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**ACCOUNTING FOR THE ATTRITION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES  
IN AN ACADEMIC SUPPORT SETTING**

**by**

**Ronald R. Lancia**

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**May 2013**

**Dissertation Committee**

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**University of San Diego**

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation addresses a continuing crisis in our nation's education system. Historically African American students have underperformed academically. This achievement gap is particularly pronounced for African American males. AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), an academic support program for underachieving students, most recently created the African American Male Initiative (AAMI). The AAMI was designed specifically to respond to the needs of black males. Despite its efforts, the AAMI has had a difficult time attracting and retaining black male participants. The purpose of this study was to better understand why African American high school males are not choosing to participate in the AVID AAMI, or once enrolled, often drop out.

This qualitative study examined the high school experiences of AAMI students, the factors that support and challenge their academic progress in general, and the factors that are more specifically influencing their retention in the AAMI program. Through an analysis of two AAMI pilot schools, this study used interviews with students, teachers, and coordinators, along with a survey and observational data of classes and AAMI meetings to construct an analysis of the individual, cultural, and structural factors that influence the educational experiences of these black males.

One major finding from the study was that individual motivation and confidence influenced retention rates in the program. With regard to culture, a key finding was that the black males in this particular study did not view academic achievement as being only associated with white students or that trying to achieve academically in school was tantamount to "acting white." In terms of structural arrangements, this study found that

conducting pre-interviews with potential participants to gauge their buy-in would serve to bolster retention in the AAMI program. The implications of this research for the AVID AAMI, and for educators and policy makers focused on improving educational outcomes for African American male students in particular, are discussed.

## **DEDICATION**

This research is dedicated to my best friend and my hero—my father.

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I share this with my family: my devoted mother Kathleen, my father Ron, my grandmother Sophie, my son Judah, and my son Jerome. I would also like to acknowledge my late grandfather Joseph Sukalski, and my late grandparents Ann and Reynold "Ray" Lancia.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

In the 1980s a high school English teacher, Mary Catherine Swanson, created AVID, an academic support program with a stated mission to “close the achievement gap by preparing all students for college success” (“What is AVID?,” n.d.). Inspired by the belief that minority students could achieve if given proper supports, AVID was born. Some 20 years later, 93% of African American AVID seniors completed four-year college entrance requirements compared to just 25% nationally (“AVID 2011 Seniors Outpace National Statistics,” 2011).

Despite these impressive results, many black males continued to underperform academically. This motivated AVID to create the AAMI, a program that embedded a culturally relevant curriculum and improved black male self-advocacy for learning (“What is AVID?,” n.d.). The formation of this initiative has been met with much enthusiasm within AVID and among educators in general who recognize the importance of racially responsive pedagogy and the necessity of mitigating the factors that negatively impact black male educational outcomes.

AVID recognizes this is a pilot and is anxious to assess its merits. This study is designed to inform their understanding of the program. Data collected by AVID thus far indicates however that retention is a significant concern. At the National AVID Conference, Director of Research and Evaluation, Dennis Johnston, reported that the AAMI is “losing African Americans at a horrific rate” (speech, December 9, 2011). Even with support in the form of a program specifically designed to address their needs, black males continued to underperform.

## Problem Statement

Inequality, clearly demonstrated in the persistence of a test score achievement gap between African American and white students has been a defining characteristic of education in the U.S. for decades. This inequity has been most pronounced within the population of black males. Oakes (1985) observed that while “the ability to learn is normally distributed” (p. 11) the capacity for black students to learn is not reflected in actual performance data. According to a 2010 National Assessment of Education Progress report that deemed black male achievement “a national catastrophe,” data revealed that only 12% of fourth-grade black males were judged proficient in reading, compared to almost 40% of white males (“Achievement Gaps,” 2010). This gap continues throughout high school. The difference between 17-year-old white and black students’ reading scores on the National Assessment of Education Progress stood at 29 percentage points in favor of white students 2004, compared with just 20 percentage points in favor of white students in 1988 (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 19). The average black 12th-grade student was reading at the level of the average white eighth-grade student in 2005 (Darling-Hammond, 2010, pp. 20-21). As expected, the gap remains evident in college. The *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* reported the college graduation rate of blacks at “an appallingly low 43%,” a distant 20 points behind their white counterparts (“Black Student College Graduation Rates,” 2007).

However, Gutierrez (2008) has argued that the achievement gap lens can be problematic for several reasons, starting with the fact that it may perpetuate deficit thinking, or the assumption that low achievement stems from internal deficits in students or in their families. She also warns against the tendency toward “gap gazing” in general,

as it has the potential to offer only “static” notions of inequity and student identity (pp. 358-359). In other words, it can be difficult to capture the full context of learning that has produced the gap, as well as the multiple identities of students within a single race. While Gutierrez acknowledged typical gap studies address access and achievement, she claimed there is a tendency to ignore identity and power; however, these two significant contextual factors will be addressed in this study.

For years researchers have accounted for the black male’s low performance in relation to whites with various deficit-based explanations. Some pointed to the individual, citing issues of cognitive ability (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994), language (Baugh, 2008), and resistance to a dominant culture (Carter, 2006) as sources of the black male’s relative underperformance. Others pointed to cultural factors, depicting black families and black communities—particularly black males—as resistant to education (Ogbu, 2003) or trapped in a futile cycle of reproduction based on their socioeconomic class (Bourdieu, 1973; MacLeod, 2004).

Lee (2007) has explained that the perception of a cultural deficit dates back to slavery (p. 9) and is a dangerous assumption that must be overcome. Many researchers such as Perry, Steele, and Hilliard (2003) have asked that we look beyond deficit-based thinking, and have argued instead that African American students should be assessed on “criterion levels of performance” (p. 139) as opposed to merely a white comparison. In other words, instead of viewing these young men as deficient and inferior to their white counterparts, we should develop standards for excellence and maintain high expectations that black males will be able to achieve them.



Martin (2009) also argued against deficit-based characterizations, maintaining, “underachievement does not imply inability” (p. 305). Shifting the onus of failure away from student deficiencies, Martin (2000) highlighted the oft-overlooked success among black students despite a historical context of discriminatory practices. He explained black students persist “in light of and in spite of school and community forces” (p. 164) that socialize educators and students alike to hold low expectations in terms of academic success.

Ford and Grantham (2002) explained how deficit thinking—when educators hold “stereotypic and counterproductive views” and lower expectations accordingly—can hinder access for culturally diverse students (p. 2). Deficit thinking plays out in multiple ways, including having an impact on placement decisions of high school classes. African Americans are typically underrepresented in advanced programs and overrepresented in special education classes. This occurrence is one example of how deficit views limit the opportunities of others. The authors urged educators toward a “philosophical change” away from this kind of deficit stance (p. 8).

This research points out the potential dangers of deficit thinking in terms of the educational outcomes of the black male, and recognizes that gap gazing does not take into account the many privileges granted to white and Asian students that may be causing the gap. Thus, this research challenges deficit-based explanations by providing a more comprehensive analysis of the multiple factors that construct educational outcomes. It pays particular attention to how issues of individual identity, cultural factors, and structural arrangements interact to influence achievement.

### **Institutional or Programmatic Responses to Structural Inequity**

**AVID “un-tracking.”** AVID is an “un-tracking” program that seeks to increase the representation of traditionally underserved students at secondary institutions, specifically by equipping students with precisely the kind of cultural capital and “college-going behaviors” they, and most likely their ancestors, are missing.

AVID attempts to change the structure for participants in that it offers “social scaffolding” and explicit instruction in what Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, & Lintz (1996) called the “hidden curriculum” that minorities and students in lower tracks may be missing (p. 83). In AVID, students receive social scaffolding that mimics the kind of “capital” that affluent families possess that support their children as they prepare for college (p. 80). The authors explained that privileged children are “socialized into an ideology” that supports hard work and academic achievement and are provided with supports that reinforce that ideology (p. 97).

Mehan et al.’s analysis of the reproduction of inequality built on the work of Bourdieu (1973), who pointed out how academic success depends on cultural capital. Once again, ruling classes possess more social capital as well as the means to use it, resulting in the best academic placements (p. 85, 96). In contrast, lower class students lack the cultural capital traditionally rewarded by the education system as well as the networks and access to power, thus leading to poor academic achievement, lower tracks, and underrepresentation in universities (MacLeod, 2004, p. 101). AVID offers the opportunity to serve students in ways that can potentially ameliorate this dynamic, address the social scaffolding that may be absent from the home, and provide the “hidden curriculum” they may be missing out on at school (Mehan et al., 1996). Teacher

advocacy of this kind, referred to by Mehan et al. as “institutional bridge-building,” is the transfer of social capital derived from the school setting as opposed to the family (p. 100). It actively helps students navigate the journey to secondary institutions, deftly using the system to the advantage of minority students, a practice more effective in preparing underserved minority students for college (p. 81, 99). Of course, AVID cannot be viewed as a panacea, because as Mehan et al. point out, unless the occupational world is re-organized with equitable career ladders, “changes in the organization of schooling such as this un-tracking program” will be inadequate to close the achievement gap and/or socioeconomic gap (p. 93).

At the 2011 AVID National Conference, data expert Dennis Johnston reported, “AVID is student-centric, but can transform systems as well” (speech, December 9, 2011). As an agent for change, AVID seems to be working effectively. After three decades of working with traditionally underserved students, AVID has reached 400,000 students in 4,500 schools. In California, 89% of high school seniors who participated in AVID throughout high school met college entrance requirements, compared to just a 36% national average for their non-AVID peers (“Avid Closes the Achievement Gap for California Students,” 2011). On the surface, then, AVID’s achievement seems to be nothing less than remarkable. However, despite all of its success in raising academic achievement among minorities, the existing resources available through AVID—including a daily AVID class, a dedicated AVID teacher and advocate, and access to college tutors—are sometimes insufficient (Mehan et al., 1996, p. 92). In other words, the benefits AVID offers are sometimes not adequate to overcome constraints and challenges

imposed by practical and often overwhelming circumstances in the lives of students (p. 91).

Mehan et al. (1996) reported that while AVID prepared 41% of all Latinos for entrance to UC/CSU (nearly doubling the state average of 22%) and prepared 41% of white students (next to the state average of 34%), the average for all African Americans was identical to the state average, hovering at around 20% (p. 82). Statistics such as these helped to motivate the formation of the AAMI.

**AVID's African American Male Initiative (AAMI).** It is helpful to examine the underperformance of black males through the lens of AVID, because AVID's AAMI has been designed specifically to rectify some of these long-standing institutional arrangements that have resulted in inequity for minorities, specifically black males. The attrition rates of AVID students in the AAMI (the specific AVID program for black males) prompt additional interest because of the program's focused and heightened attention to the challenges that black males face.

This study proposes to explore the extent to which an educational intervention program for black males is equipping them with the supports they need to navigate the myriad obstacles, institutional and otherwise, that have historically served to hinder their progress. As mentioned earlier in this paper, in 2009 AVID created the AAMI to help remedy AVID's low black male achievement. Although the AAMI has boosted the numbers of black male participants and contributed to positive outcomes such as demonstrating greater college knowledge and taking rigorous courses, Dr. Karen Watt from the University of Texas-Pan American reported: "Retaining males in high school AVID programs is difficult" (speech, December 9, 2011).

The AAMI program seems to be having a positive impact in that it is providing the kind of environment black males were missing. Watt detailed some of the great work being done that is “changing the trajectory of these students” in terms of educational outcomes (speech, December 9, 2011).

Watt (2011) and her colleagues reported that in each of the sites where the AAMI was implemented, not only did students feel AVID teachers “cared and wanted them to succeed,” perhaps more significantly they identified “a ‘brotherhood’ of high-achieving, motivated black male peers” (p. 21). From herein, this brotherhood will be referred to as the “club effect.”

Importantly, though, Johnston from AVID Center revealed that the program is “losing African Americans at a horrific rate” (speech, December 9, 2011). His theory has suggested that only the strongest black males are retained in AVID, a phenomenon he refers to as “creaming” (speech, December 9, 2011). He also revealed that general AVID data is collected through a sample of seniors, so again, seemingly positive data is skewed by the fact that only retained seniors—or the “cream”—have been documented. In other words, if we are examining AVID data only from their seniors—the “cream of the crop,” so to speak—we are disregarding the males, and in particular African American males, who have dropped the program, and the reasons behind that attrition. Johnston urged, “If senior attrition is a significant problem, then an action plan targeting this challenge should be created, implemented, and evaluated” (speech, December 9, 2011).

This research is designed to respond to this call to action by contributing to a greater understanding of what factors may be shaping retention issues within the AAMI program. Importantly, as Mehan et al. (1996) described, educational reforms designed to

address equity must be “transformative” (p. 100). In this case, the program must have the potential to support black males while recognizing they are segregating the participants from their white male counterparts.

Studying AVID’s AAMI with a focus on attrition issues provides an opportunity to understand the ways in which individual, cultural, and structural factors influence black male academic experiences in hopes to contribute to the body of research focused on remedying the inequality that persists.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to understand the persistent underachievement of black males by focusing on their responses to an initiative (AVID AAMI) that was designed specifically to respond to their needs. AVID AAMI, in fact, has been informed by a substantial body of research that has examined the continued low academic achievement among black male students in the U.S. Building on this research, this study examines why such a thoughtfully designed program has had difficulty recruiting African American males and retaining those who were recruited.

This research is conducted in two schools that have piloted the intervention. It investigates the ways in which the AAMI is supporting black male students and also the factors that are challenging their involvement in the program.

### **Research Questions**

The primary research question framing my study is: Which factors shape the attrition rates of black males in the AVID AAMI program?

Sub-questions include: What individual factors support or impede participation? What cultural factors impact participation and persistence in the program? What

structural and/or programmatic factors present in the classroom and the schools themselves challenge and/or support persistence in the AAMI?

### **Significance of the Study**

As inequalities are examined in our educational landscape, Pollock (2004) warned against hanging blame and instead examining how we may “help undo the disparity” (p. 26). This study is aimed at responding to that call. In light of what Pollock dubbed the “complex dynamics of our existing inequalities” (p. 144), it seems sensible to not let blame divert our attention from the work of understanding the construction and reproduction of inequality. This study provides the opportunity to provide important insights that can potentially affect positive change both for the academic achievement of black males and for programs that hope to scaffold their success.

At the 2011 AVID National Conference, the keynote speaker Mack Hines III explained most educators are quick to cite a lack of economic resources, role models, or solid parenting as the root of black male underachievement (speech, December 9, 2011). He contended, however, that these so-called “at risk” students are more “at risk” of encountering teachers who lack the “knowledge, skills, and disposition” that would allow the students to develop a “strong racial and academic identity” (speech, December 9, 2011). There is a need to look deeply into the educational and personal lives of black male students.

As this research was done with the support of AVID, I was granted access to their pilot schools, which provided an opportunity to hear the collective voice of the AAMI—including students, teachers, coordinators, and counselors. This study sheds light on the individual, cultural, and structural factors that support or impede participation by black

males in the AAMI. Studying the program's challenges and successes is instructive for AVID as it continues to improve and enhance the AAMI program and for others who attempt to address the needs of black male students.

### **Scope and Limitations**

#### **The Role of the White Researcher**

I am a white researcher limited by the fact that I have not personally experienced the phenomena being studied, i.e. the educational experience of the black male high school student. Carter Godwin Woodson (1933), the father of black education, stated unequivocally: "There is no particular body of facts that Negro teachers can impart ... that may not be just as easily presented by persons of another race if they have the same attitude as Negro teachers" (p. 24). Although I may not have the exact same "attitude," I have worked diligently to understand and represent the comments of black males in this study as carefully as possible, checking my understandings with them in an attempt to get it right—that is, from their perspective. I built rapport with the young men during classroom observations to generate more authentic and productive conversations during the interviews. Throughout the interview process, I constantly restated and/or paraphrased their responses to check for accuracy, and then completed both formal and informal follow-up interviews to clarify and probe for deeper understandings. Whenever possible, I would "check" their responses against the perspective of the AAMI staff members or other respondents in subsequent interviews. This was an effort to gain the fullest possible understanding of the lived experiences of these young black males, particularly in regard to their educational outcomes.



As a white researcher, I chose not to shy away from the black community, but rather cultivate the “attitude” of which Woodson speaks. The first steps are listening and learning, as Hines emphasized, and shedding the deficit model or “lack-of mentality” for black students is important as well (speech, December 9, 2011).

Aronson (2008) encouraged the development of a “mindset of insatiable curiosity” about black students as individuals (p. 67). The most earnest teachers can surely relate to that. Tyson (2005) offered one sure way to develop this curiosity, namely, “looking at each child in your classroom as if she or he were your own” (p. 129). For the white researcher investigating the educational experience of black males in a system that continues to replicate inequality, approaching the subject from the vantage point of an academic office will be inadequate. We must enter the research as if it would inform our own children.

Finally, Hines remarked, “You cannot fear being racist and cannot be race-less” (speech, December 9, 2011). In other words, we must be “color-embracing,” and instead of pretending not to see color, we must cultivate that racial awareness so we can make a “natural connection” with black males (speech, December 9, 2011). Then, maybe we can begin to tap into those innate capacities so often ignored.

Throughout the research, a major challenge existed, namely establishing access and rapport in such a short period of time. Researcher reflexivity refers to awareness that our feelings and bias “affect the construction of meanings” (Jamison, 2010, p. 31). In the interest of addressing any potential bias, as a teacher I did have the opportunity to teach a semester of AVID. While this is an issue of personal reflexivity, my familiarity in navigating through the AVID experience is beneficial. Additionally, my 15 years as a

classroom teacher serve me well as I attempt to establish comfortable connections so that I can listen to and learn from these young people and their experiences in education.

My access began by establishing rapport with the AAMI teachers. Not only did my experience and connections grant access to these young men, they granted access to their classrooms and their normal, daily operations. I endeavored to make the research as unobtrusive as possible at all times.

### **Description of Dissertation Chapters**

The first chapter of this dissertation introduces the study and provides a background for the research. Then, a statement of the problem and the study's purpose are presented. In addition, both AVID and the AAMI are described and placed in a historical context. Finally, the significance of the study is discussed along with its scope and limitations for the research.

The second chapter consists of a review of the literature associated with the academic achievement of African American male students, including a look at the historical roots of inequality in this nation. Three major sections make up this literature review that help to account for the factors that support and challenge educational outcomes: (a) individual and student-centered explanations; (b) cultural explanations; (c) explanations related to the structure of the system.

After a description of the school sites, Chapter 3 focuses on the research design and methodology and restates the purpose and particular research questions that guided the research. Then, a rationale is offered for the qualitative approach used to investigate the AAMI. Each strategy of data collection is described, including observations, initial and follow-up interviews, and the student survey. After describing the population and

sample, data collection and analysis procedures are discussed, and issues of internal and external validity are addressed.

The fourth chapter is made up of the key findings from the study, including an analysis of data that shows an interrelationship of factors impacting attrition and retention in the AVID AAMI. These findings and analyses are listed not in order of significance, but rather according to the individual, cultural, and structural factors, as well as the program strengths that influenced retention rates in the program.

Finally, in the fifth chapter the implications of the key findings as well as suggestions for future research are discussed, and conclusions are provided.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

As a nation, we have failed deplorably to educate the black male population. Education has been used as an instrument of oppression and segregation. It has reproduced unequal conditions since the time that African Americans were brought to the country as slaves to the present day. In this section of the proposal, after first discussing the historical roots of inequality for black males, I will examine common, contemporary explanations offered by some for this inequity, namely: (a) individual and student-centered explanations, including cognitive ability, the role of language, resistance to acting white, and distrust of white schooling; (b) cultural or race-related explanations, including issues related to community and parent-centered deficits, gender differences among blacks, and explanations related to cultural capital; (c) structural explanations, including school-related factors in general: curriculum, pedagogy, standardized testing and tracking arrangements, such as the over-identification of black males in special education and their underrepresentation in advanced placement (AP) classes. This literature review will explore this broad range of explanations commonly offered for the academic underperformance of African American males. I relate this discussion to the possible causes for the attrition and retention of the black males in the AVID AAMI.

#### **The Historical Roots of Inequality**

The sheer inequality of educational outcomes has characterized our education system since the arrival of the black man on a slave ship. Frederick Douglass (1845) sensed that the crux of the problem seemed to lie in a power relationship perpetuated by

the dominant oppressor, and this was inextricably linked to education. He recalled his master saying:

A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master—to do as he is told to do. Learning would spoil the best nigger in the world ... if you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. (p. 41)

Indeed, if any sort of teaching and learning occurred, they were designed to keep the black man in his proper place. Du Bois (1903) agreed that to be an educated Negro was to be a dangerous Negro, asserting, “opposition to Negro education” was “bitter” because education always has an element of “revolution ... and discontent” (p. 20).

Woodson (1933) addressed the role of education in the black man’s life and this notion of discontent in *The Mis-Education of the Negro*. Here he explained that education “made [the black man] more of a malcontent,” elucidating “the impossibility of success” (p. 16) within his condition. In other words, Woodson realized that the acquisition of literacy for the black man would illuminate the injustice of his present state but also reveal a future devoid of real opportunity. The formal systems of education, then, became the cornerstone for oppressing the black man in America, and would be used to keep him suited for only the lowest stratum of society.

Woodson (1933) pointed out that after emancipation, a debate arose as to whether a freed slave should receive a classical or merely a vocational education (p. 13). Booker T. Washington felt the latter was more appropriate, explaining, “For the masses, industrial education is the supreme need” (Harlan & Smock, 1976, p. 620). An advocate for higher education, Du Bois (1903) saw a paradox, asserting that Washington’s schools

of industrial training like Tuskegee “could not remain open for a day if it were not for teachers trained in Negro colleges” (p. 31). However, Washington felt the majority of blacks would be better served by preparation for industrial posts in society where they would inevitably land. Hansberry’s 1958 play *A Raisin in the Sun* encapsulates this paradoxical dilemma through Mama and her cantankerous neighbor, Ms. Johnson:

JOHNSON: You sure one proud-acting bunch of colored folks. I always thinks like Booker T. Washington said that time—“Education has spoiled many a good plow hand”—

MAMA: Is that what old Booker T. said?

JOHNSON: He sure did.

MAMA: Well, it sounds just like him. The fool. (Act 2. Scene 2.)

Washington, like other black educators of his time, faced the quandary of simply preparing black men for labor, as opposed to offering them an education that pinpointed, as Anderson (1988) described, the “very source of the masses’ discomfort and oppression” (p. 278). Certainly an industrial education was not concerned with cultivating the black man’s “gifts”—i.e., his unique capacities that could be harnessed.

Thus, from these historical roots—such as the insistence on keeping black slaves uneducated, the post-emancipation emphasis on industrial as opposed to classical education, and the practice of segregation that characterized the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—we find that education was simply proscribed differently for blacks and whites. Differential expectations for black and white men shaped the kind of curriculum that they were exposed to. Black men were trained for menial tasks and the lowest posts in society, while the white man received a classical education. Even as our nation has evolved and

efforts have been made to desegregate schooling, over time educational inequality has remained, which is why “gap-gazing,” as Gutierrez (2008) calls it, is so problematic. The gap in achievement for black males could very well be in direct relation to the gap in instruction they have received.

Despite systematic oppression, African Americans have seen and constantly made use of education for purposes of liberation. Douglass (1845) knew that his self-education was a “pathway from slavery to freedom” (p. 51), and Abdullah, Kamberlis, and McGinley (1992) have argued that the African American community did not lose touch with the notion that “literacy and freedom are inextricably linked” (p. 388). Woodson and Du Bois were also both strong advocates for education as a means to fight oppression and elevate the black community.

Yet today, we find that many black males are underachieving in our nation’s schools. The reasons for their underperformance demand further investigation (Hubbard, 1999). In a review of the literature several primary themes or reasons for black male achievement emerge: individual, cultural or race-related, and structural. I will review the body of literature that addresses each of these explanations, with the understanding that factors overlap and create an interrelated set of conditions (Mehan, et al., 1999; Hubbard, 1996) that impact educational outcomes.

### **Individual and Student-Centered Explanations**

Some researchers have identified the individual as contributing to his own underperformance. This “blame the victim” ideology has typically relied upon explanations related to low cognitive ability (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994), the role of

language, resistance to “acting white,” and a distrust of white education (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). I will discuss the literature that focuses on each of these explanations.

### **Cognitive Ability**

Citing low cognitive ability as the source of black males’ academic underperformance in schools, Herrnstein and Murray (1994) blamed blacks as individuals for their own low performance in schools. In *The Bell Curve*, they reported measurements that demonstrated “blacks are at least as motivated as whites” (p. 283), thus lower achievement among blacks is not related to a lack of motivation. Instead, intelligence accounts for their academic performance. The authors asserted that these “ethnic differences in cognitive ability are neither surprising nor in doubt,” and that by adulthood, “IQ is fairly well set” (p. 142, 269), thus social supports could do little to alter their education outcomes. They theorized that the achievement gap is attributed to lower intelligence—something they view as determined at birth. Environmental factors, they argue, are not nearly as important as genetics. They go on to refute hypotheses that point to external factors as the cause of depressing test scores.

Many researchers have rightly dismissed the argument made in *The Bell Curve*, such as Gardner (1994) who called it an extreme work of “scholarly brinkmanship,” maintaining “high IQ doesn’t make a person one whit better than anyone else” (p. 61). Pollock (2008) agreed with Gardner and flatly rejected cognitive deficiency theories and went on to claim that such explanations merely serve to perpetuate inequality. Pollock stated that the “myths” that whites are smarter than blacks were “constructed to justify slavery” (p. 9). Later, even post-slavery scientists attempted to justify inequitable Jim Crow laws by arguing there was an intellectual gap between blacks and whites (p. 9).



While the literature obviously demonstrates strong, divergent opinions on cognitive ability and genetics, it remains an oft-cited factor that influences the education experience of black males, both by impacting their own perceptions of their abilities, as well as the perceptions others have of them.

To summarize, research that situates the academic achievement of African American males within cognitive deficiencies has been judged by many researchers as highly suspect. They have turned our attention to the importance of factors that are both internal and external to the individual. This body of research emphasizes how teacher expectations for student success are shaped by their deficit perceptions of African Americans' language and communication style.

**The role of language.** Certainly, as Baugh (2008) observed, "issues of language are intertwined with issues of educational access," and nowhere is this phenomenon more pronounced than in the black community (p. 103). When black students use AAVE (African American Vernacular English), teacher expectations for their success are impacted. Ogbu (2003) recognized that teacher expectations for their success were impacted. He recognized that black vernacular "differs vastly from standard 'white' English" (p. 37) and that teachers often judge AAVE to be a non-grammatical, lower form of English. Students who use this language, then, are stigmatized.

Woodson's (1933) historical writings explained why language use is doubly problematic; both black students and society in general view it negatively. Black pupils long ago were made to "scoff at the Negro dialect as some peculiar possession" rather than embrace it as a derivation of their native African tongue essential for survival (p.

18). Today, Black English is perceived by many non-blacks as an inherent deficiency and devalued and/or ignored as a vibrant cultural practice.

Baugh (2008) argued that both non-standard and standard English skills should be honed, explaining that educators must offer standard English instruction as well as honoring the value of the “native vernacular” (p. 104). Dyson (2005) agreed, noting, “Black English grows out of the fierce linguisticity of black existence ... carving a speech of their own from the remnants of African languages” in order to survive (pp. 72-73). In other words, Black English and Ebonics are legitimate dialects that speak to the exigencies of the culture and should be valued as such.

Others disagree that maintaining Black English is desirable. Iconic African American Bill Cosby (2007) urged parents not to use this dialect at home, arguing Black English “can limit the potential of our children to do well in school” (pp. 117-118). He also contended, however, that those who “don’t or won’t speak the dialect” are deemed not “black” enough and “damned if they do speak Black Vernacular English by their teachers and damned if they don’t [speak it] by their peers” (p. 119).

Dyson’s (2005) rebuttal to Cosby was that anti-intellectualism is not a black problem, but rather “endemic” to modern youth (p. 8) and Black English is not at the heart of academic achievement. Defending non-standard English, Dyson explained that Cosby is “dealing in a language he can barely parse” (p. 9), and described the ability of the black male to use culturally unique styles of communication that could be harnessed as a potential strength.

Those who argue that Black English disadvantages blacks from an academic setting fail to recognize that many blacks maintain power with their peers and gain power

in the classroom when they “code-switch,” or transition purposefully between “standard” and “street” discourse. Carter (2006) addressed this topic, asserting that within the “delicate boundaries of power” students will modify their discourse to suit a particular context (p. 316). This description of code-switching illustrates that learning standard English *and* reinforcing native vernacular can allow students to negotiate—in their home and school cultures—strategies that can support them academically and on their home turf. AAVE, then, can be not perceived as a deficit, but rather as a vibrant cultural component that can be capitalized on in terms of developing a student’s potential and creating racially relevant forms of instruction. The problem that seems to persist, however, is the way educators devalue students who speak AAVE.

Baugh (2008) urged the educational community to “work toward acceptance” of those from different linguistic backgrounds (p. 105). Yet despite the insistence by many that AAVE offers advantages to black youth, research tells us that black language continues to be devalued. Delpit (2008) has asserted that when curriculum is “stripped of children’s cultural legacies,” they are in turn forced to perceive that they are out-of-place in the classroom (p. 41). Blacks are often “dismissed as ignorant” by those in power who assumed that the language of African Americans is “further evidence of their cognitive deficiency” (p. 37).

### **Resistance to Acting White**

Another explanation that rests responsibility for academic failure on blacks themselves is the idea that blacks resist the American education system, seeing it as part of a larger system of black oppression. In other words, students eschew participation in school. Fordham and Ogbu’s (1986) research pointed out that black students face the

burden of “acting white.” Black students see an intrinsic conflict with succeeding in school and maintaining their black identity. They do not want to behave in what Ogbu (2003) called “white people’s ways” (p. 38), in or out of the school context. There are myriad dimensions of acting white, including adopting white language, listening to white music, joining white social networks, and engaging in the academic practices prescribed by what some blacks might see as white education.

Carter (2006) agreed that some students have no desire to “adapt to the cultural prescriptions of the school and white society” (p. 308). Achieving good grades and participating in school may be tantamount to what Carter called the “transgressing of boundaries of racial solidarity” (p. 320), a phenomenon of specific concern among black males. Moreover, peer pressure to resist whiteness and its perceived forms such as enrollment in advanced classes may cause black youth (Ogbu, 2003, p. 199) to disengage because to do otherwise would separate them from their black peers. The fear of acting white may also affect participation in academic programs such as AVID or AVID’s AAMI, a point I will return to in Chapter 4.

Carter (2006) also has suggested that the achievement gap actually exacerbates the pressure on black students. As black students see an increasingly stratified society, they may “perceive that [achieving higher] status [means] embracing a dominant and oppressive culture” and is one that should be avoided (p. 318). Equating academic success to acting white can also lower their self-esteem and aspirations for their future. Carter’s research showed how students’ resistance to acting white is tantamount to a rejection of achievement (p. 323). Black students may even lose cultural credibility among their peers if they excel. Peer pressure among blacks becomes largely negative

because they feel education is, as Ogbu (2003) described, a “white imposition,” and a curriculum and language that privileged whites have traditionally used against them to communicate and reinforce feelings of inferiority (p. 189).

Carter (2006) has reminded us, however, that we cannot merely assert that all black students perceive high achievement as acting white, and therefore “reject schooling” in general (p. 322). In fact, some research has shown that black students embrace mainstream beliefs about education, or in other words, that they feel if they work hard in school they will have a better future (p. 309). Researchers such as Boykin and Noguera (2011) view the “acting white” phenomenon simply as an explanation rooted in a stereotype, and contend that it fails to account for black students who excel in traditional settings. Nevertheless, distrust for white schooling is argued to be present among some black youth and continues to be cited as a contributor to black males’ low achievement.

**Individuals’ distrust of a white education.** The notion that blacks contribute to their own academic inequality has been perpetuated in statements made by Cosby (2007), who quipped, “Black youth are as thrilled about getting education as they are about getting head lice” (p. 101). But Tatum (2008) pushed our thinking further when she discussed the possible causes for this notion and connected distrust to educational practices. The distrust black parents have for white schooling is, as Tatum found, “rooted in generations of institutionalized policies ... that have denied equal access,” and this includes over-referring black children to special education and under-referring them to gifted programs (p. 311).

Given the sort of practices described by Tatum, is it any wonder black youth would be skeptical of the education they are to receive? In fact, MacLeod (2004) explained that in many ways black students have no choice but to be skeptical—and even resistant. In order to maintain a modicum of dignity and self-worth, it becomes necessary to adopt “a rejection ... of the dominant ideology” as a “cultural response to class domination” (p. 151). If black youth know their innate capacities will be ignored, and that they will be asked to shun their cultural norms, engagement and achievement will surely suffer (MacLeod, 2004).

In addressing the challenge of black male skepticism, Aronson (2008) wrote, “We must form and maintain trusting relationships,” as well as see each other as individuals rather than mere “social categories” (p. 67). Woodson (1933) explained much earlier in our history the persistent problem of distrust, stating, “The Negro will never be able to show all of his originality as long as his efforts are directed from without by those who socially proscribe him” (p. 24). Clearly, unless the intention of education is to equip all students, black males may fail to achieve their full potential. Instead, they will be set on a path that readies them for lower social and economic positions in society.

### **Summary of Individual Explanations and Discussion of Factors**

A significant body of research has vehemently challenged theories that point to a deficiency in cognition among black males, yet this ideology persists and constructs unequal power relationships in education and society. Ford and Grantham (2002) have pointed out that works like *The Bell Curve* served to revive this kind of deficit orientation (p. 2) and they urged educators and policymakers toward a more “dynamic” way of thinking that views intelligence and giftedness as a “social construct that manifests itself

in many ways” (p. 3). In other words, cognitive deficit theories fail to account for the unique strengths and capacities of African American males, and therefore fail to explain their underperformance. Cognitive deficiency theory will not be explored as a potential contributor to the attrition of the black males in the AAMI.

Language use among African Americans remains a polarizing subject in the research, and a key to their access in education. Some see the black vernacular as severely limiting potential in the classroom while others view it as a unique capacity to be mined for further potential. Importantly, Villegas (1988) has pointed out that citing a “language mismatch” explanation between the home and school environment only provides an excuse for what she called “institutionalized inequality” (p. 260). In other words, because the system continues to assess students in terms of “white, middle class ways of using language,” (p. 260) the politics of power and maintaining the social class hierarchy make language use a problem primarily because the use of non-standard English is often judged negatively by others, and thus, poses consequences for blacks. While I will examine the role of language in this study, I also recognize that its impact on black male achievement is linked to culture, power dynamics, and structural arrangements that may hinder the educational attainment of the black male.

Finally, resistance to white education in general and distrust of the white education system may be present in individuals, but its salience in constructing participation in the AAMI will be considered within the context of the cultural and structural arrangements that may be impacting the educational experiences of the black males in the AAMI.

A significant body of research points to the role of culture, specifically beliefs, practices, and norms that, in this case, are understood to impact black academic achievement. I discuss some of these cultural factors, such as community and parent-centered factors and their perceived relationship to educational attainment, in the section below.

### **Cultural and Race-Related Explanations**

**Community and parent-centered forces.** Ogbu (2003) took a multi-factor approach to academic disengagement in the black community. Along with individual factors—specifically “low-effort syndrome,” lack of focus, and a tendency to de-prioritize academics—he also cited community forces such as parent-centered factors as reasons for academic disengagement (pp. 17-28). His cultural ecological theory suggested that community forces, or the way a certain group perceives education, affects achievement (p. 46). According to Ogbu’s theory, the perception that there is unequal opportunity in the white system is not just a perception of individuals, but rather is ingrained in the minds of the black community. While other minorities may not “question the pedagogic style of public schools,” Ogbu argued black community members and parents play a key role in encouraging minority students’ mistrust of whites and teachers (p. 48). Importantly, this isn’t an inherent cultural practice that is shaping their relationship to schooling, but rather, refers to how the black community perceives their opportunities within a white education system. Further, he suggested that there is a lack of involvement among some black parents in their children’s schooling, which also stems from feelings of mistrust regarding their inability to succeed within the current system (p. 235).



Long before Ogbu developed his theory, Woodson (1933) bemoaned the lack of opportunities for black youth and the impact it had on black parents, noting: “Negroes ... learned from their oppressors to say to their children that there were certain shapes into which they should not go because they would have no chance therein” (p. 54). In other words, the black community had been conditioned to prepare children to not seek certain opportunities because they were likely to not be available because of their race.

This conditioning that Woodson speaks of is one of the contextual influences Martin (2009) described as contributing to the negative socialization of African Americans, particularly in regards to math education. In other words, the orientation of African Americans toward mathematics results from a “legacy of denied opportunity” (p. 26). This collective attitude may affect the home-school partnership and cause discouraged parents to lower their expectations (p. 79). Consequently, students themselves may limit their own access by not pursuing higher-level math (p. 30).

Researchers like Lareau (2003) have theorized as to precisely how membership in black families could perpetuate a negative cycle of inequality through more than just perceptions of inequity. Lareau focused on class, but because the U.S. Census has reported a disproportionate number of black children live below the poverty level (the most of any race and double the number of whites), her research is helpful in describing how cultural factors may contribute to the construction of inequality (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012; Lareau, 2003, p. 29). She pointed to the parents’ level of education as one of the “best predictors” for students’ college entrance and success, and this translates into less success for black youth where fewer parents are college graduates (p. 8). Lareau also discussed a set of cultural repertoires regarding the raising of children in the middle class

that serve them more favorably than those in place in poorer communities. These practices and ideologies result in the “transmission of differential advantages,” related to verbal capacity, vocabulary, and abstract thinking skills (p. 4). The middle and upper class students experience what Lareau called “concerted cultivation,” a style of parenting that promotes dispositions among children that positively impact achievement (pp. 275-276). Conversely, the parents of working class or poor children experience what she termed “accomplishment of growth,” strategies that assume for the most part that children’s activities should be centered around play and it is not necessary or even desirable that they spend their leisure time being academically focused—an approach that ends up disadvantaging students in school.

Weis and Fine (2005) also noted that low levels of education among parents can contribute to a negative cycle of low educational attainment. When parents are less educated, their children are also less likely to be part of an academic “social network” (p. 23), and therefore less equipped to provide children with the “right” guidance and connections to support college admission and success. Similarly, because the language used by middle and upper-class parents match the demands of school, Mehan et al. (1996) observed that children have acquired skills subsequently rewarded on assessments (p. 80). Conversely, because language used by low-income parents does not always align with classroom discourse, their children are not provided with background knowledge crucial to success on lessons, tests, and other academic outcomes. This argument is related to Bourdieu’s (1973) theory of “cultural capital,” which explains how symbolic wealth possessed within classes serves to perpetuate power structures, a notion that will be explained in detail in a subsequent section (p. 71).

Louie (2008) took a somewhat different position and reminded us, “Not only are group differences in parenting habits often overstated, but student achievement results from far more than differences in parenting” (p. 259). In other words, if we over-generalize and focus solely on the black family as the root of the black male’s educational woes, we excuse the institution where teachers and administrators make constant decisions affecting achievement (p. 259). The structure of the system will be outlined in detail, but first, it is helpful to examine the role that the cultural influence of gender plays in the academic achievement of black youth.

**The role of gender.** Black males and females have a decidedly different educational experience in terms of educational perceptions and ultimately, achievement (Hubbard, 1999; MacLeod, 2004). Along with a healthy skepticism about academic achievement translating to life success, Ogbu (2003) argued black males tend to have unrealistic beliefs that they will “become stars and be rich” (p. 122). In her study of AVID, Hubbard (1999) accounted for gender differences in college attainment among African American students as due in part to socialization by a media that continues to “portray successful African American males as either entertainers or athletes” (p. 369). She called this a problematic and a “powerful stereotype” that is ingrained in this country’s ideology (p. 369). Along with these skewed depictions, students’ attitudes about education were found to result from perceptions they formed as young adults living in low-income families and communities (p. 366). Hubbard found that black males in AVID were far less specific about occupational goals than black females, and although they were motivated to attend college, they saw it merely as an avenue to sports (p. 369). The fact that they had slim chances to play professionally seemed to have “no impact on

the fervor of their dreams” (p. 369). Echoing MacLeod’s (1987) research, Hubbard (1999) explained that this dynamic was affirmed in their community context, as black males who gained the greatest respect from peers were those with sexual and athletic prowess, not those who excelled academically (p. 366).

Hubbard pointed out that black females’ ideologies were constructed by the “anticipated roles” they expected to encounter (p. 379). Females worried about how they would get along economically if they did not earn a degree, and “explicitly anticipated a future” with a man who may not provide for them (pp. 373-374). Their familial experience often reinforced their academic urgency. The absence of male figures as fathers and husbands was a commonality, and as a result, the young black women in Hubbard’s study felt they could not anticipate support, and felt the need to be self-dependent. These high school students had witnessed their mothers “struggle to make ends meet” and learned from that experience (p. 372). Furthermore, the female students received “deliberate academic encouragement from their parents” to go to college, not to count on sports scholarships—a decidedly different message from the one that the young black males received. The gender differences exposed here encourage additional research into the community and parent role in the academic achievement of black males (p. 370). As Hubbard has suggested, there is a need to investigate how the past experiences of parents and the interactions of “gender, race, and class” construct students’ academic decisions (p. 366). Understanding the relationship between race, class, and gender is conceptually important to my own research. Students hold, as Hubbard has described, “gender-specific notions about education and economic opportunities students have learned in families” (p. 379). Specifically, family separation, parents’ education and

occupational opportunities seem to create urgency for black females to achieve, while a general distrust of white education and choices to pursue athletic paths seem to characterize many black males. An examination of the role of gender (in interaction with race and class) can help us understand more deeply educational outcomes within the black community.

To understand more fully how cultural constructions such as gender and race play into inequality reproduction, we can turn to Bourdieu (1973), who has highlighted the perceived cultural difference between white and black students, and a devaluing of what he defined as “cultural capital” among certain classes (p. 71). Once again, because a disproportionate number of blacks live in low-income situations, this discussion is helpful in examining how class can contribute to black male educational outcomes.

**Cultural capital.** Bourdieu (1973) observed that the “transmission of power and privilege” is accomplished through education (p. 72). Just as denying blacks the opportunity to learn to read was a tool of enslavement, the most powerful tool to reinforce elite power structures was and is schooling. Bourdieu explained that the system reproduces the existing power structure because it values the “cultural capital” that white middle-class students bring to the classroom and devalues the “cultural capital” minority low-income students bring, which impacts the “reproduction of the structure of power relationships” (p. 71). Simply put, different cultures possess forms of knowledge that are translated by educators differentially. The dominant or white culture is used as a measure by which other cultures are judged. The reality is in the majority of schools, the cultural capital, or the “symbolic wealth socially designated as worthy of being sought” (p. 73) is associated not with blacks, but with whites, not with low-income students but with

middle-class students. When students bring the requisite capital, the school adds to that capital and students are more likely to become eligible for higher education. Advantages are passed on through generations to affluent white students because they come to school with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that were deemed most valuable by the education system. Whereas minority children have not had college-educated parents to help them learn how to navigate the educational system, their white, affluent counterparts whose parents have more likely graduated from college can connect their children to various social networks that can mentor them and improve their chances for academic success. Bourdieu's explanation of cultural capital has helped us to understand how race and class interact with school practices to reproduce inequality.

**Cultural identity.** Martin (2000) explored ways that all African Americans have experienced a negative socialization particularly in terms of mathematics achievement, in spite of the fact that there is “no evidence Black students differ from their peers in their capacity to learn” the particular subject (p. 10). He described this socialization as the shaping of a collective mathematics identity among African Americans resulting from historical, community, and school contexts (p. 19). This notion of cultural identity and its potential effect on the retention of black males in the academically supportive AAMI setting will be examined.

### **Summary of Cultural Explanations and Discussion of Factors**

Many African Americans disproportionately live below the poverty line and may indeed lack the “cultural capital” that is valued by K-12 education and institutions of higher learning (Bourdieu, 1973). Bourdieu showed how power is brokered in the system via a set of cultural habits and forms of communications that are either valued or

devalued, and this dynamic—which is closely related to society’s economic structure—will be examined as a possible factor contributing to the reproduction of inequality among the black males in this study.

Importantly, Martin (2000) has argued that appeals to socioeconomic factors are “limited in explanatory scope” and cannot alone account for the relative underperformance of African Americans (p. 16). In other words, while lack of resources may contribute to disproportionate achievement, this should not detract our attention from the structural inequality that may impede black males. These structural factors will be addressed in the following section of the literature review.

In this study I examine the structure of the school and more specifically the structural arrangements of the AAMI that create conditions that influence the educational outcomes of the black youth who participate in the program. Although the infusion of culturally relevant instruction in their curriculum is likely to be supportive of achievement, it will be important to attend to the attempts the AAMI has made to literally change the structure of the system on behalf of their participants.

### **Structure of the System**

To uncover factors contributing to the persistent underachievement emblematic of the black male educational experience, we must look directly to the schools themselves and their practices. All students, including students of color, Jervis (1996) has asserted, “require an equal share of teacher energy,” and if they do not receive it, achievement will lag and the cycle will be perpetuated (p. 561). However, what actually occurs is that some children become “more central to a school’s agenda than others,” and rarely are these children poor and minority students (p. 548). As subsequent subsections in this paper

address, within the structure of education, interlocking issues—including subtle or covert racist practices, tracking practices such as the over-identification and placement of black males in special education and their under-enrollment in advanced placement (AP) courses as well as standardized testing—may also hamper the black male.

As this review has demonstrated, an amalgamation of individual and cultural explanations have been purported to account for the black man's relative underperformance. However, among all of the factors contributing to their academic underperformance, those that operate as part of the apparatus of the educational system may be the most unfavorable to the black male. Within the structure of the system, multiple mechanisms likely operate to his disadvantage. Bennett (1962) has contended, "In all oppressive regimes ... the system was made up of interarching systems that meshed and intermeshed" (p. 257). Of course, one of these systems is education, where our schools have fallen well short of the mark in terms of providing an equitable and culturally responsive experience.

**Racist practices.** Bonilla-Silva (2010) has explained that racism becomes a structural factor for blacks because it is "systematic" (p. 8). Although race is a cultural factor, racist practices are, like Bonilla-Silva describes, structural and often institutionalized. Although "de jure" racism has become more rare, more common is a new, subtle, but no less virulent strain, "de facto" racism, which can be found in language and practices that support "color-blindness."

Bonilla-Silva has revealed the paradoxical nature of race relations in the contemporary United States, i.e., "professed color blindness" amidst "color-coded inequality" (p. 2). Racism, in a sense, went underground, and color-blind, nearly



undetected racism became the new mechanism of inequality reproduction and reinforcement of white privilege.

Bonilla-Silva explained in part how this occurs, as whites filter issues through four central frames that barricade them from racial reality with an “impregnable yet elastic wall” (p. 46). In this way, whites—both knowingly and unknowingly—provide continued justifications for the systematic reproduction of inequality.

Racism and bias underlie attempts to transform the system, yet they are often hidden. Bonilla-Silva (2003) has described this as a kind of “new racism” that is equally toxic as slavery or segregation in that it can reproduce inequality with a kind of “invisibility” (p. 272). Certainly, accounting for the underperformance of black males must include the systematic reproduction of white privilege, even if it is “like smog” and we cannot see its “poisonous effects” clearly (Bonilla-Silva, 2011).

It is important to develop an awareness and understanding of these frames as they have the potential to appear throughout this process. They include: (a) applying abstract political ideas to make de facto racism appear moral or reasonable; (b) minimizing racism as a thing of the past; (c) suggesting racial phenomena like segregation are natural occurrences; (d) relying on culturally based arguments to explain disproportionate achievement in society (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). The four frames outlined by Bonilla-Silva shed some light on how racism can operate with a cloak of invisibility, maneuvering among seemingly well-meaning individuals and “rendering domination almost invisible” (p. 174). Therefore, it is essential to cultivate awareness of not just overt racism, but, as Spencer (2009) has suggested, we must understand “the subtle ways in which racism constricts” (p. 2).

### **Over-Identification in Special Education and Underrepresentation in AP**

Structural arrangements that disadvantage African Americans disproportionately include their overrepresentation in special education classes and their underrepresentation in AP classes. Both placement practices serve to highlight inequity in the system and may help to explain a test score achievement gap. Artiles, Harry, Reschly, and Chinn (2002) have described the overrepresentation of students of color in special education as one of the most complex, contemporary issues as it is stigmatizing and can “deny individuals the high-quality and life-enhancing education to which they are entitled” (p. 4). Artiles et al. (2002) recognized that poverty can impact special education placement “directly and indirectly” as it affects, among other things, medical care, nutrition, and academic achievement, which in turn “exacerbates the chances of ... placement” (pp. 5-6). Poverty alone, however, cannot explain educational inequity, as poor schools serve primarily students of color and have greater percentages of inexperienced teachers (Artiles et al., 2002). Perhaps most troubling is the “incongruent” nature of special education demographics in relation to educators, i.e., most special education students are poor, male, ethnic minorities while the teachers who serve them are middle-class, female, and white (p. 7).

Finally, Artiles et al. (2002) addressed the issue of bias, which is described as “an elusive factor with deep structural roots” (p. 8). They have claimed that racism and bias, both subtle and overt, have affected the over-identification of the black male in special education. The authors have pointed out that bias should be thought of not just as words and deeds, but also in terms of “historical residua that are layered in social structures” and lead to institutionalized racism (p. 8). Bonilla-Silva (2012) agreed that a kind of

“invisible” racism exists under the surface and is embedded in the context of all “social transactions” (p. 176).

Enrollment may also be affected by the racial makeup of the AP teacher. Importantly, Klopfenstein (2004) has explained that the racial makeup of AP teachers contains a small percentage of African Americans, and this is particularly troubling as black students deciding to enroll in AP may “choose teachers rather than courses” (p. 129). The author has built on the research of Fordham and Ogbu (1986) in pointing out that in an oppressive culture, those AP teachers who are black may even be perceived as “functionaries” (p. 185) of that dominant culture, meaning placement of black students into special education or AP has particular importance for this study, as the ability to enroll in Honors and AP classes is likely to have a direct bearing on AAMI attrition.

**Standardized testing.** Standardized testing may be viewed as a mechanism used to maintain differential power structures and as a justification for explanation of ethnic group deficiencies. Many have argued that standardized tests are written in a way that disadvantages certain races (Sapon-Shevin, 1993). While some have asserted they are appropriate measures of IQ, others argue that the tests, as well as the institutions that administer them, are skewed against the poor and minority students (Mehan et al., 1996, p. 80). Oakes (1985) suggested the substance of the tests, as well as “procedures used to standardize and administer them,” are biased (p. 11).

Herrnstein and Murray (1994) disagreed. They argued the SAT is not discriminatory against blacks, offering a contention that if it were biased, the test would “underpredict their college performance,” but it does not (pp. 280-281). However, they pointed out that blacks have substantially narrowed the IQ test score discrepancy between

themselves and whites, a phenomenon they attribute to socioeconomic improvements, school quality, and perhaps even diminishing racism (p. 293). In this sense, although the authors suggested inherently lower intelligence for African Americans, they conceded here that environmental factors do contribute in some small way to an achievement gap.

Within the structure of the greater system, whether the tests are valid or not, one of the most negative outcomes of standardized testing is their use as an instrument to segregate or track students. MacLeod (2004) agreed that standardized testing and tracking are both “complex mechanisms of social reproduction deeply embedded in the American educational system” (p. 100).

**Tracking.** Research has pointed out that structural arrangements like tracking can serve to perpetuate inequities in achievement (Hubbard & Spencer, 2009). Certainly, a wide chasm exists between what people intend, and as Oakes (1985) reported, “what actually happens as a result of tracking” (p. 191). Some common false assumptions about tracking include the myth that students learn better in homogeneous groups, slower students are more “positive” when segregated, tracked students are easier to teach, and tracking is part of an equitable system of achievement earned by students (p. 192). Oakes maintained we “assume that [tracking] is best for students,” without considering the myriad adverse effects on students and teachers, and that no group of students has been found to consistently benefit from homogeneous grouping (pp. 6-7). The “nearly ubiquitous” practice of tracking portrayed by Oakes is said to both cause and support differences in student outcomes, and can be devastating in terms of self-confidence and motivation (pp. xiv-3).

Tracking seems to produce many unfavorable effects. It can cultivate poor self-esteem, lower aspirations, and serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy if students internalize their track and let it negatively affect motivation and performance (p. 8). Specifically, tracking can, as Ogbu (2003) explained, “reinforce the internalization” in blacks that they cannot perform on par with whites (p. 85). Meanwhile, higher track students experience higher aspirations (Oakes, 1985, p. 143). And, one could even assume these higher tracks may be perceived as the “white” niche or track, producing yet another layer of institutionalized racism (Wells, Revilla, Holme, & Atanda, 2004).

Importantly, tracking affects teachers as well. Through tracking, Oakes (1985) explained students are “identified in a rather public way” and pre-characterized in teachers’ minds (p. 3). Also, teachers of tracked classes assume homogeneity and do not differentiate instruction (p. x). As education has evolved the notion of differentiated instruction has become more critical, but the context of tracking seems to be counterintuitive to diversifying pedagogy. In other words, if students are tracked according to perceived ability then teachers may not feel the need to diversify strategies in order to unlock otherwise hidden potential. Oakes also found the alarming trend that in higher track classes, more time is spent on instruction (p. 99). Briefly, tracking alters the educational landscape and contributes to differences in content, expectations, and instruction (p. xi).

In the context of the black male, tracking has not served him well. Minorities disproportionately appear in lower tracks, and the majority of blacks, particular black males, are placed there (Oakes, 1985, p. 40, 59-64; Mickelson, 2001). Indeed, another evil of tracking is that it “separates students across socioeconomic lines,” and in that

sense mimics economic inequality. In fact, Oakes (1985) has argued that teachers may be preparing lower track students for the lowest levels of the society's structure (p. 91).

Additionally, as a result of tracking, Oakes argued students learn dispositions necessary to reproduce the hierarchical status quo (p. 144). Oakes contended that at best, tracking is inconsistent and does not increase efficiency, opportunity, or achievement, and at worst, it overtly contributes to legitimizing inequality (pp. 40-43, 146). In terms of power dynamics, Oakes remarked that low-track students are rarely "exposed to content we might call high-status" (p. 76, 78), or high-value information aligned with success in the academic and occupational structure.

MacLeod (2004) supported Oakes' critique, arguing the educational system, by sorting students according to achievement or ability, plays a "crucial role in the legitimization of inequality" (p. 113). He asserted that low teacher expectations along with the valuing and devaluing of certain knowledge within the practice of tracking work to "handicap the performance of lower classes" (p. 100). Tracking allows institutions to legitimize inequality if expectations, pedagogy, and the educational experience vary across tracks.

### **Summary of Structural Explanations**

Many structural forces impact the black male educational experience. As this literature review has shown: (a) course placement decisions, special education (Artiles et al., 2002), and AP classes (Klopfenstein, 2004); (b) standardized testing, which tends to disadvantage minorities (Sapon-Shevin, 1993); (c) tracking, which has detrimental effects on both black males and their teachers (Oakes, 1985); (d) a lack of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995); (e) racist practices, including issues of power, and

overt as well as “covert” racist behaviors (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, p. 272) all are likely to shape educational outcomes. Such evidence motivates the question: In what ways if any do these factors affect the retention of black males in AVID’s AAMI?

### **Conclusion of the Literature Review**

The educational system seems to fulfill the nefarious function of legitimizing racism and discriminatory practices to perpetuate the social order. What Hubbard (1999) called “persistent, institutionalized inequality” (p. 379), and what MacLeod (2004) referred to as the “intergenerational transmission of social inequality” (p. 6) continue to beleaguer the black male. This review of the literature associated with this phenomenon has exposed a variety of explanations for the inequality, namely: (a) individual issues, including a resistance to and mistrust of white education; (b) cultural issues, including community and parent-centered forces, the role of gender, the devaluing of cultural capital; (c) structural issues, specifically issues related to the educational system, including racist practices that have been institutionalized.

The continued underperformance of black males and the widening chasm of achievement separating black and white suggest the need to further explore explanations for inequality. AVID serves to traverse some of the challenges to opportunity blacks face in society and within the educational system in particular. Studying AVID’s AAMI with a focus on attrition issues provides an opportunity to understand the multiple factors that contribute to the academic performances of black males. This study makes clear that black males cannot be viewed only in relation to whites, with a deficit orientation towards them (or their culture). As Spencer pointed out, it is an “inadequate space” from which to explore his educational opportunities (personal communication, March 13,

2012). It is only through a more comprehensive microanalysis of the lived academic experiences of black youth that we will better understand their challenges and how they can best be supported.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

This chapter begins with the purpose of the study and the key questions guiding the research, along with a statement on the positionality of the researcher. Then, a profile of both school sites is provided. This is followed by a detailed description of this qualitative research study. Data collection and analysis procedures are discussed, including an explanation of the methods for coding and analysis, and finally, issues of internal and external validity are addressed.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to better understand the factors that shape attrition rates in the AVID AAMI program. Specifically, the study examines the individual, cultural, and structural factors that shape students' experiences in the AAMI, and how these factors interact to influence the retention of black males in the program.

#### **Research Questions**

The primary research question framing this study is: What factors account for the attrition rates of black males in the AVID AAMI program?

Sub-questions include: What individual factors support or impede participation? What cultural factors impact participation and persistence in the program? What programmatic and structural factors present in the classroom and the schools themselves challenge and/or support participation in the AAMI?

#### **Positionality**

I have been intrigued, and quite frankly, angered by the discrepancies between the pervasive portrayals of black male failure and dysfunctionality and the vitality and

community commitment I personally observe. Terms such as “at risk” often account for the cultural understanding of black youth, while summarily dismissing the considerable attributes and sophisticated, unique insights that they possess (Lancia & Meacham, 1998). From the earliest days of my work as a teacher, I was unwilling to accept the depictions of black male failure and oversimplified explanations for black male underperformance.

My work with black males began in 1998 as a beginning teacher-researcher studying the literacy practices of urban youth as they developed a community television program. Through a partnership with a community action organization, I designed and piloted a program where young people utilized storytelling to represent their unique perspectives on the contingencies of inner-city life. The participants wrote, filmed, and edited their own documentary-style vignettes on compelling aspects of the neighborhood that they presented in the form of a community television broadcast. I developed a practical knowledge of how urban youth use stories as a vehicle for representing the complex exigencies of urban life, especially when told through television, a popular medium in urban culture. The theory that informed my project was Baker’s (1984) African American Vernacular theory that assumes literacy for a community reflects and informs its basic struggles, serving as a vehicle to navigate interconnected constraints. As a teacher, I used this knowledge to construct more culturally relevant forms of instruction (Ladson-Billings, 2002). This project taught me many things. Among them was the idea that if black students were given a context that held high expectations, valued their strengths, and provided a culturally relevant pedagogy their engagement and productivity seemed to increase dramatically.

### **Population and Site Descriptions**

In 2009, AVID announced the selection of six pilot schools to implement the AAMI, a program designed to utilize culturally responsive pedagogy and focus on the retention of black males. The participants in my study were from two of these six AAMI pilot sites. In order to protect the identity of the two pilot sites and all of the participants, pseudonyms will be used throughout the research.

The two AAMI sites were very different. While Ralph Abernathy High School (RAHS) in Eastern Los Angeles features an AVID AAMI class composed entirely of African Americans, the AAMI program at George Washington High School (GWHS) in Bakersfield is made up of a mixture of African American, Hispanic, and other minority students. Another key difference was that while the RAHS AVID AAMI class met every day during the school day, as well as bi-weekly in an after-school meeting, the GWHS AVID AAMI students met only once a month at lunch. The GWHS AVID AAMI students were distributed across the AVID classes and did not have their own official AAMI class embedded in the school day.

The variation in the amount of time spent on the program and the type of intervention used by coordinators prompted a comparison of sites. Although a traditional case study design was not employed, some site comparisons were helpful because they allowed me to investigate a complex set of contextual issues that included but certainly were not limited to (a) how individual factors, such as a resistance to white schooling; (b) cultural factors including parent and community-centered influences; (c) structural arrangements within the school influenced the retention of the black males in the AAMI.

**Study Site #1: RAHS**

Located in the San Bernardino High School District of Eastern Los Angeles County, Ralph Abernathy High School serves 1,772 students. The school did not make AYP in 2011, and its CST results were below the district and state average. Of the school population, 80% of students were eligible for free or reduced lunch in 2010, and 49% of the population was African American. More than 500 students (30% of the campus) participate in AVID.<sup>1</sup>

AVID Center generously provided enrollment and retention statistics for AAMI students. These statistics are detailed here to identify trends in the participation. In the 2009-2010 school year, 29 total RAHS students were enrolled in the AAMI (16 freshmen, five sophomores, five juniors, and three seniors). Of the 26 non-seniors, 18 were retained (a retention of 69%) In the second year of the program (2010-2011), 18 new freshmen and 10 students from grades 10 through 12 were recruited to bring the total number of AVID AAMI students up to 46. AVID did not provide statistics for the 2011-2012 school year but at the start of this research in September of 2012, the AVID counselor reported that total enrollment in the AAMI program was “close to 60.” Later on in the semester, the counseling office estimated the total AAMI number at “about 52.”

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<sup>1</sup> *Information above is a composite gathered from school websites, district websites, Wikipedia, and education.com.*

At no point in the research process did this number appear to reflect the accurate total of AAMI participants. Coordinator Mr. C pointed out that “because participation is low, it is nothing ... to rent a couple vans” that would hold a total of 16 people. During the time I was collecting data (September 2012 through March 2013), at best there were 30 active AAMI participants observed in their AAMI homerooms or in their bi-weekly after-school meeting.

On the final day of student data collection, AAMI staff helped to administer the anonymous survey in conjunction with an afternoon pizza party. Student-athletes who had to leave the site early for a game were given the survey to complete in the morning. Even with all those students accounted for, only 28 surveys were returned, corroborating the theory that the actual number of AAMI participants was much closer to 30 to 40 students than the 50 to 60 students that the site reported. The program seemed to lose approximately 30 to 40 percent of its students each year.

RAHS, situated in a rural section of San Bernardino, is a classic example of a California open campus without traditional hallways. As soon as you enter the RAHS building, the AAMI is prominent. Photos of AAMI students are displayed and a description of the program is featured in a sleek, framed poster on the wall in the main office. The AAMI epicenter is at the back of the campus, defined by the two side-by-side homerooms of Mr. Curtis and Mr. Ellis. While Mr. Curtis, known by everyone around campus simply as Mr. “C,” acted as AAMI coordinator, he shared his AAMI teaching duties with Mr. Ellis. The homerooms of these two African American male teachers created a headquarters for the AAMI where students congregated throughout the day in order to meet as a group or to seek guidance.

These classrooms are where members are expected to report at first bell. During the AAMI homeroom time, greetings are exchanged, plans for various activities and events are discussed, and very often, elements related to African American culture are explored. This is the time when students have the opportunity to receive culturally relevant pedagogy (one of the main tenets of the program). However, like most traditional high school homeroom experiences, it is a quick and chaotic time, marked by myriad student issues and the need to address daily site operational items. This fleeting 21-minute period is the only AAMI time that students and teachers have together.

The young men in the RAHS AAMI are very prominent members of the campus community, according to the AAMI teachers. The students are often identified with their program's signature element, namely "dressing out" for success every Monday. The fashionable and professional image projected by these young men is well-received by teachers and administrators, and even a noticeable contingency of non-AAMI peers. Overall, the perception of the program on campus is decidedly positive.

#### **Study Site #2: George Washington High School (GWHS)**

Located in the rural community of Westlake, George Washington High School is the oldest high school in Bakersfield, CA, and operates as a "single school" district. Of the school's 1,000 students, 11% are African American, 61% are Hispanic, and the rest are mix of Caucasian and Asian students. The school's mission states: "Students are educated and empowered for success," and over the past 10 years, it has improved API by 160 points, with a 2008 dropout rate of 5%, well below the state average. AVID has its own page on the school website, complete with resources including information about college admissions, entrance exams, and test preparation.

The 2009 through 2011 enrollment and retention statistics provided by AVID revealed that 29 total members comprised the initial cohort (nine freshmen, eight sophomores, nine juniors, and three seniors). Of the 26 non-seniors, nine were retained (a retention rate of only 35%). The program added four new freshmen to go with 12 students from grades 10 through 12, making a total of 16 students enrolled in 2010-2011. Once again, AVID did not provide statistics for the 2011-2012 school year, but at the start of this research in September of 2012, the AAMI coordinator and AVID counselor reported total enrollment in the program at approximately 20. During the research process and in particular during observations that took place from September 2012 to February 2013, however, there were never more than five members of the program in a classroom together. It wasn't until a meeting was eventually held—under the auspices of their AAMAC or AMAC (African American Male AVID Club, a phenomenon to be discussed in detail in the next two chapters)—that 14 of the approximately 16 active members currently enrolled came together. It appears from the data provided by AVID as well as the data collected in this study that after a large initial drop-off after the first year, total enrollment in the program has held steady, with 16 reported members in 2010-2011 and approximately 16 active participants in 2012-2013.

GWHS, a small, open campus in an extremely rural outskirts of Bakersfield, does not have an AAMI/AMAC presence that is visible on campus. However, the school is an all-AVID site, meaning that the AVID program is part of every aspect of the academic process and every student is exposed to the AVID academic strategies.

The majority of the observations at GWHS were of formal AVID tutorials and classrooms that included decidedly AVID pedagogy in terms of organization, acquainting

students with college, and other strategies. With no formal AAMI class scheduled for a specified period in the school day, the AAMI became a club called AAMAC. Members met approximately once per month, and that was their only direct exposure to the AAMI curriculum. The program was held in the classroom of a Caucasian teacher named Mr. Hart, where students received the benefit of daily mentoring within the context of AVID-based classes run by their AAMI teacher.

The young men in the GWHS AMAC club were not identifiable in class because not every African American male in the AVID class was necessarily an AAMI member due to attrition or because they simply chose not to enroll. The one force that helped to unify the program on the GWHS campus was the efforts and dedication of the AAMI teacher and his mentorship of the young men in the program. Overall, the perception of the AVID program was extremely positive at GWHS, and since the AAMI program was considered one and the same with AVID, it also garnered a positive impression on campus.

### **Conceptual Underpinnings for the Research**

This study takes an interpretivist approach to the research. Miles and Huberman (1994) explained that in this line of inquiry “researchers are no more ‘detached’ from their study than are their informants” (p. 8). The authors pointed out that because interviewers bring their own frames of reference, interviews therefore will be a “co-elaborated” (p. 8) process with both parties involved. This perspective challenges those who see interviews merely as information gathering. Woods and Trexler (2001) defined interpretivism as research that seeks to “understand and interpret” phenomena as well as ascribing meaning to it by participants (p. 69), including the researcher. In order to



understand the interrelationship of factors that shape attrition rates in the AAMI, I took an interpretivist, qualitative research approach to the study. I describe my research design next.

### **Qualitative Design**

Mathison (1988) described the importance of using multiple data sources and methods as a means to “triangulate” findings and therefore increase their validity (p. 13). Miles and Huberman (1994) defined validity as the “plausibility” and “confirmability” of meanings emergent in the data (p.11). As this study is qualitative in nature, it will utilize procedures to check for the accuracy or “qualitative validity” of the findings (Creswell, 2009, p. 190). In order to examine what forces impact attrition in the AAMI, this study used triangulation techniques in the data collection. Overall, triangulation is a way to give the results of the research more depth, and to account for the “richness and complexity” of behavior (Jamison, 2010, p. 21). Data was collected from AVID AAMI students, teachers, and coordinators in order to examine the program from various perspectives with particular attention to factors that support and challenge black male achievement and program retention.

Open-ended qualitative interviews and follow-up interviews were conducted, extensive observations were made, and surveys were administered at the end of the study based on data already collected from those interviews and observations. Woods and Trexler (2001) concurred that by using a combination of data collection techniques the researcher “capitalizes on the strengths of each and minimizes the weaknesses inherent” (p. 74) in any one strategy.

While I used both interviews and a survey instrument that I expected would reveal important quantitative data, the qualitative portion of the study became the most helpful data source. Survey data provided some insight into students' backgrounds and experiences with the program but primarily allowed me to cross check data across respondents and the two sites in my study. Interviews provided "rich insight into human behavior" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.106) and allowed me to dig deeper into the factors that would help me answer my research questions about retention and attrition rates among black males in AVID's AAMI.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) pointed out that the etic (outsider) view may have no meaning within the emic (insider) view of a culture, and that qualitative methods are "useful for uncovering emic views" (p. 106). In other words, in order for a researcher to better understand how a program operates from the outside looking in, the study can benefit from hearing from the insiders. The survey data expanded the 25 student respondents from the qualitative interviews by adding an additional 17 students, and provided additional insights into student-program relationships. This data was compared with the interview and observational data, which helped to unpack some of the cultural and structural factors that influenced AAMI participation.

### **Observation**

This qualitative study included observation, interview, and survey data. Woods and Trexler (2001) pointed out that observation presents both strengths and weakness as a data-gathering technique. First and foremost, observations provide a context to the data and to the entire narrative and greatly enrich the researcher's understanding of and insight into a particular dynamic. In addition, observations can provide a check against interview

and survey data as well as against the researcher's own biases and perceptions (Woods & Trexler, 2001). Cresswell (2009) encourages researchers to use an "observational protocol" that may include "descriptive notes" (p. 181) related to participants, settings, and events, as well as "reflective notes" related to interpretations and/or potential biases (p. 182). Following this advice I used descriptive and reflective notes during both the classroom observations and during the meetings I observed.

At both sites, I was able to observe students interacting with other students and staff on site, including the AAMI teacher, fellow AAMI members, other non-AAMI AVID members, and AVID teachers, AVID counselors, and various students around the campus not affiliated with AVID. Observations were somewhat different at each site due to the structural components of the site and the program. At the first school site (RAHS), from September 2012 to February of 2013 I closely observed 17 students who had volunteered to be a part of the research. I spent five to seven full school days over the course of multiple visits doing classroom observations and qualitative interviews, and had the benefit of starting every day in their homeroom, after which I was able to "shadow" and observe them throughout the school day

Observations at RAHS were of the all-AAMI homeroom model. There I could interact with and even talk with the AAMI as a whole group. I was also able to observe an RAHS AAMI meeting that was held with various stakeholders, from parents to community members to AAMI staff.

At the GWHS school site, although I conducted research for the same six months and made approximately the same amount of visits (five to seven full school days), the AAMI was simply small pockets of students embedded into AVID classes. The teacher

did not address the young men as AAMI members in particular, unless it was for the purposes of my research and awareness.

At the culmination of the data collection process, I made a final visit to both of the sites to complete formal follow-up interviews. These were based on themes that had emerged from the initial interviews, informal follow-ups, and related data analysis. For the very first time during my observing at the GWHS AAMI (or AMAC, as they referred to it), all of the group's members convened as a whole to meet as a club and to complete the final survey.

Observations provided (a) a context to the research itself; (b) a chance to interact and/or make connections with the students; (c) a more informed approach to the interview process; (d) a more informed approach to survey construction; (e) a means to cross check findings. Perhaps most importantly, the observations allowed me to form a deeper understanding of how individual, cultural, and structural factors were shaping the AAMI experience of the participants and how these factors were impacting retention rates.

### **Interview**

Interviewing also has both advantages and disadvantages as a methodology. As Woods and Trexler (2001) explained, interviewing allows the researcher to “move back and forth in time to construct the past, understand the present, and predict the future” (p. 74). In addition, the researcher may be able to access information unavailable in other forms of data collection such as observation and survey. However, the authors pointed out that data culled from interviews will be “highly reflective of the interviewee's perceptions and biases” (p. 74) and maybe even by the interviewee's emotional state.

Researchers should also maintain an awareness of their own perceptions and biases during the process. My own position as a researcher, a white male and an educator, will, as Maher and Tetreault (1993) explained, “affect the intellectual focus” (p. 118) of the process. Therefore, I made a concerted effort to monitor my thoughts, feelings, and actions, and reflected on my potential biases in terms of, among other things, race, background, and SES.

Many explanations have been offered to explain the educational outcomes of black males as reviewed in Chapter 2. This literature review directly informed my interview questions. Interviews were conducted based on Patton’s (2002) description of a general interview guide approach, in which a set of key issues is established prior to the interview so that the interviewer’s flexibility can be maintained while ensuring all interviewees will explore each key area (p. 342). Please see Appendix A for a sample interview guide for student, teacher, and coordinator/counselor interviews.

Interviews were conducted with AVID AAMI students, teachers, and coordinators in order to understand the program, paying particular attention to factors that support and challenge black male achievement and retention. Over a five-month period, 17 students and four teachers, coordinators, and counselors from RAHS, and eight students and one teacher/coordinator/counselor from GWHS were part of the initial round of interviews. The initial round of interviews included multiple conversations of varied lengths with individuals and small groups of students (pairs and groups of three), and follow-up conversations based on my reflective notes and the initial themes that were emerging from the data. Flexibility in scheduling was necessary to accommodate students and

teachers' schedules, as both students and teachers were involved in athletics and other school activities on top of their general academic responsibilities.

In the final site visits that took place over two days at each school, final interviews were conducted with some students who were available at this time. At the all-AAMI site (RAHS), six students, one teacher, and one former coordinator gave a final interview informed by the interviews, observations, and themes that emerged in coding and analysis. At the AAMI-embedded site (GWHS), I interviewed six students during the final site visits and had informal conversations with their AAMI teacher, who also served as AAMI coordinator and AVID counselor. Questions asked during these interviews were informed by the initial interviews, observations, and themes that emerged in coding and analysis, and were used for clarification purposes and to probe for a deeper understanding of the factors impacting retention rates in the program.

### **Interviewee Selection**

All of the participants in this study were high school students, and therefore after obtaining site consent to conduct research, permission had to be obtained from the students' parent or guardian in accordance with the site's IRB (Institutional Research Board). The initial letter to inform parents and students about the study is provided as Appendix B. This included the provision of a consent form for students and parents alike that explained the lengths, risks, and potential benefits of the study. These consent forms are provided as Appendix C and Appendix D. Students were provided ample time to complete their form, and at both sites the AAMI teacher along with myself encouraged students to obtain signatures from their parents. All students who returned their signed parent permission form and signed their individual consent form were interviewed. At the

all-AAMI site (RAHS), 17 out of approximately 50 students turned in their consent form. A significant portion of the students were not interviewed or surveyed because they failed to volunteer or did not appear at their AAMI class or at the after-school AAMI meeting. At the other site where the AAMI was embedded into the AVID program (GWHS), eight of approximately 20 students volunteered and were interviewed for a total of 25 student interviews.

### **Group Interviews**

While individual interviews were conducted with two of the AAMI young men, most student interviews were conducted in groups of two or three. The purpose of the group interviews was three-fold: (a) it maximized the use of research time; (b) it minimized the impact on the teacher's daily classroom routine with less coming-and-going of students; (c) it seemed to allow the participants to feel comfortable and at ease.

### **Multiple-Session Interviews**

Final follow-up interviews were conducted with a portion of the overall sample group who had originally volunteered to be interviewed. At the all-AAMI site, six of 17 students who were interviewed previously were given a final follow-up interview on the last day of data collection, and six of nine students from the AAMI-embedded site participated in the final follow-up experience. The follow-up interviewees were chosen based on convenience for both the student and the teacher in terms of availability, time, and the impact on the particular school days when the visit took place. Once again, these follow-up interview sessions were based directly on the thematic categories that emerged in the initial interviews and observations, and were then cross-checked with survey data in order to clarify and deepen those understandings.

It was paramount that this research was in no way intrusive or distracting to the important work students and teachers were doing in the classroom. Therefore, flexibility was also required in terms of people's time and availability. In other words, the AAMI teacher and coordinator dictated the flow of interviews and observations based on what would be most effective in terms of maximizing time, minimizing impact, and reaching the greatest number of participants.

Thus, while the great majority of interviews were recorded and transcribed, about 10 percent took on an informal, conversational approach instead and were captured in my note-taking. Although I did not share my email address with students, I did give it to AVID AAMI teachers and coordinators so that they could share their responses electronically. This strategy was used throughout the process to coordinate visits, but also to occasionally clarify something in the data collection or to expand my descriptions of particular students.

### **Survey**

A survey instrument was constructed in the form of a questionnaire based in large part on the first round of open-ended qualitative interviews. The survey instruments administered to each site are provided as Appendix E and Appendix F. These instruments were administered at the very end of data collection for triangulation purposes. The survey also made comparisons between the sites easier (Jamison, 2010). Importantly, I captured the sentiments of more students with survey data than I did with the interviews.

Specifically, while only 17 of the approximately 50 students reported to be in the program at RAHS volunteered to be a part of the study, the anonymous survey was administered to 28 students at this site—an additional 11 students. At GWHS, although



only nine volunteered of the reported 20 students enrolled in the program, the anonymous survey was able to capture the sentiments of 14 students—an additional five students at this site.

From my observations over the course of five months, as previously discussed the real number of AAMI participants present on a daily basis at the all-AAMI RAHS site in homeroom and in meetings was much closer to 30 than the 50 that was reported, which meant I was able to secure comments from the great majority of “active” participants at this site. The dynamic of absentee AAMI members at RAHS may be attributed to the fact that all black males in AVID were automatically placed in the AAMI program, a dynamic discussed in the subsequent chapter regarding program intake. Students not able to be reached by either interview or survey were most likely those students who were not participating routinely in the program and were not showing up for the AAMI homeroom experience. Once again, at the second study site, the AAMI-embedded GWHS, the total number of AAMI (or AMAC) students was reported as 20 at the outset of data collection, but by the end of this study it was discovered that the actual number participating was actually 16. Over the course of the year, four students had been dropped from the program. Therefore, at this site the survey captured the sentiments of the great majority of students (14 of 16) actively participating in the program.

I chose to analyze the data collected from the surveys to broaden and cross check my understandings of the thematic categories that emerged in the initial and follow-up interviews. The survey included demographic information of the student participants, along with questions concerning how the following factors were influencing retention in the AVID AAMI: (a) individual factors such as motivation, self confidence, and

discipline; (b) cultural and race-related factors including perception and image, family dynamics, and cultural response to education (c) structural factors including intake and intervention issues, time and scheduling concerns, and economics; (d) key AAMI forces including the “club effect,” pedagogy, mentorship, leadership, and opportunities provided within the program.

### **Data Collection and Instrumentation**

The first round of data collection began with site visits, focused on general observations of AVID and AAMI’s presence on campus and the daily operations of each program. Observations were focused on what AVID and the AAMI are doing systematically and/or in terms of teacher pedagogy to ameliorate the issues typically exacerbating black male inequality. These activities included mentoring, building students’ leadership capacity, and providing opportunities that would prepare these young men for future success. Observations also centered on the curriculum and pedagogy within the AAMI. I also visited some of the students’ general classes looking specifically for evidence of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010). I paid attention to student factors that were supporting or impeding participation, including issues of motivation and self-confidence. I looked for evidence of language that indicated students’ perception and image of themselves in relationship to the program. I also paid attention to issues such as social, cultural, or race-related factors that were likely to be influencing participation and persistence in the program. Finally, I observed programmatic factors that were challenging and/or supporting persistence in the AAMI, such as the time constraints of the program, any interventions that were taking place, and the various impacts of funding on the daily operations of the AVID AAMI.

Site visits and observations also included building rapport with teachers, students, and staff at all levels. This process was essential in order to broker the level of access necessary. This focus on relationship-building shifted to include pedagogical observations along with student, teacher, and coordinator interviews.

### **Data Analysis**

Miles and Huberman (1994) have viewed qualitative analysis as a three-phase process they described as consisting of “concurrent flows of activity” (p. 10), and they are: (a) data reduction; (b) data display; (c) conclusion-drawing verification. I will define each part of the process as it pertains to this study. A glossary of key terms as they apply to this particular study and as they appear in the data analysis is available for reference as Appendix H.

Miles and Huberman described data reduction as occurring “continuously throughout” the research process and as the process of “selecting ... simplifying ... and transforming” (p. 10) the data gathered from, in this case, field observation notes and interview transcriptions. During each site visit and each classroom observation, a reflective observation journal was kept to not only add context to the data collected in interviews and surveys, but also to begin to detail what I was learning about each of the participants so that our later conversations could be more fruitful. I coded the interview transcriptions and developed themes. These codes are completely described in the subsequent section.

The research questions for this study provided a lens for developing the initial concepts to become categories for coding. “In vivo” codes based on respondents’ actual language and descriptive codes guided the analysis of both interviews and observations

(Saldana, 2011). These descriptive codes are provided in full as Appendix G, and were used during the thematic analysis of the open-ended qualitative interviews.

Some of the codes, relationships, and potential themes emerged during the conversations I had with the participants. In these cases a journal proved effective to record observations, develop initial codes, and reflect on the experience. Body language, intonation, and outward image among many other factors were noted as well. After the interviews were transcribed, this coding and analysis process—a discovery process of another kind—directly informed the development of the survey instrument as well as the formation of questions for the follow-up interviews. I used these same codes to examine the follow-up conversations.

The codes were arranged in the following categories: (a) individual; (b) cultural; (c) structural or programmatic factors, along with forces specific to each site model and forces directly related to retention and attrition by the students. Because some of the codes or ideas applied to individual, cultural, and structural aspects of the AAMI, I assigned each aspect a color and indicated relationships accordingly with a circle. For example, if one of the participants explained that dressing out was part of the AAMI's expectations, it was circled in the color blue (indicating a programmatic factor). However, if in the context of the passage dressing out was described as a component of black culture or of his home or community, it was circled in the color green (indicating a cultural factor). I also used an "8" symbol to indicate a connection or relationship of two or more factors, a critical aspect of the coding when examining what factors shaped attrition rates in the program.

Polkinghorne (1995) described a “recursive movement” where emerging categories are tested and re-tested for the “best fit” in terms of organizing the data (p. 10). Then, he emphasized the importance of a “second level of analysis” that seeks to discover causal, correlational, and other relationships between categories (p. 10). These relationships may be derived from previous theory such as the traditional explanations for inequality reproduction, or concepts that are “inductively derived” during data analysis (p. 13). The data was analyzed by organizing the codes categorically and by engaging in a process Saldana (2011) described as “themeing,” or summarizing the inherent meaning according to the generation of key ideas (p. 111).

Data display as described by Miles and Huberman (1994) consists of organizing and compressing the information so that conclusions may begin to be drawn. The initial organization of themes resulted in three major categories: (a) analysis of each interview in order to view participant responses in context as well as in relation to theme; (b) analysis of relationships, specifically the individual, cultural, and structural factors related to attrition and retention as well as to one another; (c) key forces at work within the program at both sites that impacted retention issues and would later anchor the case studies.

### **Validity Issues**

Woods and Trexler (2001) have explained that interpretivist researchers are concerned with both internal and external validity. As mentioned earlier, triangulation techniques were used in this study as a means of “cross checking the data and interpretations” (p. 75) for accuracy by looking at both alternate data sources (student, teacher, and coordinator) and data collection sources (observation, interview, survey).

This is an attempt to bolster not only the credibility or internal validity of the findings, but also the external validity, or how well it will translate to another context (Woods & Trexler, 2001), while recognizing that findings from this study are not assumed to be generalizable to other contexts. Cresswell (2009) has pointed out that providing a rich, thick description of the setting and participants as well offering multiple perspectives on emergent themes can also add to the study's overall validity.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

Findings for this study were organized around the individual, cultural, and structural factors supporting or impeding the retention of African American males in the AVID AAMI across two pilot sites. These factors have been helpful in previous studies designed to understand the efficacy of the AVID program more generally (Mehan, et al., 1996). Although each factor is described separately, they are very much interrelated, and the connections among the various factors will be described in more detail in subsequent sections of this chapter. Although formal case studies and a cross case analysis will not be presented, analyzing each school site individually as well as in relation to one another, in some instances, helped me to better understand the successes and challenges of the program in retaining black male participation.

#### **Individual Factors**

This section will discuss a series of characteristics linked to the individual students in the AAMI and how those determinants influenced retention rates in the program. It begins with an analysis of the traits of motivation and self-confidence among the AAMI participants, and describes the significance of those factors in maintaining and improving the rate of retention. The section continues with a discussion on generational apathy and its negative effect on student “buy-in,” or belief in and support for the AAMI and its message. The section also examines the somewhat complex role that athletics played on student retention in the AAMI. The section concludes with a discussion of peer perception and self-image and how “dressing out,” or wearing clothes that project a professional, fashionable and respectable image, impacted participation in the program.

### **Limited Self-Confidence and Lack of Motivation Influence Retention**

Results from the survey and interviews revealed that some students' lack of motivation and self-confidence influenced their participation in the program. Ms. Garcia, first-year AVID coordinator and third-year AVID counselor, said motivation and confidence are closely related. She explained it this way: "Well, when they come in as freshmen there's a big lack of motivation to be really high-achieving. But I think it's a lot related to confidence. [For example,] I don't think they see themselves as 'A' students."

Students also mentioned a lack of self-confidence. Michael, a RAHS AAMI ninth grader, said lack of confidence, or as he stated, "just being afraid of failure," was his biggest challenge in achieving his academic goals. Michael, dubbed by his teacher Mr. Ellis as "the face of freshman in the AAMI," recognized that gaining confidence was one of the most important benefits of the program and something he knew he needed to work toward.

**Confidence and communication.** Despite the AAMI's best intentions to build the confidence of students in an academic context, and their apparent success in doing this with students like Michael, some students continued to demonstrate a lack of confidence. The students' self-assurance was challenged, in some cases, by their perception that they could not communicate well, a skill that is emphasized in AAMI and AVID generally. Solomon, a goal-oriented freshman, explained that he struggled with self-confidence because he was not a good public speaker: "It's just the idea that I might mess up or might not be as good as the teacher expected or [the] class expected ... it's just pretty nerve-wracking standing up in front of everybody." Darrius, a four-year



member of the AAMI, agreed that some students' poor communication skills undermined their willingness to see themselves as being able to "do school." He pointed out that this was particularly true among the younger students. Darrius observed, "They [get] nervous or ... they will freeze up." D'Shawn, an 11<sup>th</sup>-grade student from the GWHS site, admitted that he was challenged in terms of feeling self-confident as a public speaker: "They tell us to be confident but ... I still have a little fear of talking." D'Shawn's classmate, Allen, an AVID senior and an AAMI member since his sophomore year, attributed attrition in the program to a lack of students' self confidence tied specifically to the fact that some students did not want to talk in class. He reasoned that his friend dropped out because "he probably [was] just afraid that he would [express himself in the] wrong [way]."

According to Allen, his friend was not able to handle the rigors of having to speak in class—something that AVID's AAMI demands. The AAMI expects that encouraging students to speak publicly will improve their language skills, build their self-confidence, and enhance academic achievement.

**Level of motivation is linked to buy-in.** This study found that buy-in, or belief in and support for the AAMI program's overall philosophies, significantly influenced their motivation and ultimately retention in the program. Ms. Garcia, the RAHS AVID counselor, drew a direct connection between buy-in and expulsion from the AVID program. The counselor explained, "Usually ... the students who aren't buying in and aren't being successful in AAMI aren't being successful in AVID, so they're getting exited from AVID." In other words, students who lacked buy-in were more prone to conduct that would lead to their expulsion from the AVID program, and thus the AAMI.

Students at the GWHS site agreed that a lack of buy-in set them up for expulsion from the program. Raymond, a freshman, explained it this way: “Some of the kids ... don’t listen. They got kicked out ... but if you can stay in there and listen and pay attention and get your work done [you will remain in the program].”

RAHS AAMI counselor Ms. Garcia saw buy-in as inextricably linked to time in the program, pinpointing the ninth- and 10th-grade as the most at-risk time for attrition: “I notice it’s usually the younger kids [who] drop out because they ... were never getting with the program and they don’t feel comfortable dressing out on Monday.” The site coordinator Mr. C explained that for students without initial buy-in, motivation, or as much time in the AAMI, aspects of the program such as “dressing out,” that is wearing a dress shirt and tie (a requirement to be discussed in more detail later in this chapter) proved to be problematic and caused them to drop out. Conversely, he stated, “For the students who are rooted in AAMI, who are in it to win, who are working hard, who believe in the philosophies and the things that we’re teaching, [the daily requirements of the AAMI] don’t affect them at all.”

Mr. C acknowledged that the lack of student buy-in and lack of motivation might not always be readily apparent and thus, without knowing which students are struggling, it was hard for him to take the necessary action. He explained it this way:

That’s what’s so hard and that’s what upsets me ... when they sit in here and they look at me and they shake their head, “Yes, I’m going to do it.” And they walk out of here and it’s the farthest thing from their mind.

Mr. C explained that one part of the job description for an AAMI teacher is attempting to motivate students who are demotivated or who lack buy-in. Student buy-in

was related to an array of factors including increasing motivation and confidence, and whether the young men had a healthy relationship with a male role model. Buy-in was threatened by various factors, including, according to AAMI teachers like Mr. C, a generational apathy that was even more pronounced in the African American males than students in general, due to the potentially demotivating role of athletics.

***Generational apathy.*** Some teachers and coordinators reported that students' lack of self-confidence and motivational issues were the product of a generational apathy found across racial and ethnic groups, including whites. Mr. C, an AAMI teacher at RAHS, suggested: "It's just a part of being a young man. You think you're smarter than the previous generation." His comments suggest that some of this apathy could be simply related to gender, or maleness and belonging to this new generation.

According to Mr. C, however, some AAMI students demonstrated a lack of buy-in similar to what is evident among many non-AAMI students of the current generation:

They're like any other kid. They feel like, "I'm smarter than you are. You were weaker than me and I'm smarter than you were, so what happened to you, what you went through, is not going to happen to me. You worked hard but I'm not going to have to work hard." There's a sense of apathy that comes with every generation. And this generation wants more but expects to work less.

Mr. C felt that a direct link exists between students' buy-in to the program and their level of motivation. Mr. C characterized a lack of motivation as an unwillingness to "go the extra mile," which he said is necessary to succeed in the program. As a consequence of students' lacking motivation, mentors often spin their wheels when trying to assist students in the program. He explained it this way:

Twenty percent of the ones who are here don't really want to be here [and] when it comes to going an extra mile or even coming to a meeting or do anything outside of what they were going to do originally it's not happening.

In other words, students without buy-in were not motivated to do anything extra to succeed. As we collected student and parent consent forms at the outset of the research, one comment by Mr. C seemed to encapsulate this dynamic: "For some of these young men, if you told them they would get a million dollars for turning in that paper or participating in something extra, you still wouldn't have those papers."

*Apathy and the role of athletics.* Mr. C believed that apathy might be even more pronounced in the black community, in part because of what he described as the demotivating effect of athletics. It is important to note, however, that young black men are the target audience for messages in the media that glorify athletic achievement within their race, and thus, this is a dynamic exacerbated by societal rather than merely community forces. Mr. C explained that athletics plays a negative role in the students' academic lives because it can create unrealistic future goals.

Mr. C was likely right because most students expressed the belief that they had a good chance of a professional sports career. In fact, of the 42 students anonymously surveyed across both study sites, only 9 of the 42 (or 21%) disagreed with a statement that athletics was their path to future success. Tyrell, an RAHS freshman, estimated that his chances of making it to the NFL were "probably like one in ten" when in fact the number is more like 1 in 16,000 (Georgia Career Information Center, 2006).

It is hardly surprising that athletics can have a detrimental effect on buy-in. Mr. C explained that young men with a false sense that athletics will provide them with a path

to future success will not buy-in to the program, will not be open to mentorship, and will not be motivated to attend AAMI events. He explained, "I have ninth-graders taking leadership positions in the school. They're the ones who will come. But [another] young man is not going to come because it doesn't pertain to him. He's going to play basketball." It is possible, though, that this young man may just not see AVID's relevance in impacting his life chances. Nevertheless, prioritization of athletics over academics decreases buy-in to the programs' philosophies and interferes with teachers' efforts to mentor the students, ultimately decreasing participation. Mr. C discussed his own efforts to mentor AAMI students and observed the following pushback pattern:

[A student may say,] "I'm going to be an NFL player. I'm going to play basketball." He doesn't value what I'm trying to do for him because he doesn't think that what I'm saying is valid, because he wants to play basketball for a living.

Comments from students verified Mr. C's perspective. Keith, one of Mr. C's students at RAHS, saw athletics as a viable career path, rather than a career that utilized academic strengths. He explained that "[communication] could be my career path but like I'm trying to focus on stuff like sports." Although he acknowledged that his teachers had informed him of the challenges of pursuing athletics professionally, Keith reiterated, "I see it as my number one career path." His classmate, Tyrell, said he focused on academics only because "it provides a path to athletics," and similarly, Devin, the running back for the GWHS football team, said his "main number one goal" was the NFL and that college was merely "a step that [he] had to take."

Other students disagreed. D'Shawn, a student at GWHS, emphasized the importance of priorities, reporting that he “put academics first ... before anything.” Even some standout athletes like Albert, a freshman at GWHS, were very clear about the significance of academics. Albert said: “If you don't have an education you can't play sports or make it anywhere else.”

Thus, I found that sentiments were clearly mixed as to the impact of athletics on AAMI retention. On the one hand, students' individual perceptions regarding their classroom skills, or even the viability of them being able to “do school,” undermined the students' motivation. Being situated in a black male culture in which students saw others from their racial group succeeding in athletics challenged their willingness to remain in the program. On the other hand, there was some evidence that many AAMI students believed that grades took precedence over playing sports. The relationship between athletics and academic focus is a complicated one and since I was not able to interview the students who dropped out of the program, it is difficult to know their attitudes toward athletics and academics. The qualitative interviews I did conduct, however, revealed that there is some variation in students' commitment to grades over athletics.

### **Perception and Image Influence Retention**

Many of the students I interviewed were quite aware of how people view young black males, and this perception or image influenced their participation in the AAMI. Jhamir, an RAHS sophomore athlete, for example, struggled with other people's predictions of what would happen with students like him and found some reason for optimism given the policies and practices of the AAMI program:

The hardest part, I believe, is [to] prove other people wrong ... because a lot of black males, they don't really have a lot of chances to get into college. So having the AAMI and...dress[ing] out on Monday and just looking like we belong in college makes it easier.

For many of the African American males I interviewed, their self-image was impacted by a stereotype that others had of them—an image they desperately wanted to change. Jhamir explained, “The challenging part for me is trying to get everybody to look at us differently than what they already think of us.” His classmate, Keith, who was recruited into the AAMI, attempted to define the stereotypical image of the black male, particularly in the context of perception and expectation: “Well, what people see of a black male is someone who gets in trouble, runs around doing what they want, someone who can't do good in school ... they look for something bad to happen.” Jhamir and Keith's teacher, Mr. Ellis, described the “stigma” that these young men must confront and hopefully transcend: “Being black is bad. Being black is ghetto. Being black equates to poverty. Being black equates to lack of intelligence.” Under the pervasiveness of these sentiments, students struggled to think of themselves as able to do school.

**The dressing out strategy.** At RAHS, the practice of “dressing out” was an attempt by the AAMI to counteract the non-academic image that others might have of these students, and to build confidence in the young men. Keith, an RAHS student, explained that part of the reason the program emphasizes dressing out is to establish a positive reputation among black males on campus as opposed to supporting the stereotypical one that may be in place:

Usually when someone thinks of an African American male they think of sagging [clothes] ... and so what [we're] doing, when we wear ties and everything, they see us and [realize] those kids are actually doing something with their lives.

They're not like everyone else.

In other words, outward appearance and dress was an emphasis of the RAHS AAMI. The goal was to transform the image of these young black males on campus.

Mr. Ellis, another AAMI teacher at RAHS, saw the young men who dressed out as positive representatives of the program. Dressing out allowed students in the program to help themselves but also generated interest from other students, Mr. Ellis said. Non-AAMI students who saw students dressing out were motivated to ask about the program's philosophies and what AAMI is all about. Mr. Ellis recalled students approaching and asking, "Hey, what's up with those ties and stuff? How can I be a part of that?"

As noted previously, program coordinators at RAHS felt that dressing out was inextricably linked with the participants' improved sense of confidence and motivation to learn. Michael, a student at RAHS, claimed, "It builds confidence. ... They make us dress out. They make us participate in stuff, go to meetings." His classmate, Jhamir, a sophomore athlete who requested to be in the AAMI, explained that dressing out gave the students a college-going image and improved self-perception and self-confidence. "For us to dress out on Monday, just look like we belong in college, makes a difference," he said.

Interviews with other students supported this perspective and also pointed out how it improved their self-confidence. Darrius, a senior and an RAHS AAMI leader, agreed that dressing in a way that indicated they were serious about school increased the



students' self-confidence. He noted: "It's making me feel like I know I can do it, like I know I can make it into college ... [even though] at first I kind of doubted myself." Darrius also drew a direct correlation between the positive feedback he received for dressing out from his teachers and his feelings of motivation. He explained, "They compliment me on Mondays because I dress out. ... The compliment just motivates me more to do better in every class." While these positive outcomes reported by students lend support to the idea of dressing out, it is important to note that asking young black males to dress in a tie in order to gain acceptance academically or otherwise could be problematic. Issues around the potential of subtle racism are discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

Some students did see dressing out as way to portray an image that they were indeed serious about their academic pursuits. Some RAHS AAMI members drew a direct parallel between the notion of buy-in—particularly in terms of dressing out—and goal setting. Quite simply, they claimed that many young black men are not planning for a future that will include the need to dress for success, so many of them wear what they want to wear or do not even consider their wardrobe. Wayne, a student leader in the RAHS program, directly related dressing out to goal-orientation. He commented:

I like to dress out because I don't like to blend in with the group that's not achieving success in their life. ... I really want to dress like this for a living because what I'm trying to do, my profession is a lot harder than what their goals might be.

His classmate, Cory, agreed that dressing out is directly tied to image, perception, and even motivation, revealing, “I like getting in a suit, and it shows that you’re really passionate about what you do.”

There were challenges to dressing out as well. The concept of dress is highly cultural, and the idea of dressing out came with significant social and economic ramifications. Jhamir, a sophomore at RAHS, had previously been dropped from the program because of a failure to dress out. His story points specifically to the way economic factors affect participation in the program. Jhamir described it in this way: “The most challenging thing, I’d say, is to dress every Monday, because I don’t really have shirts or ties.” Jhamir’s classmate Keith agreed that dressing out was difficult for economic reasons, and that some students don’t dress out because of a lack of proper clothing. He acknowledged that program coordinators like Mr. C attempted to address this issue: “[They] gave out the ties and shirts for everyone ... They try to make a new look for us.” However, Mr. C himself saw the pitfalls in this dynamic, explaining, “Some of the kids are sensitive to the fact that they don’t have the cool clothes.” Students like Wayne at RAHS agreed that clothes that are simply donated are not the cool (or “swag”) clothes described by Mr. C, and that, in his opinion, “most black men don’t like to dress out because so called swag is not there.”

**Peer perception.** The social pressure from peers, of course, was a real concern for the students I studied, and their peers’ perceptions of them challenged retention in the AVID AAMI. The majority of students across both school sites had the perception that their non-AAMI friends did not support their participation in the program. A total of 42 students were surveyed across both sites, and only 10 of the 42 students (or 24%)

reported that their non-AAMI friends supported them being in the program. The matter of dressing out and identifying themselves as AAMI students, thus, became very problematic for some students. Many students would rather have been covert about their participation. Mr. C explained the tension: “When your friends are laughing at you because you put a tie on, a lot of guys don’t want to wear a tie.” The AAMI coordinator also explained that once they leave his classroom, in the hallways and on campus the students become very susceptible to peer pressure.

Mr. Ellis, the partner AAMI teacher of Mr. C at RAHS, directly related attrition in the program to students who were concerned about perception: “I think they dropped [the program] because they didn’t like the fact of being scared that their peers would look at them differently.” While perception and image, then, directly shaped attrition rates in the program, being seen as “acting in a white person’s ways” did not seem to factor into their participation. This dynamic will be discussed next.

### **Cultural Factors**

This section will discuss a series of components linked to the culture of the young black males in the AAMI, encompassing their views on the education system as it relates to race, their family dynamics, their relationships with their teachers and peers in the program, and how those factors influence retention rates. It begins with a discussion on the topics of cultural deficits and cultural resistance, a discussion that yields one of the major findings from this study: The AAMI students did not see academic pursuits as “acting white.”

Other cultural influences on students’ retention in the AAMI, including family factors, will be discussed. A significant finding from this study that is discussed in this

section is that an increased level of participation by women who are in the students' lives, including their mothers, appears to boost retention rates in the AAMI. The absence of a father or a father figure in the home can jeopardize retention in the AAMI because it tends to make some of the students resistant to mentorship from adults, which is an important part of the program.

The section concludes by delineating the response of AAMI leaders to several challenges that threaten retention in the program. It examines the role of mentorship and leadership, explores the "club effect," which is characterized by social interaction and provides a sense of belonging, and revisits the notion of student buy-in to the program.

### **Cultural Deficit and Cultural Resistance Theories**

While researchers in the past often associated black male underachievement with cultural deficits, a resistance to a white education, or a fear of "acting white" (Fordham & Ogbu, 1985; Carter, 2005), the overwhelming majority of the young men observed, interviewed, and surveyed in this study were quite articulate in ways that have often been associated with "acting white," very much wanted to be successful in the classroom, and planned to attend college. They did not see academic achievement as being only associated with white students or that trying to achieve academically in school was tantamount to "acting white."

Darius and Marvin, two tight-knit brothers and student-athletes at RAHS, were very motivated to get accepted by a college. They both felt that they would achieve this goal and "stay for four years" because of the preparation they received in the AVID AAMI. One of their classmates, Solomon, agreed, stating: "At the moment I'm focusing on trying to keep my grades up because I really want to see if I can go for a 4.0 [GPA] or

higher.” He clearly had his sights set on college, and his teacher Mr. Ellis said many people in the program believe Solomon will graduate at the top of his class.

Mr. Ellis remarked that today’s generation is characterized by “individual cultural norms,” explaining, “You got kids in different ethnic groups that are comfortable [with] themselves [whereas] 20 years ago, anyone that behaved outside the norm for their particular culture was trying to act like the other culture.”

Defying previous explanations for underachievement, AVID AAMI students, at least those who remained in the program, and, consequently, could be part of this study, claimed that they did not feel the need to resist a system that arguably had not adequately supported them. They did not have a fear of “acting white.” Thirty-eight of the 42 (or 90%) of the students surveyed at both sites agreed or strongly agreed that school is a place where black males can become successful, and all 42 (or 100%) either agreed or strongly agreed that education was important to them.

Resistance to schooling was neither observed nor did students at any point in the open-ended interviews or in the survey express attitudes that would suggest resistance. When directly probed, students such as Marvin, a senior at RAHS, firmly dismissed the notion:

When I see people in class and they’re raising their hand and stuff like that, I don’t perceive it as a white person’s attitude or a white person’s schoolboy attitude or stuff like that. I perceive it as, OK, that person is trying to learn. He’s trying to get his education so that he can get to the next level. I wouldn’t say there’s a white way of doing anything because everybody has their goals in life and everybody wants to [take] certain steps to get to the next level.

Marvin's classmate, Michael, concurred. When asked if he viewed dressing out and being actively engaged in class as some kind of white person's way of being, he said, "Success can't be based on color ... [Raising one's hand indicates] a person that wants to be informed on something that they don't know about. If [you] need help on something, then you raise your hand." Solomon, a first-year member of the RAHS AAMI, was adamant that there was no white monopoly on being intelligent, articulate, or even well dressed. "No, it's anybody's freedom to be that kind of person," he said. "You can, for instance, get a strong vocabulary. You can come dressed if you want to. This doesn't just belong to Caucasians or whites."

Marvin and Solomon's classmate, Keith, an athlete and first-year AAMI member, agreed that being goal-oriented also has no color, stating, "Someone raising their hand, answering their schoolwork, they're not acting white, but they just want to get where certain white people are going." The students overwhelmingly repeated the assertion that school-oriented behaviors such as motivation, participation, and dress are not equated with a fear of acting white. Any resistance to those behaviors did not exist, at least among the students I studied. The students who have stayed in the program did not have a fear of acting white.

### **Family Dynamics**

Factors related to the family structure of the young men participating in the AAMI played significantly into the students' experiences in the program. I begin with an in-depth examination of the role of mothers in the program and continue with a comprehensive analysis of the father-figure dynamic, exploring the myriad challenges presented by the absence of a strong male role model in the lives of many of the young

men in the AAMI. I conclude with a discussion of parental involvement in general, emphasizing that support for the program by parents is a critical factor in the students' overall success in the AAMI.

**The mother's role.** Mothers played a very prominent role in the lives of the young men I studied. Thirty-eight of 42 (or 90%) of the students surveyed reported that they had a mother who supported them in education. In the qualitative interviews, students reported that their mothers had an impact on their motivation in school and on their buy-in to the program, both significant contributors to retention in the AAMI. Marvin, an AAMI student at RAHS, frequently mentioned his mother when discussing his motivation to succeed academically. He reported, "I get good grades thanks to my mom." Marvin also explained that his mother's insistence led to his participation—and ultimately his buy-in and retention—in the program. He recalled: "[The instructor] ... passed out a piece of paper where it was explaining what the program was. And I showed it to my mom and she pretty much made me go to the program then."

Marvin's classmate Jhamir, a sophomore, also described living with a mother who was supportive of the AAMI program, particularly in terms of helping with the process of dressing out. He described it this way:

She supports it. She's not able to come to all the meetings and stuff like that ... but she supports me. I didn't have a tie or nothing, but she'll go out and get me a tie. She'll get me some dress shirts.

William, also a 10th-grader in the RAHS AAMI, described a mother who was supportive of the AAMI program in terms of dressing out, and stressed motivation and academic success as well, explaining: "Yeah, my mom supports AAMI ... and me

dressing out. She always says, ‘Oh, are you dressing out this Monday?’ ” Isaac, an RAHS underclassman, had a similar experience at home in terms of his mother reinforcing buy-in into the AAMI: “She’s supportive. She likes it, the dress on Mondays.”

Many of the black males I studied at the two AAMI sites faced family-related challenges, however. These challenges arose from aspects of their family dynamic, including, in some cases, a low level of parental involvement and/or the absence of a healthy relationship with a father figure in the family. I explain the impact of these dynamics next.

**The father-figure dynamic.** Although many stereotypes and negative cultural assumptions did not hold true in this small study, one common and unfortunate trend emerged from the qualitative interviews: Many young men in this study claimed they did not have a father figure in the home or that they lacked a good relationship with their father, and this factor challenged retention in the program. Previous research has pointed to the consequences for African American men when a father is not in their lives (Ogbu, 1985; Black, Dubowitz, & Starr, 1999). Many students’ views of their futures were consistent with the findings of previous research which indicated that black youth are impacted by the disproportionate number of older males in their lives who were either incarcerated or out of their family’s life completely (Hubbard, 1999).

Without role models, some of these young men seemed to struggle to accept the mentorship that the AAMI provided. AAMI coordinator and teacher Mr. C was not able to effectively mentor some of the students in terms of discipline and other issues because



of the fact that they were, in his words, not “reachable at this point”—a dynamic he associated with the absence of a father figure in the home:

It’s huge, the not having a dad in the house, the not having that male role model.

For example in my class ... I had a confrontation with a young man in AAMI, but he’s one of those that I don’t know if he’s ready, [if] he’s reachable at this point in his life. And so we had our big blow-up. When I told him I want to see his parents before he comes back and I go to the computer, type in his name and look for him ... well, there’s no dad.

Mr. C argued that not having a dad at home is so prevalent among students in the program that the role of the AAMI mentor becomes paternal in nature. Specifically, the mentor becomes someone who is “constantly monitoring their grades, showing them you love them, telling them you love them ... telling them, ‘I’ve got your back. I’m supporting you.’ ”

However, Mr. C believed that not having a father present in his students’ lives was also generating a resistance to accepting mentorship from another paternal male figure, and thus made his role as an AAMI mentor challenging in terms of being able to approach the student. He explained the students’ attitudes this way: “[A mentor is] not going to be their daddy if they don’t want a daddy. Or he’s not going to fill that void if they won’t let him.”

Growing up as the man of the house, also, in Mr. C’s estimation, can lead to a resistance to mentorship due to a perceived clash by the student with another alpha male:

When you're raised by a single parent you oftentimes become the alpha male of the house. The problem is when you go to school and you have another alpha male [as a teacher or mentor]... there's often conflict."

This absence of a father or a father figure was thus related to the kind of discipline and mentorship method to which some students best responded. Mr. C explained, "Being the alpha male [in some of the students' lives], I think it's really important [to] know how to do it." For this AAMI teacher, being a mentor not only meant playing a father role, but also playing a particular kind of father role: one characterized by a combination of firmness and love. However, many students still resisted the idea of AAMI teacher as paternal mentor. Cory, an RAHS sophomore, disagreed that AAMI mentor could offer the same type of support as father. He argued, "I don't think [AAMI mentors and fathers are] the same ... [there are] things that they just can't give us like a father would."

Former AAMI teacher and coordinator Mr. Meacham explained some of the challenges he has seen. For example, he noted that if a young man lacks a father figure, there can be resistance not only to mentorship, but even to asking for help academically as well. When father figures are not available to students and when it comes time to dress out and students don't have someone to support that idea, they are more likely to bow out of the program. Mr. Meacham explained:

It's kind of a cultural thing in that some of them don't have male role models to teach them how to tie the tie, [and] not wanting to ask for help with the tie is the same mentality of not wanting ... help with a problem in class.

At the GWHS site, AAMI teacher Mr. Hart clearly saw his role as a decidedly paternal one, especially in light of his population's needs. One example he cited involved

a black student asking him for help tying his tie. Mr. Hart explained that the young man's receptiveness to accept help or mentoring from another man made the incident even more significant:

One of the African American males who I'd never had in class, wasn't real familiar with ... stood in front of me and said, "I need you to help me tie my tie." For him to come to me and ask me to do that, it made my teaching career, I guess you could say, because he felt comfortable enough for me to do that.

Even though dressing out was not part of the expectations for the AAMI at his site, Mr. Hart saw this rare occurrence of being asked for help with a tie as symbolic of the paternal relationship that can, in fact, play out between teachers/coordinators and students in the program. However, participation in the program, for some, was challenged when they had to accept their teacher/coordinator in a paternal role.

A significant portion of the students interviewed described having a lack of a healthy relationship with a male role model at home. The survey data was more positive on this point: 25 out of 42 (or 60%) of the students surveyed (which broadened the number of responses) reported having a father who was supportive of them in school. Even among the interviewees, where the numbers were skewed toward absentee fathers and father figures, some students described fathers who were supportive of their sons' educational aspirations and their retention in the AAMI. D'Shawn, an 11<sup>th</sup>-grader at GWHS, described a father figure who was very supportive in terms of academics. D'Shawn said: "He's on me every day about my grades. ... He asks me how my grades are doing. ... And he [is] on me every day, constantly checking, calling, and stuff, seeing how am I doing, if I'm getting better." His classmate Rafer, a ninth-grader, detailed

support from a strong father figure, particularly in terms of motivation and achieving goals: “[His philosophy] is that you need to do good to get what you want or you need ... you don’t go the easy way out. Do it the hard way.”

Some students described a father figure who used athletics to motivate their sons to achieve academically. Larry, a freshman athlete at GWHS, described a father who stressed academics as a priority in order to pursue athletics. He recalled: “At first growing up ... I was just, like, good in sports. But my dad [said] if you want to [succeed] you’re going to need both [academics and sports].” Larry’s classmate Devin, a four-year program participant at GWHS, described a father who was quite supportive in terms of academics as well as athletics. He explained it this way: “He’s a ‘back in the day’ person, straight. Even if the coach said I got a 1.9 [GPA], I’m almost getting 2.0, my dad said, ‘No. You’re not playing. You got to have them grades up.’ ” Although D’Shawn, a GWHS basketball standout, acknowledged that his father wanted him to succeed in athletics, he explained that his father continues to emphasize grades as the top priority: “He puts academics first ... before anything.”

So while some of the students lacked a relationship with a male role model, others, such as Larry, Devin, and D’Shawn from GWHS, had fathers who not only supported them in school, but also insisted they prioritize academics above athletics, even when the father was not in the home.

**Parental involvement.** Although some students had mothers, fathers, and other family members who were supportive of their education, others did not. It was the perspective of some of the study’s participants that this negatively impacted student buy-in and retention in the program. RAHS coordinator Mr. C argued that a lack of

reinforcement for academics at home could undermine students' involvement in the program and lead to attrition. He stated:

If the parent doesn't [support the student] then where are we going to go? Are we going to push ourselves higher? Are we going to shrink down lower? And that's usually where it is. It's that shrinking down lower. Every time you get a setback, [it] makes it easier and easier to quit.

Mr. C also observed that a lack of parental involvement, which often resulted from parents' lack of a college education, could negatively impact motivation among students. He put it this way: "They don't push them to the next level. ... They don't see the value in it."

Even though nearly all mothers and many fathers supported the AAMI, parental involvement in the AAMI was low in terms of maintaining communication with program coordinators and teachers. This led some AAMI educators to suggest that parents were not fully supportive of the program. RAHS AVID counselor Ms. Garcia said that although AAMI parents were often more involved than the average parent, "the parent involvement isn't as high as we want it to be." She related a lack of parental involvement, for the most part, to a failure on the students' part to communicate the value of the program to their parents:

I think I find a lot of times that they're not communicating with their parents at home, if they have parents. Because once we talk to them ... the parents are, a lot of times, they're on board. I think it's up to us, the adults, to reach out to them.

At the GWHS site, AAMI coordinator and teacher Mr. Hart had a similar experience. He observed that regarding parents, “Program-wide, [parent involvement] is just low.”

### **AAMI’s Response**

An interrelationship of individual and cultural factors impacted retention rates in the program. The AAMI worked to address these factors in ways that included, but were not limited to building students’ motivation and self-confidence, addressing any discipline or perception problems, and attending to issues regarding family dynamics and parents’ and students’ attitudes towards education. The AAMI developed many strategies to build students’ self-confidence, support them academically, and keep them in the program. As previously discussed, AAMI strategies included having the students “dress out.” Other key strategies included creating what was referred to as an AAMI club effect, providing opportunities for students to build their leadership capacity, and offering a culturally relevant pedagogy.

A key strategy present in the AAMI was providing members with the opportunity to attend many important events. To build the so-called “club effect” as coined by the AVID Center, AAMI leader arranged for students to attend college-related events. Ms. Garcia, a counselor at RAHS, explained that things such as college visits and events like football games increased not only buy-in to the program but also boosted the students’ self-confidence. She noted: “We need to work harder at making it seem possible. ... They don’t see themselves as on a four-year campus either, so I think some of the field trips they have for the AAMI students are really helpful.”

The AAMI recognized the insecurity of some of the young men they worked with and provided experiences that built a club atmosphere in response to their cultural needs. The club supports motivation, builds self-confidence, and provides opportunities to address some of the cultural factors that challenge retention in the program. RAHS senior Marvin explained, “[These experiences] empower us to go do [well] in high school so that we can get to that [college] level.” RAHS AVID counselor Ms. Garcia agreed that the opportunities to attend events are critical for AAMI students: “That’s one of the big things, I think, just exposure to the college campuses. We can bring all the people we want out here but I think they need to [walk on a campus and see it].”

Mr. Meacham concurred that the AAMI offered students some real advantages and these included economic advantages. He explained:

For the young people, they saw last year we had seven guys graduate and get accepted into four-year universities. Six of those young men got at least \$10,000 scholarships. ... So outside of the dressing up and the pictures and the trips, now they see some real hardcore numbers. ... They see the guys with the check in hand and the acceptance letters, and so it has made it real for them, instead of all the pie-in-the-sky conception.

Mr. Meacham suggested that the opportunities provided by the AAMI, particularly in terms of college assistance, have significantly supported retention.

**Mentorship and leadership.** Another crucial AAMI response included mentoring from both adults and peers, as well as providing opportunities to build the young men’s capacity for leadership. Along with daily support from program coordinators, special events, and other college-related opportunities, the role of the

AAMI mentor appears to prepare these young men to successfully navigate the world that awaits them in college and outside the high school classroom in general. Perhaps nowhere is this preparation more prevalent than in the work being done in terms of leadership and mentorship in the AAMI.

RAHS AVID counselor Ms. Garcia identified mentorship—both peer and adult—as the most significant factor supporting retention. She explained:

I think the guidance from the peers and teacher, the older peers and the teacher ...

I think that if it's positive interaction and they feel like it's worth their time and that people are on their side [it encourages retention].”

Veteran members of the program attempt to support their younger members. Their effort builds their own self-confidence and ultimately empowers them to feel like they can do more.

The black males in the AAMI appear to benefit from mentorship. Keith, a student in the RAHS AAMI, explained that the teachers at his site serve as excellent role models for young black males: “It’s like when I see Mr. Ellis and Mr. C, I see them [as] leaders [who] show us the path. They’re good African American males [and] that’s how I want to grow up to be.” In addition, Keith’s classmate Darrius explained that these men provided more than just a model to emulate: “He’s more than just my teacher. ... We’re actually close. We talk about stuff.” For some students, this closeness filled a void when there was no father figure. Michael observed that this is a new dynamic for some black males that has implications for both the student and the teacher in a mentoring relationship. It will ultimately impact receptivity to mentorship and challenge retention in the program.

Michael said:



Nobody has been on their back ... supporting them because ... if you actually care about somebody you are going to try and guide them. And ... you have to guide them how you need to, not how they want to [go].

One mentorship strategy within the AAMI, particularly at the RAHS site, included developing the leadership capacities of young men who often struggled greatly with this notion of pursuing college. The AVID AAMI, in essence, demands students take the path that has been less travelled by their black peers. RAHS teacher Mr. Ellis defined leadership as “being willing to set the example, to set the pace, to do the thing that no one else wants to do,” and certainly this relates to the young black males successfully participating in this program. Solomon, an RAHS freshman, revealed that his teachers recognized his shyness, and in an attempt to mentor him, encouraged him to take a leadership role and speak up more frequently in class. Although described by Mr. Ellis as being highly regarded within the program and around campus, Solomon acknowledged that he felt challenged by the leadership component of AAMI because he lacked confidence, particularly in terms of communication. However, even though Solomon wasn't completely comfortable in social situations, he related leadership building to his retention in the AAMI program: “At the moment I don't think I can be much of a leader, but I want to stick with AMI because they teach us how to be a leader.”

Other students such as Darrius, a prominent senior leader in the RAHS AAMI, also saw the value of the program in terms of confidence and communication, like Solomon, explaining, “I'm very confident. ... At first I wasn't [but] now I like speaking up in class.” Although Darrius and Solomon were ready to take on the challenge of becoming a leader, Solomon explained that when other students who lack confidence are

forced to communicate and become a leader it might challenge students' participation in the program. He explained it this way: "Some people just don't like standing in front of a bunch of people, like, they get all nervous and ... some people just don't believe they can lead others." AVID counselor Ms. Garcia agreed, indicating that while some students like the fact that the program pushes them into leadership roles, others do not like being "under the microscope". Their retention in the program is threatened by being placed under that microscope—in other words, being asked to dress out, speak up, or become leaders in the program and on campus.

Mr. Ellis explained that although being under the microscope may feel uncomfortable, once again, the AAMI wants to prepare students to be leaders—something many of these young men are reticent to do. He explained: "To be a father is to lead, to be a big brother is to lead, to be a successful student you need to lead." Even in terms of dressing out, Mr. Ellis explained, "You look across the room and there's no one else dressed that way, understand that's because you're preparing for paths that they don't want to walk." The AAMI places a great deal of emphasis on leadership building. If the program is to construct an action plan for the future that considers economic, pedagogical, and/or retention-based implications, according to these educators, the idea of leadership must play a prominent role. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

**The club effect.** The program is designed to support a culture that secures participation. AAMI creates a kind of club structure that motivates retention. When working in conjunction with AVID to make this study possible, one dynamic they asked

me to look for was the presence of a “club effect.” The “club” provides opportunities for social interaction and it has an effect on students’ sense of belonging.

Mr. C, RAHS AAMI coordinator and teacher, explained that the culture of the club or community could potentially draw in students who are resistant and/or demotivated, and help those at risk of attrition in the program: “Having that culture creates that cohesive bond that allows everything to flow through it. ... If the culture magnifies itself and becomes such a powerful entity then it would draw in those outliers.”

His partner in mentoring the AAMI students, Mr. Ellis, saw the importance of the club effect, or club culture, of the program: “Just the fact that these guys on campus can get together with a group of like-minded individuals [is valuable].” Mr. C explained that the young men in the AAMI “need that social aspect” and that the program “makes [a young man’s] life more social [because] he has friends like him who are in the program.” One of his students, Albert, agreed, stating: “It’s like all of us, African American students, just bringing us together and making a brotherhood out of it.” This social dynamic supports buy-in and, ultimately, retention.

Students at the GWHS site recognized the importance of the social aspect of the program. D’Shawn said of the program. “It made me bond with more people.” His friend Allen, a standout athlete at GWHS, saw the program’s success as synonymous with the building of relationships. He explained, “AAMAC [or African American Male AVID Club, the site nickname for the program to be discussed in the following section] is basically just a fellowship with people. It’s [about] building relationship[s].” The club effect and the philosophy behind building a community certainly were positive factors in

terms of retention, the implications of which will be explored in further detail in Chapter 5.

**Culturally responsive teaching.** Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is considered an important strategy used by the AAMI to support academic success, and according to AVID's mission statement, a key characteristic of the AAMI. Although the description of the AAMI program from AVID Center does not provide a specific definition for CRT, Gay (2010) defines CRT as a strategy that maximizes effectiveness and relevance by focusing on the "cultural knowledge ... frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students" (p. 31). Following the guidance of work done by Gay, Sleeter (2011), and others, AVID has been pro-active in developing a CRT curriculum and pedagogy, believing that it would directly impact attrition and retention in the program. The leaders of the AAMI met in Philadelphia in 2011 to construct a draft of a culturally relevant teaching guide, but at the time of this writing, that pedagogical guide was not available to the three AAMI teachers involved in this study.

**Cultural knowledge.** Observations of the AAMI classrooms suggested that AAMI teachers in RAHS, even without access to an AAMI CRT guide, embedded a consistent cultural curriculum component in the program. RAHS student Jerome described it this way: "Every day Mr. Ellis looks at his calendar and it has something that is significant [for African Americans] about that date."

At the RAHS site, there seemed to be a concerted effort to bring in black history. Teacher Mr. Ellis provided an example of culturally relevant pedagogy, namely the relationship between the stereotypical image of the black male and the actual potential to

achieve success. He illustrated this dichotomy by using the example of Benjamin Banneker, the famous scientist and surveyor, mentioned in a song by a well-known hip-hop artist: “To quote KRS-One ... basically he says to them you don’t have to just be a janitor. No one told you about Benjamin Banneker. So my job is to make sure that [students] transcend.” Mr. Ellis used Banneker to highlight the relationship between the intellectual, successful black male and the prevalence of inequity that unfortunately exists throughout the nation.

*Frames of reference.* Frames of reference shape how we perceive events and make decisions, and often, the pedagogy surrounded cultural trends shaping these young men’s views such as the absence of healthy relationship with a father figure. RAHS senior Marvin discussed the relevance of that kind of pedagogy for him. It helped him to understand his father’s life. He stated: “That [kind of pedagogy] connected to me because my father’s in jail ... he dropped out [in,] like, eighth grade.” Mr. C used hip-hop music in the form of a Kanye West song that contained the line, “Everything I’m not makes me everything I am” as a vehicle to address the father figure/male role model dynamic, and how these struggles make them “everything they [are]”.

Marvin’s classmate, Keith, explained that part of the pedagogy of the AAMI also deals with making the correct decisions when faced with difficult situations. Keith described a typical lesson:

They print out a newsletter [and] one time it was about an African American baseball player that actually had something going in his life. But ... a woman took him out of his character. He killed her. And we sat there and talked about it ...

and it connected to us, like how we would have felt in that situation. They asked us, “How would you feel? What would you have done? What did he do wrong?”

***Performance styles.*** However, while lessons about black history and issues affecting these young men were well-intentioned and some students found them relevant, there did not appear to be any kind of clearly delineated curriculum designed to address and support the specific academic needs of the African American youth involved in the program. While mentoring certainly could be considered a part of culturally relevant pedagogy, I did not observe teaching and lessons that exhibited, as Gay (2010) described the “wide range of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles” (p. 32). And I saw virtually no evidence of the sort of CRT that I heard about at the 2011 AVID National Conference. During his keynote address on CRT, educational scholar Dr. Mack T. Hines III outlined a number of CRT strategies. Using the oral and rhythmic expression that he described as “the hallmark of the black experience,” Hines demonstrated the effect of using CRT (in the form of oral rhythmic expression) to teach fractions to African American students.

***Summary.*** The structure of the program at each site affected the CRT goals of the AAMI. When the young men at GWHS did not even meet regularly as a group and never in the context in the classroom, it was almost impossible for CRT to take place. Albert, a freshman participant in the GWHS program, confirmed this dynamic. When I asked him if he ever learned anything about African American culture in the program, he reported, “Not at the time we haven’t.”

However, even at the RAHS site where there was an AAMI class embedded in the school day with co-teachers engaged in myriad efforts to spotlight black culture, a clearly

defined CRT curriculum was lacking. While honoring black history and addressing issues related to young black males is certainly relevant, there is a growing body of research emphasizing the importance of embedding an even broader, more comprehensive CRT curriculum. Most of the young men reported that they liked learning about black culture, but a range of CRT strategies similar to the lesson demonstrated by Mack Hines at the AVID Conference were not available to help them plan their daily curriculum. Although Hines's lesson tying fractions to hip hop could be itself considered by some as rooted in a cultural stereotype, it is, however, an attempt to harness a perceived cultural strength in order to impact academic achievement.

Former RAHS AAMI coordinator Mr. Meacham defined culturally responsive teaching as a "strategy of relationships," and revealed that AVID, as mentioned previously, has done important work with regard to CRT. This work includes the draft of a curriculum guide that was borne out of the four-year AAMI research study in which Mr. Meacham himself participated, but once again, the information was not yet readily available to the AAMI educators that were part of this study at the time of this writing. This and other implications in terms of incorporating a more holistic CRT approach into the AAMI's future plans will be discussed in Chapter 5.

### **Structural Factors**

This section will discuss an array of structural factors that impact student participation and retention. There were two separate structural arrangements of the AAMI investigated in this study, and both had consequences for students in terms of retention. Thus, this section contains two major segments. The first segment examines the organization of each AAMI at the two school sites. I compare and contrast the all-AAMI

homeroom model with the club model. The second segment examines structural arrangements across the entire scope of the program, focusing on intake procedures, intervention procedures, issues related to time, and economic issues and their impact on participation in the program.

### **Structural Arrangements at Each Site**

**All-AAMI homeroom model.** The program model at RAHS was an all-black male AAMI homeroom embedded in the school day. The AAMI program was divided into two homerooms, namely Mr. C's and Mr. Ellis's, and members spent the first 21 minutes of the school day in their assigned homerooms. They also met in their homeroom for a bi-weekly after-school meeting. The AVID counselor, Ms. Garcia, felt that this structural component of the program structure engendered a "club effect," or a sense of strong community, which in turn increased buy-in, motivation, and, ultimately, retention. She also saw the homeroom structure as a venue for peer mentorship to take place and for students to be exposed to some of the opportunities the AAMI has to offer:

What has helped with retention big-time is the homeroom ... and just having a place where they all go. Because if I had the kids just go to a voluntary after-school thing, they just don't buy into it as much. And it helps that they're also in a homeroom where there's leaders in their class. There are older students who are ... doing the "dress for success." They're getting the high grades. We celebrate when they're doing big things. And I think that helps the younger kids to see that. So that's how ... it's helped retain them in the program.

**AAMAC club model.** The structural arrangement at the GWHS school site did not allow for an all-AAMI class due to scheduling issues, so the site went to a "non-



traditional” AAMI model GWHS students and mentors referred to as AAMAC (African American Male AVID Club). For GWHS students, the program was embedded in the context of a mixed-race AVID class. The black males also met as group, but only once monthly, after school or at lunch.

At GWHS, in other words, AAMI functioned more as a school club than as a homeroom or separate AVID club. The coordinator at GWHS, Mr. Hart, observed that time constraints led to the development of a club model. He explained, “We have meetings [but they] should [take place] a little bit more [often]. ... It’s usually at lunch, just because there’s no other time to do it.”

A very dedicated mentor, Mr. Hart was not fazed by the fact that the school had no plans to provide them with a special class period to meet with the young men. “It’s a club on campus. It’s established,” he told me. The participants even modified the name of the AAMI program to suit their reality. Mr. Hart explained that the nickname they gave to the club capitalizes on the young men’s predilection toward athletics:

We call it AAMAC, African American Male AVID Club [and] we developed that three years ago because it was a club atmosphere. The students—even though we don’t want to always push them towards sports—that’s what they relate to [and] AAMAC sounded like a college [sports] conference, so they all loved that.

### **Summary**

While both sites, then, worked under a different structural arrangement, both were able to generate a version of the club effect that positively influenced participation in the program. The connection between athletics and academic motivation, along with other

implications of the club model, the all-AAMI homeroom model, and the club effect dynamic as they relate to buy-in and retention, will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

### **Structural Arrangements Across Sites**

**Intake procedures impact retention.** While there were key differences between the RAHS AAMI and the GWHS AAMAC, certain aspects of the two site models were the same, including intake, or how students were recruited into the program. The policy in place at both sites of automatically enrolling all AVID black males into the AAMI without a pre-interview to gauge initial buy-in negatively impacted program participation.

RAHS athlete Donshay explained that there was no pre-interview involved with his initial intake into the program, recalling, “Out of nowhere I got my homeroom switched.” Wilbur, another member of the RAHS AAMI, had a similar recollection, reporting: “They never interviewed us to go into AAMI. So they just stuck a whole bunch of black kids in, basically.”

AAMI teacher Mr. C directly related the lack of an interview process and even blindly placing students in the AVID and/or the AAMI to a potential breakdown in the program and ultimately attrition:

That’s one of the things that’s happening in our school. They don’t ask the students if they want to be in it. When we get a new kid that’s new to the school, [administrators] throw them in AVID because it’s an open elective and [they] throw them into AAMI. That’s where you have the breakdown.

Mr. C’s student, Jhamir, discussed the relationship between the lack of a pre-interview, students who had no initial buy-in, and students who were not retained in the

program. He recalled: “We wasn’t interviewed to be in the AAMI [and] a lot of people didn’t want to be in there.” As a result, Jhamir explained, many students who were not on board with the program’s philosophies and ended up either dropping out or being removed from the program within several months. Marvin, an AAMI leader at RAHS, agreed, saying, “I can see a few people dropping out ... because I do hear a lot of talk like, ‘I don’t want to be here. I don’t know why they put me here.’ ”

Virtually everyone I interviewed—students, teachers, counselors, and coordinators—indicated that because students were not pre-interviewed to assess their initial buy-in to the program’s overall philosophies, they were not only personally at risk for attrition, but this placement appeared to have somewhat of a demotivating effect on some AAMI students. RAHS AAMI coordinator Mr. C, for example, explained, “If the kid doesn’t want to be there, let him not be in there because it’s not helping anybody for him to be there.” He argued that the intake policy of placing every African American into the program automatically was actually negatively impacting retention, because some of those placed “come in and they’re a hindrance” and “tend to demotivate sometimes the students that are doing well.”

Negative attitudes toward the AAMI and the accompanying peer pressure may explain why at RAHS nearly half of the students at RAHS were not reachable for an interview, did not complete the survey, and seemed to never reveal themselves as AAMI students, even after multiple site visits to the AAMI homeroom, classroom, and a weekly after-school meeting. The practice of blanket enrollment of AVID black males into the AAMI challenged participation and buy-in into the AAMI program. For that reason, Wayne, an RAHS sophomore, argued that it would be “most proper” for a pre-interview

to occur, because if not, a student “feels like he can be there anytime he wants. He doesn’t feel like it’s a pleasure ... so he doesn’t really care for it.”

Former AAMI teacher and coordinator at RAHS Mr. Meacham agreed that a pre-interview is necessary to assess buy-in, because without one the student is likely to not perform or participate in the program with motivation. He explained it this way: “If the kid didn’t want to be in, doesn’t have any buy-in, he’s not going to perform. Nobody ever took the time to explain why we’re doing it ... so we had to put in place ... a pre-screen.”

His successor Mr. C explained that having a pre-interview could determine a student’s initial buy-in in order to avoid the inevitable non-participation and even “resentment” that may exist. He reiterated the importance of having a pre-screen in relation to the students’ potential to be open to mentorship, stating:

That interview process is critical. So making sure that they’re interviewed before we stick them in [is important], because at the end of the day, just putting a kid in front of a black male and having them preach to them or talk to them or try to connect to them is not always [successful].

Both of the AAMI coordinators who had served at RAHS were emphatic that assessing buy-in with a pre-interview was essential to the mentor’s efficacy and ultimately to student retention in the program. It is important to note, however, that if they didn’t have the requisite number of bodies in the room, they wouldn’t have received the grant funding to launch and implement the program. Furthermore, the costs of the program may not be insignificant, and must be acknowledged when evaluating their intake policy, as well as their intervention procedures to be discussed next.

**Intervention procedures.** Along with an intake policy that negatively impacted attrition rates, the lack of a formal, clearly delineated intervention process for discipline problems influenced retention. At the RAHS site, students with discipline problems were simply dropped from the program. Although discipline problems did not appear prominently in the qualitative interviews, presumably because students with discipline issues had already been dropped or removed from the program, AAMI coordinator Mr. C explained that constant interventions were needed and having to discipline students placed too much strain on the program, particularly in terms of time. He stated:

I'm going to put [a student] on probation because of his grades. But if he continues with this discipline I don't see him lasting another semester because of the constant interventions. We're constantly intervening. We're constantly calling home. We're constantly talking to his teacher.

During one site visit to RAHS, I noticed a vibrant young man known as "Q" struggling to write an essay. In a conversation with him he shared a gripping paragraph that described a life troubled by the lack of a healthy relationship with a father or father figure. When I spoke with his counselor Ms. Garcia and his teacher Mr. C regarding "Q," I learned he apparently was already on his way out of the AAMI due to discipline issues. In every sense, "Q" seemed like a candidate for a comprehensive intervention. However, RAHS site staff reported that there was no specific directive or structures in place to help construct interventions. William, a RAHS AAMI member, described it this way: "[If] kids just didn't come to class or something, they just dropped them altogether." Any actions teachers took to address discipline seemed to be conducted on an arbitrary basis.

At the GWHS site, when I pressed Mr. Hart, AAMI teacher and coordinator, as to how I could reach the last four students who did not complete an anonymous survey, he referred me to one of the other AVID teachers. Similar to the dynamic present at RAHS, the AVID teacher I spoke to explained that students were dropped from the program for being discipline problems. However, this teacher did not describe any kind of sustained intervention process to help retain these young men in the AAMI.

Mr. C described a peer intervention program that they instituted at RAHS to address student buy-in, motivation, and any discipline problems, but it proved to be very challenging:

I said, "Juniors and seniors who were the leaders, you're responsible. I need you to do this, make up interventions [to address discipline issues]." And it worked for a while. But it was when those students who had the horrible grades, when they got frustrated because they were like, "You know, he don't care anymore. He doesn't even care. ... He won't even come to tutoring with me." And I'm like, "Now you see how I feel. Welcome to my world."

Although there were a few examples of interventions being attempted by both adults and by peers, there were no formal procedures in place at either of the schools.

From the students' perspective, of the 42 students surveyed anonymously across both sites, only 6 of the 42 (or 14%) disagreed with the statement that if you don't behave in class, you would be removed from the AAMI. Overall, discipline and the lack of a clearly defined intervention process were related factors that shaped attrition rates in the program. The implications of this will be discussed in Chapter 5.

**Issues related to time.** Structuring the time needed to support the students seemed to be the most pressing unmet need in the program, in terms of having (a) requisite time in the program for a student to generate buy-in; (b) time for the teachers to develop relationships with young men so they were willing to be mentored; and (c) time in general (whether it is a homeroom, class period, meeting, or event) for all the academic and social supports of the program such as a club effect and CRT to take effect.

***Time to generate buy-in.*** AAMI senior Marvin equated motivation and buy-in to the amount of time in the program. Underclassmen haven't put in the time so they lack buy-in. He stated, "Upperclassmen and juniors, we know it's a good group to be in. ... But the freshmen, they're saying, 'Nah, it doesn't really matter to me,' like they don't know how important this group is."

Mr. C observed that freshmen, without time in the program, often lack the confidence to participate in elements of the program such as dressing out. He remarked, "The freshmen are still in that place where they're a little bit embarrassed sometimes." Mr. C also argued that if students have not had the time to see benefits of the program, then they may resist aspects of the program's philosophy:

[Younger students] haven't seen the things that we do because it's so early in the year. We haven't put on the talent show. We haven't put on the parade. We haven't done all these things that we do at the school so that they can see it.

One final point about the time-in-the-program issue: At least a part of the reason that eleventh and twelfth graders do better in the program than freshman and sophomores do is the fact that, but the junior and senior years, many of the problematic students have either dropped out or have been removed from the program.

***Time to build mentoring relationships.*** Mr. C also explained that although economics presented a challenge in providing all the support the AAMI students needed, even more essential to the success of the program was providing more time with the young men so that the rapport required for effective mentorship can be developed:

I need time for them to see me as a real person, as someone who's a lot more like them and not the person who I am in homeroom, which is the facilitator of information. ... The only time they get to see me, to see us take our guard down, is in the meetings. But the meetings are bi-weekly. So what I'm saying, again, is time.

Former RAHS coordinator Mr. Meacham explained that a young man with time in the program could develop the openness to receive mentorship, even if that young man had trust issues based on an unhealthy relationship with a male role model:

I'm not here to hide or trick you or whatever...a lot of times in [their] past male figures in their life have left or went away or disappointed them in some way so they're slow to build that trust. It's not going to happen in the first quarter ... [it] may not happen the first year.

***Time to build the club effect.*** Mr. C described a situation in which homeroom alone—without time spent doing outside events—was not sufficient to build the club effect, or a sense of community:

These young men only see each other once a day in homeroom. That's with me standing up here as a conduit of information, giving [out information] or jumping on cases or having a powwow, but that's it. They don't see each other anymore. So they don't have that sense of community unless we do something like a field



trip or unless we're doing something like a leadership conference at the Boys and Girls Club.

His partner teacher, Mr. Ellis, agreed that his time with the young men is minimal, especially in relation to the time they were exposed to peer pressure:

I'm very frank with them. ... I don't beat around the bush because I've only got them for 55 minutes [in AVID class] ... because, again, they're in here for a little bit of time and then they're gone the rest of the day elsewhere doing other things.

Mr. C explained that part of the challenge in terms of time constraints, specifically in terms of creating opportunities to spend time with and interact with these young men, required that he create time for AAMI outside school hours. He said, "I've got to create that time on Saturday, create that time after school."

The RAHS AAMI coordinator also pointed out that athletics creates an additional strain on students' out-of-school time because they are spending time involved with sports when they could be attending meetings and events. He explained, "Half of the young men who should have been in my [AAMI leadership] conference instead were watching football tapes."

If time is a problem at RAHS, it is undoubtedly even more of a problem at GWHS. At that school site, there is even less time for the AAMI students (albeit with a different name) to be together.

***Time to run the program.*** Mr. C emphasized that he considers time his most valuable asset. "It's not even about money," he said. "It's time." Time impacted the ability of the AAMI coordinator to develop the program in key ways, particularly in

terms of dealing with the structural details necessary to procure and maintain grant funding. He explained:

It takes more than one person because when [another instructor] was doing it by himself, that's when I saw a lot of holes, a lot of things that he wasn't doing. And it wasn't until I took it on almost by myself till I realized you need two people.

There's too much paperwork with the compliance. In order to get the [funding] you have to meet [assessment] benchmarks.

**Economic issues.** The AVID AAMI was launched and implemented through a funding grant made available to the original six pilot sites, including RAHS and GWHS. Economic issues now threaten the sustainability of the program. According to the site leaders in this study, if resources are unavailable after the grant expires, there will undoubtedly be a severely negative impact on retention rates. Students and AAMI coordinators described how funding impacted the structure of the program and ultimately challenged students' willingness to stay in the program. All factors related to economics, including putting on the events required to make a program like this engaging, enjoyable, and effective in a way that would attract and sustain buy-in, are being challenged by the threat of reduced funding. The former AAMI coordinator at RAHS, Mr. Meacham, said simply, "[Lack of funding] will obviously impact the program because you can do a lot more things with money than you can do without."

The absence of funding would make some of the opportunities provided in the AAMI impossible, and that would likely cause students to drop the program. Marvin, who seemed to have earned the unofficial title of ambassador of the program at his site, emphasized the opportunities the AAMI had provided him, related directly, of course, to

funding: “Already since I’ve been in high school, I’ve been to 13 colleges. ... The greatest thing about being in the program is visiting the schools. You really get to see the campus life.” He recalled field trips to college football games that gave him and his peers a taste of the full college experience. Marvin related the exposure to college to his improved feelings of self-confidence about his ability to succeed in high school and make his goal of attending college possible. Without these kind of confidence-building events, buy-in and retention in the program will inevitably suffer.

His teacher Mr. C indicated a relationship between the opportunities that funding for AAMI made possible and the overall goal of the program to close the achievement gap. He stated, “You need to ... create opportunities to build their self-esteem, to build their college-going culture, to build the skills they need to close this gap.”

Finally, Mr. C pointed out that even if the budget is not cut, there remains a problem: the AVID AAMI coordinator does not have discretion over the spending of the budgeted funds from the program’s grant. He explained, “The problem is they give you this large sum of money, but how you spend it is line-itemed out.” Mr. C revealed that as the AAMI teacher he had to personally absorb some of the expenses to run the program effectively. He explained that, “the leadership summit that I put on [recently], between the food, the pizza, the supplies for the games, props ... it was more than \$100. I paid for that out of my pocket.” This personal investment of resources, according to Mr. C, was due to a lack of control over the existing program funding, his dedication as a mentor and his recognition of the importance of building relationships with the young men while he had them.

The coordinators explained that good teachers are critical in providing the kind of leadership and mentorship necessary for the success of the young men in the program. The inability to attract teachers to do this incredibly challenging job—one that demands extra work without a monetary stipend—challenges the very foundations of the initiative and raises concerns that the AAMI will not be able to attract the quality teachers they need. While Mr. C was clear that he would do the job for free if necessary, he remarked that stipends for teachers “would be a selling point, especially for schools that may not have any African American teachers,” or even more generally, to have teachers willing to take on this work. Without question, the loss of funding for the program is worrisome as it has critical implications for the AAMI on several fronts, which will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 5.

### **Summary of Key Findings**

This chapter provided a comprehensive discussion of a wide array of characteristics of the AAMI, focusing on a selection of key individual factors, cultural factors, and structural factors, and exploring how each of the factors influenced retention rates in the program. The section on individual factors included a discussion of how high motivation and enhanced self-confidence among the AAMI students positively influenced retention in the program. “Buy-in,” or belief in and support for the AAMI and its philosophies, was also found to be a crucial factor in supporting retention. Although athletics were a valuable tool when used to engage and motivate the young men, some students who lacked buy-in to the program did so because their interest in athletics overshadowed their academic priorities and/or aspirations.

Cultural factors also helped to account for the students' experiences and retention in the AAMI. Importantly, the young black men in the AAMI did not consider academic pursuits as "acting white". An examination of the role of family in the students' lives revealed two important dynamics: students embraced support they received from the mothers to participate in AAMI and were troubled by the lack of a father or father figure, which threatened their retention in the program. This condition caused some students to resist adult mentorship, which is an integral part of the AAMI's philosophy.

The AAMI's response to cultural factors included mentorship by adults and peers, a focus on leadership building, and an emphasis on increasing the club aspect of the program. All of these appeared to be beneficial in building confidence in the AAMI students, a critical factor in boosting retention rates. Additionally, culturally relevant teaching, though less extensive than experts recommend, did at least put a spotlight on black history and issues affecting young black males. All of this seemingly bolstered students' focus on academic achievement.

Structural factors also accounted for retention of AAMI students. Time available, as well as available funding structured the opportunities that AAMI leaders had to provide the activities and support essential to the success of the black males in the program. The implications of these findings regarding structural factors, as well as those individual and cultural factors that are influencing retention in the program, will be discussed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Geertz (1973) defined the culture of a people as an “ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles,” which the researcher “strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong” (p. 452). Obviously, deriving meaning from the complexity of factors intertwined with black male culture and even the AAMI culture from an outsider’s perspective becomes a daunting task. Therefore, rather than attempt to reduce individuals or groups to a theory or formula, the research endeavored to provide an account that, as Geertz describes, “attends to their substance” (p. 453). Thus, implications are offered for each of the findings from Chapter 4 with an emphasis on the complex interrelationship of factors that impact retention in the AVID AAMI.

#### **Individual Factor Implications**

This section discusses the implications of this study with regard to the individual factors among young black male students that influence participation in the AAMI. It emphasizes the significance of confidence and motivation in supporting student retention in the program and what it means for the AAMI going into the future. It also suggests ways in which using athletics in an optimal manner could be beneficial for the AAMI and its participants. Finally, in regard to how student self-image and family dynamics impact retention, the section highlights aspects of the program that are effective, as well as provides suggestions for the program going forward.

#### **Motivation and Confidence are Critical to Retention**

At least in the two sites studied, the two individual factors that most impacted retention, according to students, teachers, and program coordinators, were motivation and

confidence. These qualities were associated with various other factors, including athletics, self-image and family dynamics. Therefore, any action plan implemented by the AVID AAMI for the future should consider how these interrelated factors can be most effectively addressed in order to positively impact retention in the program. This section provides a discussion of two of the individual factors: the dichotomous nature of athletics and the importance of self-image.

**The dichotomy of athletics.** Many of the students in the AAMI also competed in sports, and their instructors commonly used anecdotes about well-known athletes to illustrate the point that success in academics and athletics can go together. In one example, AAMI co-teacher Mr. C referred to a famous athlete to illustrate the importance of staying academically motivated, even when a student is highly talented in sports: “You want to have a Plan B that includes college. I taught [NBA star] Russell Westbrook [and he] wouldn’t have gotten into UCLA unless he was a scholar. And he was a scholar.” Since the staff at RAHS used athletics to promote academics and students very much want to play sports, it makes sense for the AAMI to seek a direct partnership with the athletic coaches on-site to reinforce the value of the program.

There were a large number of athletes in the AAMI. Of the 42 students surveyed, 28 students (or 67 percent) reported that they played on one of the school sports teams. Since athletics sometimes derailed the student-athletes in the AAMI, then a partnership with the coaches on campus could support these young men’s retention. Although coordinators and teachers at both sites made it clear that they wanted to expose these young men to non-athletic paths, connecting the AAMI with athletics could be beneficial for all parties. If coaches were to partner with the AAMI, they could share the

responsibility for not only motivating the young men in the program to maintain excellent academic standards, but also for instilling in them the belief that they have the capability to do so. In addition, AAMI teachers and athletic coaches could also help each other in terms of mentoring and building the capacity for leadership in these young men, even in the cases where there are not positive male role models in young men's lives.

Another possible course for the AAMI may be to partner up with locally or nationally recognized black male scholar-athletes to promote retention. The black males in this study look up to black athletes. Many black athletes are on television promoting good causes such as the NBA's Read to Achieve Program. These athletes and others similar to them would likely be interested in supporting a program like the AVID AAMI, that benefits young men, supports their culture, and empowers them to break the cycle of under-achievement.

**The importance of self-image.** A significant finding from this study is that building a strong and healthy self-image among the young men is necessary to boost retention rates in the program. Attending to ways that AAMI can support a strong self-image among black males has implications for the future of the program.

One of the primary factors that impacted self-image and ultimately students' participation in the program was "dressing out". Dressing out was used by the AAMI as a confidence builder, which was greatly needed by the young men. The downside of the practice was that if students failed to dress out, they were disciplined, which caused some of them to drop the program.

If the AAMI were to adopt a general policy about dressing out, they would also need to recognize the factors that challenge such a policy, not the least of which are peer



pressure and economics. One strategy that seemed to help, at least with economic constraints, was Mr. Hart's efforts to set up a shop that sold shirts and ties cheaply for students who couldn't afford the clothing. He recalled:

We had teachers and staff donate clothes ... and then we opened up the AVID store at lunch for all students to shop at. And we called it shopping because we would make ties for a quarter, shirts were 50 cents [so] they take ownership [and] appreciate it a little bit more because they bought it, even if it's just a quarter.

The shop helped students to dress out and also made them feel more confident, improved their self-image, and gave a more outward academic appearance.

The benefits of dressing out have shown that any future AAMI action plans or strategies should be designed to support students' self-image and self-confidence, but careful attention should be paid to the potential cultural challenges students face, such as peer perception and economic constraints.

### **Cultural Implications**

This section discusses the implications of this study from the perspective of the culture of the AAMI participants. It examines the students' views that academic-oriented behaviors are not associated with "acting white." Finally, the section offers a discussion on the implications of the family components of the AAMI students that affect their participation.

#### **Cultural Deficits, Resistance, or "Acting White" do not Account for Attrition**

A major finding from this study is that the AAMI black males I was able to study did not resist school for fear of "acting white" and did not see systemic racial inequality as a factor that would motivate them to drop out of the program or hinder their future

success. The students in this study disagreed with findings from previous research that pointed to black students' deficit thinking and/or resistance to "whiteness" as an explanation for black underachievement. Instead, they believed that there was no longer a white monopoly on education, and that being educated and successful was no longer the exclusive privilege of whites. Thus, as we attempt to improve the educational outcomes of the black male going forward, focusing on cultural resistance as an explanation for under-achievement may be taking our eyes off the ball, at least if the students I studied are typical of all black males.

In my study, at least, the students' attitudes were somewhat surprising given the work of Wise (2009) and others who have argued that institutionalized racism still exists in America, even in light of President Obama's success. Wise states:

While the individual success of ... Obama, is meaningful (and at this level was unthinkable merely a generation ago), the larger systemic and institutional realities ... suggest the ongoing salience of a deep-seated cultural malady—racism—which has been neither eradicated nor even substantially diminished by Obama's victory. (p.8)

Wise views Obama's victory as potentially dangerous, in that it may create "a new archetype or model of acceptable blackness" (p.11) that is, what white society perceives as an "acceptable" skin tone, voice pattern, and/or personality for the African American. Therefore, all educators must remain vigilant post-Obama to not ascribe some kind of expectation for what the successful and "acceptable" black male student should look and sound like.

While this study did not detect any overt racism at the site or at the program level, educators seeking strategies to support black males must understand they are operating within a system in this country that has been, as addressed in the literature review, steeped in racist practices since the arrival of the black man. As Wise has pointed out, “policies, practices, and procedures” (p. 49) in the system still possess the residues of racism and must be examined. This call to action makes the strategies to counteract structural inequities (such as an authentic and expansive CRT curriculum) that much more urgent. I take up this point in a subsequent section of this chapter.

**Bringing women into the circle.** Another factor that was identified as impacting retention rates in the program was the support mothers had for the AAMI. This finding suggests that fostering an increased level of participation of mothers or women who are in the young men’s lives would be beneficial for the students. Mothers are already in the circle, and according to these young men, their mothers seemed to ameliorate factors that contributed to their attrition in the program.

The intake process into this program—a topic that will be discussed specifically in the subsequent section on structure—should be used as an opportunity to not only establish communication with the women in the lives of the young men served by the program, but also to enlist their support wherever possible. In a great many cases, mothers were the central figure in these young men’s lives, and they are able to provide invaluable information as to what may support or threaten their sons’ retention in the program. At least one of the special events the program promotes should be to honor these women for the critical role they play and for the central place they hold in the lives of these young men.

**Addressing the father-figure dynamic.** The absence of a father or the lack of healthy relationship with a father figure threatened retention in the program. This study shows that one of the reasons it impacts retention is that it tends to make some of the young black males resistant to adult mentorship, an integral part of the AAMI. Addressing the father-figure dynamic will be critical for any future AAMI action plans related to retention. Some aspect of the program's philosophy or mission statement should address this reality.

Another key reason to address this issue is that the young men in this program are the next generation of fathers and father figures. Certainly, the program's pedagogy and the mentorship offered by both adults and peers should endeavor to not only break out of the cycle of disproportionate underachievement, but also to help to revitalize the culture in terms of grooming young men to be the male role models and fathers for the next generation. The implications in terms of both mentorship and CRT will be discussed next.

### **Capitalizing on Current AAMI Strengths**

This section will discuss several of the strongest points working in favor of the AAMI and how the organization can capitalize on them as it plans for the future. It contains three primary segments. The first segment explores the club effect, and how it will continue to be crucial in supporting retention in the program. The second segment offers suggestions for the AAMI to establish peer mentorship as part of the core of the initiative. The third segment deals with the notion of culturally responsive teaching, and makes the argument that increasing CRT efforts—including making a formal CRT guide available to all teachers in the program—would benefit retention rates in the AAMI going

forward.

### **The Club Effect**

Mr. C, RAHS AAMI coordinator, explained that for some students, a lack of confidence made social situations a challenge, and therefore attending events that expose students to the broader environment can be helpful in bringing out the social aspect of themselves. Therefore, maintaining the club aspect of the program and having the young men meet as often and consistently as possible would boost confidence and ultimately retention.

RAHS AAMI teacher Mr. Ellis also saw a relationship between the young men in the program without a father figure and the importance of the club effect:

Just the fact that [they] have black men on campus that they can see doing things outside of that box of what they perceive as kids to be cool. ... I think especially with our demographic, a lot of guys don't have dad at home.

In other words, besides making the young men more confident socially, the rationale for preserving the club aspect of the AAMI can help to address the consequences of not having a male role model or a healthy relationship with a father or father figure.

### **Mentorship and Leadership**

This study shows that students are benefitting from the adult and peer mentorship as well as the leadership training that is occurring in the program, indicating that the AVID AAMI needs to capitalize upon, develop, and formally promote these supports. Having a well-developed mentorship plan could attract much-needed funding from groups or individuals in the black community who recognize the relevance of mentorship and leadership building with young black males. Attention to the importance of

cultivating positive male role models should take a prominent place in the program's overall plan to support retention.

Moreover, AAMI needs to expend their efforts to use upperclassmen in the program as mentors for their younger classmates. Mr. Ellis explained that at RAHS, peer mentorship is already stressed, stating, "We push the men in the group who have chosen to be leaders and [to] hold [their] bros accountable." With all the peer mentorship that is already occurring in the AAMI to counteract the lack of motivation and buy-in among some students in the program and especially the underclassmen, it may help to formally name and establish a peer mentorship plan as part of the core of the initiative. It has the potential, along with leadership training, not only to promote retention but also to attract much-needed funding.

Leadership and confidence-building activities are taking place in the AAMI in ways that are not called out in the organization's literature. The current mission statement from AVID includes an emphasis on culturally responsive teaching and black male self-advocacy for learning, but does not specify the mentorship aspect of the AAMI and its role in building confidence and leadership. Without this formalized and called out in the mission statement, the AAMI is squandering an opportunity for potential buy-in to the program from students, parents, school sites, school districts, and even potential sources for funding.

Finally, an avenue for funding on a national or even an international scale could be to align the program to leadership, a concept very prevalent in the program at both study sites, but again not necessarily named by the AVID AAMI in its mission statement. Leadership is a field that is gaining more prominence, and because it is related to the

notions of confidence, communication, and image that are so important for black males, there may be money available in the black community from those who see great value in this kind of program. Economics in general and the sustainability of the AAMI program will be discussed in detail later in the chapter.

### **Redoubling CRT Efforts**

One response to a diverse population with diverse needs is to implement “culturally relevant pedagogy” (Ladson-Billings, 1995). CRT, as AAMI calls it, may serve to improve the black male’s engagement and achievement and neutralize some of the traditional factors contributing to educational inequity. Whether it is in a specialized program like the AAMI, or just a general curricular choice, schools that promote a minority student’s culture—i.e. focusing on cultural knowledge or addressing the African American male’s frames of reference—may produce better results (Carter, 2006, p. 324).

Ladson-Billings (1995) defined culturally relevant pedagogy as practice where teachers would recognize unique language and literacy skills—i.e., performance styles—students brought to the table and “connect them up” with traditional forms of literacy (p. 117). Harnessing these skills traditionally deemed as problematic by traditional teachers could impact student engagement, and presumably achievement.

W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) lamented, the black man’s “best powers and his latent genius” have been “wasted, dispersed, or forgotten” (p. 3) and this inequity demands that we continue to carefully examine and refine pedagogy as it relates his educational outcomes. Insight and attentiveness to culturally relevant instruction offers an important avenue toward, as scholar-educator Mack Hines III described at the 2011 AVID National Conference, “validating” the identity of the black male.

This certainly held true for me as a beginning teacher and researcher. I attended to black vernacular and produced a program relevant to the culture and community of young African Americans. I was able to support students in their ability to express their perspectives on the exigencies of urban life through culturally relevant mediums (Baker, 1984; Ladson-Billings, 1995). The outcomes I witnessed were confined to the summer program, but the participants remained tremendously engaged and demonstrated a range of proficiencies—including impressive verbal and interpersonal skills—as they produced a sophisticated television program showcasing their diverse capacities.

The implementation of CRT pedagogy was in evidence to some degree at both sites, but obviously more at RAHS where students were able to congregate for a homeroom period and have access to this strategy. However, this study found that increasing CRT strategies—starting by making a formal CRT guide already drafted by AVID available to all AAMI teachers—would be beneficial. Disseminating a guide that would be make CRT strategies more accessible to AAMI students and efficacious for teachers is an idea that formed AAMI coordinator Mr. Meacham has already considered. He even had a hand in developing the draft of the CRT guide. He wondered, as did I:

Why doesn't everybody in this room that's on this District CRT Committee have this book, the resources, that we did the work [on]? We spent three or four years putting it together. Everybody on this committee should at least have the book so they can familiarize themselves with CRT.

It is certainly time for AVID to escalate its efforts to engage in CRT and to implement that draft. Individual AAMI programs also need to be able to draw from the experience of educators like Mr. Meacham and Mack Hines III, who are valuable



resources as to how to effectively and authentically implement CRT. However, a CRT is only valuable if there is time to implement it—an implication to be discussed in the following section.

### **Structural and Programmatic Implications**

This section will discuss the implications of this study as they relate to the structural and programmatic aspects of the AAMI. It begins with the implications of this study's finding that an exclusive AAMI homeroom was beneficial in supporting student participation. It continues by detailing a series of programmatic factors, including intake policies and the notion of a vertical program, intervention procedures, and the impact of time devoted to AAMI activities, that influence retention. It concludes with a discussion on the future sustainability of the AAMI, focusing on the importance of securing funding and other economic issues.

#### **Structural Implications at the Site Level**

**The all-AAMI homeroom model.** This study found that creating and maintaining a homeroom exclusively for the AAMI was beneficial in supporting retention rates, at least if a significant amount of time each day is devoted to students being in the classroom. RAHS AVID counselor Ms. Garcia argued that “the most effective part is actually being able to be in a homeroom,” and whether it is through AVID funding or simply site administration support, maintaining the integrity of the all-AAMI homeroom at RAHS will support student buy-in and ultimately retention. Conversely, if students are only able to meet on an inconsistent basis, there will not be as strong of a sense of community or a powerful club effect, and therefore, there will be less support for buy-in and retention.

The program was designed to support black males. This study shows, however, that at least one of the six original AVID AAMI pilot sites has opened the program to students from various racial and ethnic groups—namely RAHS. Mr. Ellis revealed that some white and Mexican students came to seek mentorship, and Mr. Meacham stressed that he was “adamant” that the AAMI “was open for any man.” He was not about to close his door to young men seeking to build their confidence or leadership skills, or to find a positive male role model, simply based on their skin color.

The open-door policy did not affect the substance of the program. Rather, it improved the reputation of the program on campus because it did not exclude anyone—regardless of color or even gender (a dynamic which will be discussed in more detail in the conclusion of this chapter)—from the opportunities provided by the AAMI. Thus, while AVID has clearly provided their rationale for targeting African Americans, it might also address the notion of opening some aspects of the program to young men (and women) regardless of color who seek mentorship and would like to set themselves apart as leaders.

**The club model.** This study found that relying on the club model, as opposed to an all-AAMI homeroom model, brings about a series of challenges including fewer meetings as a group, diminished time spent interacting with peers, and less access to adult mentors, that could jeopardize retention rates. Mr. C explained that even if the homeroom was taken away, the leaders were willing to turn the program into a club, assuring me, “We’re going to risk it. We’re going to do it.” Mr. Ellis agreed: “Yeah, the funding is pulled. And we want to keep the program running as a club.” Thus, whether it is through new sources of funding or site administrative support to maintain the integrity of the

program, or simply the dedication of the staff to run the program as a campus club, the implication is that the AVID AAMI program will continue into the future.

### **Structural Implications Program-Wide**

**Reconsidering intake procedures.** Findings from this study indicate that conducting interviews with prospective participants to gauge their level of interest for the program would serve to boost retention. Wayne, an RAHS student, explained: “[A pre-interview] would be most proper [because if not, a student] just feels like he can be there anytime he wants.” Automatically placing students into the program negatively impacted retention, and the AAMI must seriously reevaluate that policy, even if it will cause the program’s total numbers to suffer a setback.

Mr. Meacham discussed the importance of a pre-interview to determine initial buy-in to the program—something he dubbed “the sniff test”—to see if the student “doesn’t have any buy-in [and] he’s not going to perform.” Mr. C, agreed, explaining, “students that don’t want it actually come in and they’re a hindrance.” Therefore, rather than boast high raw numbers of students in the program, the AAMI should shoot for what Mr. C called “quality, not quantity,” and focus their efforts on those who have the requisite motivation to actively participate.

***Building a vertical program.*** Along with the importance of a pre-interview, another implication of this research in terms of intake is the notion of making the program a vertical one, which means starting this program at junior high or middle school. This study found that expanding the program to the middle-school level could better prepare young men to succeed in the AAMI. At the 2011 AVID National

Conference, Dennis Johnston urged that “vertical teaming is key” in terms of narrowing the achievement gap.

Mr. C explained, “They’re begging us to come over [to the middle school] and do this type of work.” So, along with a pre-interview to determine students’ willingness to participate, there would also be a tremendous benefit from a vertical aspect to the AAMI. Solomon, an RAHS freshman, argued that students who started in middle school “would be more confident, more motivated to do, to be a leader, and to be stronger in academics and be positively social and able to commit more to a program like this.” Perhaps no other sentiment expressed by a student participant in this study better captures the benefits of the AAMI program and so clearly delineates the important work to do going forward.

**Refining intervention procedures.** A finding from this study is that clearly defined intervention procedures would support retention in the program, especially in light of the blanket placement policy described above that is certain to include students who lack buy-in, struggle with confidence, are resistant to mentorship, and/or have discipline issues. Therefore, an intervention program must be in place. Intervention policies for the future could expand to not only include AVID and AAMI staff, but peer mentors and parents.

Developing a program within the AAMI where older peers guide students who are struggling and at-risk of dropping or being dropped from the program might contribute to positively influencing retention rates. Of course, program coordinators must play a crucial role in an intervention program as well. However, the AVID and AAMI counselors and coordinators find much of their role deals with collecting and managing

data in order to meet compliance requirements for funding by AVID and at the district and site level. As AAMI moves forward, the initiative would be wise to refocus some of their counselors' and coordinators' efforts on student interventions to avoid dropping students from the program due to discipline issues.

Many students seemed to hold the perception that if they slipped in terms of discipline they would be removed from the program. This seemed to be a reality. As boys caused discipline problems, they were made to leave the program, as in the case of four students in the GWHS AAMAC. If retention is a goal for the AAMI, then part of the program's action plan for the future must include an intervention process—led by the coordinator but in partnership with senior AAMI student leaders—designed to address behavior issues that may be caused by a lack of buy-in or self-confidence, and/or a resistance to mentorship.

Finally, parents need to be part of interventions whenever possible. While AVID coordinator Ms. Garcia reported that, "the parent involvement isn't as high as we want it to be," students interviewed and those surveyed overwhelmingly reported having mothers who supported their educational pursuits, and in addition, many also described having supportive fathers. More of an effort must be made to make these parents part of their students' AAMI experience, including, if necessary, interventions to keep them actively and successfully participating in the program.

**The impact of time.** Another significant finding from this study is that having ample time to devote to AAMI activities was a constant concern among program coordinators and it was having a negative effect on retention. Time must be created to develop mentoring relationships with the young men and to build the club effect.

Ms. Garcia pointed out that although the role of the mentor is often a father figure for the students, it is a relationship that hinges on time. She explained, “I think it’s really important that they get a time to meet with them during the school day. I wish it could be a whole period.” Because time is essential to build a sense of community that allows for peer mentoring to occur and for buy-in to increase, the number one priority of the AAMI going into the future must be to provide ample time for both students and staff to support student retention.

**Future sustainability of the AAMI.** This study found that securing adequate funding for the program is a crucial factor in maintaining or attempting to increase retention rates. The AAMI program is at risk of losing its outside funding. The idea that program leaders have expressed at one site is to go into the local community and seek financial support. If the case can be made for the AVID AAMI at the district level, local school districts could potentially support the program. GWHS Coordinator Mr. Hart explained that even in lieu of any outside funding, the AAMAC program would continue: “As far as ... the school receiving money for hitting certain benchmarks like turning in data ... I believe that’s stopping [but] I don’t see how that changes what we do next year. We keep going.”

### **Implications for Future Research**

Each of the findings presented suggest future research focused specifically in that area. For example: (a) the importance of confidence building in the AAMI in general or as it relates to retention; (b) the effect of family dynamics on AAMI students in general or as it relates to retention; (c) the impact of intake and intervention strategies on AAMI students in general or as it relates to retention; (d) the presence of culturally relevant

teaching on AAMI students in general or as it relates to retention, and/or possible ways to refine AVID's approach to this dynamic. I see this study more as a beginning than as an end. Now that some of the issues that impact black male participation and retention in the AVID AAMI have begun to be unearthed, more research is needed to further explore these interrelated factors.

### **Conclusion**

This study has shown that individual, cultural, and structural arrangements have mattered in the crafting and implementation of the AAMI—a program specifically designed for black males. To understand what factors supported or challenged retention in the AAMI program, it has been necessary to examine each of these factors and how they were interrelated.

On the final day of on-site data collection at RAHS, I was able to attend an after-school AAMI meeting, and it was at this event it became clearer how the program works to support these young men became clearer. The primary subject of the meeting was to discuss a future trip the AAMI was planning. The AAMI teachers proposed the idea of visiting historic Allensworth, a nearby California town established by Lt. Col. Allen Allensworth, a prominent African American soldier and educator, in 1908. He designed Allensworth as a community where black people could live the American dream. Mr. C remarked, “This is the route to the fruit—that is, the route we come from, and you are the fruit.”

They also discussed a college field trip. Students were encouraged to bring a transcript, resume, letter of recommendation, brag sheet, and writing sample to share with college officials they encountered, a directive provided with what the coordinators called

the “black tax” in mind. Mr. Ellis used this metaphor to highlight the injustice and inequity of the education system and the larger society: “Black tax is a reference that if you are a black male then there’s a tax that you’re going to pay if you want to succeed ... if you are going to get your foot in the door then one hundred percent is not acceptable.” Mr. C explained, “They don’t know you. They don’t know your work ethic. They are not going to give you the benefit of the doubt.”

The AAMI teachers made sure that both of the experiences were culturally relevant. The journey to Allensworth provided knowledge of their local ancestors (i.e. the “route to the fruit”), and the college field trip was designed with the young men’s best interests (and the “black tax”) in mind. Mr. C and Mr. Ellis were at once strong male role models, promoters of African American culture, and dedicated mentors, along with performing their duties as teachers. In terms of both time and money, these AAMI mentors are sacrificing their own resources for the betterment of these young men. The amount of effort and care they put into organizing a cultural experience and a college field trip was impressive and indicated the extent to which AAMI endeavored to provide valuable opportunities for the young men in the program.

At the conclusion of the meeting, former coordinator Mr. Meacham, there with his daughter, addressed the group. With almost a reverence, he reminded the RAHS AAMI that they were members of “the original six,” and “were a part of something,” referring to the AAMI’s six pilot schools. The “something,” as he described it, was a legacy of academic excellence. Mr. Meacham—still a strong presence in the RAHS AAMI—reminded the group that “leadership can change at any moment,” highlighting



the importance of establishing the program that can withstand structural challenges going into the future.

For example, while the program at the GWHS site was non-traditional in terms of its “club model,” there are valuable lessons to be learned from that site in terms of how to run the program independently if necessary. In measured tones, Mr. Meacham began laying out the idea of “Harambee”—Swahili for community effort or coming together. This event, like the AAMI in general, was about community, and bringing AAMI staff, parents, and students together.

This community included the newly formed AAFI, or African American Female Initiative, a group operating informally at RAHS but poised to establish itself as a formal club on campus. The presence of the AAFI was a strong signal that the RAHS AAMI has the right idea going into the future. These young ladies need to be part of the process in not only narrowing an educational achievement gap, but also in transforming the image of the black male as a student and eventually a father, father figure, and/or male role model to the next generation.

In a rather poignant moment, Mr. Meacham explained to his former students, “I didn’t want to leave—had to go.” His emotional address punctuated the importance of the male mentor in these young men’s lives. He was careful to stress that they were not abandoned because of his jobsite change, but rather, he was “never far away.” The work of AAMI could not happen without dedicated individuals like Mr. Meacham and Mr. C. Mr. C explained the kind of “passion” that is needed:

If you don’t like it, you know, let’s put it on the table. Because ... the first word is passionate. If you’re not passionate about this work, you won’t continue fighting.

I mean, it's almost a job description ... You have to be passionate for educating and closing this equality or achievement gap in the young men because at some point you're going to be discouraged. I'm discouraged all the time. But my passion ... pushes me to continue to work hard with the ones who are working.

From the first moment I called the site to make arrangements for the research to the final RAHS meeting I attended, I was inspired by the dedication of the AAMI staff. At GWHS, Mr. Hart demonstrated the same level of commitment.

In addition, I was made to feel welcome by the AAMI at both sites as a researcher, partner teacher, and human being. In order to maintain the integrity of the research and to offer the clearest possible insights to AVID as to the current and future state of the AAMI, I endeavored at all times to make the research objective, even in light of the bonds I had formed with staff and students, and the fact that the nature of observing the human experience is a decidedly subjective one.

Without question, I entered, and for now, leave the research with support for the extraordinary work that AVID is doing in their flagship program and in their AAMI. The student participants in this study have confirmed something I have known since my first days in the classroom. African American male students are extraordinarily capable, and bring an array of unique talents and capacities to the classroom that are often untapped for the full potential.

While black males operate in systems that continue to, at times, hinder their advancement, well-intentioned and increasingly well-informed educators and researchers are doing work to, for lack of a better term, "un-do" some of the constraints that have stifled black male achievement, overtly as well as subtly, from slavery through

segregation and up to the present time. It is my hope that the findings and implications provided in this small study can lend insight to AVID's African American Male Initiative—a program that has clearly shown it has the young black male's best interests in mind.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**INTERVIEW GUIDE**

	<b>AVID STUDENT</b>	<b>AVID TEACHER</b>	<b>AVID COORDINATOR</b>
<b>Background</b>	<p>Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?</p> <p>How long have you been in the AVID program?</p> <p>How did you get involved with the AAMI?</p> <p>What do you do in the AAMI?</p> <p>What about the AAMI program do you like the most, or what has helped you the most?</p> <p>What part of the AAMI program do you not like as much, or has been the most challenging for you?</p>	<p>How long have you been teaching AVID?</p> <p>Can you describe your primary role as the AVID AAMI teacher?</p> <p>In your perception what part of the AAMI is the most effective with students?</p> <p>In your perception, what about the AAMI is the least effective with students?</p>	<p>How long have you been an AVID coordinator?</p> <p>Are all African American males who are in AVID placed in the AAMI?</p> <p>Can you describe your role as AVID coordinator, especially in relation to the AAMI?</p> <p>In your perception what part of the AAMI is the most effective for students?</p> <p>In your perception, what about the AAMI is the least effective with students?</p>
<b>Individual</b>	<p>Which class do you try to give the most effort in? Why?</p> <p><b>STUDENT</b></p> <p>Which class do you give the least effort in? Why?</p> <p>Can you describe a time in school you were praised or complimented?</p> <p>Can you describe a time in school you were corrected?</p>	<p>In your perception, when are the AAMI students the most motivated?</p> <p><b>TEACHER</b></p> <p>When are they the least motivated?</p> <p>Can you describe an area of strength among the AAMI students?</p> <p>Can you describe an area that needs improvement</p>	<p>In your perception, when are the AAMI students the most motivated?</p> <p><b>COORDINATOR</b></p> <p>When are they the least motivated?</p> <p>Can you describe an area of strength among the AAMI students?</p> <p>Can you describe an area that needs improvement</p>

<p>Do you take harder classes because of AVID or the AAMI? If yes, how do you feel about that?</p> <p>Are your friends in these harder classes? Do you study together?</p> <p>What kind of student do you think you are?</p> <p>What kind of a student do your friends think you are?</p>	<p>among the AAMI students?</p> <p>Do students take harder classes because of being of AVID or the AAMI? How do they handle that?</p>	<p>among the AAMI students?</p> <p>Do students take harder classes because of being of AVID or the AAMI? How do they handle that?</p>
<p>Do you want to be known as someone who does well in school? Why or why not?</p>	<p>In your perception, do the AAMI students want to be known for doing well in school? Why or why not?</p>	<p>In your perception, do the AAMI students want to be known for doing well in school? Why or why not?</p>
<p>How important is it for you to have the correct answer in class? Does it matter? To whom?</p>	<p>In general, do the AAMI students answer questions frequently in class? In your perception, why or why not?</p>	<p>In general, do the AAMI students participate and answer questions frequently in class? In your perception, why or why not?</p>
<p>What are your study habits?</p>		
<p>STUDENT</p>	<p>TEACHER</p>	<p>COORDINATOR</p>
<p>How about your homework habits?</p> <p>What are your goals after high school?</p> <p>How will you achieve those goals?</p> <p>What role does AVID play,</p>		

## Cultural

specifically the AAMI, play in helping you achieve those goals?

What will doing well in school and going to college do for you in the long run?

Who is in your family?

*The questions below will be modified according to answer above.*

How do your parents feel about you being in the AAMI program?

Can you describe your parents' involvement in your education?

What is your opinion of school in general?

In what ways do you feel your culture is represented in the student population? How about in the faculty? In the administration?

**STUDENT**

In what ways do you see connections between your life and what you are reading or learning about in the AAMI?

How do the parents feel about the AAMI program?

Can you describe your involvement with the AAMI parents?

In your perception, how do the AAMI students feel about school in general?

Does the faculty of the school reflect the culture of the AAMI students?

How about the administration?

**TEACHER**

How do you focus on developing a culturally relevant curriculum in your particular classroom?

What are the biggest challenges—academic and/or

How do the parents feel about the AAMI program?

Can you describe your involvement with the AAMI parents?

In your perception, how do the AAMI students feel about school in general?

Does the faculty of the school reflect the culture of the AAMI students?

How about the administration?

**COORDINATOR**

In what ways does the AAMI provide a culturally relevant pedagogy?

What are the biggest challenges—academic and/or

Structural	<p>How important is AVID here at your school?</p> <p>Can you describe how other students around the school feel about AVID, and specifically the AAMI? What kinds of things do people say about it?</p>	<p>personal—that influence the students' retention rate?</p> <p>How significant is AVID here at your site?</p> <p>Can you describe how other teachers feel about AVID, and specifically the AAMI? What kinds of things do people say about it?</p>	<p>personal—that influence the students' retention rate?</p> <p>How significant is AVID here at your site?</p> <p>Can you describe how others around the school—students, teachers, or administrators—feel about AVID, and specifically the AAMI? What kinds of things do people say about it?</p>
	<p>Does enrollment in AVID easily fit into your schedule? Do you get to take the other electives you want?</p>	<p>What supports do the administration provide for the AVID and particularly the AAMI program?</p> <p>Does enrollment in AVID easily fit into the students' schedules? Do they get to take the other electives they want?</p>	<p>What supports do the administration provide for the AVID and particularly the AAMI program?</p> <p>Does enrollment in AVID easily fit into the students' schedules? Do they get to take the other electives they want?</p>
	<p>In what ways, if any, does AVID prepare you for standardized testing?</p>	<p>In what ways, if any, does AVID prepare students for standardized testing?</p>	<p>In what ways, if any, does AVID prepare students for standardized testing?</p>
	<p>STUDENT</p>	<p>TEACHER</p>	<p>COORDINATOR</p>
	<p>Have you ever been tracked—or placed in a certain level class because of your ability? Can you describe your history with tracking?</p>	<p>Does tracking exist in your school? If so, can you briefly describe how it works at your site?</p>	<p>Does tracking exist in your school? If so, can you briefly describe how it works at your site?</p>
	<p>In what ways, if any, has</p>		

participation with  
AVID affected  
that?

Has being in the  
AVID or the AAMI  
influenced your  
performance in  
your other classes?  
In what ways?

In your opinion,  
why do some  
students drop  
AVID?

Will you continue  
to stay in AVID?  
Why or why not?

What—if any—  
improvements have  
you noticed in  
student  
performance due to  
the AAMI?

In your perception,  
why do students  
who drop AVID do  
so?

In your perception,  
why do students  
who retain AVID  
do so?

What—if any—  
improvements have  
you noticed in  
student  
performance due to  
the AAMI?

In your perception,  
why do students  
who drop AVID do  
so?

In your perception,  
why do students  
who retain AVID  
do so?



**APPENDIX B**  
**SITE CONSENT LETTER**

April 27, 2012

My name is Ron Lancia and I am a doctoral student doing my dissertation work in the PhD Leadership program at the University of San Diego. I have designed a research project that attempts to better understand the factors that support and those that challenge African American male students in AVID's AAMI. Director of Research Dr. Dennis Johnston and AAMI Director Dr. Maria Cobb have suggested that the work you are doing at your site would provide valuable information as to how to best serve AVID AAMI students into the future. I am writing this letter to ask for your support and permission to conduct research at your school.

As a teacher for the past fifteen years, my first priority is make sure the research is not intrusive or distracting to your classroom. While the majority of the research will consist of case studies developed through observations, beginning in the fall I would like to conduct interviews with the AVID coordinator, the AVID AAMI teacher, and some students. I would also like to analyze retention data and administer a brief survey to all students in the program at the end of the semester. Of course, I will secure all necessary consents and the anonymity of all participants will be maintained. As a first step, I would like to visit your site at the end of this school year, and begin to get to know you and your students and the AAMI program.

My intention is to gain a deeper understanding of the AAMI by exploring what individual, cultural, and structural factors impact retention in the program. I simply hope to provide information that supports your efforts and those of AVID in enhancing opportunities for African American male students. The Internal Review Board at USD will need your permission for the study, so for convenience I have attached a consent form that includes contact information. Please do not hesitate to contact Dr. Johnston or Dr. Cobb at AVID Center or myself if you have any questions. I sincerely look forward to working with you and observing your program.

Thank you,

Ronald R. Lancia, M.Ed.

**APPENDIX C**  
**STUDENT CONSENT FORM**

**University of San Diego  
Institutional Review Board**

**Research Participant Consent Form**

For the research study entitled:  
**ACCOUNTING FOR THE ATTRITION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES  
IN AN ACADEMIC SUPPORT SETTING**

**I. Purpose of the research study**

RONALD LANCIA is a DOCTORAL STUDENT in the PHD LEADERSHIP PROGRAM at the University of San Diego. You are invited to participate in a research study he/she is conducting. THE OVERALL PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY IS TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE FACTORS THAT SHAPE BLACK MALE EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES BY EXAMINING THEIR RESPONSES TO AN INITIATIVE DESIGNED TO MITIGATE FACTORS TRADITIONALLY IMPEDING THEIR PROGRESS. IN OTHER WORDS, THIS STUDY WILL EXAMINE WHY STUDENTS CHOOSE TO RETAIN OR NOT TO RETAIN AVID'S AAMI.

**II. What you will be asked to do**

You will be observed during your AAMI classes during the 2012-13 school year.

If you decide to be in this study, you will be asked to:

PARTICIPATE IN AN OPEN-ENDED QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW THAT WILL TAKE NO MORE THAN 60 MINUTES TO COMPLETE. YOU WILL BE AUDIOTAPED DURING THE INTERVIEW.

FILL OUT A SURVEY THAT WILL TAKE NO MORE THAN 30 MINUTES TO COMPLETE.

Your participation in this study will take a total of ONE HOUR and THIRTY MINUTES over and above your normal school day if you decide to participate in the interview and the survey.

**III. Foreseeable risks or discomforts.**

Sometimes when people are asked to think about their feelings, they feel sad or anxious. If you would like to talk to someone about your feelings at any time, you can call toll-free, 24 hours a day: San Diego Mental Health Hotline at 1-800-479-3339. Or, you could choose to contact a local provider.

**IV. Benefits**

While there may be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study, the indirect benefit of participating will be knowing that you helped researchers better understand why African American high school males are choosing to participate or not participate in the AVID AAMI, or once enrolled do not continue their participation in the program—a program that is specifically designed to employ culturally responsive teaching and ensure the retention of black males. This study will focus primarily on three general contributors to African American male education outcomes previously identified in the research: 1) individual and student-centered issues, 2) social, cultural or race-related forces, and 3) the structure of the system.

#### **V. Confidentiality**

Any information provided and/or identifying records will remain confidential and kept in a locked file and/or password-protected computer file in the researcher's office for a minimum of five years. All data collected from you will be coded with a number or pseudonym (fake name). Your real name will not be used. The results of this research project may be made public and information quoted in professional journals and meetings, but information from this study will only be reported as a group, and not individually.

#### **VI. Compensation**

You will receive no compensation for your participation in the study.

#### **VII. Voluntary Nature of this Research**

**Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You do not have to do this, and you can refuse to answer any question or quit at any time. Deciding not to participate or not answering any of the questions will have no effect on any benefits you're entitled to or your grades. You can withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.**

### **VIII. Contact Information**

**If you have any questions about this research, you may contact either:**

**1) RON LANCIA, INVESTIGATOR, UNIVERSITY OF SAN DIEGO**

**Email:**

**Phone:**

**2) LEA HUBBARD, ADVISOR, UNIVERSITY OF SAN DIEGO**

**Email:**

**Phone:**

**I have read and understand this form, and consent to the research it describes to me. I have received a copy of this consent form for my records.**

---

Signature of Participant

Date

---

Name of Participant (**Printed**)

---

Signature of Investigator

Date

**APPENDIX D**  
**PARENT CONSENT FORM**

**University of San Diego  
Institutional Review Board**

**Parent of Research Participant  
Consent Form**

For the research study entitled:  
**ACCOUNTING FOR THE ATTRITION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES  
IN AN ACADEMIC SUPPORT SETTING**

**I. Purpose of the research study**

RONALD LANCIA is a DOCTORAL STUDENT in the PHD LEADERSHIP PROGRAM at the University of San Diego. Your child is invited to participate in a research study he/she is conducting. THE OVERALL PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY IS TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE FACTORS THAT SHAPE BLACK MALE EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES BY EXAMINING THEIR RESPONSES TO AN INITIATIVE DESIGNED TO MITIGATE FACTORS TRADITIONALLY IMPEDING THEIR PROGRESS. IN OTHER WORDS, THIS STUDY WILL EXAMINE WHY STUDENTS CHOOSE TO RETAIN OR NOT TO RETAIN AVID'S AAMI.

**II. What your child will be asked to do**

Your child will be observed in their AAMI classes during the 2012-13 school year. If you decide to permit your child to be in this study, he or she will be asked to:

PARTICIPATE IN AN OPEN-ENDED QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW THAT WILL TAKE NO MORE THAN 60 MINUTES TO COMPLETE. YOU WILL BE AUDIOTAPED DURING THE INTERVIEW.

FILL OUT A SURVEY THAT WILL TAKE MORE THAN 30 MINUTES TO COMPLETE.

Participation in this study will take a total of 1 HOUR and 30 MINUTES over and above their normal school day if they decide to participate in the interview and the survey.

**III. Foreseeable risks or discomforts.**

Sometimes when people are asked to think about their feelings, they feel sad or anxious. If you child would like to talk to someone about your feelings at any time, you can call toll-free, 24 hours a day: San Diego Mental Health Hotline at 1-800-479-3339. Or, they could choose to contact a local provider.



#### **IV. Benefits**

While there may be no direct benefit to your child from participating in this study, the indirect benefit of participating will be knowing that they helped researchers better understand why African American high school males are choosing to participate or not participate in the AVID AAMI, or once enrolled do not continue their participation in the program—a program that is specifically designed to employ culturally responsive teaching and ensure the retention of black males. This study will focus primarily on three general contributors to African American male education outcomes previously identified in the research: 1) individual and student-centered issues, 2) social, cultural or race-related forces, and 3) the structure of the system.

#### **V. Confidentiality**

Any information provided and/or identifying records will remain confidential and kept in a locked file and/or password-protected computer file in the researcher's office for a minimum of five years. All data collected from your child will be coded with a number or pseudonym (fake name). Their real name will never be used. The results of this research project may be made public and information quoted in professional journals and meetings, but information from this study will only be reported as a group, and not individually.

#### **VI. Compensation**

Your child will receive no compensation for your participation in the study.

#### **VII. Voluntary Nature of this Research**

**Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your child does not have to do this, and can refuse to answer any question or quit at any time. Deciding not to participate or not answering any of the questions will have no effect on any benefits they're entitled to or grades. They can withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.**

### **VIII. Contact Information**

**If you have any questions about this research, you may contact either:**

**1) RON LANCIA, INVESTIGATOR, UNIVERSITY OF SAN DIEGO**

**Email:**

**Phone:**

**2) LEA HUBBARD, ADVISOR, UNIVERSITY OF SAN DIEGO**

**Email:**

**Phone:**

**I have read and understand this form, and consent to the research it describes to me. I have received a copy of this form for my records.**

---

Signature of Parent

Date

---

Name of Parent (**Printed**)

---

Name of Student Participant (**Printed**)

---

Signature of Investigator

Date

**APPENDIX E**  
**AAMI SURVEY DOCUMENT**

*There is no need to place your name anywhere on this document. Your answers will remain completely anonymous.*

Place an [X] next to the response that most fits you.

1. Grade Level: 9<sup>th</sup> [ ] 10<sup>th</sup> [ ] 11<sup>th</sup> [ ] 12<sup>th</sup> [ ]
2. How many years have you been in AAMI? 1 [ ] 2 [ ] 3 [ ] 4 [ ]
3. What is your approximate grade average? A [ ] B [ ] C [ ] D [ ] F [ ]
4. Do you have an after-school job? Yes [ ] No [ ]
5. Do you have to watch your brothers or sisters after school? Yes [ ] No [ ]

Place an [X] next to ALL that apply to you.

6. Who lives at home with you?

Mother [ ] Father [ ] Brothers/Sisters [ ] Grandmother [ ]

Grandfather [ ] Aunts/Uncles [ ] Other [ ] \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please list)

7. Do you participate in any of the following school-sponsored activities?

Athletics [ ] Band [ ] Drama [ ] Other [ ] \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please list)

Indicate with an [X] how much you disagree or agree with the following statements.

8. I volunteered to be in the AAMI.

[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]  
strongly disagree disagree undecided agree strongly agree

9. I am going to stay in the AAMI program through my senior year.

[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]  
strongly disagree disagree undecided agree strongly agree

10. Education is important to me.

[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]  
strongly disagree disagree undecided agree strongly agree

11. Staying motivated every day in school is a challenge for me.

[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]  
strongly disagree disagree undecided agree strongly agree

12. Behavior and discipline in class are a challenge for me.

[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]  
strongly disagree disagree undecided agree strongly agree

13. I don't like being disciplined by male teachers.  
 strongly disagree     disagree     undecided     agree     strongly agree
14. I like speaking in front of the class.  
 strongly disagree     disagree     undecided     agree     strongly agree
15. The AAMI helps me to become a better public speaker.  
 strongly disagree     disagree     undecided     agree     strongly agree
16. I am considered a leader in the classroom.  
 strongly disagree     disagree     undecided     agree     strongly agree
17. The AAMI helps me to become a leader.  
 strongly disagree     disagree     undecided     agree     strongly agree
18. If I work hard in school I will be successful.  
 strongly disagree     disagree     undecided     agree     strongly agree
19. School is a place where black males can be successful.  
 strongly disagree     disagree     undecided     agree     strongly agree
20. I have what it takes to be successful in college.  
 strongly disagree     disagree     undecided     agree     strongly agree
21. My goal is to earn a college degree.  
 strongly disagree     disagree     undecided     agree     strongly agree
22. The AAMI program prepares me for success in college.  
 strongly disagree     disagree     undecided     agree     strongly agree
23. My family can afford to send me to college without a scholarship.  
 strongly disagree     disagree     undecided     agree     strongly agree
24. I have a father who is supportive of me in school.  
 strongly disagree     disagree     undecided     agree     strongly agree

25. I have a mother who is supportive of me in school.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

26. My friends that aren't in the AAMI support me being in the program.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

27. Being in the AAMI is like being part of a club or a community of friends.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

28. The older members of AAMI help keep me on the right path in school.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

29. The AAMI teacher is like a father to me.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

30. The principals and vice principals on campus support the AAMI.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

31. The AAMI program has a good reputation on campus.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

32. Black males have a good reputation on campus.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

33. Teachers on campus see black males as athletes only.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

34. Athletics is my path to success in the future.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

35. I like learning about black culture in school.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

36. The AAMI teaches me about black culture.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

37. Being in the AAMI is difficult on my schedule.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

38. It is difficult to attend all of the AAMI meetings.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

39. The AVID part of being in the AAMI—such as notes or tutorials—helps me succeed in school.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

40. If you don't behave in class you will be removed from the AAMI.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

41. If I start to slip, the AAMI has a way to help keep me on track and in the program.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

42. If I stay in the AAMI all four years, I will receive opportunities like the other older members of the program.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

Place an [X] next to the best possible response.

43. What is the biggest challenge for you as a student?

Confidence[  ] Discipline[  ] Motivation[  ] Other[  ] \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please list)

44. What makes you want to drop AAMI?

a) Academic challenges because of AVID[  ]

b) Daily program expectations[  ]

c) Not buying-in to the program's overall philosophy [  ]

d) Perception of friends or peers[  ]

e) Time-management issues[  ]

f) Other[  ] \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please list)

45. What makes you want to stay in AAMI? a) Belief in the program's philosophy and what it stands for[  ]

b) Belonging to a club or community of friends[  ]

c) Guidance from older peers and/or the teacher[  ]

d) Preparation for success in school and beyond [  ]

e) Opportunities for events and scholarships[  ]

f) Other[  ] \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please list)

APPENDIX F

AMAC SURVEY DOCUMENT



*There is no need to place your name anywhere on this document. Your answers will remain completely anonymous.*

Place an [X] next to the response that most fits you.

1. Grade Level: 9<sup>th</sup> [ ] 10<sup>th</sup> [ ] 11<sup>th</sup> [ ] 12<sup>th</sup> [ ]
2. How many years have you been in AMAC? 1 [ ] 2 [ ] 3 [ ] 4 [ ]
3. What is your approximate grade average? A [ ] B [ ] C [ ] D [ ] F [ ]
4. Do you have an after-school job? Yes [ ] No [ ]
5. Do you have to watch your brothers or sisters after school? Yes [ ] No [ ]

Place an [X] next to ALL that apply to you.

6. Who lives at home with you?

Mother [ ] Father [ ] Brothers/Sisters [ ] Grandmother [ ]

Grandfather [ ] Aunts/Uncles [ ] Other [ ] \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please list)

7. Do you participate in any of the following school-sponsored activities?

Athletics [ ] Band [ ] Drama [ ] Other [ ] \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please list)

Indicate with an [X] how much you disagree or agree with the following statements.

8. I volunteered to be in AMAC.

[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]  
strongly disagree disagree undecided agree strongly agree

9. I am going to stay in the AMAC program through my senior year.

[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]  
strongly disagree disagree undecided agree strongly agree

10. Education is important to me.

[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]  
strongly disagree disagree undecided agree strongly agree

11. Staying motivated every day in school is a challenge for me.

[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]  
strongly disagree disagree undecided agree strongly agree

12. Behavior and discipline in class are a challenge for me.

[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]  
strongly disagree disagree undecided agree strongly agree

13. I don't like being disciplined by male teachers.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

14. I like speaking in front of the class.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

15. AMAC helps me to become a better public speaker.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

16. I am considered a leader in the classroom.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

17. AMAC helps me to become a leader.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

18. If I work hard in school I will be successful.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

19. School is a place where black males can be successful.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

20. I have what it takes to be successful in college.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

21. My goal is to earn a college degree.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

22. The AMAC program prepares me for success in college.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

23. My family can afford to send me to college without a scholarship.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

24. I have a father who is supportive of me in school.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

25. I have a mother who is supportive of me in school.

strongly disagree      disagree      undecided      agree      strongly agree

26. My friends that aren't in the AMAC support me being in the program.

                         
 strongly disagree      disagree      undecided      agree      strongly agree

27. Being in AMAC is like being part of a club or a community of friends.

                         
 strongly disagree      disagree      undecided      agree      strongly agree

28. The older members of AMAC help keep me on the right path in school.

                         
 strongly disagree      disagree      undecided      agree      strongly agree

29. The AMAC teacher is like a father to me.

                         
 strongly disagree      disagree      undecided      agree      strongly agree

30. The principals and vice principals on campus support AMAC.

                         
 strongly disagree      disagree      undecided      agree      strongly agree

31. The AMAC program has a good reputation on campus.

                         
 strongly disagree      disagree      undecided      agree      strongly agree

32. Black males have a good reputation on campus.

                         
 strongly disagree      disagree      undecided      agree      strongly agree

33. Teachers on campus see black males as athletes only.

                         
 strongly disagree      disagree      undecided      agree      strongly agree

34. Athletics is my path to success in the future.

                         
 strongly disagree      disagree      undecided      agree      strongly agree

35. I like learning about black culture in school.

                         
 strongly disagree      disagree      undecided      agree      strongly agree

36. AMAC teaches me about black culture.

                         
 strongly disagree      disagree      undecided      agree      strongly agree

37. Being in AMAC is difficult on my schedule.

                         
 strongly disagree      disagree      undecided      agree      strongly agree

38. It is difficult to attend all of the AMAC meetings.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

39. The AVID part of being in the AMAC—such as notes or tutorials—helps me succeed in school.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

40. If you don't behave in class you will be removed from the AMAC.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

41. If I start to slip, AMAC has a way to help keep me on track and in the program.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

42. If I stay in AMAC all four years, I will receive opportunities like the other older members of the program.

strongly disagree       disagree       undecided       agree       strongly agree

Place an [X] next to the best possible response.

43. What is the biggest challenge for you as a student?

Confidence[  ] Discipline[  ] Motivation[  ] Other[  ] \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please list)

44. What makes you want to drop AMAC?

- a) Academic challenges because of AVID[  ]  
 b) Daily program expectations[  ]  
 c) Not buying-in to the program's overall philosophy [  ]  
 d) Perception of friends or peers[  ]  
 e) Time-management issues[  ]  
 f) Other[  ] \_\_\_\_\_

(Please list)

45. What makes you want to stay in AMAC? a) Belief in the program's philosophy and what it stands for[  ]

- b) Belonging to a club or community of friends[  ]  
 c) Guidance from older peers and/or the teacher[  ]  
 d) Preparation for success in school and beyond [  ]  
 e) Opportunities for events and scholarships[  ]  
 f) Other[  ] \_\_\_\_\_

(Please list)

APPENDIX G

CODES

### **Individual Factors Significant to Retention**

ACA	academics in general
ATH	athletics
BUY	buy-in
COMM	communication (verbal)
DISC	discipline
EDUC	individual response to education
GEN	generational dynamic
GOAL	goal-orientation
ORG	organization
PP	peer pressure
POWER	confidence; empowerment
REP	reputation
SOC	social aspect
TRUST	trust in an equitable system

### **Cultural or Race-Related Factors Related to Retention**

CLUB	club effect
CULT	culture
D-OUT	dressing out
ECO	economics
EDUC	cultural response to education
GAP	achievement gap
FAM	family dynamic

FF	father figure
MAMA	mother role
PED	culturally responsive pedagogy
SES	socioeconomic status
TRUST	trust in an equitable system

#### **Structural Factors Related to Retention**

ADMIN	administrative support
AVID	AVID-related
EVENT	formal AAMI events
EXPUL	expulsion
HELP	help for the AAMI teacher
INT	intake or pre-interview
INTER	intervention
SKED	schedule
TIME	time
VERT	vertical quality, i.e., middle school to high school

#### **Programmatic or AAMI Forces Related to Retention**

CLUB	club effect
DED	teacher dedication
EXP	daily expectations
LEAD	leadership
MENT	mentorship (indicated as “adult” or “peer”)
MEET	formal meetings of the AAMI

NAV	navigating future and world outside classroom
PED	culturally relevant pedagogy
PREP	college preparation
PHIL	program's overall philosophy
ROLE	role of AAMI teacher or coordinator
OPP	opportunities, economic and otherwise
SERVICE	service
TEAM	teamwork and/or collaboration

**Factors Related to the Specific Site Model**

MOD	model
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**Factors Directly Related to Retention and Attrition**

RET	retention
ATT	attrition



**APPENDIX H**  
**GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS**

**Achievement Gap:** For the purposes of this study, achievement gap refers to the persistent gap in educational achievement between black and white students.

**Administrative Support:** Support for the AVID AAMI by the local school site, especially in terms of economics.

**Advancement Via Individual Determination (or AVID):** An academic support program created in the 1980s whose stated mission was to “close the achievement gap by preparing all students for college success and readiness” (<http://www.avid.org>).

**African American Male Awareness Club (AMAC):** A version of the AAMI, run as a club in lieu of a scheduled meeting or class within the school day.

**African American Male Initiative (or AAMI):** Piloted by AVID in 2009 in response to the underperformance of black males, it is a program whose strategies include embedding a culturally relevant curriculum and improving black male self-advocacy for learning.

**Athletics:** Refers to a formal involvement in school sports.

**Attrition:** A wearing away of total membership for any reason, including dropping the program voluntarily or being directly removed by AVID/AAMI.

**Buy-in:** For this study, refers to belief in and support for the AAMI program’s overall philosophies.

**Club Effect:** A group dynamic that provides social interaction and a sense of belonging.

**Cultural Resistance to Education in AAs:** The theory that African Americans may be resistant to education due to their mistrust of a system they perceive as inequitable and/or their perception of school-oriented behaviors as a white person’s ways (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 2003; Carter, 2005).

**Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT):** Defined by Ladson-Billings (1995) as a practice that focuses on students' academic achievement and supports "cultural competence" (p. 111), CRT refers to teaching that is relevant to a certain cultural group, in this case black males. Also may be referred to as culturally relevant pedagogy.

**Culture:** The knowledge, beliefs, and customs of a people, program, or organization.

**Dedication:** The commitment of the AVID AAMI teacher or mentor in terms of time, money, effort, and other variables.

**Discipline:** Having to do with maintaining and controlling appropriate conduct, either as a student or in terms of a teacher's classroom management.

**Dressing Out:** Wearing attire that projects a professional, fashionable and respectable image.

**Education:** Used interchangeably with academics, this is a general term for all formal schooling.

**Empowerment:** Synonymous with an increase in self-confidence or image, especially in terms of perceived efficacy in the classroom.

**Events:** Refers to important occurrences, either formal or informal, in the AVID AAMI program, including college field trips, leadership seminars, or social get-togethers such as ballgames.

**Expulsion:** Deprivation of membership in the AAMI program through being directly removed by a teacher, coordinator, or administrator.

**Family Dynamics:** Having to do with any aspect of the family or home environment.

**Father Figure:** While the traditional denotation of this term may refer solely to a substitute for a biological father, the term father figure applies to this study in a different

sense, namely the male role model—both biological or otherwise—in these young men’s lives.

**Generational Aspect:** Forces particular to the current generation or age group.

**Goals:** Future aspirations, especially in terms of school or career.

**Help:** For this study, refers to any sharing of the workload for the AAMI teacher or coordinator.

**Image:** Refers to the external or outward perception of an individual or group.

**Intake:** For this study, intake will refer to any part of the process in becoming a member of the AAMI, including recruitment, pre-interview, or placement in the program.

**Intervention:** Applies here to any interference by the teacher or coordinator, either formally or informally, with a student’s attrition in the program.

**Meetings:** Formal gatherings of the AVID AAMI or AMAC.

**Mentorship:** For this study, refers to guidance by a teacher or even an elder peer.

**Motivation:** The energy or drive that determines behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

**Navigation:** For this study, refers to a student’s ability to navigate or travel successfully through the world beyond high school.

**Opportunities:** A favorable opening for an individual to gain an advantage, particularly in terms of academic or economic assistance.

**Organization:** For this study, refers to daily self-management in the context of navigating an experience as a high schooler/young adult.

**Pedagogy:** Refers to the method of teaching. As stated above, the term culturally responsive teaching is interchangeable with culturally relevant pedagogy.

**Peer Pressure:** An umbrella term for behaviors that originate in one's peer group at school or in the neighborhood that interfere with a member's buy-in and ultimately retention in the program.

**Perception:** An individual's view of self or others.

**Philosophy:** The program's overall values, methods, and goals.

**Pre-Interview:** Refers to a formal interview as part of intake into the AAMI program.

**Preparation:** For this study, refers to an overall readiness to succeed in college, including skills related to academics and time management.

**Reputation:** Denotes the general opinion or regard in which an individual is held.

**Retention:** Remaining in the AAMI program from entrance through graduation.

**Schedule:** Having to do with the arrangement of activities over time.

**Self-Confidence:** Refers to one's self-assuredness in terms of ability or power (Oxford Dictionary, 1999).

**Time:** An all-encompassing term referring to factors related to the demands of the student and/or teacher schedule, as well as the structural mechanisms of the school day in relation to scheduling.

**Trust:** For this study, refers to a belief that the education system provides an equitable path to success for all races.

**Tutorial:** A formal aspect of the AVID program in which students have consistent access to a tutor, often brought in from local colleges and universities.

**Vertical Aspect:** For this study, refers to the dynamic of a pre-program or feeder program that prepares individuals for a future experience—i.e. a vertical AAMI program beginning at the middle school level.