alone with his biological mother. However, his biological father who lived in town rarely made contact with him. The remaining participant lived with his older sister. She was designated as his legal guardian because his biological mother was incarcerated. He has never had any contact with his biological father. The participants described what they deemed to be enough support at home. Taylor summarized the participants' beliefs stating,

I think that good support at home would be your mom or your dad interested in what you've learned at school, that they um, are helping you with homework or whatnot, always checking up on you, making sure you're grades are up to par, make sure you have all your credits.

Tray added,

Well, you've got to support yourself first before anybody and then if you do that, then anything else should come along and your people like your folks and friends, they help you out and try to encourage you and stuff, that will keep you right.

Billy stated, "They stay on me fairly well. But, like if they did any more, I probably couldn't deal with it. I'd probably get mad". Sean's stated that his parents were very involved. He said,

Both of them are like real involved in my education, like both of them come out to the school like every, like about once a month and talking to my guidance counselor about how I'm doing in school and what can I do to make stuff up.

All but one of the participants felt that their parent(s) gave them what they believed was an adequate amount of support with school. They defined adequate support as: checking nine weeks

and semester grades; helping with homework when able; and having expectations of A, B, or C letter grade averages. D and F letter grade averages were not acceptable among any of the participants' parents/guardians. Billy, an 11th grader, stated:

Yeah, if I need help with something, she (mom) usually helps me out. Like she, I only need help with writing kind of stuff, so she helps me with that kind of stuff...she (mom) likes to see A's and B's stuff like that she pretty much stays on me about my work for the most part.

Although they stated that they received adequate support from their families, their responses to additional questions did not match their definitions of familial support. Again, their definition was: checking nine weeks and semester grades; helping with homework when able; and having expectations of A, B, or C letter grade averages. During the focus group, Shawn, a 10th grader said, "My parents don't help me with my homework, but they do check report cards and they don't care about progress reports, but if my grades start slipping they will be right up here to the school." Dee said, "My mom never helps me with my homework or anything . . . my mom always checked report cards, she doesn't care about progress reports though and she never met with teachers". Tray agreed stating, "They don't help me with my homework. I pretty much do it on my own. My report card they will check on that, but progress reports they don't much care about and all". All of the participants' parents/guardians worked full time. They had high school diplomas and several were attending community college for academic advancement. Many of the participants, whose parents were in community college, described their parents' expectations of school success as being very strict. Taylor said, "She's like real strict...but my mom, she doesn't be playing about no school because she's in school trying to get hers".

These students described their daily household/job responsibilities in depth. Three of the seven participants had jobs and/or participated in extracurricular activities. One of the three

participants, Tom, had the responsibility of caring for his sister's two children. He stated that this chore directly impacted his ability to complete assigned work. He described his daily routine as:

I watch them (nieces and nephews) every day from Monday through Friday, Saturday through Sunday...I'd get checked out, drive to her home, she'd drop me off I'd go pick up my niece, I carried my nephew, pick up my niece from school...when I put him to sleep for his nap it'd be like 3pm. I'd go outside to get my niece and I'd bring her back, pull her blinds down, [and] clean up. Most days he rips up my books and stuff so I'm like 'Oh my gosh!' Then, I put him in the bathtub watch him, put him...let him watch TV, it's like you can't take your eyes off of him because if you take your eyes off of him something's going to be messed up...I feed them dinner and like they go to sleep at 9pm every night.

Tom struggled for several years to find a balance between his desire for school success and the stressful responsibilities from his family. He said, "It's like you have to know how to keep your personal matters and school separated because you add them together it's chaos, it's not going to work. The remaining participants stated that they had a significant amount of free time after school. All of the participants had daily chores that they were asked to complete by their parents/guardians. These chores consisted of tasks such as cleaning dishes, their rooms, and bathrooms. Four of the seven participants did not have a curfew and were allowed to return home at their leisure. Tray said, "I drop my backpack at home and go outside...until I am ready to come back [home]." When asked when he came home on a school night, Dee said, "Probably 11pm, 10pm. I don't have a curfew" This particular student had a great deal of unstructured time compared to the majority of the other participants. Many of students were also home alone in the morning and/or in the evening while their parent(s)/guardian worked.

Research Question 1 b) How Do Teachers' Teaching Styles/Characteristics Influence High School Black Males' Perception of School Success?

As the third theme, Educational Relationships emerged, participants repeatedly spoke about how significantly their teachers' teaching styles and characteristics impacted their desire and willingness to work in a class. As stated in research question 1, the participants agreed that

they were partially accountable for their current lack of success in school. They stated that they did not spend much time on homework or studying for tests/quizzes. Sean stated, “I don’t study for tests period...didn’t do any homework or studying over the weekend”. Tray said that he spends “a few minutes or so” completing homework. Taylor reinforced that his overall lack of studying and completing homework impacted his grades. He stated:

So, if we did have a little bit of homework I’d do it, but sometimes I’ll be...some things come into my mind, if I didn’t have to work that day, I’d be like well I’m going to go outsides and such. I don’t even think about homework.

These patterns of inadequate time spent studying and completing assignments did not hold true in all of their classes though. The most significant factors that seemed to influence the participants’ behaviors in school were the teachers’ instructional methods and interactions with students. Billy stated, “I try to like be friends with my teachers because like if I don’t like my teachers, most likely I won’t get my work done. I like ignore it or go to sleep or something like that”. Negative interactions with teachers significantly deterred participants from attending and/or working in a class. Tray stated that the “teacher who just always have a mean attitude and just don’t really care about passing, they just want that paycheck that is really what they are here for, [and] not to help you pass”, made him not want to do any work. Tom said during the focus group that,

I was failing her class because I can’t stand her and I don’t like English and she wasn’t patient and she always had an attitude, it was like somebody stomped on her foot or something every time I had seen her.

Dee explained that the manner in which his teacher spoke to him, “he’ll talk to them like he was just better than [the kids]”, made him not want to do any work. Junior stated, “I’m the kind of person [that] I don’t like the teacher to be too hard on me, but that’s what it was, so, [that] made me not want to do my work in class”. Taylor explained that he had such a negative experience

with his English teacher that he opted to skip her class in lieu of attending and interacting with her. He explained:

I never really went to that class I went sometimes, but most of the time I never really went because I like the 1st quarter, when I was going to her class, I was doing all my work every day but she was grading it. But she never gave it back so I never knew what my grade was and then when my report card came out for the 1st report card I had an F on my report card. So that really upset me. So from then on I was really like, I don't like her class.

The participants explained to the researcher that the teacher's characteristics in class could make them want to give up and not work in the class. Tray said,

Whereas with science it was more as to how she taught and you didn't like her teaching style so you kind of gave up in that class . . . Like, ruin your day, say something to hurt you or make you not want to do it anymore and just give up.

All of the participants agreed with Tray stating that negative interactions with their teachers significantly reduced the likelihood that they would be successful in that class.

However, Taylor spoke for the entire group of participants when he described one of his favorite teachers. The qualities that he described are the same qualities that the other participants believed their ideal teacher would possess. He said,

She's just a good teacher period. You can get a lot of understanding from her because she's going to break it down, she's not going to break it down like where you are slow or something, but she's going to break it down where you can understand it for the whole class to understand and she's going to ask you like if you don't understand it she's going to be like raise your hand, you don't have to decide to raise your hand about nothing because if one person doesn't understand she's going to be like this means that somebody else doesn't understand it but they just don't want to raise their hand.

The positive relationships with their teachers and the engaging methods that the teachers employed to instruct, according to the participants was directly related to their success in that class. This was true even for classes that were not the students' "preferred" subject areas. The

teachers' interactions included how they were able to relate to the students as individuals. The participants agreed that a teacher who knew them as individuals were more effective. Dee stated:

The perfect teacher is down to earth, knows how to talk to people and like knowing where other people come from and stuff like that. Because, just diversity...By knowing kids personally they can like...it will help the way you teach in your class. You teach people differently.

In addition to the teachers' interactions with students, the participants reported that the teachers' instructional methods impacted their success. Sean struggled with teachers who were unable to teach concepts in different ways; this made him give up in those classes. He said,

“Some...teachers that I had didn't really give examples of what we were supposed to be doing. If they did, they would probably give us like one example but after that we had to figure it out ourselves”. The participants described what they thought an ideal teacher was. This person was someone who utilized instructional methods such as teaching: (a) the material in several different ways so that all students understood, (b) with solid understanding/knowledge of the subject matter, (c) with joy and passion for the material, (d) in a variety of different ways (lecture, note-taking, hands-on activities, labs, etc.), and (e) with creativity and flexibility while using solid classroom management strategies. Sean described this type of teacher as:

kind of a well-rounded teacher that was strict, she really knew her material, she not only knew it but she knew how to teach it to other people and teach it in a bunch of different ways but was also kind of nurturing kind of almost like a mommy kind of a friend, kind of mentor type that would kind of guide you and help

Additionally, Junior described his ideal teacher as:

He could teach very good, his teaching style was...you know he'll explain it, you know, he'll keep on explaining it over and over until you get it and you know sometimes he'll ask other kids to help you if you still didn't get it, but he'll explain it to you.

Again, during the focus group, the participants restated the traits of their ideal teacher. These traits included: positive attitude, strict but fair, know their students (not just know them

academically – but if there were personal things going on that a really good teacher would know what’s happening maybe outside of school and was supportive with that), they had good relationships with their students, they listen to some of the same music, they understand the culture (the things that the participants were excited about), they knew their material that they were teaching and could actually teach it to you and make you understand it. Tom was clear about the importance of a teacher having a solid understanding of the content and more importantly he/she is able to teach it so that his/her students grasp the concepts. He said,

Someone who knows their material and not just knows it but can actually teach it . . . Like it’s one thing that you got your doctorate at UF, but do you know how to teach your material, that’s like something totally different. You can learn anything you want to learn, but to actually get in front of somebody and teach it like that’s why I love teachers.

The participants had clear opinions regarding various instructional methods that they did and did not like. All of the participants wanted teachers that would teach and reteach the material until all of their students learned the concepts. Dee said, “I feel like if the teacher doesn’t re-teach the material he shouldn’t be teaching because . . . he actually should be able to go over the work with you and make sure you understand. Tom supported Dee’s statement saying,

If the teacher doesn’t want to re-teach the material that will piss me off because I feel like if I want to learn and you’re mad or you have an attitude just because I can’t get it the first time, that will be a very big problem for me.

Taylor expressed very strong feelings toward a teacher who would be unwilling to reteach class material. He said,

I’m the type of person if the teacher doesn’t explain it and I’m not getting it and I ask him or her can they go over it and they ignore me or don’t go over it, I’m a person that I might just put my head down and go to sleep or something like that. Because I feel like if they don’t have time for me or whatnot or they are too busy, I don’t think that would be a good teacher though.

All of the participants wanted teachers who were able to teach the subject matter in a variety of different ways. Teachers who stood at the front of the class and lectured were not effective for the participants. Billy described one of his teacher's ability to differentiate her instruction stating,

One of my teachers this year she was like, when she teach to us, she like she put notes on the board and talked to us and told us like ok this is who we are learning about. She would read the notes. She would ask us if we understood it. She would like go into depth and tell us it might not have been up there on notes. But if we were writing about a king or whatever then she would tell us, 'ok he did this' and she would like tell us about him, but she would help us further understand the person while we were writing notes about them.

Several of the participants were very frustrated with large classes that were taught mostly using a computer. They agreed that the teachers were not able to give them adequate instruction and support with skill and concept acquisition. Sean said, "I started falling back on my math class because it was the computer sessions. That's the only reason, because I was passing everything that we were doing in the classroom". Taylor has similar concerns with his computer based math class. He said, "I know I could be needing more help, but it's only one teacher and it's like 25 students with like 25 different computers so he's got to be there for everybody else too. The teacher's ability to maintain an engaging and well managed classroom also impacted the participants' success. The participants have the same opinion regarding the teacher's classroom management. Tom said,

Behavior management is a great skill for teachers, but I feel like as long as they don't, you know like push to the limit like . . . when the class is out of control and once the teacher gets mad or aggravated, they take it out on students that haven't been doing anything.

Taylor agreed with Tom stating, "I believe behavior management is a lot of important things you do in a classroom . . . they want the class to be quiet so they can pass or be learning the skills that the teacher is teaching".

The data from the participants' cumulative folders reinforced their statements regarding how a teacher impacted their success in school. All of the participants had a C grade letter average or higher in the classes in which they held positive feelings regarding the teachers' instructional methods and interactions with students. The only exception to this was Tom; he was frequently checked out early from school to care for his niece and nephew and therefore had excessive absences in one of his favorite classes. In addition, the classes that the participants described negative interactions with teachers, they all had D and/or F grade letter averages. When asked how the teacher's way of interacting with him impacted his grade, Dee said, "I would say a lot because I didn't make as good a grade as I should have made in the class. I didn't like him and I didn't want to try as hard". Junior said,

you know if they talk to me in a rude way, then that will make me mad and then talk back to them in a rude way, then I'd get in trouble, I'd get wrote up or something and then I wouldn't feel like going to their class and doing their work.

This data reinforced the participants' statements that their teachers had a significant impact on their school performance.

Research Question 1 c) How Do Peer-Based Social Interactions Influence High School Black Males' Perception of School Success?

The fourth theme was Peer Relationships. Each of the participants described the friends that they interacted with in and/or outside of school. Dee associated with different friends outside of school, but would not participate in all of the things they would do. He said, "They are involved in stuff that's illegal that they are going to get in trouble for... I try to stay away from that". Taylor also had two different groups of friends. He stated that he and his friends outside of school did not talk much about school and grades. However, his friends at school played multiple roles. He described them as,

If anything was to ever pop off or anything or go down I believe they have my back like they were standing there, if I ever need help with anything . . . Like say it I was

about to get jumped or anything or like if I'm going to have problems with somebody else then they know this person or something they can probably (inaudible) or something . . . I hang around with the more successful group, that's who I spend most of my time with. They have a big influence on me and whatnot because like I say I'm interested in sports so everybody I hang around with plays ball, plays football and track so I say that they have a big influence on me because I see them doing good and I want to do good too.

The other participants also tended to associate with other students who were interested in similar activities like themselves. Tray said, "They [are] just like me", when describing his friends. Each of the participants had friends that they described as being successful in school, as well as friends who they identified as being unsuccessful. In addition, the participants all had friends who encouraged them to do better in school. Billy said his friends encouraged him by, "they like tell me like get me down so I realize so they tell me what happens if I don't study and they tell me what happens if I do and they motivate me that way". Taylor stated that his interactions with his friends regarding school success were extremely fun and encouraging. He said:

We have competitions and stuff like...we have competitions, like who's going to get done first...you know we'll try to joke around it like 'Oh he's smarter than you' or whatnot. But, it's coming from a joking manner, like at the same time we're really trying to encourage them like you know you can do better just stay focused, you know, take your time

Three of the participants noted that they had friends who were not successful in school and engaged in illegal activities. Instead of allowing their friends to negatively influence them, the participants stated they tried to steer those friends in the direction of school success. Junior stated, "I try to talk to them telling them it's not the right thing, but they've been around it so long I just can't...I try but it doesn't work". In addition to attempting to encourage their friends, the participants said that they would opt to not hang out with them when they engaged in illegal activities to avoid getting in to trouble as well. Dee stated, "I usually like, when I'm out with them I'll probably not be around them like at the times they are doing certain [illegal] stuff".

Dee added to this during the focus group stating:

Uh I feel like that they don't...neither side influences me, but I hang with probably more of the successful side more than the group of who I don't think will be successful, but they all...I feel like neither one has influence over me because I influence myself to do good and do well.

Dee struggled at Lakeview when he first arrived because of the lack of solid friendships. He said, "At one point in time the people I was around when nobody was doing it so I didn't want to do it so I was pretty much just copying and why following them". Among the participants, there they found their interactions with friends to be motivating. Junior, in particular explained how the death of a close friend inspired him to do better and become successful in school. He expressed this desire, stating:

Another reason why I try to do good in school and go to college is for Darius (pseudonym). He wasn't able to make it to 12th grade, make it to college. You know, I wanted to see him play. So every time I know when I go in a classroom or I go on the court you know, I do it for him...

All of the participants considered their friends to be influential in their desire to be successful in school. They worked on doing well and encouraged each other to stay on track and strive for success in school. In addition, none of their friends teased them for doing well academically. When asked during the focus group about being teased for doing well academically, Tray said, "I've never been picked at or teased at school." According to the participants, they continued to make positive choices even when their friends did not. During the focus group, Dee stated,

Uh, I feel like that they don't...neither side influences me. But, I hang with probably more of the successful side more than the group of [friends] who I don't think will be successful. But they all are my friends and I feel like neither one has influence over me because I influence myself to do good and do well.

The majority of the participants reiterated these beliefs during the focus group. One participant, Tom, modified the group of friends that he spent significant amounts of time with. He said, "I

spend more time with the more successful group. Um, I kind of dropped off the other people that was bringing me down and that didn't really care about themselves".

Summary of Results

Participants reported that family relationships, teachers' instructional styles and behaviors, and peer interactions played a role in them achieving what they defined as school success. All participants agreed that their teachers' instructional styles, characteristics, and interactions with them had the most significant impact on their success. Success in school was something that all of the participants acknowledged they had not achieved, but desired to do so. The majority of the participants did not spend substantial amounts of time completing homework. Very few of the participants took ownership of their learning. Participants did not seek assistance from teachers when they were unclear about concepts and/or assignments. The participants stated that they had adequate support at home. Their descriptions of that support did not substantiate their statements. The majority of the participants' parents/guardians did not assist with homework, did not check in daily regarding academic progress, and only checked report cards to monitor grades. In addition, multiple participants did not have curfews. Again, culturally established definitions of parental support vary and thus must be considered when judging whether or not support is adequate. "The lack of shared values and expectations are among the primary causes of discontinuity between the culture of the school and those of culturally diverse families" (West-Olatunji, Sanders, Mehta, and Behar-Horenstein, 2010, p. 138).

The site was located in one of the highest poverty areas of this county, with approximately half of the students receiving free and reduced lunch services. The major university located within the county provided minimal support for students and faculty. Several of the participants lacked any feeling of connectedness with their school. The participants who

expressed some level of connectedness were involved in extracurricular activities. The researcher noted a lack of school pride among all of the participants. In addition, the researcher experienced a lack of acknowledgement from the participants regarding the purpose of their education and how it would drive their future. Many of the participants had positive interactions with at least one or two of their teachers. Each participant worked with six teachers throughout the day. Having solid relationships with less than thirty percent of their teachers proved to be detrimental for the participants.

The four major themes that emerged from the data were found in the interviews with the individual participants as well as in the focus group. The researcher was able to substantiate many of the findings by comparing participants' statements with the data found in their cumulative folders. The School Success theme was influenced by the other three themes, Family Relationships, Educational Relationships and Peer Relationships. The impact of these themes on School Success is illustrated in Figure 4-1. Figure 4-2 illustrates the frequency of the subthemes and depicts proportionally the occurrence of each theme in relationship to the others.

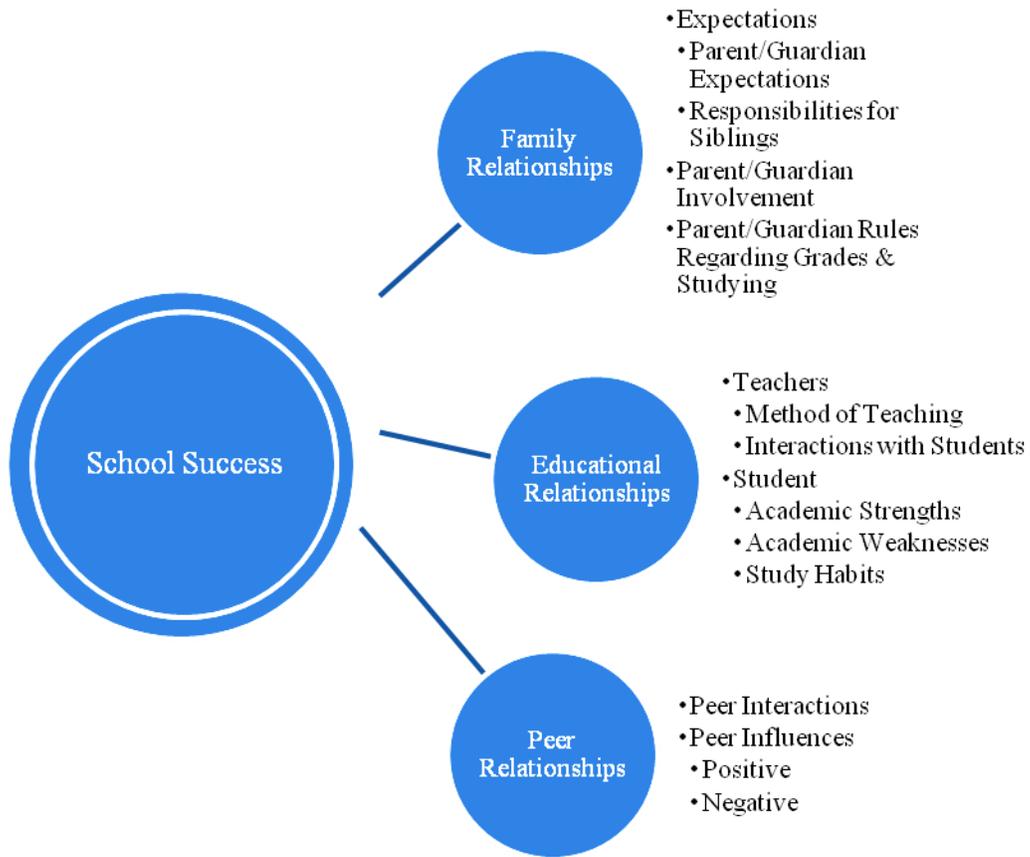


Figure 4-1. School Success and Supporting Themes

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to describe the factors that influence high school Black males' academic performance. The findings and implications of the study will be summarized in this chapter. This chapter concludes with suggestions for future research.

Research Question 1: How Do High School Black Males Perceive School Success?

Definition of School Success

There was broad agreement among the participants in their definition of school success. They described school success as earning good grade letter averages and demonstrating respectful classroom behavior. They reported that A and B grade letter averages with one or two C grade letters were indicative of academic success. Overall success in school included these grades as well as positive interactions with their teachers. All of the participants expressed that in spite of their current lack of success in school, they were longing to find their defined level of success in school. There were different reasons for the participants. Several of the participants wanted to participate in athletics. In order to do this, they needed to have a cumulative GPA \geq 2.0. Other participants stated that they wanted to be able to graduate from high school and attend a local community college.

Research Question 1a) How Do External Factors Influence High School Black Males' Perceptions of School Success?

The theme of Family Relationships encompassed several factors that influenced the participants' academic performance. Family relationships included parent/guardian involvement with school, household members and responsibilities, and parent/guardian academic expectations. Graves (2010) stated, "One factor that has been consistently related to high levels of academic achievement has been parental involvement" (p. 265). Participants agreed that the amount of time their parents/guardians spent was adequate for them to become successful in

school. Several of the participants stated that their parents' personal goals for academic advancement further motivated them to do well in school. Parent/guardians have the ability to impact multiple factors in their children's futures; this includes factors such as academic and social success, as well as positive attitudes and behaviors (Brandon, 2007; Mandara, 2006). Although research shows that academic performance increases with parent involvement, the participants' definition of adequate support was not consistent with what has been reported in previous studies. For example, only one of the participant's parents checked with him regularly to monitor his daily and weekly progress. None of the participants stated that their parents checked in with them daily or weekly regarding homework, time spent studying, upcoming projects, or current academic performance. It should be understood that the studies referenced above were conducted through a Eurocentric definition of family support. West-Olatunji, C., Sanders, T., Mehta, S., and Behar-Horenstein, L. (2010) stated, "Most of the literature on African American parenting and student achievement has been deficit-oriented and has frequently misinterpreted cultural mores and assumptions that characterize the African American culture" (p. 142). Therefore, the support provided by the participants' parents/guardians was seen as adequate by the participants. In addition, none of the participants made reference to teachers encouraging them to conduct self assessments or record keeping in order to monitor their grades and progress in class (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2005). All of the participants stated that the teachers that they had positive interactions with would frequently encourage them to complete their assignments and work hard in class.

Research Question 1 b) How Do Teachers' Teaching Styles/Characteristics Influence High School Black Males' Perceptions of School Success?

Participants repeatedly referred to the impact that the classroom teacher had on their ability to be successful. Within the Educational Relationship theme, the impact of both teacher

characteristics and student behaviors/skills on their success become clearer. However, regardless of the participants' ability, parental involvement, or peers, the quality of the relationship with the classroom teacher seemed to be most influential in their academic performance. The characteristics of the teachers (Table 5-1) that were most effective in motivating the participants to achieve academic success were consistent with those found in Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP). Gay (2002) explained the significant impact of a teacher who is culturally responsive in his/her instructional pedagogy. She said:

There are strong correlations between culturally responsive teaching and the school achievement of students of color. The higher the one, the greater the other on all measures including academic performance, social adjustment, school satisfaction, self-concept, and students' feeling of confidence and efficacy.

When Black males are able to relate to their teachers both on an individual and an academic level, they are more likely to be actively involved in their academic achievement (Booker, 2006; Cartledge & Dukes, 2009; Gay, 2002; House, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Love & Kruger, 2005; Milner, 2009; Neal, 2001; West-Olatunji, Baker & Brooks, 2006). The participants stated that their ideal teacher would exhibit the following traits: know the students as individuals, love what s/he is teaching, have a solid knowledge of the material, be able to teach the material in many different ways, interact positively with students (strict, but fair), encourage students, and be able to manage classroom behaviors. This description of their ideal teacher mirrored many of the tenants in CRP; these findings give cause for current teachers to review their own instructional pedagogy. Utilizing these tenants in instructional methods enables Black students to feel connected with and validated by their teachers, thus increasing academic performance (Booker, 2006; Cartledge & Dukes, 2009; Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008; Gay, 2002; House, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Love & Kruger, 2005; Milner, 2009; Neal, 2001; West-Olatunji, Baker, & Brooks, 2006). Along with the tenants found in CRP, Ware (2006) and Bondy and

Ross (2008) supported the “warm demander pedagogy”. This pedagogy reflected the tenants found in CRP and further elaborated on the teacher characteristics and instructional methods. Bondy and Ross (2008) said, “Warm demanders care enough to relentlessly insist on two things: that students treat the teacher and one another respectfully and that they complete the academic tasks necessary for successful futures” (p. 55). The participants in this study all stated that these characteristic were essential in their ideal teacher. It should be noted that the participants’ lack of school success should not be mistaken for learned helplessness. Shutting down and/or resisting academic/school success can be attributed to the marginalization that Black males are subjected to in public education. All too often, the academic expectations for Black males are lower than those for their White peers (Stinson, 2006; West-Olatunji, Sanders, Mehta, and Behar-Horenstein, 2010). Stinson (2006) stated, “Rejection of school and academics are argued to be coping strategies employed by African Americans in managing the negative effects of racism and discrimination” (p. 487). These factors must be considered when discussing the perceptions of success for Black males.

Research Question 1 c) How Do Peer-Based Social Interactions Influence High School Black Males’ Perceptions of School Success?

Peer Relationships emerged as the third subtheme under School Success. The participants indicated that their friends were much like themselves. They shared similar criteria for school success. One theory in the literature described the propensity for Blacks to avoid academic success due to the social stigma by their peers (Ogbu, 2004; Ogbu & Simmons, 1998; Peterson-Lewis & Bratton, 2004). Ogbu (2004) stated that frequently, many Black students’ poor performance in school was a result of having chosen academic failure in lieu of being teased for “acting White” with academic success. However, none of the participants expressed these beliefs during the interviews or focus group. Instead, the participants indicated that they attempted to

motivate each other to be more successful in school. West-Olatunji, Baker, & Brooks (2006) stated, “African American male youth have a need to be respected by their teachers as well as peers that stems from an intersection of cultural and social influences” (p. 7). Some believe that Black males evaluate other Black males based on athleticism and more culturally based standards (Harper, 2006). Much of the standard K-12 instructional methods violate these students’ cultural values. Foster stated:

studies suggest strongly that rethinking the emphasis that teachers and schools place on individual achievement, competition, and status differentiation may be a critical first step in improving the academic achievement of Black students. By adopting cooperative learning activities congruent with the group ethos of the Black community, institutions can and do actually build on its strength (p. 27).

These methods would encourage Black males to work together for mutual opportunities for success in school, while maintaining the integrity of their social norms.

Theoretical Implications

Ladson-Billings (1994) “Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 18). These instructional beliefs and methods significantly increase Black males’ school success. The four major themes that emerged during the data analysis were: School Success, Family Relationships, Educational Relationships, and Peer Relationships. Family relationships and peer relationships were important to each of the participants. The positive and negative influences of peers, although important to the participants, were not as influential in their school success as their teachers’ instructional methods and student interactions. None of the participants expressed the concern of being ridiculed by peers for being successful in school (Peterson-Lewis & Bratton, 2004; Ogbu, 2004). Family relationships were another factor that influenced the participants’ academic performance. All of the participants considered their parent(s)/guardian’s involvement to be enough to help

them be successful (Mandara, 2006) although it was not. However, one of participants stated that they needed more from their parents. Participants did not identify any use of self-assessment for monitoring their own academic performance. Each participant desired to be successful; yet, none utilized self-assessment or record keeping (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2005). The findings in this study supported the majority of the tenants in CRP (Ladson-Billings, 1994). The participants' believed that their teachers who utilized CRP significantly impacted their success in school. A review of their nine-week grades supported their beliefs. Neither the race nor the gender of the teacher was relevant to the participants. Instead, it was the teacher's ability and willingness to get to know them as individuals and the teacher's ability and perseverance in helping them master academic concepts (Gay, 2002; Howard, 2003a/b, Mack, Love & Kruger, 2005; Milner, 2009; Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clark, 2003). Even if a student struggled with the subject matter or external obligations, a teacher's instructional methods and personal interactions motivated, if positive, helped them to succeed. "Children have an innate drive to master their world, if they are not held back. Our job is simply to do whatever it takes to help them succeed (House, 2006)." A significant number of the tenants in CRP were supported by the participants' beliefs regarding their high school success. All of the participants stated that their ideal teacher would be passionate about and have a solid knowledge of their subject matter. They would be able to teach in a variety of different ways, ensuring that all students understand the concepts. Their ideal teacher would be confident and would be able to manage their classrooms effectively and with the highest regard for maintaining each student's dignity. The participants wanted a teacher who would not give up on them; one who would work with them until they fully understood the course material. Another essential characteristic of the participants' ideal teacher is the ability to know each student as an individual and take their diversity in to account

when developing their instructional methods. The participants respected teachers who encouraged a sense of collaboration within the classroom and among the students, allowing them to help each other to learn. The teacher's interactions with each student were essential. The participants stated that they wanted a teacher who would speak to them with respect and genuine concern for them as individuals and as students. All of the participants believed that a teacher, who was able to relate to each and every student and consider their life experiences when teaching, would be highly effective for them. Although these views of the participants supported the majority of the tenants in CRP, a few of the tenants were not supported by the participants' beliefs about their high school performance. For example, none of the participants referenced the desire to have a teacher who enabled them to see a connection between themselves, the curriculum, and the community/world around them. None of the participants viewed the teacher's role as an artistic representation of teaching.

In addition to the tenants found in CRP, the participants described an overarching theme of caring in their ideal teachers' characteristics. Milner (2005) stated, "Care is critical for effective learning to occur in any environments" (p. 402). The definition of caring and the care ethic were developed by Nel Noddings (Noddings, 2005/2006). Noddings (2006) stated, "Caring teachers listen and are responsive . . . caring teachers hear their students' expressed needs, whether those needs are expressed verbally or in some other way" (p. 341). Roberts (2010) supported this stating:

This kind of caring is something that African American students need in order to experience more success with realistic challenges that they face in and outside of American schools due to the prevalence of racism and hegemonic influences in American society (p. 462).

Black students will find greater success in environments that are congruent with their cultural norms and expectations (Foster, 1989; Milner, 2005; Noddings, 2005/2006; Roberts, 2010;

West-Olatunji, Sanders, Mehta, and Behar-Horenstein, 2010). Foster (1989) supported these findings stating:

studies suggest strongly that rethinking the emphasis that teachers and schools place on individual achievement, competition, and status differentiation may be a critical first step in improving the academic achievement of Black students. By adopting cooperative learning activities congruent with the group ethos of the Black community, institutions can and do actually build on its strength.

Teachers need to be able to care for students and meet their needs academically, socially, and culturally.

Implications for Practice

The findings from the study provide many suggestions for teachers, preparation programs, and school administrators. For example, all of the participants stated that their teachers' instructional methods and interactions with students were the most influential factors in their school success. Participants want teachers who are able to teach in a way that is "responsive to the students' culture by including a teaching pedagogy that gives attention to incorporating planned instruction and teaching styles that are supportive of the students' multiple learning styles" (Warm, 2006, p. 420). Teachers, who were able to relate to the participants, effectively manage their classrooms, and instruct in challenging, yet differentiated manners, motivated them to work to their fullest potential. Clearly there are multiple factors that can impact students' success. Tucker et al. (2005) pointed out:

Teachers who believe that student learning can be influenced by effective teaching despite home and peer influence and who have confidence in their ability to teach persist longer in their teaching efforts, provide greater academic focus in the classroom, give different types of feedback, and ultimately improve student performance (p. 29-30).

Based on the findings of this study the following suggestions are made to guide practice.

1. Evaluate Teacher Preparation Programs

Given the significant impact teachers have on students' academic performance, educational institutions should review their teacher preparation programs. Programs should provide prospective teachers with opportunities to learn about culturally diverse student populations and the teaching practices that are most effective. Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clark (2003) found that, "when teachers and students come from different cultural backgrounds, planned efforts to cross social borders and develop caring, respectful relationships are essential" (p. 273). In order to help students reach their fullest potential, teachers must first understand them individually and culturally (Freeman, 2006; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Bondy and Ross (2008) supported this, stating,

Although classroom teachers have little control over many factors that affect student engagement, they do have the means to create a supportive climate that fosters engagement among high-poverty students. Warm demanders do so by approaching their students with unconditional positive regard, knowing students and their cultures well, and insisting that students perform to a high standard (p. 58).

Many teacher preparation programs do not provide student teachers with adequate classroom time that would enable them to learn about students as individuals (Ladson-Billings, 1994). In addition to developing cultural awareness, beginning teachers need to receive considerable training opportunities to develop the skills necessary to effectively differentiate instructional methods. Prospective teachers must be able to teach in a variety of ways that appeal to students' various learning styles, while enabling them to acquire skills, concepts, and content knowledge.

2. Review School-Based Hiring Practices and Professional Development for Current Teachers

When hiring teachers for culturally diverse classrooms, administrators need to probe potential candidates for culturally relevant teaching practices. Prospective teachers should express an interest in working with culturally diverse populations and a willingness to meet the

academic needs of this group of students (Gay, 2002; Howard, 2003a/b; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Milner, 2009). Professional development opportunities need to be afforded to current teachers. Opportunities to develop culturally relevant teaching practices are valuable at any stage of a teacher's career. Teachers must be aware of cultural differences and how their own cultural beliefs impact their instructional methodologies and their expectations for their students' academic performance (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Howard, 2003a/b; Love & Kruger, 2005; Milner, 2009; Tatum, 2000; Ware, 2006). Opportunities to directly observe culturally relevant teaching should be afforded to all teachers of culturally diverse populations. Additionally, teachers would benefit from opportunities to develop knowledge and understanding of common vernacular used among their students as well as current social trends. Having the ability to relate to students and to be able to communicate with them regarding topics outside of curriculum, increases students' sense of connectedness with their teachers. This includes, but is not limited to music genres, dance styles, hairstyles, clothing, and sports. Small learning communities may be established for teachers to collaborate in exploring barriers impeding their students' school success and the multitude of instructional practices that are available to increase academic performance. Bondy and Ross (2008) said, "What is missing is not skill in lesson planning, but a teacher stance that communicates both warmth and a nonnegotiable demand for student effort and mutual respect" (p. 54). Current and future teachers must be skilled academically and culturally. "Teacher's classroom management and pedagogical approach are grounded in a history and a reality that is steeped in care for the student's best interest" (Milner, 2005, p. 402).

3. Encourage Black Males to Strive for Academic Excellence

School communities, administrators, and teachers need to encourage Black males to embrace and identify with the advantages that come with successful academic performance. Black males need to be encouraged to see the benefit from obtaining a quality education and

advancing themselves socially and academically (Freeman, 2006; Jackson & Moore, 2006). Without this encouragement to achieve academic excellence and continual exposure to teachers who lack culturally relevant practices, Black males will continue to fail to achieve as their non-minority peers. Booker (2006) indicated that culturally relevant teaching practices increased Black males' academic success, thus increasing the positive opportunities available in post-secondary education and the work force. Black males must be given multiple opportunities to develop a strong sense of value for education and the impact that their education has on their future academic, educational, and social endeavors. Giving students opportunities to discuss goals/aspirations and then actively plan ways to monitor their own progress would enable them to actively strive for those goals. Self-monitoring/assessment has proven to be effective in increasing academic success; these same strategies should be utilized to encourage Black males to develop a strong value regarding the importance of school success and its relatedness to their goals (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2005).

4. Preparation for School Administrators

School administrators are the leaders of the school. Their cultural and educational beliefs help to drive the school's vision and mission. In order for a school to educate Black males to their fullest potential, the leaders of the school must encourage faculty and staff to teach in ways that are culturally relevant to the school's population. Educational Leadership programs need to provide prospective school-based administrators with the training necessary to lead their teachers. "They should opt for ways to lead that support teaching pride in self and academic achievement... They must advocate different pedagogical approaches that achieve results... School leaders should secure needed resources and encourage teachers to strive to be culturally relevant teachers" (Gooden, 2009, p. 243). They must be well trained in and able to

teach through culturally relevant practices in order to ensure their teachers are able to do the same.

Implications for Further Research

The following recommendations for further research are shown below.

1. Explore factors that influence academic success of Black males in high schools.
2. Review methods for increasing Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in teacher preparation programs and in current classroom settings.
3. Explore Black males' parents' views regarding success in school and the factors they believe impact their sons' academic performance.
4. Encourage teachers to evaluate and/or modify their teaching practices to further encourage Black males to be successful in school.
5. Explore teachers' current instructional practices and the impact they have on Black males' academic performance.
6. Develop professional development opportunities that could be provided to local school teachers and administrators; include opportunities to observe teachers who use culturally relevant teaching methods.
7. Review district/school policies for hiring teachers who will be working with Black males.

Limitations of this Study

The purpose of this study was to give voice to a small group of high school Black males, in tenth through twelfth grade, with a cumulative GPA ≤ 2.5 , in a single local high school. The perceptions regarding their academic performance are limited to the participants' point of view.

The number of participants involved in the study was limited by the willingness of the Black males, who met the study criteria, to participate. In addition, the number of participants was limited to the use of a single site within the local school district. The participants' willingness to openly respond may have been limited with a single interview and single focus group. The use of single interviews with the participants and a single focus group could have

limited the information available to the researcher. The participants may have provided the researcher with further findings had additional interviews been conducted over a period of time. The lack of corroboration of the findings and supplemental information by peers, parents/guardians, or teachers forces a dependence on only the participants' point of view.

Therefore, the findings may only be applicable to the context of this study. Nevertheless, the findings may be meaningful for Black males in similar school settings and for teachers working with similar populations.

Summary

The factors that influence this group of participants' academic performance emerged from interviews and the focus group. The participants clearly defined what they considered being successful in school. Three additional themes emerged that impacted the participants' success in school. Although the participants indicated that Family Relationships and Peer Relationships were influential to their academic success, they strongly believed that the teachers' instructional methods and interactions with students were far more significant in determining school failure or success.

The voice of these participants provides a foundation for additional research and opportunities to improve current educational practices. Teachers, who are given the exciting task of educating Black males and increasing their opportunities for success, must incorporate culturally relevant teaching in to their instructional pedagogies (Freeman, 2006; Gay, 2002; Howard, 2003a/b; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Love & Kruger, 2005; Mack, 2005; Milner, 2009; Monroe, 2005; Neal, 2001; Tatum, 2000; Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003; West-Olatunji, Baker, & Brooks, 2006). The potential that teachers possess to increase Black males academic performance is significant when instructional pedagogy recognizes and embraces students' cultural diversity.

Researcher's Views

The researcher chose this study to help find an explanation for the significant number of Black males failing to find school success. Her sixteen years of experience in working with this population created a passion for and a need to understand this marginalized population. The researcher found success while working with students similar to the participants in this study. She was fortunate enough to speak with a number of Black males that she had worked with in the past, as well as one of the participants after the completion of this study. She did this to garner a greater understanding of what it was that enabled her to be successful, as well as what skills could and should be taught to other educators. The researcher, when working with this group of students believed in ruthless consistency. One of the young men she spoke with stated that he knew regardless of if he liked it or not, he knew that she would always do what she had told him that she would do. This included providing praise, constructive feedback, and even disciplinary consequences. The participant from this study stated that he knew that the researcher would always have his back and that if she said she was going to do something, she would. The researcher found that her background gave her no clear understanding of what her students lived through each and every day. Therefore, she spent significant amounts of time learning; she learned everything she possibly could about her students and their lives outside of school. The researcher would attend the student's churches, call/meet with their parents as often as possible, attend school functions and interact with the students there, served as a labor coach through labor and a cesarean section delivery, and attend funerals as well as celebrations. The researcher brought extra food for students, found people to sponsor them to go on field trips, helped pay for graduation photos, provided clothing, and anything else she was able to provide. Learning about her students lives outside of school was an absolutely critical piece of her finding success. There was absolutely no way that once she had opened up her mind and her heart to these students that

she would ever be able to turn back. The researcher cared about and cared for her students. Several of her students called her “ma” or “mom”. This was the greatest compliment she ever received. Even when having to correct behaviors, she tried to reassure her student that she still cared for them and had higher expectations for them. She strived every day to push her students beyond what they had ever imagined. She fully accepted each and every one of her students as individuals; yet, she fostered a sense of family in her classroom. Teasing/chastising/ridiculing each other was not tolerated; her rule was that you could never pick on someone for things that were out of his/her control. This included, but was not limited to body shape/size, clothing, physical appearance, and academic ability. The researcher held all of her students to the same expectations. Regardless of the relationship with the student, he/she would be interacted with in the same way. She would go to their classes and check on them. If they were not being successful, she would work with them to help them find success with their other teachers. This was done both academically and behaviorally. The researcher believed in giving her students tools to navigate society in ways that would ultimately benefit them. This included asking them to speak in standard written English while in her class. The researcher never used the phrase “proper English” as she believed this to be terribly offensive to the students and their families. Instead, she used standard written English to teach those skills they would need for writing and communication in various settings. In addition, the researcher built a significant support system for her students. She had a multitude of “mentors” she could contact to come speak with her students. Several of the students she spoke with laughed about all of the people she would have come in, calling them her “entourage”. The researcher utilized any and every resource she could secure.

Though the researcher found success with many students who were similar to the participants in this study, she also recognized the disproportionate number of Black males not achieving school success. The researcher learned that the teacher's ability to connect with his/her students beyond the curriculum was absolutely essential in fostering school success. The ability to teach conceptually and creatively alone is not adequate. Understanding what encourages students and equally as important, what discourages students must be respected and utilized. The participants all agreed that they needed teachers who understood them as individuals. They wanted to be more important to the teacher than just a paycheck. The teachers that the participants felt positively about and were successful in their classes were "warm demanders" (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Ware, 2006). These teachers expect their students to perform at their highest ability and constantly encourage them to rise to those expectations. Having high expectations alone will not suffice. They must be combined with the nurturing yet firm interactions between teachers and students. The participants had very strong negative feelings regarding their interactions with teachers who acted like they were merely there for a paycheck, not to help the students. They needed to have a sense of trust and a strong belief that their teachers would not give up on them, even when they gave up on themselves. Passing a class because they completed worksheets or viewed movies violated their right to quality instruction which would lead to school success. The participants expressed the need for teachers who are able to differentiate their instructional methods, ensuring that all students grasped concepts. Participants craved differentiation such as hands-on activities, student led instruction, direct instruction, and real-world applications. All of the participants not only enjoyed their classes but also were successful when teachers utilized differentiated instruction methods. Science, history, and math were commonly enjoyed subjects among the participants. Consequently, several of the

participants expressed that they disliked the math courses that were completed on a computer. This format further blocked the participants from developing a connection with their teachers and decreased their opportunities for skill acquisition. Very few of them expressed that reading and writing were among their preferred subjects.

Although the participants were able to give clear definitions of school success, none of them were achieving it. Only a few of the participants actually stated that they had long term goals; these goals necessitated school success. All of the participants expressed that they had adequate support at home. However, their description of the support did not uphold their statements. None of their parents/guardians checked with them regularly or monitored their progress. Only a few of the participants acknowledged the importance of their school success and how it would impact their future. The participants did not speak to personal accountability that went beyond stating they needed to do more in order to be successful. They did not track their progress, independently seek assistance from their teachers, nor did they invest a significant amount of time in studying/homework.

The county where the study took place is home to a major research university. The university has not to date created enough programs that would work to reduce the marginalization of the participants. Programs developing teaching practices have an awesome opportunity and obligation to explicitly train future teachers in the tenants of CRP. Beginning teachers who possess the ability to teach in culturally responsive methods along with quality differentiated instructional practices could increase the likelihood of success for many marginalized students in this and surrounding counties. By increasing the success of Black students in K-12 education, this university serves to increase its own enrollment of Black students.

Many studies have addressed the marginalization of Black males and the propensity for their lack of school success. Teachers need clear descriptions of instructional methods and interpersonal interactions to increase their efficacy with at risk populations. The findings of this study, through the voices of the participants, give teachers this needed information. There is a clear difference between the intimacy, involvement, and differentiation of teachers that these students like versus the ones they did not like. The lack of these things puts the latter group of teachers at risk of perpetuating or at worst extending the sense of marginalization these students already feel. Because of the connection established between the researcher and the participants, the researcher worked with the participants beyond the official scope of the study. She was able to, but most importantly, wanted to continue to monitor their progress and celebrate the success that several of the subjects achieved. To truly understand and serve the needs of these marginalized populations, researchers have an obligation to use research methodologies that give us the greatest depth of appreciation and motivation to find strong solutions. Research has to do justice to the issues themselves; it must honor their nature and complexity. Researchers need to make sure that our research and research methodologies do not perpetuate the marginalization that the teaching methods and systems have already created.

Table 5-1. Findings of study based on theoretical framework.

Key Points of Theory	Findings	Theory Supported or Unsupported
<i>Culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994)</i>		
Teacher has high self-esteem and high regard for others.	Participants believed that teachers who were confident in both the subject matter and managing their classrooms were more effective.	Supported
Teacher sees herself as an artist, teaching as an art.	None of the participants identified these characteristics in those of an effective teacher.	Unsupported
Teacher sees her/himself as part of a community and teaching as giving something back to the community, encourages students to do the same.	None of the participants identified being encouraged to give back to their community.	Unsupported
Teacher believes all students can succeed.	Participants believed that teachers, who were willing to teach and reteach until students grasped the concepts, helped them to be successful.	Supported
Teacher helps students make connections between their community, national, and global identities.	There were no findings in the study to support or not support this tenant.	Not Applicable
Teacher sees teaching as “pulling knowledge out”—like “mining.”	Participants believed that teachers, who understood their background and got to know them, were more effective.	Supported
Teacher-student relationships is fluid, humanely equitable, extends to interactions beyond the classroom and into the community.	Participants found success in classes where teachers encouraged interaction with the students and among the students.	Supported
Teacher encourages a “community of learners.”	Participants worked harder for teachers who encouraged their entire class and ensured everyone learned.	Supported
Teacher encourages students to learn collaboratively. Students are expected to teach each other and be responsible for each other.	Participants believed that teachers who supported students teaching and helping each other were more effective.	Supported

Table 5-1. Continued

Teacher is passionate about content.	Participants believed that they learned better from a teacher who was knowledgeable about and loved what they taught.	Supported
Teacher helps students develop necessary skills.	Participants believed that teachers who were willing to work with them until the understood concepts helped them to be successful.	Supported
Teacher sees excellence as a complex standard that may involve some postulates but takes students diversity and individual differences in to account.	Participants were motivated by teachers who were able to find their individual strengths and build on them.	Supported
Teacher is careful to demonstrate a connectedness with each of his/her students.	Participants believed that it was essential for teachers to understand them as individuals in order to teach them effectively.	Supported

APPENDIX A
 UF IRB SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH PROTOCOL SUBMISSION

UFIRB 02 – Social & Behavioral Research Protocol Submission	
Title of Protocol: Doctoral dissertation studying African-American males’ perceptions of high school.	
Principal Investigator: Melissa P. Singleton	UFID #: 2891-0970
Degree / Title: Doctoral candidate Department: Educational Administration & Policy	Mailing Address: 1505 Fort Clarke Blvd Apt. 6-302 Gainesville, FL 32606 Email Address & Telephone Number: mprue@ufl.edu (352) 332-2542 (home) (352) 284-8858 (cell)
Co-Investigator(s): N/A	UFID#:
Supervisor: Dr. Linda Behar-Horenstein	UFID#:
Degree / Title: Ph.D. / Distinguished Teaching Scholar and Professor Department: Educational Administration & Policy	Mailing Address: PO Box 117049 Gainesville, FL 32611-7409 Email Address & Telephone Number: lsbhoren@ufl.edu (352) 392-2391, ext. 299
Date of Proposed Research: August 2007 – December 2007	
Source of Funding <i>(A copy of the grant proposal must be submitted with this protocol if funding is involved):</i> None	
Scientific Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to give voice to a marginalized group of students. A group of African American males in a single site will be asked to share their perspectives of high school.	
Describe the Research Methodology in Non-Technical Language: <i>(Explain what will be done with or to the research participant.)</i>	

A pilot study will be conducted with two African American males similar to the study participants. The interview questions that will be used were developed by the principal investigator to cover three areas of the students' high school experiences. They are as follows: 1) peer-based social interactions, 2) external factors, and 3) teacher behaviors. (see attached) After the pilot study is completed, necessary revisions to questions will be made. Ten African American males, who are 10th, 11th, or 12th graders, who have voluntarily agreed to participate in the study will be interviewed individually. A follow-up interview will be conducted with each of the 10 participants to ensure that the researcher has adequately represented the participants' perceptions regarding high school. Two focus groups consisting of five participants each will be conducted to discuss the researcher's initial findings and to request any further information and/or perspectives that the participants would like to share.

Describe Potential Benefits and Anticipated Risks: *(If risk of physical, psychological or economic harm may be involved, describe the steps taken to protect participant.)*

The potential benefits of this study are that the researcher will be able to give voice to a marginalized group of students and the findings may provide common themes that would enable teachers to better serve these students. The anticipated risk of this study is no more than minimal risk.

Describe How Participant(s) Will Be Recruited, the Number and AGE of the Participants, and Proposed Compensation:

The participants will be recruited from a single site, a local high school. All of the participants will need to meet select criteria which are: classified as a 10th, 11th, or 12th grader (ages 15-19), enrolled in a career-ready diploma track, and have a cumulative GPA less than or equal to a 2.5. Ten African American males, who meet the designated criteria, will be asked to participate in this study. If the student is under the age of 18, a parent/guardian will be asked to give consent along with the student in order for him to participate in the study.

Describe the Informed Consent Process. Include a Copy of the Informed Consent Document:

Informed consent will be obtained from each participant and his parent/guardian. Because the participants are students in a local public high school, parent/guardian consent will be obtained from each student regardless of his age.

A written letter of informed consent will be presented to the participant. The researcher will verbally explain all of the information contained in the letter. If the student is willing to participate in the study, he will be asked to obtain parent/guardian consent. If the parent/guardian has any questions/concerns regarding the study, s/he will be provided with contact information for the researcher.

See attached written Informed Consent letter

Principal Investigator(s) Signature:	Supervisor Signature:
Department Chair/Center Director Signature:	Date:

APPENDIX B
PARENT LETTER OF CONSENT

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am a graduate student in the Department of Educational Administration and Policy at the University of Florida, conducting research on Low-Achieving African American males' opinions of high school under the supervision of Dr. Linda Behar-Horenstein. The purpose of this study is to gather African American males' feelings and beliefs regarding their experiences in high school. The results of the study may help give voice to this group of students and help teachers better understand how African American males feel about their high school experiences. These results may not directly help your child today, but may benefit future students. With your permission, I would like to ask your child to volunteer for this research.

Each of the students participating in this study will be asked to participate in an individual interview. The interview will take 30-45 minutes. The individual interview will consist of questions that focus on three different aspects of the student's high school experiences. The three areas are their relationships with their peers, activities they participate in outside of school, and teachers' behaviors. Your child does not have to answer any questions that he does not wish to answer. After the individual interview is completed, your child will be asked to participate in a focus group (small group interview) consisting of five students, including your child. The purposes of the focus group are to ensure that I have correctly documented your child's perceptions of high school and to ask the group to share any additional information regarding their perceptions of high school. The focus group will take 45-60 minutes. With your permission, your child will be audio-taped during the individual interviews and focus group. The audiotape will be available only to the research team for verification purposes. The information shared during the interview will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. To further ensure confidentiality, I will replace your child's name with another random name. Results will only be reported in the form of group data. Participation or non-participation in this study will not affect your child's grades.

You and your child have the right to withdraw consent for your child's participation at any time without consequence. There are no known risks or immediate benefits to the participants. No compensation is offered for participation. Group results of this study will be available in August upon request. If you have any questions about this research procedure, please contact me at 955-6704, ext 275 or my faculty supervisor, Dr. Behar-Horenstein, at (352) 392-2391, ext 299. Questions or concerns about your child's rights as research participant may be directed to the UFIRB office, University of Florida, Box 112250, Gainesville, FL 32611, (352) 392-0433.
Melissa P. Singleton

I have read the procedures described above. I voluntarily give my consent for my child, _____, to participate in Melissa Singleton's study of African-American males' perceptions of high school. I have received a copy of this description. I would like to receive a copy of the final "interview" document submitted to the Supervisor. Yes / No

Parent/Guardian Signature

2nd Parent/Witness Signature

Date

APPENDIX C
STUDENT LETTER OF ASSENT

Dear Student,

I am a graduate student in the Department of Educational Administration and Policy at the University of Florida, conducting research on Low-Achieving African-American males' opinions of high school under the supervision of Dr. Linda Behar-Horenstein. The purpose of this study is to gather African-American males' feelings and beliefs regarding their experiences in high school. The results of the study may help give voice to this group of students and help teachers better understand how African-American males feel about their high school experiences. These results may not directly help your child today, but may benefit future students. With your permission, I would like to ask your child to volunteer for this research.

In this study, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview. The interview will take 30-45 minutes. The individual interview will consist of questions that focus on three different areas of your high school experiences. The three areas are as follows: how you interact with your peers, things that you experience outside of school, and your teachers' behaviors. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. After all of the students have been interviewed, you will be asked to participate in focus group (small group interview) consisting of five students, including yourself to make sure that I have correctly understood your perceptions of high school and you will be asked to share any additional information regarding your perceptions of high school. With your parent/guardian's permission, you will be audio-taped during the individual interviews and the focus group. The focus group will take 45-60 minutes. The audiotape will be accessible only to the research team for verification purposes. The information shared during the interview will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. To further ensure confidentiality, I will replace your name with another random name. Results will only be reported in the form of group data. Participation or non-participation in this study will not affect your grades.

You have the right to discontinue your participation at any time without consequence. There are no known risks or immediate benefits to you. No compensation is offered for participation. Group results of this study will be available in August upon request. If you have any questions about this research procedure, please contact me at 955-6704, ext 275 or my faculty supervisor, Dr. Behar-Horenstein, at (352) 392-2391, ext 299. Questions or concerns about your child's rights as research participant may be directed to the UFIRB office, University of Florida, Box 112250, Gainesville, FL 32611, (352) 392-0433.

The information and procedures regarding Melissa Singleton's study of African-American males' perceptions of high school listed above have been read to me. I have received a copy of this description. _____ I am willing to participate in this study.

_____ I am unwilling to participate in this study.

Student Name (printed)

Student Signature

Date

APPENDIX D
INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW

Q: Thank you for being here today. I appreciate your time. We're going to go through some questions that we have in regards to your schooling and your ideas and your beliefs about school. If at any time if any of the questions are unclear or you have a question for me, feel free to go ahead and ask and stop me and let me know and I will either rephrase the question or explain the question better to you. The first area, I'm going to do it in three areas for you, with the first kind of area we're going to talk about is kind of some of your peers and some of the social things that you may or may not be involved in at school. Can you describe to me some of the people that you interact with at school?

A: Um, yeah...(inaudible) like they're pretty much like me like out spoken and they're like really good friends, they are like there when you need them like most of them have great grades like their academics, some of them play sports like basketball and football, some of them are in ROTC...that's like about it.

Q: And when you say they excel in academics or they have really good grades in your mind, what are good grades? To you what is a good grade?

A: Like when I say good grades I mean by grade point average, like most of my friends they have like a 3.0 or higher.

Q: So then like averaging Bs and higher? And that's your idea of a good grade as well or their idea?

A: That's like my idea, but their idea, they always want more so like I have some friends in the IB program and like they get a B or something their like dang I should have gotten an A, you know what I'm saying? Like their...they just....I don't know they want more, they want to be the best of what they do.

Q: Ok, does that go for grades and other things or is that mostly their focus at school?

A: First like their grades come first and then it's their like ROTC or band or football and of course you have to have a 2.0 to you know do any after school activities.

Q: Well speaking of after school activities, what kind of things do you do with your friends outside of school? So I know you're involved in ROTC and you do those things, what other things are you involved in with friends outside of school?

A: Like...we pretty much like what other teenagers do, we go out we have fun like we go to the bowling alley sometimes and to the movies, sometimes we go play pranks on people, we do a lot, we do like what teenagers do.

Q: Ok. What is your definition...like how would you tell me that you were being successful in school. Describe what that would be mean to you.

A: Me being successful in school would mean that I'm getting straight As in all subjects, it would mean that my grade point average is like 3.2 or better, that's what I'm striving to get. It would mean that all my teachers like back me up which they always do, um, and that's about it. It would mean that because I was wanting to be a...like student body...like something to do with (inaudible) and that's like one of my goals in school so I would like to do that too.

Q: And when you say student body you mean student government? You're talking about running for student government, being involved in that?

A: Yes

Q: So for your success at school does it only include your grades or with your ROTC does that play a part in the whole...your idea of success in school?

A: Yeah ROTC is my personal...so when I say grades, that comes with the grades too because ROTC you have to get grades before the after school activities so if like, you have to like your studies in ROTC you have to learn your chain of command and general order to (inaudible) all that, it's book work you have to do and you have to pass the bookwork to be able to do after school activities so it's all part of it.

Q: Ok, now you told me most of your friends are good in school and that they would be what you consider to be successful and what they consider to be successful, can you pick one of your friends who you think is very successful in school and tell me about him or her?

A: I would use (name) because he was a good friend at first, but when it comes down to doing school and all that, he would put school before like going out and having fun with friends and like when I look at him at the time that he was crazy for doing that but then when you think about it it's just like Hey he's just graduated with an IB diploma and he's like doing great getting As and Bs, um, he's fixing to go to college to be a criminal investigator and he's graduated I want to say at the top of his class so he did good and when I look at him and then like I almost compare myself to him like I always like try to...like you have to set a goal and like I'm trying to reach his goal, like I'm trying.

Q: It sounds like you kind of have an idea of where you want to be. Now on the opposite side of that, do you have a friend who has not been successful in school and if so could you describe him or her to me.

A: Yes I do. I have a lot, like they play around with school, um, I really can't pin point anybody but it's like first they play around in school, they don't think about like the consequences or their actions or whatever, they just act on impulse. Um, they're like the people that you'd say are the class clown and all that, they put like other people before their grades, their grades are like very poor, they have like Fs and Ds, they pretty much don't have any, do not have any credit it's like um, I have friends that are supposed to be in 11th and are still 9th graders. It's very sad, it is and I don't...when I look at them I don't want that to happen to me like in some way they inspire me to be better, but like I try to tell them like you can't...that's not acceptable you've got one more year in school and you're still considered as a 9th grader.

Q: That's what you see. It sounds like you've got a pretty clear idea of both sides of what you consider to be someone who's very successful and someone who's not and you kind of know where you want to fit in those. Um, based on your last two years of school, where do you see yourself falling?

A: My last two years of school...my 9th grade year like believe if or not almost everybody blew off their 9th grade year and they don't take it as seriously because they just came to high school, they're just getting around this new environment and everybody wants to be popular and all of that, so my 9th grade year I kind of blew it off, but then again it was not all my fault because you know personal problems and me not coming to school on time or not coming at all, it had got to a point that it was a truancy problem, um, but my 10th grade year I dragged a little bit at the beginning of the year and then there you go with the personal problems again and it's like just dragging you down, it's like you have to know how to keep your personal matters and school separated because you add them together it's chaos, it's not going to work.

Q: It makes it hard for you to do well in school. Um, well with that in mind, tell me a little bit about your home life, like where do you stay, who do you stay with, tell me a little bit about that.

A: Ok, um, I stay with my godmother, um, she recently became my godmother like 6 years ago my mom was going through all these things we stayed at this place called (inaudible) and

like she was like one of my best friends moms and she like took it upon herself to like take care of me when my mom was going through her problems and going to jail, in and out of jail and all that, so like she just was like made up to herself that she was going to take care of me no matter what's going on and like it got to a point where like my mom was kind of jealous and it started a lot of things and then that like added more stress to me and like the people that was around me, they were kind of stressed out because they didn't want me to be stressed so they became stressed, but um, I stay on a better part of town, I would say the neighborhood is great, it's quiet.

Q: Why do you consider it a better part of town? What do you mean by that.

A: I'm going to be quite frank, it's not in...some people would say ghetto, like I mean you can like think that you don't have to worry about locking your doors, like if you was on like this thing (inaudible) you would have to lock your doors, you would have to have deadlocks and all that because people try to break in. I left my doors open, windows open, I left my moped in the yard, I came back it's still there like I left it and like you have neighbors that actually watch your house even though you know they are nosey neighbors but they actually help out and they will call you had say Hey somebody's at your house and I had that happen several times. So they are like very helpful.

Q: So it seems that you have more of a community, there are people that are looking out for you so you're not with your mom at this point in time.

A: No

Q: Why not?

A: Um, she is incarcerated because she...first it was something...well my youngest sister, um, she had a baby and I'm pretty sure it was in the news, she had a baby and um, the baby died and my mom was out of town and it was just me and my brothers and his girlfriend there and like I came in the room...they came in the room and woke me up saying that the baby was dead so the authorities was called and my mom was out of town but like when they questioned my sister she said that she left the baby in my mom's care, which she did, she left it at day care and like they ran with that and they charged her with involuntary manslaughter.

Q: Wow that must be tough on you guys.

A: And um, and child abuse and child neglect and they...she got out on probation, she violated her probation by driving with no license and not appearing to her own probation officer and she um...she got tested for drugs and all that and she came up (inaudible). First the probation officer was like the first time they...they actually like give you a chance, like the first they don't expect you to be clean and like the second time she was like I have to violate you and you have 24 hours and she got caught driving with no license and she already had an outstanding warrant so...

Q: There's a sentence for that.

A: Yeah she got 7 years in the correctional facility.

Q: I'm sure that's got to be very hard on you and your siblings. Do you...how many siblings do you have? Brothers and sisters?

A: Including me 5, it was six but my sister had died.

Q: Ok. Do they all stay with you and your godmother?

A: No. I'm the only one of my moms children that stays with my godmother.

Q: Where does everybody else stay?

A: Um, Melinda which is the oldest, she's 22, she has her own place with my nieces and nephews, (inaudible name), she has her own place, I have no idea where she is, my brother that's

older, he's incarcerated too and my brother that's older than me, Willie, he's um, he went to Lakeview too and he's fixing to be incarcerated because he got caught with a gun.

Q: All of the values that you have about doing well in school, how does your family play into that? Do they...like whether or not they support you, do you get any support outside of your godmother? Let's talk about your actual family prior to moving in with your godmother because that was recent, right? So living actually with your mother and you said with her boyfriend, right? You call Dad?

A: Yes

Q: Tell me about how they were with school. Did they help instill these values?

A: My mom, she was always like that, she wanted me to be better than her, but then she had a poor way of showing that. She didn't care if I went to school like she always said do this, do that, it's like you need to go to school, but when it comes down to it she didn't care. Like when one day I had ditched school and it was my first time skipping school with my friends, peer pressure, and like they called and the speak phone came on, I was like Oh Lord, and they were like Lakeview High School calling that I didn't show up at school and she was like Oh well and then she started telling me how I was going to be like everybody else.

Q: Everybody else in your family? Or in the neighborhood?

A: Everybody else in my family that didn't make it, that didn't go through high school. She um, she like really put me down, but it's like in putting me down it brings me up, it makes me want to do more.

Q: So your mom didn't finish high school?

A: No.

Q: What about your other siblings?

A: Melinda, my oldest sister, she um, she finished high school...she almost finished. See what happened to her, she had transferred to Lofton because she was pregnant and um, I actually was there when it happened, she missed a lot of days and she had a whole credit to do and she had this packet, you know making up the credit and the lady threw it in the garbage and um, like my family was there and went crazy and all kind of stuff like that and my sister was dropping out of school so she was pretty much crazy to do that. That should have pushed her into doing it more, like to actually come and attend school, but she didn't, she just dropped out.

Q: So I'm hearing your family doesn't really...especially when you were living with your mom, they weren't...even your dad were not a whole lot of support when it came to school?

A: My dad he wanted me to go to school, he was like you should go to school every time I didn't go to school he would get mad, but then like he...I don't know it seemed like he didn't care but like...it seemed like he cared but really he didn't because he could have done more to like actually push me to go do school. I mean nobody should make you do anything that you don't want to do, but come on you're my parent you should you know stop telling me about Oh you're going to fail and do this and like he was pretty down too, but then again he like lifted me up at the same time.

Q: Tell me a little bit about your day, like from the morning to night and like using this last year because you said you started to do better, but then started to go down again so...yes tell me about your day from the time you wake up to the time you go to bed, what is your day like.

A: I wake up 5:30am, I take a shower, brush my teeth, put on my clothes, wait for the 6:27 bus, get on the bus, get on another bus to go down town which is like at 6:40am get in town at 7am and then from...I'll be at Lakeview at 7:23 and I just walk around until school starts.

Q: Which was like an hour, so you had an hour on campus.

A: Yes, doing nothing and then like, Ok I go through school 1st period was English2, then 2nd period was biology, 3rd period was ROTC, 4th period French, 5th period was college and careers, 6th period was geometry, I literally almost a didn't make it to gym.

Q: Why not?

A: Because I was being checked out by my older sister to watch her kids.

Q: So you would be taken out of school to go home and help with your niece and nephew?

A: Yes.

Q: How frequently did that happen?

A: Almost every day of the school year.

Q: And was that only during 6th period or did you miss other classes too?

A: I missed half of 5th period.

Q: Which was your computers class.

A: And it's so hard like to make up. Sometimes she'd just come get me from before when I'd go to school, like sometimes she'd go to Lakeview and call my cell phone right here and I need you to watch them for the day and I don't even make it to school.

Q: So she would come get you before you even got

A: And then I started having problems because my teachers, they would see me in the morning and they say I was skipping and they'd write me a referral and then I'd get suspended. Like one time I got suspended because I had to walk out of class and my teacher wouldn't let me out of class.

Q: Because she called you to go watch her kids? Why were you watching her kids?

A: Because she took them out of day care and because she would like to use people.

Q: So it would be the majority of your days you didn't even finish your school day and you already said your family didn't help you with your school work so what would have normally been time after school...

A: I couldn't do my work because of my nieces and nephew, they are a handful you can't...you can't work and watch kids at the same time, you just can't do it because they're so young and they get into a lot of things, but my nephew...I (inaudible) because no kid is bad they are just misunderstood and like he does some crazy things like he would like literally like climb on the cabinet like I can be in like the bathroom and stuff and he'd climb on the cabinet, cut the stove on and like throw stuff like on the fire. I swear to God there was a fire in my sister's kitchen. That...it's like...and you have like watch him 24 hours a day. He can be up from like 6am and go to sleep at 2 am, he will not close his eyes, he will not, he will fight against that.

Q: How many days a week, Monday through Friday, during the school year were you taking care of your niece and nephew after school?

A: Um, Monday through Friday pretty much because Wednesdays and Thursdays Melinda is off but she wants to do stuff so she comes check me out anyways.

Q: And then what about on the weekends?

A: I watch them every day from Friday, Saturday through Sunday and it starts over Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday and Thursday and it keeps going.

Q: So you didn't get much support at home?

A: Nope.

Q: At all when it came to school? Do you think that you would have been able to do better had you had more support at home?

A: It's not really about the support, it's about that like because you don't have to be supported...like really you don't have to be like encouraged to do something, it's there if you're

allowed to do it, like if I wasn't watching her kids so much or if I wasn't like doing...like the situation that I am in it doesn't bother me, it's the point that she had me watching her kids everyday checking me out of school and like you had me like scrambling to do all this...like trying to do all this work before I get checked out and you just can't do it. Once...Oh gosh, it made me fail mid-terms, she checked me out during mid-terms. I was like literally crying and I went right out of there...and this was right in class, she was looking at me and said You can't wait. She literally made me fail mid-terms and from that point on I just knew I was not going to pass that class.

Q: That was your geometry class?

A: Yes.

Q: And at one point you were in geometry honors?

A: Yes.

Q: And got bumped down to the regular geometry because your grades dropped. Did any of your teachers know what was going on?

A: No, but you know if you're around the person like for 188 days a year they are going to get to know you real good and they can tell when something is bothering you or something's not right at home, they tell that and say Is everything all right at home, Sure.

Q: You just didn't tell them. So they suspected things but you didn't share it with them. So none of them knew really what was happening with you.

A: Nope. Besides ROTC's like...even though we're like a family there, that's like my real family, and we talk about everything, like my friends knew but that was it, my teachers didn't know.

Q: Now that you've moved in with your godmother, when did you move in with your godmother?

A: Like May something.

Q: So at the very end of the school year so you didn't really have any times to salvage or to bring up any grades at that point, it was already pretty well the end of the year. Um, you clearly know what you want in order to be successful and what it means to be successful for you, you've defined it very clearly for yourself, what things do you need in order for you to reach that goal? To be successful in school? And it can be things at school, it can be things at home. What in your idea of the perfect situation that would allow you to get those straight As?

A: Stability.

Q: Ok. And what does that mean for you?

A: Like just to be in a stable place and to be like...like I just want to be left alone, that all comes to I want to be left alone and it's like you have people in your face all the time nagging wanting you to do this, wants you to do that, it's like pulling you back and forth, I just want to be left alone. And I believe if I was like in a stable environment, when I say stable environment...where I am now, but it's still chaos everywhere I go, I mean, I would be able to do better because I have somebody actually encouraging me instead of putting me down.

Q: Does your godmother do that?

A: Encourage me?

Q: Yes.

A: Yes does...like she don't care, like just...she thinks that Ok I can stay with her, that's good, she doesn't get involved with anything.

Q: So for her idea of providing for you is the physical environment, that you have shelter, that you have food, clothing, that's what she's concerned about?

A: Yes. I don't look for like anything else from her because she's doing a lot now, so she didn't have to do that, she didn't have to take me in. So...

Q: Does having that stable environment help you and give you some of the stability that you're looking for? Because that's only one part of what you said you need.

A: She gives me some, but it's not really stable. It's like it's shaky sometimes because you have...there's arguing there too, like you have all arguing, people are always just bickering and...

Q: Do you have your own room there? Somewhere that you can go?

A: Yeah.

Q: Does that help?

A: No.

Q: No, because you still hear it? Or do they involve you?

A: They pull me in like it's not even involvement, they just like...

Q: It sounds very difficult for you. Well I'll switch it to school topics for you. So for your school environment, tell me what your favorite class is this year?

A: Oh my gosh, even though I failed the subject, I loved Ms. West's class, I did. I remember that because I love math. It's like...on the FCAT I made a 4, I could have done better if I had some sleep...maybe we won't talk about that. (inaudible)

Q: Is that your geometry class?

A: Yes. I just love math period, and science like biology. I love science, I love math, anything that...even combined like you know science has math in it so that's why I'm in love with science.

Q: So you like the actual content of those two classes. Does the teacher make a difference for you?

A: My teacher...my science teacher, biology (inaudible) but he was a great teacher, but he just...he had like this big head like you can't get anything to reach him, like you can't talk to him, he just wanted you to learn it and that's it, like...so but Ms. West was like an all around person, like she'd literally like try, I swear she literally tried to help me pass her class. And she said let's get through the book and I said there's no way, she literally like tried, she really did. She gave me all kind of chances and I didn't...I ruined them and like they took my chances from me.

Q: Meaning your sister, taking care of the kids and that. So your responsibilities outside of home kept you from being able to do what you wanted to do in school. So even though you failed that class would that be one of the classes that you would consider to be the most successful in because of your relationship with the teacher or do you...talk to me about your idea, because you have your idea of success at school.

A: Ms. West talk me a lot, I mean I passed the FCAT like it was a wonderful score as you can see, um, I would (inaudible) it was like she's like a good teacher and like she...I guess she thought I wasn't listening to her, but like when I was there I did listen, I studied and all that. It was about the only thing like when you try to pick up a pen and write, (inaudible) ripping up your math book which she helped me on that too, um, she was just like the closest I can get to have a teacher being a friend.

Q: Is that your idea of a good teacher?

A: Yes.

Q: That would be the kind of teacher if you could pick a type of teacher you would have all day long?

A: Yes because she was strict too like it was...she was (inaudible)

Q: What do you mean by that?

A: She was like, she was a good teacher, a person you could talk to and like...there was something about her teaching style that was...it was just like she was able to teach anybody and everybody just by her...if you'd just sit in her class you are going to learn something, no matter if you are not even listening, you know it's the way she teaches, her strategy and all that.

Q: Tell me a little about how she teaches, like give me an example of what you like about her teacher style?

A: Ok, like say like we're going through something...in the beginning of the year we were learning about a little of algebra 1 because you know it carries over to geometry, we were talking (inaudible) form and all that, there was like some people who didn't know what points (inaudible) form was but I knew and like she was the type of teacher, Oh you know so get up there and teach it, like so she would actually let you teach like the students (inaudible) she would help you with the prime numbers and like she let us teach each other.

Q: And what if you guys couldn't get it, what would she do?

A: She would like...stay on it until we get it, she would figure out different ways to try to teach, she's like let me dumb it down for you.

Q: So she would take it back a step, make it easier and show you guys how to do it and then encourage you to build on that knowledge?

A: Like she would teach the short way first and then like after that, if she did it the short way she would break it down and actually do it the correct way and the long way and like it really helped. It helped on the FCAT.

Q: So it's kind of backwards from what most math teachers do because they typically teach you the hard way and then show you the short cuts later.

A: It was really um, it really helped on the FCAT math, it was like I was over taught on math, Ok on math I got a 4 because I (inaudible) and then like some of the problems I was so lazy to um...they actually had like responses on the FCAT now and I was like Wow what's this and then I guess those days I wasn't in school and I didn't know what it was but she told me if you don't know the answer at least try to solve it, like put the given down and stuff like that and you'll get one point or two points and I did.

Q: Ok, so she sounds like a...kind of a well rounded teacher that was strict, she really knew her material, she not only knew it but she knew how to teach it to other people and teach it in a bunch of different ways but was also kind of nurturing kind of almost like a mommy kind of a friend, kind of mentor type that would kind of guide you and help.

A: She would help anybody that needed help or wanted help.

Q: So would this be a teacher that you would feel safe going in the classroom, feel comfortable even if you didn't know something you would feel comfortable asking her to help you. So there is a positive teacher. Tell me about your class that you liked the least, not because of content, but because of the teacher...or content as well and tell me why, what was the difference with that teacher and you don't have to tell me the teacher, just teaching style, I mean you can but you don't have to, but what was the worst one for you?

A: (inaudible) in the beginning of the year I...you know (inaudible) and then you actually get to know that teacher and you actually start learning in his or her class like this man was (inaudible) and I disliked that man with a passion, I really did until like he started to make sense like he was like Hey I have my degree it's up to you to get yours and like when you're in a classroom with like 9th graders, I don't know why they did that, they mixed 9th grade and 10th

grade together like the biology and biology honors which I don't know why they would skip science and they are going to take it next year, I don't understand that, but um like he like...he actually broke it down too, but in the beginning of the year we just bumped heads.

Q: What was it about his personality that you guys bumped heads? What were some of the things that caused you to bump heads?

A: He always thought he was right. He um, like even when he got proved wrong, he would get mad and he'd want to move on the subject, he was like well...he's um...

Q: Did you feel like he listened to you guys?

A: He listened, it was just his way and that's the way it was going to go no matter what.

Q: So he wasn't flexible.

A: No. He wanted it his way.

Q: Set in his ways and that was it even if he was wrong.

A: Yeah, it was still his way.

Q: Ok.

A: He was kind of rude. He was um...he was like

Q: Do you mean that by the way he spoke to you guys? That you didn't like how he spoke to you?

A: Not his teaching, he's like...rude, like he would say something...he would like actually (inaudible) he was like...say like if a person did something, they are talking or something and you know how most teachers ask rhetorical questions, So you want a referral, you don't answer, so he'll ask you do you want a time out or referral and you know the first thing that pops in your head it's a trick question, don't answer just sit there and be quiet, Do you want a referral and he'll say if you don't answer then you're getting a referral I'm like I hushed, I did what you wanted me to do and he's like So you're talking back, get out.

Q: And that was it?

A: Yes that was it.

Q: So what did that do for you when you would go back to his class the next day.

A: (inaudible)

Q: Did you?

A: Of course I mean everybody...he just gave you a referral and like then they did kind of affect the way he acted on you, like if one person (inaudible) angry at you, (inaudible) what are you being rude and then I was like (inaudible) you're being defiant and I'm like Oh my God, what did you say and I was like nothing. It repeats every day until like I (inaudible)

Q: What about during 9th grade? Did you have any teachers that you really did not like? Or any classes that you really did not like?

A: I cannot remember that one teacher I didn't like in 9th grade. My favorite teacher (inaudible) AP World History, I loved that man to death that was a bright teacher, he was a real teacher (inaudible) he was a teacher like...I guess...I don't know if it was because he was so young or what but he just...(inaudible)

Q: So if you were to list some qualities of a teacher that you would want a teacher to have so that you could be successful in their class, what...give me the qualities like which ones popped into your head first, that you would want in a teacher.

A: Tolerance, they have to have a high tolerance level. You have to be able to teach. Some teachers just can't teach like certain students they can't teach because like they get either frustrated real fast or...you have to learn not to let that get to them, but there's going to be some students like me that would like push your buttons, I'm not even going to lie to you, I will push

their buttons like you have to learn how to ignore that, probably with a smile like well if you don't sit down you're going to get into trouble and I'll start yelling, like blow your head off because people like me, that's just food for the fire and then I'll get calm and then I will be like what are you talking and then that will get you madder because you're looking like an idiot and then...it's crazy.

Q: So you want someone who's tolerant, someone who's calm, you said someone who knows their material and not just knows it but can actually teach it.

A: Like it's one thing that you got your doctorate at UF, but do you know how to teach your material, that's like something totally different. You can learn anything you want to learn, but to actually get in front of somebody and teach it like that's why I love teachers, there is not way I can come to high school every day and teach to these rude students like I picture myself in front of me like teaching me every day.

Q: Ok with you saying that thought, but you continue to still do some of those things in classes.

A: I stopped, it was like...I've been doing good, I don't know like you know how you have your moments you just want to try a teach

Q: See what you can get away with

A: Yeah that's right. I mean every students has that and you can't lie, like every student has that moment that they just want to see how far they can push it and there's just some teachers that you can push over, but like...I actually stand up for those teachers like when you see students that Ok it's a certain thing with being like fighting and it's like disrespectful, like I would be funny you know if I got almost through but I would never like actually disrespect the teacher like just call them by their name or something like that, then that's like...I wasn't raised that way even though I went through hell, I wouldn't do that, but they are not here to like cuss you out or anything they are here to teach you and it's what they love to do so let them do it. But I mean (inaudible) be grey all your life, I mean there can be some funny times. I mean I have a lot of teachers that would laugh if you say something like you know like big head or ride on each other, I mean talking about each other. So I mean you can have fun with a teacher but there's a point of how much fun are you having.

Q: Meaning boundaries. That you don't take it too far but you still are able...so you actually want a teacher with a sense of humor as well, someone who can kind of play and banter back and forth but also knows how to keep you in check.

A: Yes, pretty much.

Q: Because it sounds like you know that you need someone that can keep you in check. Like Ms West.

A; Yes but it's like..

Q: She would laugh with you but when you did get too far she would remind you that you were taking it too far and make you feel bad about it.

A: Yes. That's why I love her. It's like Ok you have to have these teachers like...this should be in every teacher, it's Ok to have fun and jump around, life is too short to take everything seriously, like it really is, like you can't just like sit up straight all your life and like just be a puppet. You have to have fun sometimes too and like you can do that but still be professional at the same time like you can teach in a fun way but then when it gets too much you have to know how to Hey stop, this is serious now. Do you know what I'm saying? Like test time you can't laugh through a test, I mean it's a test. So you have to know when to do it.

Q; A time and a place?

A: Thank you.

Q: Now I wanted to just clarify one thing, we had talked about your schedule during the day and that at the end of the day we got to your after school part, can you tell me the rest of you day, what the rest of your afternoon was like?

A: Ok, when I dodge my sister, sometimes I did dodge her, I told them in the front office like I'm not going to leave her all the time like this, ROTC I loved it like I hated it last year when I was in it but this year I loved it and like nothing is going to stop me from doing what I want to do like in the ROTC so like I used to have, you know we go right there for drill practice and I was on the basic drill team (inaudible) drill team and the (inaudible) is where you flip the rifles and all, and basic is when you do the basic rifle movements, but like I was getting more involved and (inaudible) commander they were like (inaudible) and you just can't quit you have to keep it up. I had the best improved cadet, most improved out of the whole unit.

Q: So it sounds like that's another trait that you like in a teacher is that you like them to recognize and see your hard work and to praise you for it?

A: Yeah I mean

Q: Not necessarily publicly, but you wanted it privately.

A: Yeah, it's not...you don't have to get anything physical, I mean a good job, Good Job, that's not hard, I mean...

Q: But just some feedback that you're doing well, you want someone who actually says something to you or even writes on your paper, great job, so. When...so you would have drill after school until about what time?

A: Um, drill started at...sometimes it started...like if there's a drill meeting it would probably start right after school like 3pm. But usually it would start at 3:30pm and then whenever we feel like...pretty much when it's time to go when we feel like it's time to go then we leave.

Q: 5, 6pm?

A: 5...like 5...the latest I stayed after school was until 8pm. And that was because of an awards ceremony. The latest I stayed for drill practice was like 5:30 I think.

Q: Ok. Now the days that you didn't hide from your sister and you went on your...what was pretty much your normal routine, what was the rest of the day like for you?

A: I'd get checked out, drive to east park, she'd drop me off I'd go pick up my niece, I carried my nephew, pick up my niece from Riverside, walked down the street then I'd walk back home and then like I'd feed them and I let her go outside and I'd walk outside and play with her and he's like running chasing cars and I have to get him, he's beating up kids at the playground, he's always doing stressful things and I go put him to sleep.

Q: What time was that?

A: Usually when she'd take me out it's like around 1:30 because she goes to work at 2pm. When I put him to sleep for his nap it'd be like 3pm, I'd go outside to get my niece and I'd bring her back, pull her blinds down, clean up most days he rips up my books and stuff so I'm like Oh my gosh then I put him in the bathtub watch him, put him...let him watch TV, it's like you can't take your eyes off of him because if you take your eyes off of him something's going to be messed up. I came back...like I walked into the laundry room and I'm putting clothes in the laundry and I came back he was about to pull the TV on him. Now the TV is like this big and it's in an entertainment center and this baby is like super baby I promise you and he was pulling the TV on him and if that would have fell on him he would have been dead, like seriously.

Q: So what time did you feed them dinner?
A: I feed them dinner, like they go to sleep at 9pm every night, at least I put them to go to sleep in the bed, they may not be going to sleep, um...
Q: And then when did you get to go home?
A: Whenever she got...she got of work at 10:30, she'd be home like 11:15pm.
Q: And then would drive you home and you'd get back to your house at what time?
A: Like 11...like she stayed...she takes a bath so I'd get there at 12am.
Q: And then be back up the next day at 5:30 to catch the bus because you ride the city bus to get to school.
A: Yes.
Q: Wow, that's quite a day.
A: Not to mention all the drama in between like them fighting and all kinds of crap. Like one day I was there with my niece and nephew and um, like I see like my sister in this car and I see this SUV like chasing her around and they were like sliding, they were actually getting chased and they almost like hit my niece and I had to like grab her and like I was holding her and (inaudible). It was crazy.
Q: And you dealt with this everyday pretty much during the school year until May, until you moved in with your godmother.
A: Yes. Until school was over she was like taking me home
Q: To your godmother and that's really...they are far apart.
A: Yeah they are.
Q: Is there anything else you want to add about school, good or bad?
A: Sometimes school is the only place that I can clear my head without all the drama. ROTC pretty much.
Q: How hard was it for you to come to school and do school work when you had all of that stuff going on at home?
A: So hard. I mean it was really hard like it was hard that I didn't do it, but I'd just sit there and stare at the (inaudible) to clear my head. And like I wanted to do it so bad I just can't...didn't have the brain power to do it.
Q: Because you had so much going on and so tired?
A: Yes I'd be so tired and like it's (inaudible) and then sometimes I get so tired that I seem super happy, like I'm about to go (inaudible)
Q: Get the giggles?
A: Yes, I'd just be laughing and laughing. I'd be so tired and then you'd have to stay up all day long, you have your teacher and if you fall asleep you're getting a referral.
Q: Do you have any questions for me or anything that you would like to ask?
A: No.
Q: Ok, thank you very much.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The researcher earned a bachelor's degree in special education from the University of Florida in 1994. She specialized in students with learning disabilities and emotional and behavioral disorders. Immediately after graduation, the researcher started her master's degree in special education at the University of Florida; she graduated the following spring.

In August of 1995, the researcher began her full time teaching career at Eastside High School. She taught exceptional student education in a varying exceptionalities classroom. During the 2003-2004 school year, the researcher was selected as the Teacher of the Year for Eastside High School. She earned her specialist degree in educational leadership, in May 2005, from the University of Florida. The following summer, she began working on her doctorate. In June of 2005, the researcher became the Activities Director at Eastside High School. In addition, she taught a leadership skills course and served as the student government and senior class sponsors.

While working on her doctorate in education leadership, the researcher became the Exceptional Student Education staffing specialist. After working in this position for two years, the researcher earned a promotion. She currently serves as the Assistant Principal for Curriculum at a local middle school.