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**A Study of Factors that Influence Academic Success of Black
American Male Middle School Students**

has been approved by his committee as satisfying completion
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Tuesday, December 4, 2001
Date

**A Study of Factors that Influence Academic Success of
Black American Middle School Males**

*A dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University*

By

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Abstract

The Black American male has had to face and endure many physical, emotional, and psychological hardships since his ancestors arrived in this country as slaves. One of those hardships has been his constant status as a second-class citizen. Throughout his history in America, the Black male has received unequal pay, unequal justice, unequal medical care, unequal treatment, and unequal education. Yet, despite the circumstances and the odds, there have been Black males who have achieved in many fields. However, even today, in the field of education, achieving academically is not an endeavor most Black males pursue.

This study investigated some factors that can influence some Black males to achieve academically. It was modeled after a 1993 study done by Drs. James McMillan and Daisy Reed, professors at Virginia Commonwealth University. The McMillan & Reed study's topic was resilience, which is a group of certain individual characteristics that help individuals overcome at risk (of school failure) circumstances. That study and this one were conducted as qualitative research. For this study, 11 Black boys of middle school age and grade were interviewed to ascertain how they generally functioned as students in school and as individuals. Also, they were questioned about their families and friends. Several professional educators were also interviewed to get their perceptions about adolescent Black males' academic achievement.

The two sets of data, as well as the interviewer tapes and notes were coded, compared, and analyzed. The results were interesting in that this particular group of boys all possessed some resilient traits, they all liked school, and they felt that schooling was important to their futures. These boys were students who had performed well in elementary school but were not presently distinguishing themselves academically. The educators displayed valuable insights and knowledge in recognizing what helps Black males achieve in school. Their experiences in working with at risk students have aligned their thinking with that of the many researchers that have investigated this problem.

This study revealed that the boys who participated collectively possessed several resilient traits which previous research has shown to be related to success in schools. As well, this study highlighted that possession of these traits by these boys was not necessarily a predictor of academic achievement nor was living in at risk circumstances necessarily a predictor of academic failure. The boys in this study enjoyed school, occasionally making good grades in certain subjects, and collectively had very good daily attendance. Also, this sample understood those negative behaviors and influences that prevented other boys from being academically successful but did not apply this understanding to themselves.

Chapter I

Introduction

Background of Study

There is a distinct and well-documented disadvantage growing up and belonging to the Black race in America. Many ethnic groups tend to experience various difficulties in assimilating into American society, but Black Americans, although they have been in the United States since the 1600's, have the greatest difficulty, especially Black males. The condition of Black males in America is becoming a constant research topic. Researchers and writers such as Courtland C. Lee, (1996), Jawanza Kunjufu, (1982, 1988), William L. Jenkins, (1990), Michael Porter, (1997), Henry Louis Gates, (1997) and many others have investigated the condition of Black males in America.

Historically, Black males have had many challenges since being brought to this country as slave labor in the 1600's. These challenges have been physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, and social. From the physical beatings, castrations and degradation of slavery, to the disrespect to their manhood by Jim Crow laws and practices, the message was sent to Black males that they were unwanted. Although segregation in schools, restaurants, and other public facilities has been eliminated and legislation has been enacted to protect civil rights, these actions have not completely alleviated the disadvantages experienced by America's Black male population. Little noticed witnesses to the disrespect and deprivation of Black males are young Black boys, who are seeing their future played out before them.

Even though legislative and judicial victories such as the Civil Rights Act, the Brown decision, the Voting Rights Act and the revocation of segregation laws and practices have gone far toward protecting the rights and liberties of all Americans, there is still a subtle but effective message communicated to Black males that they are not accepted as full participants in American society. This is true even though there are some Black men who do become productive and responsible citizens.

One area where there has been some progress and some major success is in the field of education. There are many Black male teachers, professors, researchers, administrators, and writers throughout America's educational establishment. However, many of these Black males are not involved in elementary schools where young Black boys receive their initial introduction into the larger society. Young boys are very impressionable and willing to learn. They bring enthusiasm to the classroom, trust their teachers, and display a willingness to please (Kunjufu, 1982). Yet, young boys have little interaction with males because most men in education are at the secondary or post secondary levels.

This writer is one of those who have served in the public schools, mainly at the secondary level. However, over many years this writer has observed through reading student records and talking to parents that many Black boys lose their enthusiasm for school and schooling between the end of the third grade and the middle of the sixth grade when educational and social problems begin to manifest themselves (Lee, 1996). Many times a situation arose with a student that was complicated and the possible solutions had

complicated consequences. As an educator responsible for helping the system and the family reach a solution, it became important to delve into a student's background and to read his academic folder.

The folders often revealed that a student had experienced academic success as an elementary student and that teacher comments were complimentary of the student and his abilities. This writer's involvement with the students was in middle school, but by that time there was often a distinct difference in the students' overall academic effort, preparation and results as compared to the elementary school years. When inquiries were made of the student, the response generally was that school work no longer held the interest or importance it once had. When inquiries were made of the parent, that response was also one that expressed that achievement had been important to the student, but the parent did not know when the attitude change occurred. Over time, this writer has witnessed many boys who were achievers in the early grades who later became involved with crime and failed to reach the potential that was evident in the early years.

Elementary education is greatly influenced by the White, middle class, female culture, which is a difficult situation for boys, especially Black boys, to handle (Lee, 1996). Boys are encouraged to be active and aggressive, and an environment in a school that emphasizes opposite behaviors is challenging for boys. Not only are they uncomfortable in school, they also become resistant to authority. Coupled with the biological changes that puberty and pre-adolescence bring, young boys resist the school and academic success because it is associated with femininity. This phenomenon of

adolescent changes has been observed by Kunjufu (1988) and other writers who have concern about the future of Black males.

Statement of the Problem

The problem to be addressed by this study is the investigation of factors related to adolescent Black males' academic achievement. The numbers of Black boys who are retained in grade, suffer poor grades, drop out of school and are incarcerated are large, but there are many adolescent boys who succeed in school and who come from neighborhoods, homes, and schools that are similar to those of less successful boys. This researcher wants to investigate those factors that influence and motivate Black male students to become academic achievers.

There is some limited research that discusses and explains what these influences are that can cause young Black males to be academically successful. The term "resilience" is one research topic in which these influences are discussed. Resilience is generally defined as having positive responses to adverse conditions (Floyd, 1996; Garmezy, 1991; McMillan & Reed, 1993).

The adverse conditions have been termed as at risk conditions which describe negative environments that some students live in; many of these students are Black males. A broad array of social and economic indicators consistently stress the fact that individuals who are Black and male are in deep trouble within this society (Noguera, 1996). Many boys are reared in father absent homes that have low socio-economic status within neighborhoods that are beds of criminal activity. Therefore, the major influences

for these boys are not educated people who are pushing academic success, but people who are themselves influenced by the environment and perpetuate a similar lifestyle for the next generation. Society has labeled these children “at-risk,” and Black American boys are the most at-risk group. While men at the corner may provide role models, the nature of their influence is very questionable (Lee, 1996).

The resilient traits that are found in students who can overcome these negative environmental influences are nurtured through the home, the school, the community, and by the positive feedback that these individuals receive from those around them.

During the early formative years of students’ lives, the schools have not given the Black students, especially males, the type of curriculum that is interesting and relevant to their culture. When relevance is absent from the curriculum, children do not gain the motivation to learn (Glasser, 1969). For example, the children love seeing pictures of the statues of Black accomplishments and as a result, their attitudes and behavior begin to change for the better (Porter, 1997). The time young people spend after school is not usually spent in an environment that nurtures the thirst for knowledge about oneself or his culture, but it presents them with another environment that greatly influences their attitudes and actions in a negative fashion.

In observing this deteriorating attitude toward schooling, academics, and authority, it is notable that it progresses to a more devastating level between the sixth grade and the tenth grade. This stage seems to be characterized by a need to appear capable of violence, becoming involved in risk taking behaviors (i.e. smoking, drugs, alcohol, sex, etc.), and a

need to generally look like everyone else. These boys possess solid ideas about masculinity, implicit theories of manliness and some concepts of masculinity that may lead to academic underachievement, scholastic misconduct, truancy, dropping-out, apathy, vocational/occupational inadequacy, criminality, orientation toward violence, substance abuse and maladaptive relationships with females (Wilson, 1992). School becomes more of a social atmosphere and not a place to begin a life long journey of opportunities. Appearing to be an achiever is not proper within this culture; those who do are often ostracized and treated as outsiders. For males, the peer pressure is so tremendous that to do well academically in school is to risk being called “White,” a “nerd” or a “sissy.” Young Black boys see education as sissyish and condescending, and as denying their manhood and their blackness (Jenkins, 1990). This imposed pressure results in many boys opting for academic failure rather than risk rejection by their peers. Thus, they miss opportunities to adequately prepare for adulthood because they do poorly or drop out of school.

Another issue that arises is what is an accepted definition of academic success or academic achievement. Many see accomplishment as passing or even reaching graduation without a thought about further academic preparation. Additionally, the issue is the delineation of what factors help to produce academically successful boys. There is the home, the school, the community, and the individual, and each can be considered as a major area of investigation. This study will look at the factors dealing with the family, the individual, and the schools.

Rationale for the Study

This researcher acknowledges that many writers have recognized that for adolescent males of African descent, the schools do not offer much hope in the way of societal acceptance. This is because of a neglect in school curricula of attention to Black accomplishments and achievements throughout the world (Oliver, 1989; Garibaldi, 1992; Noguera, 1996; Gordon, 1994). Despite this dearth of material related to Black models, a few Black adolescent males become accomplished students. This study seeks to add to the overall understanding of those factors that influence young Black males to become academic achievers.

The generalization sometimes applied to adolescent Black males labeled at-risk is that they will not achieve and cannot achieve; and if achievement takes place, it is by chance. This assumption is that academic success constantly escapes Black males. However, over generations, many Black males have achieved despite the inherent barriers they face. These males, for the most part, eventually participate fully in the American dream. Unfortunately, there is a larger group who do not overcome the barriers and do not accomplish much in school and rarely are full partners in the American way of life. It should be mentioned that educational achievement is not the only prerequisite for obtaining the American dream, but this writer believes that for a Black American male it is the most promising route. In America, education is considered to be vital to upward mobility (Gordon, 1994).

The decision to achieve academically is an individual one. This study investigates the ways those boys who do strive toward school success are motivated and disciplined. Some youngsters are strong enough to pursue their schooling even through a myriad of unpleasant factors.

Since these youngsters do pursue their education goals despite the other influences, there is a body of knowledge as well as suggestions about what will work with these boys (Garibaldi, 1992; Dryfoos, 1996; Noguera, 1996; Ascher, 1992). There are some schools and programs that are having some positive effects on the attitudes and lives of adolescent Black boys. For example, there are schools designed specifically for Black boys, mentorship programs within and outside of school, curricula changes that constantly teach the contributions of Blacks along with more traditional content. However, this study concentrates upon those individual factors that help Black boys become academically successful.

The Black American male, adult, adolescent or child, and his welfare do not seem to be a concern for the larger society. Very little has been published about this group when one compares the amount of information with that about many other groups. What is happening and what has happened to the Black male, generally speaking, in American society does not seem to shake the consciousness about fairness and equity, even in some segments of Black society. Therefore, this study will be another piece of literature in the limited body of knowledge on the affirmation of the adolescent Black male.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate those factors that influence some at-risk Black teen males to choose academic achievement in spite of conditions that discourage many others. Many times young Black teens witness the public denigration of Black maleness through the different media. Not only do they see educated men brutalized in the press, they see men in their own neighborhoods who are educated and still struggle for the American Dream. For many of these men the message that achievement in school opens the door to future success is not true. Because the job ceiling faced by Black adults stops them from receiving rewards commensurate with their educational credentials, education is not the same bridge to adult status and accomplishment for Blacks that it is for Whites (Mickelson, 1990).

Yet, there are some who still seek to achieve. The “why?” of their achievement and “how?” they accomplish it is the emphasis of this study. This researcher wishes to add to that body of understanding.

Overview of the Literature

Much of what is written that deals with the dilemma of Black males, boys in particular, centers on the problems of race and its long term effects on Blacks, at-risk factors and the major role they play in shaping attitudes and outlooks, and the general lack of academic achievement of Black males. Although there are other factors that influence the growth and development of Black males, many of them are also negative and very few are positive.

Throughout the literature, there are subtle hints that the condition of Black boys may be somewhat intentional on behalf of the dominant society (Kunjufu, 1982; Jenkins, 1990; Noguera, 1996; Porter, 1997). That is, the condition that Black males have lived in and with since being brought to America remains oppressive. These conditions are not new but have existed since the first African was brought to America and have persisted since that time. Homes are absent of fathers (Kunjufu, 1982), living conditions are dilapidated and debilitating, peer pressure is overwhelming (Kunjufu, 1988) and the schools are under-equipped and under-funded (Bierlein, 1993). Many young boys are reared in environments and neighborhoods that are contaminated with attitudes, habits, people, facilities, and circumstances that almost dictate that their lives are doomed forever. Although the law, through programs and government spending, has allowed certain aspects of this situation to change, the conditions themselves have not.

The lack of academic success among Black Americans in general keeps this population of people from enjoying some of the fruits of America. Many assert that the conditions that make Blacks at-risk are a major factor for this lack of success, whereas others claim that it may be due to lack of innate ability and low intelligence (Hernstein and Murray, 1994) and still others say it may be the curriculum (Noguera, 1996).

However, there are some Black males finding academic success in schools despite these negative circumstances that surround them. These cases of success have certain common factors, including high expectations for performance, strong parental support

and encouragement, an independent spirit, an internal locus of control, an understanding of the importance of money, and a relationship with an adult male.

Research Questions

The major question of interest is what are the significant factors that influence some middle and high school Black males to strive for and achieve academic success while other Black male middle and high school students show no evidence of trying?

Other questions to be addressed are as follows:

1. Is there a difference in individual attitudes toward academic achievement of more academically successful Black middle school male students as compared to those Black middle school male students who are not as successful academically?
2. Is there a difference in the individual family situations of more academically successful Black middle school male students as compared to those of other, less academically successful Black middle school male students?
3. Is there a difference in the perceptions of school experiences of academically successful Black middle school male students as compared to those of the other, less academically successful Black male middle school students?
4. Is there a difference in the attitudes about and relationships with peers of academically successful middle school Black male students as compared to those of other, less academically successful Black male middle school students?

Methodology

The study is a qualitative study that uses interviews to collect data. The sample was to be chosen from male populations at four public secondary schools, two urban middle schools, and two suburban middle schools. The subjects were Black American male students who attended one of the four intended middle schools in the metropolitan area of a mid-size city in the Southeastern United States. These subjects were chosen because they are either in early adolescence to late pubescence, a time when many Black American males have been known to lose interest in academic achievement. Permission was obtained from one of the school districts and the parents to conduct the research.

The researcher conducted interviews with two of the principals and several selected teachers. Parents who had agreed to be interviewed were not because of logistical conflicts. The researcher questioned the students to ascertain the types of environmental factors they believe influenced them positively or negatively toward academic achievement. In addition, the academic grades were obtained for students in the sample.

The information gathered was compiled and categorized, and conclusions were reached based upon the responses. The analysis of the data that were obtained yielded some material that was developed into some case studies in order that this study has the proper interpretive support indicative of a strong analytical and scholarly work.

Definition of Terms

1. *At-Risk*: a term that describes the negative environmental and educational conditions that many Black boys are reared in and that limit their opportunities for

acceptance and success. It actually is a term applied to any child whose chances of academic success are limited because of social, racial, economic, and other characteristics.

2. *Successful*: an academically accomplished student as evidenced by high report card grades, standardized test scores and general participation in school and community activities.

3. *Unsuccessful*: a student who is not academically accomplished as evidenced by low report card grades and standardized test scores and low participation in school and community services.

Summary

This study yielded results that added to the limited and general body of knowledge about those factors that influence young Black boys to become academic achievers. The results may be useful to someone that has an interest in this group and wishes to duplicate it or to take it to another level. The researcher believes that this is what made this study significant.

This study was conducted with some expectations about its results. One was that despite the circumstances of upbringing, to be successful a student must have had a strong internal desire to perform and achieve (Garmezy, 1991). Another was that many students possessed the capability to perform but they were blinded by the unseen rage that existed because of their living conditions. The expectation was that all parents, regardless of their own academic attainment, wanted to see their children successful even though

many may not have known how to help them (Johnson, 1992). Additionally, the strength of racism and economic deprivation continued to do significant damage to the African American male psyche (Oliver, 1989).

Whether or not these expectations were supported or rejected or unmentioned by the results, the study will have benefited those who have a concern for the condition of the young Black American males.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Introduction

The purpose of this review of literature is to explain the research that has been accomplished and written concerning Black American males in general and adolescent boys in particular. The sources used in this chapter are written by a variety of authors. Some of the authors are Black Americans (Courtland C. Lee, 1996; Amos Wilson, 1991; Na'im Akbar, 1991; Jawanza Kunjufu, 1982, 1986, 1988; Henry Louis Gates, 1997; Brenda Wall, 1992; James P. Comer and Alvin F. Poussaint, 1992, Garibaldi, 1992 and Michael Porter, 1997) who adopt a perspective that many of the difficulties that Black males face are due to inherent racism in American society and the resulting struggle that Black males have in defining their manhood. There are other authors of diverse ethnic origins who find the dilemmas of American Black males an interesting topic (Noguera, 1996; Craig, 1992). The information and data shared by these authors will be used by this researcher to provide a basis and background for conducting this study.

The contextual framework for this study is referenced in the work of Daisy Reed and James McMillan, professors at Virginia Commonwealth University, on resilience of at-risk students. Their study, Defying the Odds: A Study of Resilient At-risk Students (1993), was qualitative research that identified and discussed those programmatic and personal factors that helped disadvantaged students become academically successful. The study involved students from six school districts from the metropolitan area of a mid-

sized southeastern city. The students were nominated to participate in the study by their principals and school counselors who were given some indicators of at-riskness such as grade retention, drug abuse, dysfunctional families, and low socio-economic status (McMillan & Reed, 1993).

Their research methodology for this study was the case study approach. This was implemented so an understanding of how the students became academically successful despite the risky circumstances of their lives could be reached. The researchers were interested in the students' perceptions about the quality of their lives and school experiences. Interviews were conducted with the students, which enabled the researchers to profile each student. The data were analyzed in ways that enlightened and insured complete analysis of the trends and issues throughout the responses. The instruments and protocols were developed and tested by the researchers. This study will use some of the same procedures, instruments and protocols but with adjustments.

The term at-risk was used in the McMillan & Reed (1993) study to describe the students who were in danger of dropping out of school because of environmental difficulties as well as school failure. The term "at risk" has been used to describe a variety of ills, some of which are personal, some educational, and some societal. This term first appeared in the 1983 study entitled A Nation At-Risk, which declared public education in America mediocre. In that document, the term meant the nation, whereas today it generally refers to children to describe their state of existence. "Resilient" refers to those students who become academically successful despite negative influences in

their lives. In this study, the concentration will be upon adolescent Black males who are in middle school.

In this new study, the experiences of Black adolescent males are viewed in the context of the difficulties experienced by all Black males in their struggle to define their manhood and gain social acceptance. This chapter will include some information about the general existence of Black males and will focus upon Black males' struggle within American society for survival, acceptance, and social and material success in their family lives, among peers and in education. For many Black men this struggle began in school where the lack of academic success of Black boys is accentuated by many negative behaviors that they exhibit constantly within their culture. However, despite the strong influences of many negative factors in their lives, there are some young Black boys who choose to overcome these obstacles and become successful in school. This research seeks to identify some of these factors that have this influence upon these boys.

Black American Males and America

Historically, Black American males have faced many challenges to their safety, sense of well being and even their existence. The challenges in America began with the landing of the first slave ship about 400 years ago (Akbar, 1991) and have continued through the centuries. Black males have been subjected to abuse, deprivation, and denigration. Racism was and is a major factor that influences their lives. At the inception of this country a Black man was defined in the Constitution as counting "three fifths" of a white man in allocating congressional representation as documented in the United States

Constitution. Today, much of American society still has not accepted Black men as worthy members of the society. As a result, Black males face major challenges that put their welfare and quality of life in jeopardy (Lee, 1996). The reason for this negative response to Black males has been attributed to blatant racism. The root of the problem in Black America is race and the accompanying unjust distribution of the nation's wealth, power, and resources (Anderson, 1994).

Black males generally are subjected to underclass status throughout American society. This causes Black males to be poor, uninformed, self-destructive, and confused (Akbar, 1991). The negative social and material conditions that many Black Americans live in cause Black youth to be vulnerable to an antisocial and criminal mindset (Wilson, 1992). In the 1998 State of Black America Report, edited by Lee Daniel, the National Urban League published these statistics from 1993: 30.3% of African American males 25 and older had less than a high school education compared to 18.2% of White males; 22.8% of Black males between the ages of 18 and 24 were high school drop-outs which was lower than the 34% for White males of the same age group; 13.8% of Blacks were unemployed and 47.9% were employed in service and manufacturing industries while only 4.3% were employed in finance, insurance and real estate. Among White males of the same group 6.2% were unemployed, 44.2% were employed in service and manufacturing jobs and 5.2% pursued financial careers. Additionally, in the same 18 to 24 age group, the employed Black male had an average weekly wage of \$392 as

compared to \$531 for White males and 33.1% of all African Americans were living below the poverty level as compared with 12.2% of Whites (Daniels, 1998).

Generally under-educated, under-employed or unemployed, prone to substance abuse, alcoholism, disease, and other social maladies, the Black male can be considered a member of an “endangered species.” The term endangered refers to actual dangers of existence, survival, mis-education, and lost opportunities faced by Black males in American society. The most endangered are the Black children (Akbar, 1991). Constantly surrounded by these and other negative factors and prone to indulge in risky behaviors, young Black males continue to struggle with influences that cause them to be regarded as problems for society. The perception by the public in a recent Baltimore survey of the high arrest rate among young Black boys was the public’s fear of violence by the boys. Actually, fewer than one in ten of the arrests were for violent acts (Miller, 1997).

This general fear of Black men causes their exclusion from the total society and limited inclusion in Black culture. Their attempts at inclusion are made more difficult partly because of limited academic achievement. Thus, a cycle is created that brings Black males to the point of being defined as a societal problem. The high rate of social problems exhibited by Black males results from structural pressures that are generated by patterns of political, economic, social and cultural organization that perpetuate Black inferiority (Oliver, 1989).

The reality of being a problem for society creates confusion in both Blacks and Whites about Black males’ identity as men. Manhood in America is generally defined by

the ideas, practices, and traits of White males as depicted in the media. For example, many television commercials depict White males as successful, masculine, suave, debonair men whereas most Black men are shown as laborers for the larger society. Even though there are some exceptions, Black men are seldom depicted according to the White interpretation of manliness.

Accordingly, Black males struggle with the concept of manhood. There is an inner struggle that surrounds the meaning of manhood for them. Young boys struggle with this concept also because they see the images of Black men as generally unsuccessful beings as well as the sordid treatment that the society gives Black males. Since young Black boys do not have access to most symbols of successful manhood such as a job, money, authority, responsibility, and a sense of purpose, this distorted image is all they have (Jenkins, 1990). This inner struggle experienced by Black boys manifests itself within the school environment. Many Black male students have negative attitudes about their educational experiences, they experience higher levels of conflict in school and exhibit anti-authoritarian behavior, all of which affect their academic achievement (Gordon, 1994). Because the school is a structured environment, it requires all students to subject themselves to others' authority. Young Black males generally have a tough time with authority, and when they attempt to exhibit the manly behaviors they are familiar with, they get into difficulty; in school that makes them discipline problems, and in society it may make them delinquents.

Black Males' Response to Societal Stimuli

Despite the negatives of their environment or the struggle with manliness or the difficulty of accepting the school's authority, there are some young Black adolescent males who strive for and attain academic success. Despite the problems they face, many Black men have achieved and participated fully in society (Gordon, 1994).

However, the predominant image of Black men differs strikingly from this picture. They are seen as immoral, lazy, violent, mentally deficient, and athletic (Blake & Darling, 1994). Black males frequently encounter negative stereotypes about their manhood, which include the notion of social castration, insecurity in identity, and a negative self concept (Lee, 1996). Young Black boys struggle with this societal image of themselves.

The idealistic image of men in American society is of individuals who are responsible for their actions, are productive members of society, provide for their families, and are considered courageous.

The problems facing Black males are not new (Noguera, 1996) and to overcome these problems, Blacks need to understand themselves, define themselves, and think from their own perspective (Akbar, 1991). However, Black males are dramatic examples of a purposeful "inferiorization process" which is a stress attack believed by some to have been designed by Whites to produce dysfunctional behavior patterns in all areas of Black life (Oliver, 1989). One of the challenges the Black male must face is the conflicting images of masculinity in his predominant community against that of the broader society

(Hale-Benson, 1982). Many Black males are convinced that they can be men only if they adopt the White man's gender role (Blake & Darling, 1994), yet many people understand that a Black man generally thinks, acts, performs and characterizes his manliness, either positively or negatively, in a very different fashion than Whites.

Black males tend to express an air of bravado to overcome the lack of societal acceptance, and often this results in violations of the law and incarceration. A Black man is one hundred times more likely to be sent to jail than to college (Gates, 1997). The problems facing Black boys are even more debilitating. They are killed more often through violence, they are arrested more frequently, they drop out of school and do not enter college, and they do not act as fathers to their children in large numbers (Canada, 1998). There seems to be the mindset among Black boys that society recognizes one as a man when he has run afoul of the law or been incarcerated. The high rates of poverty, drop-outs, incarceration, crime, under-education, unemployment, poor health, and premature deaths prevent many Black males from progressing. Many of the most creative Black minds are locked into prisons and jails and are not involved in schools in their most potentially productive years (Akbar, 1991).

Progress for Blacks can be equated with academic achievement, but striving for academic achievement is not generally an accepted behavior among young Black males. The majority of Black youth have been negatively influenced by their peer group's attitude toward academic achievement (Kunjufu, 1988).

However, there are quite a few young Black boys who choose to be academically successful even though they may suffer from confusion about their eventual acceptance in the society and risk rejection by their peers.

Black American Males and Schools

Historically, Blacks (especially males) were denied access to education from the beginning of the American experience. Once Blacks were being taught the bare essential skills for survival, then there were issues of equity in educational opportunity. Many one room schools with several grades or levels taught throughout the day did not provide a chance for any student to really excel. The eras of slavery, reconstruction, segregation, and Jim Crow were designed, in part, to prohibit any educational progress by Blacks.

Although schooling has not been a ticket of opportunity that it was expected to be for the Black community, it is still the best way that a person can help himself or herself to overcome life's negative influences. For many years, African Americans believed that a good education was the ticket to lift them from their negative circumstances. For almost 100 years after the end of slavery, Blacks held fast to their faith in education as a tool to lift them from poverty and oppression (Mickelson, 1990). Blacks expected educational quality to improve after the Brown decision, passage of desegregation laws and implementation of busing. However, these actions did not have the benefits for Blacks many had hoped for.

There are many reasons that the schools have not fulfilled Blacks' expectations of social progress, and a complete explanation of these reasons extends beyond the scope of

this study. Generally, for Black boys, there have been low expectations for performance; there have been safety issues, issues that surround instructional techniques and the lack of cultural foci in the curricula. The lessons are that Black students profit from a demanding curriculum, regardless of its nature or pedagogical approach, and that it must be taught by those who are mission-oriented, believing that Black children can learn and achieve in schools (Irvine, 1996).

At the time, young Black boys begin school; they tend to have an enthusiasm for learning that is not sustained through elementary school and into middle school. Somewhere around the third or fourth grade, there is a change in interest in learning. The environmental influences and certain peer influences begin to have an effect upon their attitudes toward academics. If being White is working hard for good grades, using proper speech and being involved in extra educational activities, then being Black is not studying, having poor grades, using slang and being involved in other activities that are antisocial in nature (Kunjufu, 1988).

School success has been narrowly defined in terms of a White middle class female norm, and students whose reality does not fit this norm are required to make major adjustments to ensure a measure of success (Lee, 1996). The relationship between education and economic success is a close one. The motivation to study suffers when young people see a greater return from drug-dealing rather than a college education (Kunjufu, 1988). If they attend school and see that the majority of Black children are in exceptional education placements, this sends negative messages (Abato & Abato, 1991).

The factors that can help these low achievers succeed in school are teachers believing in what teaching is, a modified curricula, teacher preparation, insightful teaching and luck (Franklin, 1998).

However, in spite of the history of denied education and in spite of the low expectations or the culturally poor perception about academic achievement, many Black male teens strive for and achieve good grades and academic success.

Black Boys and Academic Achievement

A large population of Black boys have low GPA's (grade point averages), SAT (scholastic aptitude test) scores, poor attendance and behavior problems throughout school. Academic achievement is escaping them. Achievement refers to those indices, including GPA, SAT scores, other kinds of test scores, that indicate the degree to which a student has encountered success in school (Johnson, 1992).

Since the job ceiling faced by Black adults prevents them from receiving rewards that parallel their academic and educational credentials, education is not the same bridge for Blacks that it is for Whites. Black children (especially boys) see that effort in school often does not have the same outcomes for members of their group as for middle class Whites (Mickelson, 1990). Young Black people are aware that a White male with a high school diploma will earn more than a Black person with a college degree (Kunjufu, 1988).

Therefore, Blacks have little incentive to pursue education.

As well, many external factors prevent many Black males from concentrating upon achieving in school. Absent fathers, a house full of siblings, friends who encourage risky

behaviors, teachers with low expectations and generally non structured environments can hinder boys from achieving at school. Anger, frustration, and failure represent the educational reality for many Black males (Lee, 1996). The life of the Black male who does not get to manhood with a clear direction and perspective gets worse for him as he ages (Jenkins, 1990). It is imperative that support and direction be a part of young Black males' lives. The outside influences of drugs, promiscuous sex, and other deviant behaviors have a strong pull upon them and can keep them from reaching their potential. They need a safety net (Kunjufu, 1982) of adults to guide them.

All of the circumstances of the home environment such as socio-economic status, living conditions, single male or female head of household, sibling rivalry, the existence of physical and/or emotional abuse as well as substance abuse have either a positive or a negative effect upon the boy. Some research suggests that for adolescent Black males, the support and encouragement of the family, the adults at school, as well as positive interaction with peers increases their chances of obtaining academic achievement. This support and encouragement are particularly important for urban Black males because these factors aid in their emotional development, help to define the masculine role, social behavior and personal identity coinciding simultaneously with biological development where body size, reproductive capability and other physiological functions influence their environment (Mincy, 1994).

Despite the struggles and the negative factors in and outside of school, some Black boys do choose to strive for academic success. Given the historical negative relationship

of Black males and their existence in America, Black boys struggle with their identity, their well being, their self acceptance, and their educational development. The many boys who are reared in poverty and nurtured on negativity have little hope of escaping those circumstances. The research that discusses the traits or characteristics that help these boys and other young people to be successful students is limited. This study is meant to help fill that gap.

There is some research centered around the term resilience. This writer did not find any resilience research that was specific to Black boys. However, it is reasonable to apply the findings to young Black American boys because any diverse group of at risk children includes these children. Some researchers (Barbarin, 1993; Floyd, 1996; Luthar, 1991; Garnezy, 1991; Freiberg, 1993; McMillan & Reed, 1993) describe resilience as the reason some at risk students achieve. Resilience describes students who are at risk for academic failure but are nevertheless academically successful. Resilience is concerned with individual adjustments as responses to problematic situations (Floyd, 1996). Children labeled “resilient” or “stress resistant” defy expectations by developing into well adapted, successful individuals (Luthar, 1991).

The aims of the research on resilience were to identify and promote the coping mechanisms of non-resilient children and to implement strategies for establishing and sustaining protective practices that shield or lessen the negative effects of life’s stress (Floyd, 1996). Little of the research discusses resilience in terms of internal factors, but more in terms of how groups and schools can foster programs and nurture resilience

within young people. Additionally, resilience is discussed in terms of “protective factors” or “protective traits” in the environment. Protective factors within the environment or social context include the family functioning, supportive extrafamilial relationships, and community structures (Barbarin, 1993; Floyd, 1996). If the factors of a supportive family, a nurturing school and positive peer acceptance are in place, a boy’s chances of academic success are stronger than for someone whose life is missing one or more of these supportive factors. However, if a family has an absent father, and the school generally operates without the necessary funds, and the boy associates with his unsupervised peers, then he is less likely to finish school and more likely to become a ward of the state or a victim of homicide (Pulliam, 1995). Either situation can place the boys’ feet in a certain direction that has an expected outcome. This direction can be compared metaphorically to a pathway or a predicted path that is already laid out because of the forces that operate outside of the person (Crockett, 1995).

When they enter middle school, high achieving and low achieving adolescent Black males reach a turning point in their academic careers (Crockett, 1995). The developed path sets before these youngsters the opportunity to make decisions and select alternative courses of action (Crockett, 1995). If the youngster has a positive or negative type disposition, he will adjust in this new setting toward a socialization with others who exhibit the same disposition and behaviors. The tendency to arrive in settings that support one’s behavior is likely to foster continuity of that behavior (Crockett, 1995). This is evident when students experience a change in school buildings either by promotion or

transfer. The implication is that the students' attitudes and dispositions cause them to gravitate toward other students with similar qualities.

The total environment of some students can be and often is stressful, but children who have overcome adversity in their lives exhibit four protective traits that appear to help to reduce the effects of stress. These traits are: social competence, strong problem solving skills, autonomy, and a sense of purpose for the future (Freiberg, 1993).

Social Competence

Resilient students have temperamental characteristics that elicit positive responses from individuals (McMillan & Reed, 1993). Such children have been described as having high social skills exhibited by warmth, spontaneity, and expressiveness (Luthar, 1991). Temperament is one of the stress modifiers (Garmezy, 1991). The resilience research on disadvantaged, competent Black children describes them as having social skills such as being friendly and well liked, a strong perception of self with strong cognitive skills and intellectual maturity and as exhibiting active, goal oriented behavior (Garmezy, 1991).

When a crisis occurs, many at risk children react with emotional distress (Luthar, 1991), whereas resilient students are able to reach out to others and receive help (McMillan & Reed, 1993). As a result, many resilient children have an advantage in dealing with life's difficulties (Garmezy, 1991).

Coping Skills

The ability to use coping skills in problem solving is another trait of resilient students. Coping is related to problem solving in that both processes require perception and

evaluation of alternative courses of action and recognition of the consequences that may result from one's choices (Barbarin, 1993). Many resilient students have a significant person with whom they have a strong relationship and who helps with their choices. Many resilient students have an informal network of people in their lives to whom they can turn in time of crisis (McMillan & Reed, 1993).

Emotional regulation and self control are basic components of coping (Barbarin, 1993). An internal locus of control, or the belief that life shaping forces are within one's own control, has been shown to be a protective factor that helps children become more assertive in the classroom (Floyd, 1996). High intrinsic motivation and internal locus of control can enable an at risk student to succeed (McMillan & Reed, 1993).

Autonomy

In addition to having the traits of social competence and coping skills, resilient students also exhibit autonomy or independence in that they lack fear of new challenges and are willing to attempt to experience them (McMillan & Reed, 1993). Students who possess autonomous behavior can make decisions that show their ability to obtain socially accepted results. For example, when a teacher is absent from the classroom or a parent leaves him/her alone at home, an independent thinking and acting child responds to those situations in a responsible manner. Children who do not have inner control, motivation, and self direction face great difficulty when the parent, teacher, or other source of external control is absent (Comer & Poussaint, 1975).

Sense of Purpose

Resilient children tend to be involved with hobbies, extracurricular areas of interests and volunteering (McMillan & Reed, 1993; Gamezy, 1991; Freiberg, 1993). They are motivated by a desire to succeed, and feel responsible for their achievements (McMillan & Reed, 1993). Resilient individuals have been found to have high faith in their own control over the environment (Luthar, 1991). By contrast, some young people are motivated to be great, but not motivated to become great, which requires discipline, time management, vision, patience, and hard work (Kunjufu, 1986).

Many young Black boys aspire to be successful in school as well as in other endeavors. However, the influence of the negative factors in their lives which can prevent them from being resilient and therefore they do not experience academic success.

Summary

In summary, Black men have constantly experienced difficulty in assimilating into American society. The research that has been conducted on them has been limited. The research literature focusing on the specific plight of Black males has been written over the last 50 years (Gordon, 1994). The vigorously debated issues of the late 1990's have been the declining social, economical, and educational status of young Black males in our society (Garibaldi, 1992). They have not generally been granted traditional masculine power or privilege in America; societal forces have constantly combined to keep Black males from assuming accepted masculine roles (Lee, 1996).

The American educational system has played a major role in perpetuating the negative images of Blacks (Oliver, 1989). The schools, for educational and cultural reasons, need to be pressed to accommodate the learning styles of Black children (Hale-Brown, 1982). For Black American male students, schools are not encouraging institutions that offer intriguing and interesting topics that are mentally stimulating. Schools are not a haven for them. Even so, many Black boys do choose to achieve. The chief reasons for their success include effective parenting and the particular strengths of the young male himself (Hrabowski, Maton & Greif, 1998). The evidence suggests that the number of Black males in crisis can be reduced if Black males between the ages of 10 and 15 can be aided in making a successful transition to adulthood (Mincy, 1994).

This study seeks to add to our understanding of the process by which young Black males can make a successful transition to manhood.

Chapter III

Methodology

Introduction

The difficulty that Black American males experience in their daily lives as American citizens impacts all areas of their existence. Their struggle for societal acceptance filters into the perspectives and outlooks of young Black boys, whose struggle with societal acceptance is exemplified in their difficulty with schooling and academic achievement. However, there are some young Black American boys who achieve despite the many obstacles that prevent others from being academically successful.

This study was originally conceived with the intention to compare two groups of Black middle school male students--high and low achievers--and to answer the four research questions. The study was designed to compare the influence of certain factors associated with the school, the family, and the individual upon these two groups of students and to determine whether those factors promoted or hindered academic achievement for these students. The four research questions that were to be answered through qualitative research methods were:

1. Is there a difference in the individual attitudes toward academic achievement of more academically successful Black middle school male students as compared to those Black middle school male students who are not as successful academically?

2. Is there a difference in the individual family situations of more academically successful Black middle school male students as compared to those of other, less academically successful Black middle school male students?

3. Is there a difference in the perceptions of school experiences of academically successful Black middle school male students as compared to those of other, less academically successful Black male middle school students?

4. Is there a difference in the attitudes about and relationships with peers of academically successful Black middle school male students as compared to those of other, less academically successful Black male middle school students?

In the course of carrying out the research, the researcher determined that an insufficient number of high and low achievers were included in the sample to permit valid conclusions. As a result, the study design was revised and the purpose of the study was changed. In this chapter a detailed description of the original research design will be presented along with a discussion of the difficulties faced in carrying out the study and a description of the changes made in the research design.

Original Design

The original design called for selection of two sample groups of Black middle school male students from four middle schools in two school divisions. The participants were to be 16 high and 16 low achieving adolescent Black American males in middle school who were to be chosen by the principal and counselor in their schools using data from school records, to classify the boys' achievement level. The two divisions were to be an urban

division in a mid-sized city in the Southeastern United States and a suburban division in the same metropolitan area. The schools were chosen based upon similarities in demographics such as racial make up and diversity of the population, socio-economic status of the population, qualification percentage for free lunch and academic achievement through test scores.

Eight students from each school, four high achievers and four low achievers, were to be interviewed, for a total of 32 interviews. The students were to be selected from students nominated by the principal and counselor. The principal and a counselor at each school were to be asked to nominate eight high achieving and eight low achieving Black male students using criteria described below.

Academic success for the study was defined as the attainment of honor roll grades on three out of the four previous grading periods (generally a “B” average). Low achievement was defined as the attainment of a grade point average of less than “C” (2.0) during the same period. The first criterion for nomination was that the student was a Black male in middle school. Counselors and principals were asked to use school records to determine whether a student was Black American. The second was that the student fit the definition of either a high or low achiever. Next was that the student was a seventh or eighth grader because sixth grade students would not have established an academic track record in middle school. Finally, parents of the nominated students were asked to grant permission for the child’s participation. The counselors and principals who nominated the

participants were provided nomination forms (see Appendix D) on which they were asked to identify certain characteristics about the students they nominated.

Each school was to have at least eight nominees (four high achievers and four low achievers) chosen for the study based upon the criteria for participation and parental permission. The letter to the parent or guardian asking permission for their child to participate described the purpose of the study and listed procedures to be used to safeguard the participants' anonymity and prevent disclosure of any sensitive personal information. If parents did not give permission, then that student was not included in the study. If more than four parents had granted permission, then four students would have been selected at random. Parents who had granted permission for their son to participate would have also been asked to agree to be interviewed. The identities of students were protected by the counselors so that the researcher did not know the names of the students or of the parents.

The nomination form had certain descriptors to be checked for each participant by the counselor or principal. For example, they indicated whether the student came from a single parent or two parent household; or, a high income or low income home; or, a large family with many siblings or a small family with no siblings. These descriptors were to be used as informational data and would help in analyzing the student responses.

The middle school age group was chosen for the research because it is the age at which many Black male students begin to slip academically. Previous research has shown that most younger boys do not have the severe disenchantment with school that many

older boys have exhibited. Using samples from two different localities with similar demographics would have allowed the researcher to detect differences in academic achievement that possibly were related to school and community factors.

Since the expectation was that there would have been more than four Black boys in each school that met the criteria, there should have been many students eligible for participation in the study. Each nominee would have had certain at-risk characteristics and a low or high GPA (grade point average) as delineated in the directions for the nomination of students for the study.

The principal of each school was to be interviewed by the researcher on questions referring to school environment, leadership, and Black male students. Selected teachers from all of the schools, including those who had taught a boy from each group, would have also been asked to participate in the study. The total of four school principals, four counselors, and eight teachers (two from each school) were to have been asked to participate. Parents who agreed to participate were also to be interviewed.

Instrumentation

This study required the use of an interview protocol for the students and interview formats for the principals and the teachers as well as one format for parents who agreed to be interviewed. The interview questions were modeled after those in the McMillan and Reed study (1993). The questions addressed the students' attitudes and their perceptions and feelings about influential factors in their lives, families, and schools. These attitudes were addressed through open-ended questions that were intended to encourage students to

talk about these topics. The researcher-developed questions were field tested in a pilot study with several students whose parents had granted permission for their participation, in order to address the validity and reliability issues. Since the interview questions were researcher-developed and modeled after those used in the McMillan & Reed (1993) contextual study, a pilot study was conducted to field test the instrument. The field testing allowed the instrument to be analyzed for clarity and comprehensiveness. All interviews were conducted by the researcher and were tape recorded to ensure accuracy in analysis of the data.

The principals and the selected teachers were interviewed using questions developed by the researcher. Questions dealing with students' attitudes about the school environment were asked of both groups. Teachers were asked to discuss teaching techniques and pedagogy that they found effective for young Black males. The principals were asked about their philosophy of education and their leadership where young Black males were concerned. Both principals and teachers were asked questions to try to determine their views concerning young African American males and what they thought helped and hindered them academically.

Research Plan Revision

Once all of the required protocols for conducting the research were satisfied, each division was contacted according to the outlined procedures. Letters were sent to the appropriate Superintendents and their responses were adhered to. The urban division

ultimately granted permission but the suburban division made requests that would not have allowed a sufficient number of participants.

Therefore, the original plan for student selection and data collection needed revision. One school division declined to provide IQ data for the student sample and requested that the researcher have contact only with the central office and not with school personnel. That decision narrowed the numbers of middle schools providing students for the sample of two schools in one school division. At a meeting of the urban principals and counselors to explain the study and the expected procedures, full cooperation from everyone was assured. However, in one of the two schools selected for the study, the counselor later declined to provide the students or information about them even though there had been an agreement that school personnel would cooperate in the study. As a result of these developments, only one middle school was available to participate in the study.

Another complication was encountered when the counselor of the participating school chose not to use the criteria for selecting the student sample as described above. This decision resulted in a sample of 11 students, three of whom were designated as high achievers and eight of whom were low achievers. Since the researcher did not know the students' classification until after the interviews had been conducted, this problem was not discovered until near the end of the data collection process. At that point, impending deadlines prevented the researcher from drawing a new sample.

The small number of students classified as high achievers meant a valid comparison of high and low achievers was not possible. Consequently, the research design was revised to eliminate references to comparison of groups. The emergent study design is described in the next section.

Revised Research Design

Since it was no longer possible to answer the original research questions, the decision was made to adopt a descriptive design using the data from interviews with the 11 students, 2 middle school principals, 2 counselors, and 5 teachers. The socio-economic status of each student was ascertained by looking at the nomination form. The counselor was asked to provide IQ scores for participants as well as the most recent standardized test scores. The IQ scores for each student were not available. Therefore, scores on standardized tests were used as a proxy for intelligence.

Through the cooperation of the counselor at the school, the interviews with the 11 students were conducted. The major purpose of gathering these data was to answer the question: Are there factors within the individual, the school and the family that are associated with achievement for Black middle school male students? A secondary purpose was to determine whether the boys in this sample possessed resilient traits and, if so, which ones.

Each boy returned a signed parental permission form to the counselor and agreed to be interviewed. Each interview was taped and later transcribed. The questions asked during the interviews are those from the student interview format in Appendix E. The

queries were probes that sought information about factors related to academic achievement among Black male adolescents. The first three interviews were used as a pilot study to ascertain the students' comprehension of the questions. As there were no problems with their understanding, the format was used to conduct further interviews and the three pilot interviews were included in the data. Each interview took approximately 20 minutes and was conducted in a room in the school. Students were identified only by an assigned number. The researcher did not have access to the students' last names or addresses. After all of the student interviews were completed, transcripts were prepared, compiled and coded.

Two principals were interviewed, including the principal of the non-participating school. Each principal was asked the same set of questions (see Appendix F) and the interviews were tape recorded. Once the principals had been interviewed, the counselors were interviewed. The uncooperative counselor was also interviewed because of his experience in working with "at-risk" youth. The teacher interviews were conducted and taped. During each interview, notes were taken to enhance gathering data. When the interviews had been completed, all sets of data were analyzed.

Data Analysis

The student, teacher, principal, and counselor interviews covered three main categories: the school, the individual, and the family. Each of these categories was divided into sub-categories, which are listed in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Categories of Investigation

Categories	Interview Questions
<u>Individual Category</u>	
Desire for peer acceptance	1, 16
Types of friends	15, 16
Social competence	3, 6
Problem solving	5, 8
Sense of purpose	12, 14
Autonomy	
<u>School Category</u>	
Teacher expectations	6, 7, 9
Perceptions of school experiences	5, 9
<u>Family Category</u>	
Presence of father in home	10
Number of siblings	10
Physical/emotional abuse	14, 11
Parents interested in boy's schoolwork	11, 12
Boy has responsibilities at home	13
Parents set standards	14
Parents expect boy to finish school	12

The sub-category, sense of purpose, under the individual category was further subdivided into classes, such as spare time activity or self expectation, which generally were derived from the interview questions. Each of these classes was then further divided into topics such as like school, make better grades, and school importance according to the student responses. For example, in the individual category, question one, which discussed a student's spare time activities, is associated with the sub-category, desire for peer acceptance, the class is spare time activity and topics under this class are enjoyed, activity, and why.

The transcribed student responses were organized under several sub-categories that matched the student interview format. Also, the responses of the principals, counselors, and teachers were organized from the tapes into categories that matched the interview format. Each student response was coded and assigned a sub-category. The student responses were then searched to identify any common terms, concepts, or themes within these sub-categories and then were compared and related to other responses that appeared in other sub-categories. Once the relationships of responses across categories were established, then a theme was developed from those relationships. For example, a student's response to the question whether he intended to finish high school was paired with the response to the question whether there was a helpful person at school for him. Both of these responses, added to his reported liking of school and good attendance, led to a conclusion about this student's attitudes about school and academic achievement. Individual responses were compared to group responses in order to identify a pattern that

would permit a generalization about the group. These patterns were sorted and compared to responses from principals, counselors, and teachers. These comparisons helped to enhance students' responses and also served as a validity check.

The tapes of interviews with professionals were played many times to get the essence of their thoughts. As with the student responses, principal, counselor, and teacher interview responses were coded and then compared to search for similarities and commonalities. These responses of educators were categorized into three categories of the study (individual, school, and family) and into five sub-categories, achievement, factors, values, discipline and peer influence. Each of these sub-categories was further divided into classes, which in turn were divided into topics. For example, the sub-category labeled values was broken into the classes of common values, different values, and home values. Once the major educator themes were established, they were then compared with the major themes from the student data.

The student data and the professional data were then reviewed together. The two data sets were investigated to arrive at an analysis of all the responses and interpret their meanings. These meanings were developed into findings and conclusions, which are explained in Chapters 4 and 5.

Delimitations

The study was delimited because of the size of the population. The population for the sample is strictly male because the study was limited to adolescent African American males. Another delimitation was the size of the sample. The study covered only 11

students from one school. Since the study had a small sample, the analysis may be narrow. As well, this study was delimited by the nature of the sample. The participants' parents, who had granted their permission, may be different from the parents of the school population, many of whom may not have granted their permission for their son to participate. Another possible delimitation was the return of permissions from parents. The return numbers were such that some adjustments in selecting participants were necessary.

Also, the teachers and other adults who participated did not know the students who participated in the study, therefore their responses to questions were given in general terms and not specifically about the boys in this sample. This study was mainly delimited by the willingness of others outside the control of the researcher to work toward the goal of completing the original study.

Chapter IV

Results

When it became necessary to redesign the study, the purpose of the research was also changed. The original purpose had been to identify those factors that influence some at-risk Black teen males to pursue academic achievement in spite of conditions that discourage many others. The new purpose was to describe the life situations of Black male middle school students and to relate the boys' life situations, to the extent possible, to their attitudes about school and academic performance.

Research and conventional wisdom have identified a number of factors that are thought to be associated with high academic achievement. Among these factors are those that relate to the school, the family, and the individual. Those factors were the categories of interest about which students in the sample were questioned during the interviews. The major purposes of gathering these data were to determine factors that influence these boys toward academic achievement and to determine whether the boys in this sample possessed resilient traits. This chapter is organized into four sections for discussion of the results: the students' academic performance, the students' home life, the students' goals and the students' attitude toward academic achievement. A short description of the sample precedes these discussions.

The students who were interviewed were 11 middle school Black males. All of them attended one middle school located within an economically depressed area of a mid-sized Southeastern city. As well, these students all had at-risk characteristics as defined by the

McMillan & Reed (1993) study and as delineated by the information provided by the counselor. Each student was an eighth grade student, with eight of the 11 identified as participants in the federal free and/or reduced lunch program (this is normally an accepted barometer for low socio-economic status). Table 4.1 describes the sample.

Table 4.1

Description of the Student Sample

<u>Student #</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Free Lunch</u>	<u>Previously retained</u>
1	13	8	yes	no
2	14	8	yes	no
3	14	8	yes	yes
4	13	8	yes	no
5	14	8	yes	no
6	14	8	yes	no
7	14	8	yes	no
8	14	8	NA	NA
9	13	8	NA	NA
10	14	8	yes	no
11	14	8	NA	NA

Note. Free lunch and student retention information were provided by their counselor. That information was not given for students 8, 9, and 11.

Much of the research literature about Black male academic performance has shown that a decline in performance happens around the third grade for many Black American

boys. Kunjufu (1988) called it the “Fourth Grade Syndrome.” Data from Tables 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4 display three sets of data that relate to this group’s academic performance.

Table 4.2

Comparison of 3rd Grade (1995-1996) Iowa Test of Basic Skills Percentile Scores with 4th Grade (1996-1997) and 6th Grade (1998-1999) Stanford 9 Percentile Scores

Student #	Math			Science			History			English			Reading			
	3	4	6	3	4	6	3	4	6	3	4	6	3	4	6	
1		50	32		51			42			68			71	80	
2	74	73	89		71			80		84	68	61		89	76	52
3		86			31					53	53			23		
4	53	59			44			58		49	78			58	69	
5	53	55	54		44			63		74	71	68		78	54	76
6	85	62			78			38		72	52			78	67	
7	53	52	50		44			34		25	29	27		42	42	36
8	62	33	54		49			31		53	61	37		66	40	71
9	74	50	39		25			50		72	31	75		17	10	20
10	Test scores were not available for this student															
11	16	35	19		22			59		28	29	27		29	7	16

Note. The Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) and the Stanford 9 Achievement Test are norm-referenced tests; average achievement is measured by a score of 50 or above.

Table 4.3

 Student Performance (Scaled Scores) on the 5th Grade (1997-1998) Standards of Learning (SOL)

Tests

<u>Student #</u>	<u>Math</u>	<u>History</u>	<u>Science</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>Reading</u>	<u>% Passed</u>
1	302	390	400	392	383	20%
2	412	390	413	445	426	80%
3	SOL Scores were not available					
4	408	368	413	445	484	80%
5	412	394	406	445	490	80%
6	424	406	434	434	433	100%
7	369	367	382	372	426	20%
8	400	372	413	434	400	80%
9	364	383	426	408	419	60%
10	SOL Scores were not available					
11	349	361	360	372	356	0%
Number passing	5	1	7	6	7	
Percent passing	56%	11%	78%	67%	78%	

Note. The column “% Passed” represents the percentage of tests that were passed by each student.

Table 4.4

Report Card Grades from 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th Grades

Student#	A			B			C			D			F		
	4, 5, 6	7	8	4, 5, 6	7	8	4, 5, 6	7	8	4, 5, 6	7	8	4, 5, 6	7	8
1	2	0	1	10	3	0	10	3	6	1	2	6	2	7	13
2	9	2	0	13	5	5	4	3	7	0	9	0	0	0	6
3		0	0		3	4		7	6		0	9		1	8
4	8	1	4	11	5	12	3	3	7	0	0	4	0	0	1
5	5	5	4	16	5	8	5	0	11	0	0	3	0	0	1
6	14	8	8	8	2	8		0	9	0	0	3	0	0	0
7	8	0	2	14	6	4		5	11	0	0	7	0	0	4
8	2	2	2	16	3	3	3	6	9	0	0	7	0	0	4
9	4	2	3	11	5	5	7	3	10	0	1	7	0	0	3
10		1	2		3	5		4	23	0	0	7	0	0	7
11	3	0	0	7	3	5	9	5	4	0	1	11	0	0	5
Totals	55	21	26	106	43	59	41	39	103	1	13	64	2	8	52
Grade Point Average(s)				Grade 4-6			Grade 7			Grade 8					
				3.03 (B)			2.45 (C)			1.81 (D)					

Note. *Cells report frequency of each letter grade at each grade level. Not all boys attended school in the district continuously, hence the discrepancy in the totals.

Table 4.2 shows that, of the nine students for whom one or more third grade ITBS scores were available, eight (89%) had scores that were average or above in at least one subject area. Only one student (Student #11) scored below average on all tests. Sixth grade

Stanford 9 scores in mathematics, English, and reading were available for seven students. Of 20 reported scores, nine (45%) were below the 50th percentile. These figures suggest that for this sample academic achievement declined between the third and sixth grade. However, since two different tests were involved, care must be taken in drawing conclusions from these data.

Table 4.2 displays the percentile scores on two different standardized tests administered in the third, fourth, and sixth grades. The Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) covering mathematics, science, history, English and reading was administered in the third and fourth grades and the Stanford 9 Test covering mathematics, English and reading was administered in the sixth grade. A percentile score of 50 on any of these tests is considered average.

The Stanford 9 Achievement Test was administered in both grades 4 and 6. A comparison of these results as shown in Table 4.2 yields a more valid comparison of changes in students' academic performance over time. Thirteen of the 21 comparisons (62%) from the fourth to sixth grade on Stanford 9 tests in mathematics, English, and reading showed declines, and eight (38%) showed increases. However, some of the changes from grade 4 to grade 6 were small and are educationally insignificant. By examining changes of 10 or more percentile points, a more accurate conclusion is possible. Six scores dropped 10 points or more between fourth and sixth grades, whereas five showed increases of that magnitude. The remaining 10 comparisons varied less than 10 percentile points in either direction.

Score variations of 10 percentile points or more between grades 4 and 6 occurred most frequently in mathematics and reading. Five of the 11 changes of +10 or -10 percentile points were in mathematics, and four were in reading. Only two students had scores in English that varied by 10 or more points. Between grades 4 and 6, these findings indicate that the Black male students in this sample performed slightly less well in the middle school grades as compared to elementary school, but their performance was not uniformly lower in all subjects. About half of the students in this sample showed either marked increases or decreases in their achievement test scores over the two year period whereas the other half of these students showed slight changes in their test scores over that time.

Grade retention information was only available for eight of the 11 students (the same three students did not have school lunch data available). Only one of the eight had been retained.

Table 4.3 displays the student performance on the fifth grade Standards of Learning Tests (SOL) that are a state sponsored assessment of student achievement that was administered to selected grade levels in all public schools in Virginia. The SOL are criterion-referenced tests in math, English, science, history and reading. A scaled score of 400 in a subject area constituted a passing score. SOL scores were not available for Students #3 and #10. Student #11 did not pass any of these tests, whereas Student # 6 passed all of them. Students #2, #4, #5, and #8 passed four of the five tests. Only one student (11%) passed the history test, which was somewhat expected because the state

had not gotten a satisfactory correlation between the content and the test. The summary shows that history and mathematics were the most difficult tests for these students. One student (11%) passed history and five (56%) passed mathematics.

During the interviews, the students were asked if they could make better grades. Ten of the 11 replied in the affirmative with one student responding, "At will!" Student #3 responded "No." When asked what had stopped him, he replied, "Mostly kids-peer pressure." He went on to explain,

Because it's a whole lot of people. Mostly, it's like when you go down into the cafeteria, half of the kids are picking on you. It's hard to stay away from the people.

I don't really like to pick on people. I don't like to do it. It's not neat.

Student #11, who did not pass any of the three achievement tests, responded, "Um hum, yep." When asked why didn't he, the response was, "It's like I told you about being stubborn; I like didn't do my work until I saw my report card at the end of first semester.

That's when I changed it around and brought my grades up some. Student #10 said,

Man, I make good grades; it's just certain subjects...I brought my grade up in the class. It's like I only got one bad grade in the class; I brought my grade up and I know I can do better though.

Five of the boys did not offer any comment other than an affirmative answer.

Table 4.4 displays the report card grades attained by the sample in the 4th, 5th, and 6th grades combined in addition to those of the 7th grade and 8th grade up to the time the data were gathered. The 7th and 8th grade years are the last two years of middle school in this

district. Each student except Student #6 had a noticeable increase in the grades of “D” and “F” for the last two years. There was a corresponding decline in the number of A’s and B’s for all students except #6. These grades, which are those earned in classrooms and awarded by the teachers, also support two facts. The first is that these boys have proven that they possess the abilities to perform at a satisfactory academic level. The second is that the data have shown that as the boys progressed beyond the third/fourth grade levels, a slight decline in performance was observed.

The group of boys that comprised the sample for this study had shown academic success in their earlier school years. As a group, they possessed the confidence that they could make better grades if a decision was made to do so. The one student, Student #3, who spoke of peer pressure stopping him, had not said that he was without the ability to make better grades. In fact, if his data in the tables were analyzed, his ability was evident, especially in the report card grade data.

The boys were questioned about their home situations to determine some of the circumstances in which they lived. There were interview questions that asked them about their families and their at-home responsibilities and whether home responsibilities were of benefit to them. Table 4.5 describes the home conditions of this sample.

Previous research has shown that the family dynamics, whether positive or negative, affected a boy’s academic success. The number of fathers or men who resided in their homes was another important aspect under consideration. Ten of the youngsters reported

that they did not have a father living in the home. Only one boy, Student #7, had both natural parents, “My mom and dad, and five sisters.”

Table 4.5

Home Conditions of Students in the Study Sample

Student#	Single parent	Siblings	#At home	Parent/home relationship	Chores	Helpful person
1	Yes	Yes	3	Grandfather/Good	Yes	Gfather/Fiance
2	Yes	Yes	2	Mother/Gmother/Good	Yes	Mother
3	Yes	Yes	6	Mother/Live In*/Good	Yes	Sister/Brother
4	Yes	Yes	1	Mother/Gmother/Fair	Yes	Not Really
5	Yes	Yes	6	Friend of Mother/Good	Yes	Caregiver
6	No	Yes	6	Both Parents/Good	Yes	Sister in HS
7	Yes	Yes	6	Mother	Yes	Mother/Sister
8	Yes	Yes	1	Mother/Good	Yes	Mother/Brother
9	Yes	No	1	Mother/Fair	Yes	Mother
10	Yes	Yes	2	Mother/Good	Yes	Sis/Mom/Dad
11	Yes	Yes	1	Grandmother	Yes	Grandmother

Note. The number of siblings at home includes the students in the sample. This figure includes all brothers and/or sisters, regardless of age, who lived in the same household as the interviewee. The *in “Parent” column denotes homes where there is a live-in fiancée. All siblings denoted in the “Helpful Person” column are older siblings.

The other families had six mothers who were caregivers, one “mother” is a best friend because the natural mother is deceased. All of the boys, except Student #9, reported that

they had siblings who lived with them. When questioned about who lived with them, some of the responses were

1. I live with my grandfather. And he's getting ready to get married so I'm living with his fiancée too... We're all living together. Some um... I live with them and um... I used to live with my aunt and my cousin, but he wasn't nothing to me... Yeah, I have one half-sister, _____. Brothers, I have ____ and _____...

2. My brother used to live with me and um... that's when I lived with ____ and not ____... My grandma was alive then. So, I left those two and ____ moved in with my mom and _____. She wants to get all of us.

I live with my grandma, my mother and little brother.

I live with my mother. She's engaged to this man. My oldest brother just moved back down here.

3. My mother...(Discussing siblings) One on my mother's side and a brother and a sister on my daddy's side.

Many of the boys had siblings who lived at home though most families were non-traditional ones. All of the children within a household were related, having at least one parent in common. Because of the diversity in the types of families, it is likely that some of the students had experienced periods of instability during their lifetime, but not presently. As well, each boy reported that he had responsibilities or chores to perform.

1. Let me see. Wash clothes, sometimes I cook, but that's not really a chore, clean my room, wash dishes, and I have to say in some cases it is helpful. If like the vacuum cleaner, if you're trying to ignore somebody, all you have to do is vroom, vroom, vroom.

2. We all clean the kitchen, clean our dishes. I clean my room and just straighten up like.

3. That's it. (Discussing whether it is helpful.) Clean up my act because everything else is available.

4. Clean up my bed...They (chores) broaden my horizon and they give me more insight.

5. Clean up my room, wash dishes, help them cut the grass.

6. I have a lot of chores. Well, you know, my room of course or whatever, just like wash the dishes, take out the trash, clean up clothes and take them back, you know, um...then sometimes...oh yeah I like to help fix stuff, plumbing and all that, you know, basically.

All of the boys had the responsibility of cleaning their rooms. Most of the youngsters had a positive comment about how the responsibilities were helpful to them although a few did not.

1. No. Cause a lot of times it don't got nothing to do with all the things like math, English and stuff like that.

2. With school? No.

3. Yes. Show me I can respect others just like I respect myself at home.

4. Yeah, so you won't be lazy.

5. Yes, to be responsible, like to do what you need to do.

Six boys responded that their parents were stricter than their friends' parents. Three said their parents were not as strict.

1. More strict. Ah, like when I say all...I like...like my friends' parents let them do just about anything. But my parents...no, you gotta do everything before you ever think about doing anything.

2. I think more strict. Cause when I do something that's not right, she always makes me do better.

3. I think she's less. Yeah. She's fair. We agree on some things.

4. Less. Yes.

5. More about school. She's more strict about school. She's always there. She always lets me stay back to learn stuff after school. My curfew is like 10PM and my friends kind of stay out; I come in the house.

6. More strict. (Sigh) She needs to know where I am. She won't let me stay out too late. Just like normal, I guess.

7. Mines is more. (In what way?) They well...I'm not sure. My aunt is into discipline. My aunt loves discipline.

When questioned whether their parents visited school on a regular basis, seven students responded in the affirmative. Visits ranged from infrequently to frequently. Four boys responded that their parents did not visit the school.

1. Sometimes. He (grandfather) comes sometimes. Yeah, every now and then he does. He tries really hard, because of his job, you know. But for him to come he'd have to take a day off from work.

2. No. My mom used to come to most of the parent/teacher conferences, but because of her work schedule, she can't come.

3. Yes. Ah, every four or five days.

4. Quite often. Yeah, yeah. Like parent/teacher conference. Um like they go to meetings parent/teacher conference and like...(PTA?) Yeah, ah yeah. Right. What is it...like every chance they get. Like awards day for the whole year.

5. My dad (does not reside with student) comes more, though; my dad contacts the school more.

6. He calls up here to check on me sometimes. (How often?) Whenever my teachers need to talk to him.

7. Yes. Probably once a month.

The investigation into the future goals that students possessed for themselves centered upon their expectations. All of the students had definitive ideas for future goals. Ten boys believed that they would and should graduate from high school. The other said,

I'm not going to say that I expect to, but I'm going to try. (Why?) Well, I know sometime how I can be. If I am not constantly...If someone is not constantly on me, not all the time but you know, sometimes if I'm having an off day, if they're not constantly on me, you know, I'll kind of drift off.

The same ten students who were positive they would graduate from high school expressed a strong desire to continue their education beyond high school in a college or university with four boys indicating that law interested them. The one student who expressed reluctance about high school graduation said,

1. I have a few things in my mind. Like I want to narrow it down as I get older. I've always wanted to be a cop on street patrol. And I've always wanted to be in the FBI investigations; you know, sometimes I like puzzling challenges. So I wanted to be a cartoonist because I can draw.

2. Um. Hopefully, I'm going to be a lawyer and, yes, education is necessary to do it.

3. I want to be an architect and I think that education is very important. It will affect my career because if I don't get a good education in math, maybe science, or whatever, then I'm not going to be able to follow my career goals.

4. When I leave school, I think I'm gonna go to college and try to be a football player... If I don't go to the pros, I'll think about working; I'll try to be an astronaut and if I don't do that, I'll have to be a wrestler or something.

5. I plan to go to college and try to get a law degree.

Although several professions were discussed, five boys had mentioned some type of career that's law related. Two boys were undecided about careers but were committed to college. The other professions discussed were computer specialist, electrical engineer, engineer/architect and architect.

The attitudes of this sample toward academic achievement included the aforementioned data in addition to the following data generated by questions concerning helpful teachers, peer relationships and liking school. The attitude toward academic achievement is related to the boys' attitude toward the school and who helped them while they were there. As well, according to the school's data, the boys' attendance ranged from good to excellent with one student who had poor attendance (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.6

Student Attendance for the 2000-2001 School Year (Until June 1, 2001)

<u>Student #</u>	<u>Days Present</u>	<u>Days Absent</u>	<u>% Present</u>	<u>Days Tardy</u>
1	134	31	81.21%	73
2	164	1	99.39%	3
3	145	15	90.63%	36
4	158	8	96.34%	0
5	163	2	98.78%	0
6	157	8	95.15%	11
7	162	3	98.18%	2
8	165	0	100.00%	5
9	166	7	95.95%	5
10	173	6	96.64%	4
11	159	6	96.36%	2

Note. The total days of attendance varies because the school disseminated information to the researcher at different times.

All of the boys responded that they generally liked school. No one responded that he did not like school at all. When directly asked about school the answers varied:

1. It's interesting. Actually, it depends on who you are. For me, school is, like uh, it's sort of like a maze. You start out at the beginning and there are some easy choices to make. Then you get deeper into the maze and there are a little more twists and tangles than you expected. Then you get towards the end, you are happy that you are out.

2. It has been fun. I've been going here since the seventh grade. I moved from _____.

3. (What made it fun?) The teachers.

4. It's important to do good in school and it's all right, but sometimes I don't like coming here. (Why?) I don't like it when they give me homework on the week-ends and stuff, but most of the time I forget all about it. Sometimes I have important things to do on weekends.

5. Excellent. It's great. I love it.

6. First day of the sixth grade, I wasn't really used to being around, I don't want to use this word, but being around this type of people. But as a kid I went to _____. It's a whole different atmosphere. It kinda took me a little while to adjust. Then um...you know after that, I just did the best that I could.

7. It's fun because it's right here where I live at and I don't have to worry about going nowhere that I don't know nobody.

8. It's a good school; I like the teachers. They help me a lot.

Most of the boys expressed that it was important for them to do well in school.

Likewise, each of them reported that there were teachers whom they liked and they talked about why they liked these teachers. It is apparent that the good feelings these boys have expressed about the teachers were reflected by their attitudes about school. When questioned about those teachers the responses were positive:

1. I'd say Ms. _____, my reading teacher. (Why?) Because, you know, she thinks about you not just about the work or about herself. If you're having a problem, she'll listen to what you have to say. She's not rude. She's very polite and courteous. She'll help if you ask. She'll always answer your questions. She'll lend you a pencil. She won't just say you never come without a pencil. She won't do that. She'll really listen to your opinions and if you have something to discuss with her, she'll sit down and listen.

2. She's very, very nice.

3. My history teacher, Mr. _____. He stays back after school and I can go to him on a certain topic. Um. He understands. And he can joke around with you at the appropriate time and stuff like that.

4. All my teachers. They been teaching me the things I need to know. They don't say some-thing and I have to do it; they just teach it to me and they explain it better if I need help...

5. Teaching a hard subject like history. That's the kind of person I could look up to.

6. My math teacher, Mr. _____. He's letting me help do everything and coming to you and help you and he'll always encourage you to come and stay after school for more help...

7. I like that he don't never get mad at you or stuff like that and yell at you all the time.

8. Teachers. A bunch of them. Some of them give me advice. They helped me improve my study habits.

The relationship that has existed between young Black boys, their peers and academic achievement has been well documented. The vast majority of the research literature has suggested that negative peer pressure (peer pressure exerted against academic success) has been a major influence on the lack of academic success of Black males. The boys in this sample were questioned about their peers; first, why they did not achieve in school and second, how their friendships occurred. In the following responses, the numbers 1 and 2 in each set of statements assigned the two answers to the same student.

1. I'd have to say obvious situations. (Please explain) Well if you're...you probably already heard of this a lot but if you're walking down the street or you're walking down the hall or just in the classroom sitting down, and someone comes up to you and says, 'Why are you wearing that?' You know, 'Why you look like that?' You um...say, 'I like the way this looks,' or say, 'I don't know, but I'm okay with all that.' Say that sounds sorta geeky, me myself I guess I'd be okay cause people. Sometimes I'll try to put up a

bad big boy act but sometimes if I know it'll get me in trouble or something like that I'll just try to ignore the person...

2. Some of them don't make good grades and some of them do. I try not to put anybody out by how they do. Sometimes it is not a selection,. It just happens.

They continued with a second response,

1. I guess they ain't got no home training.

2. It don't make no difference. I select them.

Students provided a third response,

1. Because they always try to impress girls and stuff. Then they try to get girls more than doing their work. Act like they are better than everybody. (Please explain) Yep.

They always talk about people that do their work, most of the time. You know how they are.

2. No, it doesn't matter. I select some of them. Some of them just come like that. We just meet each other and start becoming friends.

Each student provided fourth responses,

1. They don't study enough, have not studied enough and they don't want to stay in front of a book for a teacher.

2. Me. (They select you?) Um hm. (Why?) Maybe because I'm an outgoing person. I like to smile when I do well. I don't want to be closed, you know to myself, not see anything, not talk. I like to relate, communicate.

Students last responses are,

1. They don't care. Oh, I mean they do care about their futures, but it's like they don't care to take the step to actually get it and earn it. So it's like laziness. They just don't wanna work, but they want the result.

2. To me, I don't care. Friends are friends. If they have something to offer, then it's supreme. Whether that person does good or bad does not affect me.

Attitudes toward anything, especially school and academic achievement, have positively affected these boys. The overall attitude of this sample toward academic success appeared healthy, although school for some of these boys may have been more of a social experience. The friends this group associated with appeared to be a mix of good and ordinary students.

When the interviews with the educators were conducted, each one alluded to the effect of peers upon a student, particularly a Black male that was trying to achieve academically. Throughout the separate interviews, the principals spoke of the influence or effect of their peers upon Black male students as well as their attitude toward academic achievement. One principal spoke about Black males who had been successful in this manner,

Also, I find that there are significant peers in the lives of successful students. Those students who are successful have gained the skill of selecting, I call them friends, peers, to associate with that have like values and like interests. Many times, I find that they compete with each other.

The other principal offered this thought, "I think they all, . . . they are sociable. They like to be with the group but yet, still, the achievers do not mind stepping forward out of the mix of the average or below average achiever." He added,

There are times when these young successful achievers are ostracized by their peers, be-caused they have focus, they have goals, they have aspirations and a lot of times the other folks sort of look down on them because they are aspiring to be successful . . . it's a tough task to walk that line of being an achiever versus a non-achiever and convince other young people that, "Hey, you can do it too."

When questioned whether their school populations had any Black male achievers, both principals responded affirmatively. This question was designed to ascertain if the head of either school recognized the capabilities and attitudes of their Black males. The principals spoke of high achieving boys as having strong influences emanating from their homes. Both principals mentioned the influence that was exerted by a significant adult, whether a parent or a mentor.

I believe all of them have a significant individual in their lives. I call them significant adults who serve as a, I hate to use the word *role model*, but a role model, as a motivating factor or a motivating person. . . . Many times and most times it is the parents who they want to please. I find the parents who are nurturing to those students are the ones who gain the greatest amount of success because the students strive to please those parents.

The other principal answered this way, "...then they have that family structure, ah...someone at home. It may not have to be just the home, but a church organization, or it may be the Boys' Club that have instilled some desire into a person." This principal also indicated that he believed that some of these boys are more influenced by their everyday existence and the need for the basics of survival rather than a desire for an education. Additionally, he said, "I believe very strongly that they live in the community but the community does not have to live in them." This is meant to emphasize the economic situations, which many of these students have lived in. Many of their environments have bred poverty and crime and he has expressed his thought that his students do not necessarily participate in the negatives that constantly surround them.

During the teacher interviews, the discussions did not directly address the student attitudes toward academic achievement. Nonetheless, their comments gave some insights as to why achievement of some boys was evident. Ironically, their comments flowed with those of administrators'.

1. I believe all kids can be successful if they are put in a successful environment.
2. Some have been neglected, I had push at home from my parents, these kids don't have that.
3. I believe most of them can succeed, maybe earlier in their lives they did not have that positive role model that they can see in the male teachers here. Also, it is my belief that if you constantly tell a child that they are dumb, stupid and that they will not be

anything, they begin to believe that. I've seen that a whole lot in some of these young men...so then it gives them nothing to look forward to, so to speak.

4. So many of these children do not have support at home and then they come to the schools and they don't want to learn and early on, they are socially promoted...it also creates that victimhood, that they are a victim, so, 'I'm going to blame someone else for all my shortcomings.'

The teachers also thought that most Black males succeeded if they had the will to do so. When asked about what they did in their classrooms to help these boys become successful, the responses varied. One teacher talked about being a role model for them and held some discussions about success with them.

1. I guess just being myself. I have to give them the opportunity to want to be successful. When they see a Black male in the front of the classroom, that's ah, ah..a reason they would want to be successful. We have a discussion on being successful as males in general.

2. I just come in and do the best job I can do and try to give them a positive role model.

3. Regardless of what background you come from, if you want, I came from the projects right here in _____ Court, you can be if you choose to.

4. I don't look at the color of a child's skin. I'm here to teach all of the children regardless and hopefully they'll be successful. I try to give them some everyday

scenarios about what goes on in the real world and what they need. Hopefully, they heed it.

Throughout their interviews, each counselor intimated that Black male students who experienced academic success had an adult support system. The boys' counselor suggested that the students' attitudes toward themselves, their self esteem, were vital to their academic achievement. During her interview, she indicated that she thought that unsuccessful Black males were without positive adult support nor did they desire academic success. She said, "Children can be successful if they are shown the correct support system. Successful students have parents who hand down values. The adult's view of a child is very influential in how that child sees himself." The second counselor, who works at a different school, was interviewed also. This counselor suggested that the unsuccessful male student did not participate in the many activities and/or programs that schools offered to strengthen academics. As well, he believed the home also affected performance. He said, "With encouraging parents, who may mostly be single mothers, the students participate in activities such as the tutoring offered in the public housing. Some students have no encouragement at home."

There seemed to be a general optimism from all interviewees that Black males at the middle school could achieve. A good attitude toward achievement was evident in this sample. Additionally, the professionals felt that an academically successful boy was supported by a strong adult structure, either by parents or a significant other. From the

boys' responses evidence existed that the people in their homes had been involved in their schooling.

When asked what factors at home influenced Black males to achieve, one counselor reported, "A strong family unit, and it does not have to be a traditional family unit; that makes a child feel good. When the child feels good about himself, there are positive effects for the school and community." The other counselor alluded to parents who are not strong as he responded to the same question, "Parents must help. They cannot pimp out. They can not allow non-participation by their sons in the after school programs of the school or community." He then suggested that, "More of the classroom teachers need to take on the role of a mother or a father and should not fear what is said by others." When asked a very similar question about home factors that influence academic achievement, some of the teachers gave these comments,

1. I think the same factors you find in any strong home in America, regardless of race; probably strong family values, ah... work ethic, you're probably not supposed to say this, I don't care what religion, but some religious foundation. I think all these things would lead a child to be successful.

2. Sometimes parents do not have a strong educational background. Usually parents that are educated or have done well in life, usually their children somewhat follow behind them. A lot of times, when I think a parent is not educated the children have a tendency not to push education.

3. One of those things, also observation, you know, I observed some things in my house-hold that made me want to go on to some better things. I have brothers and sisters who barely have a high school education and I kind of know where I put that. So, just observing and seeing how their lives turned out, it motivates you in a sense. I mean you see failure and you want to succeed. Likewise, if you see success you want to succeed too!

4. A lot of times, after a certain age in a child, some of the kids want to bond with us, look for guidance from us and don't know how to ask to bond with us. And it's like I once said to the kids in the class, 'Some of you know where I am every day and don't know where your one father is. I will be here tomorrow when you come here....we can bond.'

The principals were queried with the same question, which was asked of the counselors and teachers. Their responses were not exactly those of the other professionals but the contextual nature of their comments echoed those others.

I think the strongest component of their lives, that really sets the difference, is the home, the parents and the quality of the parenting that the parents do. Example, the parent who provides space for homework, checks homework, calls the school, comes by the school to dialogue with the teachers and principals frequently, that child is going to have a stronger obligation to do what is required.

He continued,

When home is a literate environment, meaning that there are magazines around, newspapers, books, novels, journals-notes that people take-and they need to...when they see momma and daddy reading that is a value that you can't tell, you have to do it. You know, it's do as I do. When the student sees momma and daddy reading then they know then that reading is important.

He suggested that if parents were educated and talked intelligently or civil around the house that that behavior may be duplicated by the children. This position was supported by literature that addressed this idea (Mincy, 1994; Hrabowski, 1996). The other principal spoke from his experiences. His position paralleled and supported the previous principal. He commented,

The factor in the home is a strong adult role model whether it be a female or a male role model. I have some homes where young people are coming out of and there is no male figure in them, it is grandmother, the mother and they are extremely successful. They can make it. So, I think it's that strong influence from home.

There were no questions on any of the educators' formats that directly addressed student future goals or ambitions. However, during some of the interviews, a few educators' comments touched briefly upon these areas as they related them to the questions. When asked what he saw in his male population that influenced them to be achievers, the principal of this sample responded,

All of our students like things. They like the prompts that they see money buy. Money buys cars, money buys fine clothes, money buys houses, money buys tickets

to events. So obviously, these are things the students want. There are students in our population who seemingly have no income, the parents have little or no income, they seem to acquire these things. They become suspect, we look on them as questionable characters. 'How did they get all this money to get these things, mother has no job, father has no job?' We understand that side. But the other side is, when we are able to promote, I'll use the word professionalism, I'll talk about some professional careers, such as we have, they do look up to principals, they still look up to teachers...they realize they do not have to break the law to have some of these things.

This principal believed that many of his Black male students begin to set some goals because of the material benefits of professional life. Therefore, the life of the street may lose its allure for many of those boys. The other principal responded to another question but gave a similar answer. He said,

The high achievers will...you can sell them "The Dream," (the American Dream), ah...and they will buy "The Dream" a lot quicker than the non-achievers. You can show them, take them out somewhere and show them another lifestyle and you can begin to impress upon them that there is a lifestyle that they might be able to achieve if they would apply themselves. And once they decide that this is something that they would like to have for themselves and that this is achievable for them, it makes it, it makes life a lot easier for them because they have a goal that's out there. They have, they see that there are ways to get there and there are steps that must be taken.

They just can't jump from here across the fence to success, that they must go step by step.

As well, some of the teachers gave their thoughts as they responded to different questions. One teacher added this comment while answering a question about achievers and discipline:

I once overheard a conversation between an administrator and a student. The administrator asked the student, 'Why do you like that guy?' The child pretty much said, 'He is more like me!' This was a Black child talking about a White man. Again, it's just that perception that Black males have of people. I guess the kid saw himself doing some of the same things as he got older whereas he didn't see that in a Black role model.

Another teacher responded to a question about motivation with this thought:

That goes back to what I was saying earlier about just seeing, observing things around home. They see things in their own neighborhood that are not exactly what you would want to have for yourself. You know, I think that it is a motivating factor just to see some of that stuff, knowing what happens to people in general when they decide they want to sell drugs, to turn to a life of crime and so forth. We have a lot of students who are that perceptive and they say, 'That's not the route I want to go.' So, they look for possible things to participate in.

It is obvious that these educators have perceived that the students' environment has opened their visions to begin to develop some positive models or directions for the future.

According to some other teachers, some of the students had short term goals of playing school sports. However, the division's Superintendent had initiated an academic requirement for students who played. Those students must pass math, science and English plus three other courses. The teachers also spoke about some of their observations where Black males did not have a vision for their futures. One teacher said,

You keep bringing up this "achiever" and I think we keep missing some words of (unintelligible). We have Black kids who really think they are going to be successful selling drugs and that's a high achievement for them because they say, 'I can take care of my family. I don't need an education'...A lot of them don't see academics as a way out. They just say, 'I'm going to school because my parents send me. I'm going to school until I get 17 then I'll drop out.' They have no real interest in it because they are from areas where academics is not a main topic.

The teacher added,

Why do I need to produce, why do I need to achieve when I'm living in a country where the news media already has said what's going to happen to me, even with an education? Is education more important than me surviving in my family, because I don't get a degree, does it keep me from being successful in other things I could do? We have too many things coming to our kids now, anywhere from Hip-Hop to guys dropping out of college after one year and becoming millionaires. They can put that in your face, they say, 'Iverson did great, he went to jail, he went to the pros and he

is a multi-millionaire.' That perception from the media, all of it plays a large role in how they are educated.

Neither counselor spoke concerning the students' future goals. Each of them responded directly to the asked questions and they did not expound much upon any point. However, the sample's counselor had written comments about each student on the nomination forms. A comment such as "motivated," "interested," "enthusiastic," or "self-motivated" was interpreted as the student exhibiting a high level of goal oriented deeds. She designated four students as "avid readers" as well as some other positive expressions about these boys. These comments, along with other data, have provided some insight into the academic attitudes of this sample. There also were comments about students who were not identified in such positive terms. This counselor described five boys as students who had earned low or fair grades. The rest of them were described as having good or average grades. None of the 11 students had exclusively negative comments. Each boy had at least one positive comment from this counselor.

When questioned whether their Black male students had the capability to achieve, teachers gave these responses,

1. Well, again, coming from what I said earlier about myself, I see a lot of myself in the students because of where I come from and my life and, the hard work I put into it. And, I believe that all kids can be motivated enough to be successful if they're put into a successful environment. So therefore, that's why I believe they can achieve.

2. All the kids I see I don't feel have the skills to succeed, at this stage of the game.

Because some of them have been neglected so far in their lives they are so far behind right now they're in middle school and reading on the third grade level. They don't have the push at home. Unfortunately, there are some that I see that are doomed to fail, it's sad to say, but it's true.

3. Most of the kids succeed if they have the will to do so. It might not be in school. A lot of them don't like school. It's kind of like our job is to kind of motivate them to want to be a little bit more educated. Not so much everything is not "street" all the time. I really believe most of them can succeed.

The principals were also asked if their schools had Black male achievers. Each responded with an affirmative answer. Their responses were,

1. Absolutely we do. In fact, we have more Black males in our school who are successful than we have Black males who are not successful academic achievers.

2. The answer is yes. Yes and the factors that I, not scientific of course, just my observation as to what factors, may be the background or the reason for the success of these young African Americans. Ah, one, I think, is an innate desire to be successful, to be someone, to have some inner drive that they want to escape the situations which they are now a part of. So that's something they bring with them. Many of them bring that with them when they come...some we have to encourage.

It was apparent that the professional educators thought that a student's attitude toward achievement was strongly related to his innate desire for success. Within the context of

operating their schools, these educators have seen good students who have not fully achieved, students who want to achieve but lack the skills and the motivation. However, they do believe that one can achieve if he wants to work at it.

Summary

The data presented in this chapter were derived from taped interviews with 11 Black middle school males. Three of these students were identified as academic achievers by their counselor and the other eight were classified as low achievers. The boys' principal and five teachers in the school were interviewed, as were another middle school principal and a counselor who worked at the same middle school.

As a result of these taped interviews and the written counselor comments, five tables were constructed to display the data. All of the tables reported findings related to the three main types of categories in this study (individual, school and family). The tables describe the sample of students both as individuals and as a group. In displaying information about the individuals such as age, grade, achievement and goals, a picture of the sample as students is given. The information about the family showed whether the boys have a "traditional" type of family or some other type of family structures. They also showed family economic status as well as familial relationships among some other things. The school type of data deals with the potential for and attainment level of academic achievement.

The interviews with students attempted to gain insights into the thoughts of these students about the three variables. The students were not overly open or talkative during

these interviews. Some students gave relatively short answers; some others gave answers that were tangential to the real questions. However, all of the students were jovial and friendly.

The boys in this sample have characteristics and circumstances that would justify their consideration as “at-risk” youth. They are 11 Black males in their early teens. Only one boy had both natural parents in the home and one boy lived with his deceased mother’s friend. The others lived with their mother and/or other relatives. Eight boys in the sample qualified for free or reduced lunch and the majority of homes did not have an adult male who was the “breadwinner”.

Based upon the data from elementary school of this group, ten boys have exhibited the capability to be academic achievers. Their classroom grades and their passing performances on state assessments verify that these boys were capable of doing well in school. However, their present level of achievement did not support their potential. Yet, each student had goals and aspirations that will require educational training beyond the high school level. This may indicate that these students realize that education is needed to achieve their goals.

The general attitude of the sample toward school seemed to be positive in that all felt that there was some adult at the school who was helpful to them and who offered them encouragement. Also, no one reported that he did not like school at all. They generally do not choose their friends according to that person’s academic achievement although they seem to not want to be in a group that gets into trouble. As well, the majority reported

that their parents or caregivers were stricter than their friends' parents. Also, every boy in this sample had chores to perform at home.

The principals, counselors and teachers all thought that the major factor in student success in school was the support for the child at home. Each, although not in the same verbiage, expressed their belief that positive encouragement from home was the key to a boy experiencing academic success. They all felt that all boys could be academic successes, but they discussed peer pressure, a lack of motivation, a lack of encouragement, a lack of self-esteem and low expectations as some of the influences that prevent boys from achieving. The principals, counselors and teachers are professional educators who interact with these and other Black male students constantly. Their responses to the interview questions showed optimism, which is based in reality.

This researcher believes that many of the interviewee responses support the research discussed in Chapter 2 and that will be examined in Chapter 5.

Student Profiles

These data are derived from a small sample of Black male middle school students. However, they do provide and contain enough information to ascertain what factors, if any, influence them to be academically successful. The following student profiles display the type of holistic data that emerged from this study. These students were picked because each one had a uniqueness about him. Student #1 lacked self confidence but had an active imagination. Student #4 had above average grades and Student #8 described himself as unmotivated.

Student #1 Darryl (Not his real name)

This student is a 13 year old Black male who is in the eighth grade in an urban middle school. The school is located in the far end of a depressed neighborhood that is comprised mostly of low income single family housing. Some of the dwellings are rental property. He lives with his grandfather, his grandfather's fiancée, and one brother. He also has another brother and a half-sister, neither of whom live with him. His natural mother has told him that she intends to have them all live with her soon.

Darryl is a pleasant boy who is intrigued by technology, especially computer usage and futuristic concepts and games. He does not appear to have a lot of confidence about finishing high school although he was "...going to try." This student is considered by his counselor in her written comments to "earn low grades" and is "inattentive in class." He does believe that he can make better grades, stating, "...I have the ability..."

When asked who in the school had been particularly helpful, he named Mrs. _____, his reading teacher. He spoke about Mrs. _____ as being nice and said "... she thinks about you." He has a problem with the other teachers, whom he perceives as rude talkers. The counselor wrote that he had "inconsistent work habits" and " does not bring the proper materials..." Yet, this student said that school was interesting and that doing well "...depends on who you are..."

In answer to the inquiry about some boys not doing well in school, he mentioned that it was because of "...their environment." He thinks a lot of boys have confrontations in their lives that affect their class work to the extent that these boys are "...angry about the

confrontations at home..." This researcher thinks that Darryl was talking about confrontations that occur in his home, some between himself and others as well as conflicts between others in his home. There is no evidence that his poor academic performance is related to confrontations.

Darryl's friends are not selected by him according to how well they do in school. Friendships are formed by chance and are not necessarily planned relationships. His responsibilities at home--washing his clothes, washing the dishes, cleaning his room, and especially vacuuming--keep his mind occupied and off of the distractions in his home. This may be his way of avoiding confrontations in his home.

Although he has poor grades at present, Darryl did, as a fifth grade student, pass two of the six state assessment tests of achievement. His attendance could be improved; in fact, his counselor wrote that he is "unable to learn due to frequent absences from school." At the time these data were gathered, he had been present 134 days, absent 31 days and tardy 73 days.

When asked what he would like if he were given three wishes, he answered:

1. Ask for money.
2. Be a character with certain traits like Goofu and Gohan" (two fictional characters)
3. My friends and family have no worries or trouble.

Student #4 Cedric (Fictional name)

Cedric is a smiling, diminutive 13 year old Black male student with a pleasant demeanor who attends the same urban middle school as Darryl. He is described by his

counselor as one who “makes good grades, is motivated and is eager to learn.” Presently, his grades are well above average and as a fifth grade student, he passed five of the six state achievement assessments while only missing passing the sixth test by 12 points.

He thinks school is important now and in his future. Also, he has good attendance. At the time these data were collected, he had been present in school 158 days, absent only eight days with no tardies. This student said, “... it is important to do good in school...” although he admitted he that he does not like homework on the weekends.

This student lives with his mother and grandmother. He believes that he has an older brother and an older sister although he does not “...know their ages. I believe my sister is older than my brother.” He does not ask for help with his homework because, “...if I ask for help they say they don’t know.” Nor does his mother or grandmother visit the school with any regularity “... because of work schedules...they don’t care.”

Cedric enjoys playing sports and games with his friends, who are not necessarily academic achievers. He also enjoys talking with his family members even though he was not specific as to whom he talks to. As well, he exhibits a lot of confidence about his future. When asked if he expected to finish high school, he simply but firmly said “Yes.” Additionally, he expressed his expectation to attend college, to graduate and to participate in the football program.

When asked what he would like if he were given three wishes, he answered:

1. He wanted to go to heaven.
2. Become a NFL player.

3. Have a lot of money, about \$50 million.

Student #8 Arthur (Fictional name)

Arthur is a 14 year old Black male eighth grade student who attends the same middle school as the other two students. He lives with his mother and has two brothers and one sister, none of whom live with him. In his home, he is responsible for cleaning his room, emptying the trash and getting the mail. He believes that his responsibilities at home help "...respect others' stuff as I do at home."

He enjoys "...hanging out with his friends..." and he likes "...to see new things..." He wants to stay out of trouble.

Arthur does not choose his friends on the basis of academic achievement, but he reported that half of them were doing well in school. He thinks the other half of them can and should be academically successful but he says, "...they won't." When asked why he thought some boys did not do well in school, he responded that many are "... tired of school..." or, there is "... no encouragement..." from home or school.

He mentioned his counselor and his history teacher as people in the school who helped him consistently. They gave him "...encouragement and are nice and friendly..." As well, his mother and an older brother help him at home with his homework. Specifically, he states that his brother "...enjoyed high school and remembers it." Also, his mother visits the school regularly about once a month.

His counselor describes him as an unmotivated student who makes "fair" grades. Yet, he has excellent attendance, almost perfect. He was present, at the time these data were

obtained, 165 days out of 165 days with no absences and five tardies. His fifth grade SOL achievement test scores show that he passed five of six tests. Yet, he presently has grades that are average or below.

When asked what he would like if he had three wishes, he answered:

1. To succeed in life.
2. Let mom see a college grad.
3. To die as a famous humanitarian.

Chapter V

Summary and Discussion

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to describe the life situations and identify the factors that affect the academic performance of a sample of middle school Black males. Many Black males have endured and have been affected by circumstances or factors that have caused them to ignore academic pursuits. Yet, despite these obstacles, there have been some Black males who became academic successes. Of 11 boys interviewed for this study, nine (81.8%) were average students academically according to the definition of success used for the research.

The idea of overcoming difficult circumstances and succeeding in school was investigated by McMillan and Reed (1993) through the Metropolitan Education Research Consortium (MERC). The McMillan and Reed study, Defying the Odds: A Study of Resilient At-Risk Students, was the model for this study. The MERC study identified certain characteristics or traits that existed in students that were identified as resilient. A strong, pleasant personality, possessing values, belief in one's ability, the willingness to accept responsibility as well as having a positive disposition were all traits of resilient students. As well and possibly more importantly, the students in the MERC study were identified as having an internal locus of control, which enhanced their positive expectations for the present and future. Additionally, the resilient students in the MERC study sought help from adults when they needed it.

This chapter identifies and discusses the findings from this study. The inclusion of the identified factors in the discussion will provide answers to the question: Are there factors within the individual, the school and the family that are associated with academic achievement for Black middle school male students? Following the discussion, implications for educators and for further research will be given and conclusions will be drawn.

The sample used in this study consisted of 11 Black American male middle school students, all males, of whom a majority (8 of 11) were eligible for free/reduced lunch. All except one of the boys came from non-traditional families. The boys lived in and attended school in an economically depressed neighborhood. All of the boys appeared pleasant and cooperative when interviewed. Each interview enabled the researcher to observe these youngsters. Each seemed to have a decent personality, as there was not one incident of a student displaying rude or disgruntled behavior. Finally, each student was trusting of his counselor, who nominated him, and the researcher, whom he had never met. Since the boys were nominated by the school counselor for the study and had permission from their parents to participate, their behavior in the interview setting may not have been representative of other boys their age.

When each boy entered the room, a handshake was exchanged. The handshakes were firm and the greetings were pleasant. This response from each boy as well as the interviews indicated there were no overtly obvious emotional problems. During the interviews, the researcher did not notice features that indicated any physical abnormality.

The physical condition of these boys is only determined by the observations of the researcher during the interviews. Each appeared to be in excellent physical shape. None was visibly handicapped and each seemed physically whole. In recollection, none of them even wore corrective glasses nor did any have visible injuries or noticeable marks from any previous injury.

Based upon the data gathered from interview notes, student school information and the interviews with students, principals, counselors and teachers, the following findings are presented. They will be listed and then discussed individually with the support of the data. For this sample, the data revealed:

1. All of the boys in this sample possessed some resilient characteristics.
2. The boys in this study had diverse, stable homes, though non-traditional.
3. The boys in this study were “normal” adolescents, meaning that their behavior, appearance, and interests were not markedly different from other adolescent boys.
4. The boys understood some of the circumstances that distracted them from academics.
5. The professional educators were knowledgeable, in line with the research, about this population’s problems.
6. Choosing friends was not an academically based activity for the student.
7. This group was not overly concerned with peer pressure.
8. There were no major differences in students’ attitudes about achievement.

Resilience

Resilient characteristics have been delineated in Chapters 2 and 4, and therefore only those that apply to this sample are mentioned. For this sample, several resilient characteristics stood out. They were a positive attitude about school, generally good relationships with adults, having ambitious but attainable future goals, a sense of self confidence or autonomy, owning responsibility, the ability to seek adult help and the demonstration of some problem solving skills.

Collectively, the boys had displayed a positive attitude about school. Seven boys reported that they liked school and had “fun” at school. Only one boy, Student #11, reported having had some trouble adjusting to the middle school, but he did not report that he did not like school. Ten boys had good school attendance, ten boys were confident they would complete high school, and each of the 11 boys reported that he liked one or more adults in the school. All 11 of the boys expressed confidence that they were capable of making better grades.

A good relationship with adults where one can seek help was defined as a characteristic of resilient students. The boys in this study acknowledged that they had some teachers with whom they had positive relationships. The teachers were helpful to the boys in many ways. According to the boys, the teachers were tutors, suppliers of materials, polite, friendly, as well as being encouraging and acting as advisors. Although the boys had no difficulty in asking their teachers for help, the boys reported that the teachers offered help to them without being asked. The teachers were relied upon by the

students for help with school work and with personal matters. One principal commented about the positive effect on students' academic achievement that results when the student attaches himself to positive teachers. Attached is interpreted to mean associate in a reliable sense. Another resilient trait that improved students' academic achievement was having a futuristic goal. As a group, all of these youngsters suggested, either directly or indirectly, that a post secondary education was in their plans. All of them named careers and goals that required professional training or a highly developed skill. Their goals were reasonable and attainable. Individually, the goals were diverse; most centered around the practice of law, engineering or architecture. Careers in computer technology were mentioned, as well as professional wrestling.

It should be mentioned that the boys did not hesitate to answer when questioned about their goals or their wishes. When asked what would they wished for, the favorite response was "money," enough money to have financial freedom. However, their request was not for selfish purposes. Half of the boys who mentioned having money wanted to include others in their wealth, particularly family and friends. Four others spoke of helping others in some way. This researcher equated this request for money as a need for independence or autonomy and showed that the boys possessed selfless, empathetic values.

The differences in this sample's attitude about achievement were subtle. Whether the boys realized it or not, fulfilling their expectation for the future required academic achievement. Those expectations were not directly conveyed to the researcher in their

responses, but if one analyzed the boys' answers to the questions that asked if they intended to finish school or, to make better grades or, if they liked school, or thought it was important, the responses were affirmative.

Another resilient characteristic that was present in this group was that of owning responsibility. All of the boys had chores at home to perform. Each boy reported that he had to clean his room, which suggested that the abodes were adequate and roomy enough for the boy to have had his own space. When discussing the chores, none of the boys appeared disgusted or disturbed about having them to do and this was an affirmation that the parents were building responsibility into the boys. Most saw some benefit doing them.

Home Lives

The boys in this study spoke fondly of their families when they discussed them. In most cases, there was someone in the home who helped each boy with school work, although some of the boys reported or implied that their helper possessed weaknesses in some subjects. Even though some of the boys reported that their family members were not very knowledgeable about some school subjects, the boys still asked for their assistance. Many of the boys appeared to have aunts, siblings and/or grandparents willing to aid them with their homework. This indicated a strong relationship with family members. It is apparent that there was parental encouragement for the boys that was spoken of by the professional educators. The boys had gotten ideas for their ambitious goals and dreams from somewhere, and generally it started in the home. Likewise, the

majority of parents had communicated with the school, some more than others. Thus, it was apparent that the parents had talked to school personnel and had an expectation for their sons. These expectations were a testament to the strength and stability of each home.

Where there were siblings who lived in the home, they were related, sharing at least one parent. As well, some siblings were caretakers. Even though only one boy lived with his natural father, one father who was not living with the student was reported to visit the school more than the mother, which indicated that the father was interested in the child and that some communication existed between the parents.

The boys' families were diverse but stable. Most of the boys lived with mothers who were the head of the household. Two of the boys lived with a grandparent and one resided with a family friend. Only one boy had a "traditional" family with his natural parents and siblings living together. There was a very different situation in the other 10 homes. There were homes with a single parent, usually a mother or other caregiver, responsible for everyone's welfare. There were homes that ranged from those with no sibling to homes where the siblings were related by one parent. Yet all of these homes had features that are associated with security and stability. That the families had modest means was shown by the fact that eight of the boys participated in the free and reduced lunch program, which has always been an economic barometer of family income. For the other three boys that information was not available.

Even though the majority of the boys qualified for free or reduced lunch, the researcher's observations of the boys' attire during the interviews led to the conclusion

that none of the boys was experiencing extreme poverty. In fact, all of the boys were clean, their clothes were pressed and fashionable, and they looked to be well fed. Whether a home had natural parents, single mother, grandparent, or caring caregiver, each boy appeared to be physically well cared for.

The educators expressed a strong conviction that a child's academic achievement was positively affected by a strong and supportive family. The elements of that strength were rooted in the values that the family transmitted to the youth. According to the educators, emphasis upon education, literacy, encouragement, interest in the child's school progress, instilling a work ethic and providing a good support system were important ways that a family helps a child be successful in school. The main threads that ran through their discussions were a strong parent or caregiver modeling what a child would emulate. It was apparent that these boys had been exposed to many of these elements at home. One piece of evidence of the parents' interest in and support for their children was the fact that most of the boys reported that their parents were more strict than those of their friends. Those responses indicated that parents held behavioral expectations for these boys. A couple of boys alluded to their curfews and their inability to stay with their friends when they wished to do so.

These boys also exhibited characteristics that were associated with "normal" adolescence. As reported earlier, the boys appeared physically well cared for and emotionally stable. Also previously mentioned was the boys' pleasant demeanor and physical appearance. In addition, each student had comments written by the counselor

that depicted them as “regular” adolescents, and for 10 of the 11 boys these comments included no mention of learning problems. However, for Student #10, the counselor wrote that he displayed “severe deficits in concentration” and had “visual memory problems.” Generally, she described the boy as an avid reader or noted that the boy got along well with others or mentioned that the boy brought proper materials to classes.

The boys possessed confidence in themselves, which implied that each had strong self esteem, an accepted emotional barometer. They also had a variety of interests, such as basketball, football, track, computer games, computer technology and watching TV. One boy enjoyed reading in his spare time. Some activities involved their friends both in and out of school, some involved their families, and some were enjoyed while the boy was alone. This suggested normal behaviors.

Attitudes Toward School

The boys reported that they liked school and, in some instances, described it as “fun.” The data revealed that these boys were average academic performers in their elementary years, and most still maintained good attendance in school and had set goals for the future, their academic records had declined in recent years. Even so, their actions through their daily attendance and their positive interaction with the staff supported their claim of enjoying school. Since they experienced satisfaction with school, it stands to reason that under the right circumstances these boys could have been high achievers. As a group, the boys reported that they had teachers who were helpful to them and whom they liked. They also expressed the idea that education was important to them.

The boys in this sample understood some of the circumstances that distracted them from applying themselves academically. This was one of the most important findings of this study because it demonstrated the boys' understanding of the discrepancy between their ability and their academic performance.

This finding was based upon the different responses to the question that inquired why they thought other Black males did not do well in school. Their answers suggested that they recognized some of the factors that distracted their peers and prevented them from succeeding in school. One boy's response "...they're just lazy..." referred to an individual factor. Another boy spoke about "no home training" which implied a family type factor. Still another said that the boys "...don't study enough..." This can be viewed as an individual factor but may also be considered a school factor because research and experience have shown that high quality instruction increases student interest.

The point here was that there were many different responses to this question and the boys articulated them. Drug dealing, impressing girls, and athletics were among the answers they gave. The larger, more important point was that many of these factors which they identified as affecting their friends also impacted them. Collectively, these boys recognized the distractions that kept other Black boys from academic achievement, but there was no evidence that they were aware of the effect these factors might have on their own lives.

The importance of this finding was that these 11 Black males were aware of some of the difficulties of an at risk existence for other Black boys, but were not able or willing to apply this information to their own situation. Even though one student said that education was "...a key to the door..." for him, other boys in the same sample did not view education with the same seriousness. The other boys' responses about the importance of education were convincing but did not appear serious enough to sway them to perform better in school. Yet, on a daily basis, these boys attended school unaware of the effect that those other influencing factors, seen and unseen, had upon them and which threatened to keep them at risk of failure in school and in life.

Educators' Views

The principals, counselors, and teachers who participated in this study had experience working in inner city schools and exhibited a high level of knowledge about their students. Their comments coincided with much of the research literature. The principals displayed a global perspective concerning their Black male populations. Their experiences and observations of the school's students, staff, parents and community gave the principals a chance to view major components as they worked together. The professionals understood the circumstances of the environments that surrounded their schools and their students. Floyd, (1996), Franklin (1998), Mincy, (1994), Kunjufu, (1982), and Barbarain, (1993) and others have written about many of the ideas that these educators discussed. All of them, researchers and educators alike, emphasized the importance of family, adult encouragement for youngsters, and high teacher expectations.

The educators discussed the influences that peers had upon boys such as those in this study. Six of them suggested that the non achievers negatively influenced the achievers more than the reverse being true. Kunjufu, (1988) and Crockett, (1995) had also reported similar findings. The educators indicated that achievers would misbehave to gain acceptance by their peers. However, none of the educators spoke of their students or their behaviors in negative terms. The level(s) of expectation for academic performance that the teachers expressed showed that they believed that academic achievement was possible for these boys and their hope that it would be a reality for all of their students. One principal concluded that Black males do well when "...they attach themselves to positive teachers" Again, research literature and these professional participants are in agreement.

At no time during an interview did an educator refer to anything about the students as "abnormal." Many spoke of the at-risk environments that existed for their populations and the effects they have had. One effect that they all mentioned was the students' desire to be a part of their peer groups. They did not see this as abnormal but as a challenge because the influence of peer groups is strong and can be potentially negative. However, there was mention of students who did achieve surrounding themselves with like minded students. Competitiveness in many areas, particularly sports but also at times in academics, was viewed as a normal characteristic for boys of this age.

Only one of the boys in this study selected as his friends boys who did well in school. The others based their choices on other criteria such as whether a boy may get into trouble a lot, or positive habits and positive outlook. One student spoke about peer

pressure affecting him as he tried to make good grades. He felt that, "If you can't beat them, join them." This was the only instance in which any of the 11 intimated a concern about peer pressure. Some of the boys generally chose their friends, whereas others just let relationships evolve. The boys were given freedom by parents to select friends but several talked about not being allowed to do certain things with their friends, which indicated that their parents were aware of the possible detrimental influence of peers.

Probably the most important finding of this study was that there were no major differences among the boys in their attitudes concerning academic achievement. All except one boy was average in academic achievement in elementary school, but for all of these boys their achievement waned as they grew older. Even so, the boys continued to express the belief that school was important and that they were able to perform capably if so inclined. Based upon the previously presented facts, it was reasonable to deduce that their attitudes concerning achievement were similar--so similar, in fact, that the differences that existed were individual and minor. The boys in this sample were not opposed to achievement but seemed to question whether achievement was something to which they aspired. Most seemed to be content to be an average or even below average student.

Conclusions

There are seven conclusions that were drawn from the data gathered in this study. They are presented here in the order of importance according to the ideas and thoughts of the writer. The conclusions will then be discussed individually. They are:

1. The Black middle school males in this study possessed many of the resilient traits that previous research has shown to be related to success in schools. These traits include a strong and stable family, a school that maintains high expectations for achievement, positive friends, and a positive attitude toward academic achievement.

2. However, for this sample, having an existence and exposure to an at-risk lifestyle was not necessarily a predictor of academic failure, nor was possessing resilient traits necessarily a predictor of academic achievement.

3. For this sample, school was an enjoyable place; it was where these boys wanted to be. These youngsters attended school regularly, some stayed for tutoring, most had shown that they could make good grades in certain subjects, and had confidence in their ability to do well in school if they had chosen to do so.

4. These Black boys understood the negative behaviors and influences that prevented other boys from being successful in school but did not apply this understanding to themselves.

5. The boys in this sample expressed positive attitudes toward academic achievement in that they reported that it was important. They also fully believed that they could make their grades improve. However, the fact that as a group their grades declined as they advanced through school raised questions about the accuracy of these statements.

6. All of the youngsters in this study had clear, positive goals for the future. In most cases, achieving their goals required extensive post-secondary education, a fact they

seemed not to have understood, even though the majority reported that they expected to continue their education beyond high school.

7. All of the boys in this study possessed at risk factors associated with social and economic disadvantage. Most had non-traditional family structures, most qualified for the federal lunch program, and all lived in and attended school in an economically depressed neighborhood. However, despite these circumstances, their counselor's comments did not refer to any of the boys as disrespectful, uncooperative, angry, sullen or any other negative term that society in general associates with unsuccessful people. Therefore, living in unfavorable conditions for this sample was not associated with a temperament predictive of failure.

A significant amount of research literature had been written concerning the impact of life upon any Black American male. There have been works that sought to identify and explain why certain challenges exist for any Black American male. This study has shown that these eighth grade boys knew why their peers were not achieving but none articulated any of those same reasons for his failure to achieve. It is possible that these boys were not aware of these life factors' effect on themselves.

If this is true, then the mentoring that is written about is very important. This data suggested that early adolescence is possibly too late a time to create conscious awareness within these boys. Therefore, this implies that an earlier time to teach is suggested, so that the boy is aware of the possible pitfalls of certain decisions and may avoid them. Early

intervention of this type could prove crucial to a young boy's productivity in school and in adulthood.

Implications for Educators

The findings of this study directed the researcher to contemplate their implications to educators and to researchers. These implications are suggestive in their nature and are by no means exhaustive. Academic achievement for Black males in America has been a problem that is national in scope. Therefore, the whole focus of this study was the identifying and understanding of factors that result in the improvement of academic achievement of Black middle school male students. This study found that there are descriptive factors that existed in the school, in the family or the individual that should influence the achievement for Black males at this middle school. Therefore, based upon these data and results, the questions are what are the implications and what can schools do that can help resolve this dilemma?

Researchers (Kunjufu,1988; Akbar,1991; Hale-Benson,1982) have suggested that Black boys need the presence of Black men who are involved in their lives, either at school or in the community. During the interviews with the educators, there were continuous references that Black boys needed interaction with positive adults. Educators do not control the dynamics of students' home lives and have minimum impact upon communities. However, if the literature is accurate, increasing the number of Black men in school environments could have positive effects on Black male students. Black men in the classrooms and in leadership roles, at all levels of schooling but especially in

elementary schools, could have some positive academic results for boys. The sparseness of the male presence in schools negatively impacts young Black boys and limits their opportunities for success.

The first implication recommended is for administrators to involve Black male students with more male teachers, counselors, principals and mentors in education as well as other professions. Even though the data showed that these boys had some men who were in the homes and in their lives, the data also showed that these men were limited in their ability to help with school work. The men whom these boys talked about being influences upon them were at the school. They thought these men were very helpful to them during and after school. As well, the male teachers spoke about trying to be role models for and encouraging of their students.

Research has also suggested that Black males have had trouble with the definition of maleness. Because of the possible lack of interaction with positive adult Black males, the importance of involved, encouraging and educated adults, especially males in their lives, cannot be discounted. Therefore, for the boys in this study, the school might develop a program that incorporates positive men to interact with and teach these boys both before, during, and after school. This type program can become one of the “protective factors” that nurtures the natural resilience in these boys. This is not to suggest that women are not positive influences or that every educator for this group should be male, but it does suggest that Black boys would benefit from the influence of more Black male educators, especially classroom teachers.

Some research literature (Irvin, 1996; Lee, 1996) has suggested that learning environments for Black students may not have been demanding enough, nor were they geared to the students' natural way of learning, which for boys was shown to be activity-based. The boys' responses concerning the teachers' willingness to help after school indicated that there were classes where they struggled with the instruction and or the subject matter. In concert with this group's exposure to adult Black male educators, consideration for the type(s) of classroom instructional strategies used by teachers is recommended. There were several areas for thought about what instructional strategies have worked. For this sample of boys with an obvious energy level, given their spare time activities, and good skills according to assessment data, the learning atmosphere, the classroom, should have actively maintained interest in their work. Their desire to please and to be accepted coupled with their competitive spirits could have motivated them to seek higher levels of achievement in an active learning environment. Instruction that is most effective is that delivered by a teacher who is caring, who possesses high expectations, is supportive of students' efforts and has a strong command of the subject matter. The teacher, whether male or female, needs to have the insights and abilities to assess what teaching skills and strategies are appropriate to produce the highest achievement levels for their students.

It is also apparent that the effective teacher should assess each of these boy's goals and aspirations so that the instruction ultimately helps the boy accomplish his future goals. More importantly, it may help the boys become more focused and determined to

become academically successful. An interdisciplinary approach by a team of teachers would expose the boys to consistency in instruction as well as show them that their future profession fits many areas. Then, it stands to reason that a good instructional strategy is to have projects that use group work and include individual achievement, grouping those students who have similar goals.

The research literature (Jenkins,1990; Kunjufu, 1982; Kunjufu,1988; Porter,1990) was clear about the reasons for Black male under achievement. In order to make positive use of the literature, educators can develop the types of culturally relevant models that research suggested foster students' success, as they seek solutions to enhance the academic performance of Black males. For the boys in this study, a group that exhibited resilient traits and shared the belief that they can perform better academically, future recommendations should focus upon what will keep them interested in achieving in the classrooms.

During the interviews, it was stated that some parents regularly visited the school, yet there was no significant mention of community organizations—churches, neighborhood associations, clubs, etc-- and their involvement with the students or school. There also was no significant mention of any outside agency, such as a business in partnership, actively involved in the school. A prescription for academic achievement for these Black males should include an effort between the school, home and community. The ability of these students to perform academically and attention to what is being done to nurture achievement should serve as a beginning point for all interested parties. A

commitment to the students, as expressed by school personnel, coupled with a sincere request by the school for help from the community, parents and businesses should enhance the boys' academic achievement.

Implications for Researchers

The implications of this study for future researchers are those that this researcher believes can enhance this study and others like it. This study was conducted with a sample of 11 Black male middle school students and it investigated those resilient factors on this small population. So, the first implication for any researcher is to broaden the study by increasing the number of student participants. A larger sample of students within a school or several schools should be the next level if this study were replicated. A larger sample could very well yield some different results. Future research possibilities for broadening the study include encompassing any group(s) such as whole school divisions, or states, a group of states, or even the nation.

The other implications are given within this context of broadening the study. There is still much to be learned about the concept of resilience and how it operates to protect children who come from high-risk environments. The factors that define resilience in at risk students have been identified and thus provide a theory for the comparison of data and a positive basis for further research. A larger sample would increase the confidence in generalizing the findings. Additionally, there are many different segments of at risk students that warrant an investigation to enhance their overall academic success within educational institutions, especially public schools.

If a researcher is interested in the dynamics that affect Black males and their academic achievement, then to broaden the age grouping of the population might also yield some interesting results. A researcher could investigate any age group(s) of Black males from elementary school to senior high school. Expanding the population by age could give some interesting interview responses if the same questions were asked. For instance, if questions from the student format used in this study were asked to different aged boys, the responses could be diverse, similar or opposing. Or, those responses may be the same, but maturity levels could have effects upon their thinking as the responses emerge.

There are other groups that may interest a researcher in trying to further investigate resilience. At risk girls, especially Hispanic girls as compared to Black American girls or Asian girls, could be a research project. One could look at Black men if the interest is in strictly the condition of Black American males. At risk college students, male, female, ethnic are all studies that could investigate the theories about resilience and/or races of people.

Finally, if this study were to be replicated, there are some processes that initiating changes may benefit. The one recommendation that stands out is that there should be a different and a better way to obtain student participants and, to protect their anonymity. Devising another method(s) of obtaining student participants while maintaining anonymity is the next researcher's major challenge. Basically, this study relied upon the time, commitment and interest of the school administrators and counselors, who were

strictly volunteers. For this study, one school division did not want the researcher to have direct contact with school building personnel; and in another division, one counselor honored the verbal agreement that was made between all of us at a meeting, whereas the other counselor did not. This caused the researcher to adjust the processes, procedures and design in order to continue the study. These adjustments certainly may have affected the results and the findings of this study.

In any future research, there needs to be a way to insure that the selection criteria for participants are observed by those who select the sample. In this study, the researcher had little control over who was chosen as an achiever or non achiever after the task was given to personnel within the schools. A method of “guaranteeing” that the researcher’s instructions are followed without creating a conflict with the school personnel may have helped to facilitate the original design. Also, the critical involvement of people who may or may not have an interest in this topic needed to be minimized.

A Personal Note

Conducting this study was many different things to the researcher at different times. Sometimes it was enlightening when the interviews were conducted and the data were collected and analyzed because as each task was completed there was a feeling that the final goal was closer. This was a frustrating experience at times because things did not always work as anticipated, and it was challenging because this task was a totally new experience. Additionally, this venture has been time consuming and tedious but worth the effort. Most of all, it was a venture into scholarly techniques that demanded studiousness

and a level of cognitive exercise that went well beyond most graduate work. This researcher has learned that in any scholarly endeavor there are no absolutes. There is no one best position, solution or opinion because there are diverse visions or approaches focusing toward the same situation or problem. The flexibility to view a problem from several perspectives allows one to get closer to a workable solution. The researcher has also rediscovered the true meaning of perseverance, which included handling the different levels of frustration and anxiety.

Finally, the researcher, a Black man, began to understand many confusing inner feelings that have always existed in him that were never illuminated until now. There have always been questions about himself, his environment, attitudes toward him and expectations of him that were never answered because the words did not exist for him to ask the questions. In conducting this investigation into achievement for Black adolescent males, this researcher has learned that the individual factors associated with resilience, autonomy, responsibility, social competence, confidence, problem solving and sense of purpose, in addition to the factors in the school such as high expectations and caring teachers, plus the factors involving the family, an absent father, the economic status, parental standards and expectations can have an impact on academic attainment. A broader study may yield different results. However, this researcher concludes that the problems associated with Black males and academic achievement need constant and vigorous investigation, particularly by researchers who are also public educators.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Letter to Superintendents

Dear _____:

I am a doctoral student at Virginia Commonwealth University who is in the dissertation research stage. I am respectfully asking your permission to gather data for my research project within your school division. Specifically, I wish to involve Black middle school males in two middle schools, preferably _____ Middle and _____ Middle, as well as their principals, counselors and some selected teachers. If possible, I want to talk to some parents also. The purpose of the study is to investigate factors that influence some Black boys to become academically successful.

As a Black male educator working in Richmond Public Schools I am aware that many young Black men who do well in the early years of school lose interest and fall behind by the time they reach middle school. I think it is important to learn what factors help some Black male students avoid school failure.

I will need the cooperation of school personnel at the school to nominate participants to determine who is a good candidate for participation. The confidentiality, anonymity and integrity that is required to protect all participants will be maintained. I will ask parents' permission for their son to participate in the study, and I will have no access to any information about the student other than that he voluntarily provides me. I will not know the students' names.

I have obtained and completed the forms that are required by the school division, a copy of which is enclosed as well as the initial three chapters of the prospectus. I will be happy to share my findings with you when the research is complete. If you need any further information other than what has been provided do not hesitate to contact me at school ([REDACTED] or [REDACTED]). Until that time, I remain

Respectfully yours,

Harvey S. Hicks, III

Appendix B

Letter to Parents

Dear Parent:

I am a graduate student at Virginia Commonwealth University who would like for you to give permission for your son to participate in my research study. Your son was nominated by his principal and counselor for participation in this study provided you give your approval.

As a black male who has worked for many years with boys your son's age, I am aware that many young black boys who do well in school during their early years lose interest and fall behind academically by the time they reach middle school. I think it is important to learn what helps some black male students avoid school failure. The results from this study will help me learn about those factors. Your son's participation will be very valuable.

I will have no access to information about your son other than what you agree to share or he voluntarily provides me during the interview. I will not know his name. However, in order to provide enough information for a good study, I am requesting that I be given standardized test scores, IQ, grades and demographic data about your son. Please be reminded that I will not know his identity. The permission form below will be kept by your son's counselor, and your son will be identified to me by a number. Therefore, whatever is confidential will remain confidential because I will not be able to connect it with anyone's identity. Only the school officials will know the identity of student participants.

If you grant permission for your son to participate in the study, he will be interviewed by me at an arranged time that does not interfere with his academic work. The interview will discuss his feelings, opinions, and perceptions about doing well in school and will last approximately 25 to 45 minutes. This interview will be taped, and I will take notes. His interview responses will be

grouped with other student responses to investigate some common factors. After the research is completed, all tapes will be destroyed. Every precaution to protect your son and his responses will be taken. If you prefer that your son not take part in this study, he will follow his usual school routine with no variations.

Please be assured that your approval or denial of your son's participation will in no way impact upon his standing with the school. I also invite you to participate in this study by agreeing to be interviewed by me. Precautions will be taken to fully protect your privacy as well. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the school principal and/or your son's counselor.

Respectfully yours,

Harvey S. Hicks, III

.....

I understand that this decision is voluntary and that this decision will have no effect on my son's grades or standing in the school. I (do __, do not __) give my permission to the school to allow my son _____ to participate in Mr. Hicks' Study. Also I (do __, do not __) agree to be interviewed by Mr. Hicks at a mutually convenient time.

Parent's signature _____ Date _____

Thank you for your help. Please return this form to your son's counselor.

Appendix C

Parent Consent Form

The purpose of this research is to learn how middle school students feel about school and the factors that affect their academic performance.

This interview will take no more than 45 minutes. The interviewer will make notes as you talk. Your answers will be confidential. No one else will know what you said or be able to identify you. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you do not have to answer a question if you prefer not to.

There are no risks to you from participating in this study. There also is no direct benefit to you for participation. The information you give may help students like your son succeed in school.

I have read the information above and agree to participate in the study.

Signature

Date

After you sign, hand this form to your counselor.

Appendix D
Student Nomination Form

Student # _____.

Age: _____

Grade: _____

School: _____

IQ score (if available) _____ Year: _____

Academic performance: (check one) High ___ Low ___

Standardized Tests: (give national percentile) Reading _____

Math _____ Science _____ English _____ History _____

At-Risk Characteristics of this Student (check all that apply):

- 1. Eligible for free and reduced lunch
- 2. Single parent household
- 3. Low socio-economic status
- 4. Retained once
- 5. Retained at least twice
- 6. Poor attendance
- 7. Behavior problems
- 8. Health problems
- 9. Trouble with the law
- 10. Other (write in) _____

Comments on any of the above:

Why do you believe that this student is a good candidate to participate in this study ?

Note: This Form Is Modeled After The Form Used In The 1993 McMillan & Reed Study

Appendix E

Student Interview Format

Student # _____ School: _____ Date: _____

Interviewer: _____

Part 1: Establish an open, comfortable atmosphere and relationship with the student by telling the student about the study and asking simple questions.

Hello, I am Harvey Hicks and I am conducting a study to find out how you feel about school and some other things. I am interested in you and your opinions. There are no right or wrong answers, only your true responses. Everything you tell me remains with me, I will not tell anyone about your answers to my questions. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Tell me about yourself:

- 1). How do you spend your spare time and what do you like about the things you do?
- 2). Do you expect to graduate from high school?
- 3). What do you think you will do when you leave school and is an education necessary to do it?

Part 2: I want you to think about school and your success as a learner.

Tell me what it is like going to school here.

- 4). Is it important to you to do well in school, or does it not make much difference to you? Why?

- 5). If you decided to make better grades, would you be able to do that?
- 6). Who in the school has been particularly helpful to you?
- 7). In what ways have they been helpful?
- 8). Why do you think some students (boys) do not do well in school?
- 9). Think of a teacher you like; tell me what you like about that teacher. Does this teacher require you to turn your work in on time and to do good work?

Part 3: I now want to ask about your family and neighborhood. I will not ask real personal questions; I just want to get an understanding about school and home.

Tell me about your family.

- 10). With whom do you live? How many brothers and/or sisters do you have? Do they live with you?
- 11). When you need help with schoolwork, is there someone in your family you ask for help? Why or why not?
- 12). Do your parents call or visit the school regularly to discuss your progress with your teachers?
- 13). What are your responsibilities at home? Is doing them helpful to you at school?
- 14). Are your parents more strict or less strict than your friends' parents?
- 15). Do you prefer friends who do well in school, or does it matter?
- 16). Do you select your friends, or do they select you?

This is my last question:

- 17). If you had three wishes, what would they be?

Appendix F

Principal Interview

- 1). Do you have Black American males in your school who are successful academic achievers? If so, what factors and/or characteristics do you think influence them to be successful?
- 2). What are the specific values that you think these boys exhibit and are there any that you think are germane to all of your achievers?
- 3). What particular types of academic (behavioral) habits, values and/or traits do you perceive are common to both the successful Black male achievers and the Black male non-achiever?
- 4). What do you perceive is the major difference in characteristics, habits and/or values between those boys who achieve at a high level and those who are not high achievers?
- 5). Do you have any successful achievers in your school who are also discipline problems?
- 6). What do you think are the factors in the home that influence Black male students to excel academically? In the school? In the community?
- 7). Describe the influence, if any, of Black male achievers upon other males who do not achieve?
- 8). What do you see in your population of Black males that is a strong influence upon them to be achievers? To be non-achievers?

Appendix G

Teacher Interview

- 1). What do you do in your classroom that helps Black male students to be successful?
- 2). Do you believe all of your Black male students have the capability to achieve? If so, what have you ascertained in your experiences as a teacher that make you think so? If not, why not?
- 3). What particular kinds of academic (behavioral) habits, values and/or traits do you perceive as common to both the successful Black male achievers and the Black male non-achievers?
- 4). What do you perceive is the major difference in characteristics, habits and/or values between those boys who achieve at a high level and those who are not high achievers?
- 5). Do you have any successful Black males in your classroom who are also discipline problems?
- 6). What do you think are the factors in the home that influence Black males to achieve academically? In the school? In the community?
- 7). Describe the influence, if any, of Black male achievers upon Black male non-achievers within your classroom?
- 8). What do you see in your population of Black males that is a strong influence upon them to be academic achievers? To be non-achievers?

Vita

