AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN AN URBAN HIGH SCHOOL

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AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF
EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN AN URBAN HIGH SCHOOL

Justin A. Zerega

MS, CUNY Hunter College, 1999
BS, New York University, 1993

A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education in Instructional Leadership
in the
Department of Education and Educational Psychology
at
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AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN AN URBAN HIGH SCHOOL

Justin A. Zerega

Western Connecticut State University

Abstract

The purpose of the study was to gain a deep understanding of the educational experiences and perceptions of junior and senior African American male secondary school students attending a diverse urban high school in the Northeast. The case study was bound by self-identification as African American male, 11th or 12th grade level, and the school setting. Ten participants were profiled by low, medium, and high GPAs. Data were collected through focus groups, in-depth participant interviews, and observations of informal school environments. Data were analyzed using a constant comparative method as different levels of codes emerged. Analysis of the data suggested themes in nine areas: identity, social dimension of school climate, peer influences, academic dimension of school climate, factors related to academic achievement, school culture, family influences, future selves, and participants’ recommendations for school changes. The significance of each theme and its implication for practitioners and researchers were discussed and offered.
APPROVAL PAGE

School of Professional Studies

Department of Education and Educational Psychology

Doctor of Education in Instructional Leadership

Doctor of Education Dissertation

AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN AN URBAN HIGH SCHOOL

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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On a personal note, I would like to thank my wife for her support and dedication. Also, I acknowledge with gratitude Roger and Marcia Smith who contributed an abundant share of grandparent’s love during this process.
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AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN AN URBAN HIGH SCHOOL

The nation’s focus on educational achievement among differing ethnic groups has been fixed for some time on the lowest scores across all racial or ethnic groups, African American males. Nationally, the twelfth-grade reading scores of African American males are significantly lower than those for males and females across every other racial and ethnic group (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008). As corroborated by Palmer and Maramba (2011) “Research has shown that the educational experiences of African Americans impinge upon their ability to graduate from high school, manifesting in high rates of illiteracy and unemployment” (p. 434). Statistics suggest that when many African American males graduate high school, they are leaving without skill sets that serve them in higher education or with career readiness (NCES, 2012). The positive correlations between education, income level, and quality of life are well documented (Baum & Ma, 2007).

Without college or career readiness, some African American men’s lives intersect with the criminal justice system: 32% of all African American males were incarcerated for some time in their life compared to 17% for Latino American males, and 6% for Caucasian American males (Smith, 2009). Although there is an increasing trend toward college enrollment—66% for African American high school completers, compared to 70% for Caucasian American high school completers (NCES, 2012)—only 37% of the African American students who enter college graduate with their baccalaureate degrees (Slaughter, 2009). These dire and persistent conditions for African American males press educators to find ways to end the persistent poor educational experiences of African American males so
these young men may be better able to improve their trajectory in society and enjoy at the bounties of American democracy in more equitable rates.

**Statement of the Problem**

The Connecticut Commission on Education reports, “Connecticut, unfortunately, has repeatedly ranked as the state with the widest achievement gaps in the nation” (Connecticut Commission on Education, 2013). African American males in Connecticut are part of the national trends of an underrepresentation in Advance Placement (AP) and honors level classes and overrepresentation in special education, suspension and expulsion rates, and juvenile detention centers (NCES, 2010). In Connecticut, 59% of African American male students graduate high school in four years compared to 85% for Caucasian American males (Schott Foundation, 2012.).

Connecticut’s education problems, like other states, leave many African American males lacking a satisfactory high school education and skills for career. This outcome results in a continuation of the poverty cycle. In 2011, the national poverty rate for African American households was more than double that of Caucasian American households: 27.6% compared to 12.8% (NCES, 2011). In July 2013, the adjusted unemployment rate for African American males over age 20 was 12.5% compared to the rate of 6.3% for Caucasian American males in the same age group (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013). For male teens ages 16-19 in April of 2013, the unemployment rates, separated by race were 44.7% for African American and 23.6% for Caucasian Americans (UC Berkeley Labor Center, 2013).

Connecticut’s poor educational performance creates high rates of involvement with the criminal justice system for African American males. In 2012, young African American males were imprisoned more than six times the rate of Caucasian American males (My
Brother’s Keeper Task Force, 2014). “This is a tragedy for the children affected … many go into the world from our public school system without the skills necessary to succeed and face a troubling personal future” (Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement, 2009). The dour statistics regarding the educational status of African American males makes their experiences in schools salient for study.

Rationale

Although extensive research has been performed about the achievement gap, that is the, “outperformance of African American males by Caucasian American males in average scores [of academic performance tests] with a statistically significant margin” (NCES, 2014, p.1) the persistent performance levels generate a need for further study. Additionally, this research was needed because, “After more than 40 years of research, no uniform theory has emerged as a foundation and frame that explains the lives of African American boys and men” (Bush & Bush, 2013, p. 1). Moreover, much of the discussion on this topic has not included members of this group in a meaningful way; “such shortcomings, only further silence the voices of those on the margins who continually seek inclusion in schools and society” (Howard, 2008, p. 961). Importantly, this study sought the participation of African American male students in order for them to share their perspectives of their educational experiences.

Benefits

The purpose of this study was to solicit and listen to the voices of African American male secondary school students. The researcher sought to learn about the educational experiences of these students in an urban high school and understand their perceptions of school experiences. The study investigated the role race played in shaping African American male students’ perceptions of the educational process. The researcher also sought to learn
what specific changes these young people would like to see made that would better serve them. Potential benefits of this study included informing school personnel how to respond in a more enlightened, timely, and powerful way to create environments and strategies that affect higher educational achievement levels for African American male students in an urban high school.

**Definition of Key Terms**

The following terms will be used throughout this research study:

1. **Burden of Acting White** refers to the social and emotional dissonance experienced by some African Americans related to the striving for success in academia which was traditionally defined as the prerogative of Caucasian Americans (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

2. **Black or African American** refers to a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (U.S. Census, 2011).

3. **Culturally Relevant Teaching** is a term used to describe the kind of teaching that not merely fits “the school culture to the students’ culture but also to use student culture as the basis for helping students to understand themselves and others, structure social interactions, and conceptualize knowledge” (Ladson-Billings, 2001, p. 314).

4. **Racial Identity** refers to the participants’ self-identified status as African American, their identification with and participation in the practices of the African American race (Nasir et. al, 2009).

6. **Stereotype threat** describes the psychological state African American students might experience when performing an intellectual task and fear judgment against a negative societal stereotyped image for African Americans that is associated with poor intellectual ability and achievement (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

7. **The Achievement Gap** occurs when one group of students outperforms another group and the difference in average scores for the two groups is statistically significant (NCES, 2011).

8. **White or Caucasian American** refers to a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa or identifying as Caucasian or White (U.S. Census, 2010).
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This study sought to understand the African American male secondary students’ perceptions of their high school educational experiences and outcomes. This chapter presents key themes in current literature as they relate in purpose, setting, design, or methodology to this present study.

The chapter provides the inclusion and selection process for the literature review process and the relevant research related to the current study. The related research section includes a review of studies that attempted to explain the high school experiences and perspectives of African American male high school students. This literature includes research on the burden of acting White, African American identity, stereotypes, stereotype threat, culturally responsive pedagogy, school climate, and self-efficacy as it intersects with the themes of this study. This chapter concludes with a summary.

Review Process

At the start of this research process, the following terms, limited to peer-reviewed articles and full text, and with the related words option applied were used in a query of the ERIC: “African American,” “males,” “Secondary Students,” and “Per*” to include perspective, perception, perceive. The results numbered 8. The researcher substituted “secondary education,” for “secondary students,” and the results numbered 55. Then, the researcher replaced “secondary education” with “high school” and the results numbered 99 potentially relevant articles matching this study’s topic. Since these terms were appropriately broad parameters of the present study, the researcher first performed an overview of each of these articles. To ensure thoroughness and breadth in this search for related literature, the
researcher then also used the same search parameters in another academic database: Academic Search Premier.

Using the same broad search terms the researcher utilized Academic Search Premier to find literature in peer-reviewed journals and limited to full text. The results indicated over 25,000 potentially applicable articles. The results were further refined by adding the terms, achievement, identity, and experiences to create a more manageable list of potentially relevant articles.

From the initial results, the researcher eliminated the literature in the non-relevant categories (counseling, crime, college, and early childhood) and focused his attention on the research of the relevant remaining categories (cultural theory, identity and attitudes, pedagogy, gender differences) that related to this research’s purpose. The researcher then examined applicable articles to learn their significance to the present study.

Finally, the researcher again evaluated each of the articles to limit them to those that would contribute to the grounding of this study. The scholarly works that were salient to the phenomena and the themes in the present study were selected for analysis. Both qualitative and quantitative research articles were included. This literature helped inform the researcher of current theories and issues related to the study’s purpose and participants.

Later, following collection and analysis of data for this study, related literature was again examined to determine its value and relevance to this study’s sample, setting, method, design, purpose, and themes. The most relevant literature in the peer reviewed applicable research pertaining to the educational experiences and perception of African American males as they related to the phenomena and the themes were selected. This final literature review
was informed by the study’s purpose, participants, themes, and for the final chapter, the significance of the study.

**Literature**

Table 1 provides an overview of the literature in this chapter that includes the salient theme and citation from the research that most applied to this study’s results. The participant sample and design are included, as well. For a complete overview of related literature with a summation of the research findings, see Appendix A.

Table 1
*Themes of Literature Related to the Results*

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<tr>
<th>Theme &amp; Citation</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Design</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Burden of Acting White (Fordham &amp; Ogbu, 1986)</td>
<td>33 African American high school students in 11th grade, 8 cases.</td>
<td>Ethnography (intensive study, focus groups, and interviews)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning Burden of Acting White (Diamond, Lewis, &amp; Gordon, 2007)</td>
<td>African American (n = 35) and Caucasian American (n = 35) high school students.</td>
<td>Case study (semi-structured interviews)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning Burden of Acting White (Tyson et al., 2005)</td>
<td>African American high school students (n = 231).</td>
<td>Mixed methods: survey (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction) and interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity (Spencer, Noll, Stolzfus, &amp; Harpalani, 2001)</td>
<td>562 African American youth in four schools (394 boys and 168 girls) ages ranged from 11-16.</td>
<td>Survey (Life Events Record, Self-Esteem Scale, Racial Identity Attitude Scale, Iowa Test of Basic Skills)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Theme &amp; Citation</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Design</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Identity</strong> (Cokley, McClain, Jones, and Johnson, 2011)</td>
<td>96 African American high school students in 10th, 11th, and 12th grades (41 males, 55 females).</td>
<td>Survey (Racial Centrality Scale, Devaluing Academic Success subscale of Psychological Disengagement Scale, Academic Self-Concepts Scale)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identity</strong> (Nasir, McLaughlin, &amp; Jones, 2009)</td>
<td>Disconnected participants - (total = 9; African American = 8, Asian = 1). Connected participants - (total = 11; all African American; males = 6; females = 5).</td>
<td>Mixed methods: case study (focus groups and interviews) and survey (Academic Identity Scale, Ethnic Identity Scale, Racial/Ethnic Identity Meanings Survey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stereotype</strong> (Howard, 2008)</td>
<td>10 African American male middle or high school students from five different schools.</td>
<td>Case study (multiple interviews)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stereotype Threat</strong> (Steele &amp; Aronson, 1995)</td>
<td>Male and female African American and Caucasian American college students: phase one: (total = 114) phase two: female Caucasian and African American female college students (total = 20), phase three: male and female African American and Caucasian American college students (total = 88), phase four: male and female African American and Caucasian American college students (total = 114).</td>
<td>Phase one: factorial design 2 X 3 (race, African American or Caucasian American, and test condition, diagnostic, non-diagnostic, or a non-diagnostic - challenge) phase two: factorial design 2 X 2 (race, African American or Caucasian American, test conditions, diagnostic or non-diagnostic) phase three: factorial design 2 X 3 (race, African or Caucasian American, and test condition, diagnostic, non-diagnostic, or control) phase four: factorial design 2 X 2 (race, African or Caucasian American, test condition, diagnostic, non-diagnostic, or control)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theme &amp; Citation</td>
<td>Participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stereotype Threat</td>
<td>Five high achieving senior African American students attending either a non-affluent school (BHS) or an affluent school (EHS).</td>
<td>Case study (unstructured interviews and observations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culturally Relevant Teaching</td>
<td>Eight successful teachers of African American students.</td>
<td>Case study</td>
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<td>(Ladson-Billings, 1994)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Culturally Relevant Teaching,</td>
<td>An award winning middle school science teacher.</td>
<td>Case study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Milner, 2011)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>School climate</td>
<td>Nine African American juniors and seniors.</td>
<td>Transcendental Phenomenology</td>
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<td>(Tucker, Dixon, and Griddine, 2010)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
<td>162 African American 8th grade students (81 males, 81 females)</td>
<td>Survey research (Career-Related Parent Support Scale, Missouri Comprehensive Guidance Survey, Middle School Self-efficacy Scale)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Allman-Brissett, Turner, &amp; Skovholt, 2004)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
<td>Forty African American males in 9th or 10th grades.</td>
<td>Survey research (Psychological Sense of School membership Scale, Academic Self-efficacy Scale)</td>
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<td>(Uwah, McMahon, &amp; Furlow, 2008)</td>
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Burden of Acting White

This section addresses the “burden of acting white” as it relates to the themes and significance of this study. Following the Civil rights movement and Black Power movement of the 1950’s and 1960’s, social scientists in the late 1970’s (Ogbu, 1978) began to search for insight into African American youths’ perspectives as they related to school achievement. Ogbu’s anthropological work led to seminal research in the 1980’s that involved 33 African American juniors at Capital High in Washington DC and led to the development of the theory of “oppositional culture” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 201) and “burden of acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 177) as plausible explanations for the low levels of academic performance of African Americans. This work contradicted the previous research that posited genetic factors (Jensen, 1969) or cultural deprivation (Bloom, Davis, & Hess, 1965) as the causes of the low level of academic achievement for African Americans.

The influence of Fordham and Ogbu’s (1986) publication led Tyson, Darity, and Castellano (2005, p. 58) to state, “Almost 20 years have passed since Fordham and Ogbu (1986) published the article… yet it remains among the most influential publications addressing the academic underachievement of Black students and the Black-White achievement gap.” The initial work of Ogbu (1978) and his later work with Fordham (1986) asserted that many African American students feel that striving to achieve academically is a betrayal of their African American culture and thus, many do not pursue academic achievement.

The setting of the seminal research of Fordham and Ogbu (1986) was a public high school in a large urban center with a student body, mostly African American, with 50% receiving free or reduced price lunch. The work at this site supported the claim that a group
of African American high school students (33) experienced a sense of belonging to and an identity associated with their African American culture (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). This sense of identifying as African American played an important role in their lived experiences of school and beyond. Fordham & Ogbu used the term “fictive kinship” (1986, p. 184) to describe the participants’ sense of group belonging based on skin color. All participants perceived a brotherhood amongst African Americans and placed the White culture outside it. The group belonging of these African American students was part of a cultural identity that was created in opposition to White culture (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

Ogbu’s work explained African American’s students’ cultural identity was born because of “status problems” (2004, p. 12) where external forces worked to declare the group as a separate and distinct entity. Such forces in the United States began with forced immigration of Africans as slaves, continued with inequality in education and the workforce, and remain active today through various acts and systems of degradation and isolation.

The participants saw their family and community members hit a “job ceiling” and encounter other obstacles to upward mobility. The participants perceived their family members were able to progress in work only so far before being limited by their status as African American. These observations were related to a distrust and contempt of society by the students and their families that had been passed along generationally and reinforced by the participants’ own experiences, particularly as the participants attended White controlled schools (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 180).

Ogbu (2004) explained how some African Americans’ responses maintain this cultural identity and oppositional stance:
They usually hold the dominant group responsible for their troubles (e.g., their inferior economic and political status, demeaning social positions, poor health and housing, and stigmatized cultures and languages or dialects). Under this circumstance, involuntary minorities respond collectively as a group and they also respond as individuals in ways that reinforce their separate existence and collective identity (2004, p. 5).

The 1986 study at Capital High suggested the participants opposed academic achievement because they did not associate it with African American culture, but with Caucasian culture. The participants perceived academic achievement and associated successful student behaviors with the behaviors of Caucasian American people (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). These behaviors included: “Speaking Standard English … spending a lot of time in the library studying, working hard to get good grades, getting good grades, i.e., being known as a ‘Brainiac’” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 177).

The participants at Capital High perceived that when students opted to succeed in school, they were opting to “act White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 186). The researchers posited that African American students carry the burden of “Acting White,” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p.186) the feeling of societal pressures to sacrifice their identity in order to display behaviors associated with the White dominant culture including academic achievement (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

As a result, some African American participants in the Fordham & Ogbu (1986) study who achieved academic success developed specific strategies to handle this cultural conflict. These participants found ways of camouflaging their success in order to maintain group membership as African Americans. For the male participants experiencing academic
achievement, this often meant joining sports teams that emphasized collaborative efforts. Some males formed alliances with bullies or developed comedic routines to help maintain bonds with their African American peers. Other low achieving participants were found to opt for ambivalence towards school, thus maintaining their cultural identity and increasing their chance of school failure (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

The researchers at Capital High (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986,) reported:

We showed that coping with the burden of acting White affects the academic performance of both underachieving and high-achieving students. Black students who are encapsulated in the fictive kinships system or oppositional process experience greater difficulty in crossing cultural boundaries; i.e., in accepting standard academic attitudes and practices … in pursuing their educational goals. (p. 202)

Fordham & Ogbu (1986) asserted the cultural interpretations by the participants led them to possess an oppositional culture towards academic achievement as it was perceived by the participants as an aspect of White culture. The participants’ cultural interpretations left them burdened by a conflict that jeopardized their African American status with successful student behaviors and academic achievement, behaviors the participants perceived as “White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 187).

**Questioning Acting White**

This section addresses the theme of “questioning acting white” as the literature relates to the present study’s themes and significance. As profound and insightful the work of Ogbu and Fordham (1986) was for its time, researchers have questioned the findings and expressed concern for its lack of empirical evidence and small number of participants. Since that time
various researchers have posited other theories to explain the educational experiences of African American males such as genetic inferiority (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994); environmental conditions (Noguera, 2003; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). Most salient among these into the investigations of Ogbu and Fordham’s hypothesis (Diamond, Lewis, & Gordon, 2007; Tyson, Darity, & Castellino, 2005) found evidence leading to other explanations for the low academic achievement levels of African American participants.

The research of Diamond, Lewis, and Gordon (2007) at Riverview High School contradicted Ogbu and Fordham’s oppositional culture argument. Diamond and his team conducted a qualitative study that included 70 interviews and analyzed existing school data to investigate the argument that African American students possess an oppositional culture. Relevant literature (Tyson, Darity, & Castellino, 2005) suggested that an oppositional culture would likely occur in this setting, Riverview High School, a desegregated high school where racial divisions along class tracking patterns clearly existed. Diamond, Lewis and Gordon (2007) found the desire to attend college was relatively equal for both African American and Caucasian American participants of all achievement levels. While the African American participants, like those in Fordham and Ogbu’s work, expected that their race would negatively impact their life chances, these perceptions did not lead the African American participants at Riverview High School to oppose educational aspirations.

Diamond et al. (2007) reported their findings did not support the claim that African American students opposed school success. Diamond et al. (2007) also found that only a small and equivalent number of high achieving African American and White participants negotiated negative social sanctioning related to their academic success. Inter-racial negative peer pressure, where high achieving African American participants were considered “acting
White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 186) was not reported. Instead, only generalized teasing in small instances was reported by from high and low achieving participants of both races related to academic achievement without association to race (Diamond et al., 2007).

Another particularly important finding of the study at Riverview High School involved the social experiences of high achieving African American participants. These participants, in primarily honors and AP classes revealed that although their experiences of traditional peer difficulties were similar to Caucasian American participants, the African American participants experienced an inter-racial negative peer feedback which involved Caucasian American peers having low expectations of the African American participants. Participants in Diamond et al., 2007 reported indirect racial joking or comments from their Caucasian American peer group. The African American participants also reported they experienced this type of negative pressure and low expectations from some Caucasian American teachers. The implication of this unique experience of racism warrants attention and is discussed in literature related to both culturally responsive teaching and identity.

Finally, Diamond et al., 2007 reported low achieving African American participants had a tendency to hide their low achievement because of peer sanctioning for poor grades. These African American participants’ peers valued academic success, and rather than risk the social cost, some participants employed a variety of techniques to save themselves from embarrassment. Diamond and his team interpreted these types of behaviors and attitudes as another contradiction to the oppositional culture concept of Fordham and Ogbu (1986).

Diamond and his team suggested future researchers who work to effect change in African American male academic performance, should not look for an explanation to education inequality within the students’ characteristics but instead, they should examine
what is happening within the school as an institution (Diamond et al., 2007). This suggestion is discussed in the related literature section of school climate. The researchers however did consider salient the self-perception and group belonging of the participants for future research. Self-perception and group belonging are discussed in the related literature section of identity.

Tyson, et al. (2005) examined data from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction that identified minority representation in gifted programs, AP, and honors courses in middle schools and high schools. In addition, the researchers requested information about the identification and enrollment procedures for these classes and programs through surveys. Then, the research team identified a representative sample of 11 schools (elementary, middle and high) from the total sample of schools that returned surveys (a total of 866 participants; 231 participants were from high schools). The subsample of schools was selected to obtain school diversity in regards to socioeconomic status and racial composition of the student bodies (Tyson et al., 2005). Since the study’s specific interest was in factors that might influence African American students’ placement in high school classes, the subsample was further refined by removing all elementary schools, leaving two middle schools and six high schools. The findings were presented according to school level. Only the findings related to high schools are discussed further.

Within the North Carolina high schools studied by Tyson et al. (2005), representation rates for African American students in honors or AP level classes varied across schools. However, African-American students were found to be underrepresented in all but 2 of the 19 AP courses and 1 of the 13 honors courses. Tyson et al. (2005) further investigated the phenomenon of underrepresentation in advanced classes through multiple interviews of 40
African American participants attending six different high schools, whereas, Fordham & Ogbu (1986) involved only one school and eight participants. Tyson et al. (2005) sought alternative viewpoints about this phenomenon by interviewing school staff in these six high schools. Student participants included both White students (36) and African American students (40) in grades 9-12 but with an overrepresentation of grade 11. The sample characteristics were sought to mirror the student body of the schools by including a mix of achievement levels, but Caucasian American participants had an overrepresentation of high achievers.

Analyses of the data were done manually and using ATLAS software. In explaining why African American participants selected their courses, most students reported their concern for how they thought they would achieve in that course, and included their level of preparedness and their willingness to complete the anticipated levels of work. Most African American participants opted out of advanced classes because of these reasons and no African American participant reported opting out of advanced courses because of negative peer reactions to achievement or academic striving. The analysis revealed all African American participants reported a positive academic orientation—a desire to do well academically.

The researchers examined the data for a presence of a “burden of acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1985, p. 177) among the African American participants. Common among the African American participants was a desire for recognition of academic achievement (Tyson et al., 2005). These findings did not support the claim that African American students possess an oppositional culture toward academic achievement. Further, African American participants reported receiving positive peer support for academic efforts and success, which contradicted the claim that academically successful African American
students experience a burden of acting White. However, there was an anomaly among the high school participants; the Dalton High School participants were found to have experienced the burden of acting White (Tyson et al., 2005).

Dalton High School was one of only six high schools where the staff, African American participants and Caucasian American participants, confirmed the social cost associated with academic achievement for African Americans. The researchers asserted it was the context of the school that created the presence of this phenomenon. “Sociologically this case is significant as an exception to the pattern at the other seven schools; it can provide important theoretical insight” (Tyson et al., 2005, p. 593). Dalton High School, situated in a rural community, had a demographic unique to the sample. The school had already become aware of social conflict in its student body as a school survey indicated many African American students did not desire to enroll in high level classes because of concern over racial and social isolation.

Another characteristic of Dalton high school was the economic differences in its community. Tyson et al. (2005) found within the sample, the schools that had the greatest level of African American enrollment in high level classes were in communities that did not have great differences in wealth and schools that had the lowest levels of African American enrollment in high level classes were in communities with disparate rates of household income. The data suggested Dalton high School’s wealth gap between White and African American participants may have factored into the presence of the acting White phenomenon.

This type of opposition was considered intra-racial class based opposition, which is peer pressure stemming from social class differences associated with acting “snooty” or “high and mighty” (Tyson et al., 2005, p. 601). Tyson and his team considered this intra-
racial class based opposition as the first, among three types. The second type was described as general oppositional. The term opposition related to high academic achievers that lead to peer taunts such as, “Nerd” or Dork” (Tyson et al., 2005, p. 600), cross racial and social class lines. The third type of opposition was described as racialized opposition- opposition from African Americans related to high achieving African Americans entering the perceived White domain and accompanied by taunts such as “Oreo” or “acting White” (Tyson et al., 2005, p. 601).

The researchers suggested both racially based opposition, the burden of acting White, as well as class based opposition, are aspects of a school’s culture that stem from stark differences between the socioeconomic status of African Americans and Caucasian American students and parallel clear patterns of course placement and achievement along racial lines (Tyson et al., 2005). Together these patterns of course enrollments and socioeconomic differences impacted the school culture at Dalton high School and may have led to its unique standing as the only high school with the burden of acting White phenomenon present. Tyson et al., (2005) asserted, “Patterns of social inequality, reproduced and affirmed in tracking, exacerbate the well documented anti-achievement ethos among America’s youth” (p. 600). This was especially true for African American students at Dalton High School.

Identity

This section addresses the theme of “identity” in the literature as it relates to the present study’s themes. Given the sociological perspective of race, and socio-economic status impacting the educational experiences of African American males, in addition to other salient factors found in research previously discussed, including self-perception and group
identity, researchers have devoted themselves towards better understanding the formation of identity for members of this minority group.

Identity formation is related to the period of adolescence which is recognized as a period of self-exploration and the strengthening of a personal identity (Erikson, 1968). During this time, many African Americans navigate concepts of race and group memberships to find meaningful understanding of who they are and how the world sees them (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Noguera, 2008). “In some instances, African American males find themselves trying to establish and carry out who they are and what they stand for within their ecology, while fighting for acceptance and independence among peer groups and adults who often misunderstand them” (Matranec, 2011, p. 227). The adolescent time period for African American males can be particularly rife with struggle as the concept of race varies across environments. For most of these young men, schools become the primary place of socialization. Thus, to understand the African American male experience in school, it is imperative to understand how they experience their identity in this context.

The research of Henri Tajfel (1982) on intergroup relations has helped researchers understand the tendency of people to classify themselves and form a group identity. Tajfel’s extensive work has helped define ethnic identity as, “That part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from knowledge of membership of a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (1982, p. 255). Individuals have a need to categorize people according to religious, racial, gender, age or other affiliations (Tajfel, 1985 as cited in Ashforth & Mael, 1989). The function of this classification is to cognitively segment and order an individual’s social environment (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). An individual has the tendency to classify others in his environment and attach the expected
characteristics of a category. The classification also functions to place and define the individual within his social environment (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). So, as African American males are placed by themselves and by others into the social classification of African American, the classification attaches to them characteristics which will impact their identities and experiences of school.

The pioneering research of William Cross (1971, 1978,) and his Nigresence model helped explain the complex process of ethnic identification formation. Others (Phinney & Ong, 1992; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998) have provided different models that also help explain identity formation for African Americans. Models of ethnic identity formation have been used to investigate how ethnic identity of African Americans impacts their educational experiences, attitudes, and academic achievement (Cokley, McClain, Jones, & Johnson, 2011; Spencer, Noll, Stolzfus, & Harpalani, 2001; Tatum, 2004 Wakefield & Hudley, 2005).

Spencer, Noll, Stolzfus, & Harpalani (2001) utilized a large database of 562 African American youth to examine how racial identity impacted self-concept, academic achievement, and the acting White explanation. Their sample included youth aged 11-16 (394 boys and 168 girls) from four schools located in a major metropolitan area of the southeast, part of the promotion of academic competence database. Almost 58% of the participants met the federal poverty guidelines. The researchers utilized a variety of instruments: Life Events Record (Coddington, 1972); items from the Blythe (1982) and Hare (1977) Self–Esteem Scale; Iowa Test of Basic Skills; Racial Identity Attitude Scale (McDemortt & Spencer, 1996). The Racial Identity Scale is a self–report survey designed to measure hierarchal stages of racial identity. “The hierarchal stages include (a) Pre-
encounter/Eurocentric white Salience values (b) transitional/movement from Eurocentric to
Afro-centric values (c) immersion/reactive superficial Afro-centricity (d)
internalization/proactive adaptive Afro-centric values” (Spencer et al., 2001, p.26). As
scores on the Racial Identity Scale move away from Eurocentric White salience values
(acceptance of negative African American Stereotypes) and towards internalized Afro-centric
values (embracing positive aspects of African American culture and traditions), one’s
identity as an African American is considered to be developed, individualized, embraced, and
more positive in nature (Spencer et al., 2001). Together, these instruments provided data
suggesting relationships between academic achievement, self-esteem, and racial identity.

Spencer et al. (2001) reported high self-esteem was significantly positively correlated
\((p < .05)\) with achievement scores, \(r = .16\). Eurocentric values and attitudes were negatively
correlated \((p < .001)\) with low achievement scores \(r = -.28\). Reactive Afro-centricity was
correlated \((p < .05)\) with low achievement, \(r = -.12\). Transitional cultural identity significantly
correlated \((p < .05)\) with achievement \(r = .11\). Proactive Afro-centricity was positively
correlated \((p < .05)\) with achievement, \(r = .10\). Significance on a Chi square analysis of self–
concept measures was only found for the reflected appraisal measure (How valued by
others). Participants who scored high for Euro-centricity scored low on reflected appraisal
by others. Self-esteem was found to be a significant and positive predicator of low Euro-
centrism; participants who scored high on positive reflected self-appraisals by others more
often were from the low Eurocentric group (Spencer et al., 2001).

The findings of Spencer et al. (2001) suggested high achieving African Americans
had strong identity with Afro-centric values and attitudes and experienced high self-esteem
and low achieving participants held low levels of African American identity and possessed
high Euro Centric values and experienced low self-esteem. Participants who performed well on the standardized tests tended to have higher self-esteem. The researcher summarized their work by stating, “African American youth with higher achievement are more likely to score high on Afro-centric identity and lower on Euro-centric identity” (Spencer et al., 2001, p. 27).

The research of Spencer et al. (2001) contradicted the acting White supposition as high achieving African American participants were not found to identify with White values, but were instead pursuing positive Afro-centric values and held high self-esteem. Spencer and her team’s findings suggested that the level of an individual’s identification with African American cultural values is directly related to academic achievement.

Cokley, McClain, Jones, and Johnson, (2011) explored the relationships between the variables previously discussed: racial identity, academic self-concept, and African American high school students’ value of academic success. Cokley et al. (2011) sampled 96 African American high school students (males = 41 and females = 55) in grades 10-12 from a predominately African American high school in the Southwest. To assess the participants’ racial identity values, the Racial Centrality Scale (RCS) was used (Sellers et al., 1998). The RCS measured using a 7-point scale (1=strongly disagree; 7=strongly agree) the degree to which race was perceived as being a core part of one’s identity, where higher scores indicated participants’ agreement that race was central to their identity. The researchers modified the instrument for their purpose to secure an acceptable Cronbach’s Alpha (Cokley et al., 2011). The Devaluing Academic Success Subscale was used to assess aspects of psychological disengagement (Major, Spencer, Schmader, Wolfe, & Crocker, 1998). This instrument, with a Cronbach’s Alpha of .75, used a 7-point scale (1=Strongly Disagree;
7=Strongly Agree) to measure three processes recognized as essential characteristics of disengagement: devaluing academic success, disengagement from school and discounting standardized test scores (Cokley, et al., 2011). Higher scores indicated that participants’ self-esteem was largely detached from their academic achievement which conflicted with results from Spencer et al. (2001). The Academic Self-Concept Scale (ASCS) used a 4-point scale (1=Strongly Disagree; 4=Strongly Agree), with demonstrated construct validity through positive correlations with GPA, assessed the academic component of a participant’s general self-concept (Cokley, et al., 2011). As it was applied in this study, the ASC obtained a Cronbach’s Alpha of .91, and high scores indicated a high academic self-concept.

Cokley and his team (2011) performed one way analyses of variance to measure gender differences in GPA, academic self-concept, devaluing academic success, and racial identity. The data indicated significant differences in GPA; females had higher GPAs $M = 2.66$ (SD= .68) than males $M = 2.26$ (SD =.58). No significant differences between gender in academic self-concept, devaluing academic success, or racial identity were found in the one way analysis of variance.

Correlations were performed by the team (Cokley et al., 2011) that included GPA, academic self-concept, devaluing academic success, and racial identity (self-esteem was not included). GPA was significantly correlated ($p<.05$) with academic self-concept, $r = .50$, strong. GPA was significantly correlated ($p<.05$) with devaluing academic success $r = -.29$, moderate. GPA was significantly correlated ($p< .01$) with racial identity $r = -.21$, moderate. “To determine the presence of dis-identification, the correlation between academic self-concept and GPA was attenuated based on age (i.e., a median split half of students average age)” (Cokley, et.al, 2011). Results indicated younger male participants strongly identified
with academics ($p < .001$) $r = .87$, while the correlation for older participants was not significant. This pattern reversed for females; the younger females were not strongly identified with academics $r = .19$ with no significance found, while older females were strongly identified with academics ($p < .001$) $r = .49$.

To analyze the variables’ ability to predict GPA, a three step hierarchal multiple regression was performed by Cokley and his team (2011). Gender and age accounted for significant amount of the variance, $F(2, 84) = 25.05$, $p < .001$ (adjusted $R^2 = .36$). The participants older than 17 had lower GPAs than the participants younger than 17, $B = -.52$, $p < .001$ and females had higher GPAs than males $B = .26$, $p < .05$. Adding academic self-concept ($B = .38$, $p < .001$) and devaluing academic success ($B = .07$, $p < .05$) produced an $R^2 = .11$, $p < .001$. Participants with higher academic self-concepts had higher GPAs and devaluing academic success was shown to have no relationship to GPA. When Racial Identify scores were added to the model, participants who considered their race an essential aspect of themselves were found to have lower GPAs, $R^2 = .03$, $p < .05$. The final model accounted for 48% of the variance in GPA. The strongest predictor of GPA was academic self-concept, trailed by age, gender, and racial identity. The work of Cokley and his team suggested African American males begin schooling much like other students with a strong identification with academics, but lose this as they matured. Whereas, female African American students increased their identification with academics as they matured. For all participants, academic self-concept was a positive predictor of GPA, while age and racial identity were negative predictors of GPA.

Cokley et al. (2011) suggested racial centrality negatively impacted academic achievement of African American male high school students, like other research (Spencer et
al., 2001; Worrell, 2007). This suggestion is salient to understanding how identity impacts the educational experiences of African American males. Cokley and his team suggested: “Students with stronger racial identity might be associated with being more vulnerable to internalizing racial stereotypes that can compromise academic achievement. The negative relationship found in this sample… may be what Spencer et al. referred to as a reactive Afrocentric identity” (Cokley et al., 2011, p.64). Racialized identity or reactive Afrocentric identity is characterized by superficial and stereotypical endorsements of African American images and culture (Cokley et. al., 2011). This type of racial identity places those African American males at risk for a low level of academic achievement and oppositional attitudes. Cokley et al. (2011) joined other researchers (Oyserman et al., 2003; Nasir, Mclaughlin, & Jones, 2009) with the suggestion that an identity that incorporated and valued a set of meanings that associated an African American identity with valuing education, and agency for social change might reduce rates of academic dis-identification and improve academic achievement rates.

Nasir, Mclaughlin, & Jones, (2009) conducted a two-year mixed methods study at a High School in a California city that experienced a pattern of low student achievement and high rates of absenteeism. The high school was situated in a historically African American community and “in many ways the school constituted a highly African American centered cultural space” (Nasir, et al., 2009, p. 85). The researchers believed this setting was an especially appropriate place to study contemporary African American and academic identities (Nasir, et al., 2009). The school enrolled 670 students and provided an average class size of about 21 students.
The first phase of the research (Nasir, et al., 2009) consisted of weekly one hour long focus groups as part of an afterschool program that lasted for nine weeks. Two focus groups were formed: one group consisted of disconnected students and the other consisted of connected students.Disconnected participants (total = 9; African American = 8, Asian =1) were identified by counselors and teachers as at-risk for dropping out. Connected participants (total = 11; all African American; males= 6; females = 5) were identified by teachers and students as having effective relationships with peers and school personnel, and regularly completing homework and participating in the school community. These sessions were designed to uncover the participants’ perceptions and experiences of their school lives and their meanings attached to an African American identity.

Following the focus groups, Nasir et al. (2009) developed case studies on both male and female participants primarily in 10th and 11th grades in phase one of the study. These case studies consisted of seven students, (6 = African American; 1 Asian) and entailed a total of 56 hours of observations of the case study participants in all aspects of their school experiences. Informal conversations and interviews with case study participants were recorded and analyzed to learn intimate knowledge of the case study participants’ experiences and perceptions as they navigated their school activities.

Electronic software aided in coding and analysis. Data compiled from the focus groups, interviews, and observations were analyzed for meaning through an iterative process of coding by the research team. Data collapsed into three final codes: connection and disconnection, racial and ethnic identity, and an aspect of the school considered the “two school phenomenon” (Nasir et al., 2009).
Nasir et al. (2009) reported two configurations of identity for the participants. The first was a “street savvy African American identity” (p. 87). This identity endorsed speaking Ebonics and wearing clothing styles commonly associated with urban African American youth that was popularized through rap stars and hip-hop musicians (sagging pants, oversized shirts, and caps). These participants perceived “African Americans as being drug dealers, pimps, gangsters; not being well educated; not caring about the law, citizenship, or their futures.” (Nasir et al., 2009, p. 87). The researchers posited that for some participants this identity was easily accessible because it was communicated through mass media, their neighborhoods, and their experiences of school.

The researchers asserted the “street savvy African American identity” (Nasir et al., 2009, p. 87) was reinforced by the participants experiencing the second school in a “two school phenomenon” (Nasir et al., 2009, p. 91). Although the comprehensive high school was one school, it offered two very different schooling experiences and pathways. The first school offered some participants experiences including above average expectations of academic achievement, leadership roles, and regarded them as bound for college. For the other participants, the second school offered only minimal academic rigor and very little nurturing for future options. The participants with a "street-savvy African American identity" (Nasir et al., 2009, p .81) were predominantly from the educational trajectory that did not adequately promote educational achievement worthy of college nor nurture career readiness. These participants were reported to lack introspective analysis of their racial identities (Nasir et al., 2009). In the case study of these participants, researchers noted a “lack of explicit discussion about race" (Nasir et al., 2009, p .90). The team considered an explanation for a lack of racial commentary was that the participants did not perceive identity
on racial terms, and also considered it as evidence the participants were not consciously adopting this identity but rather embracing an image provided for them from their communities, media, and schools (Nasir et al., 2009).

The other identity configuration Nasir and her team (2009) found was the "school oriented and socially conscious African American identity" (2009 p. 92). Participants with this identity were attached to their local communities, as well as a historical African American community. Additionally, the participants perceived themselves as agents for social change, and as students. The researchers suggested the "school oriented and socially conscious African American identity… viewed being African American as being committed to the positive development of family and community, [thus] a strong academic identity became a part of their racial identity" (Nasir et al., 2009, p. 95).

The case study data suggested participants with the "school oriented and socially conscious African American identity" (Nasir et al., 2009, p. 92) were experiencing the first school in the "two school phenomenon" (Nasir et al., 2009, p. 91). The first school provided these participants with interactions and accomplishments that nurtured their academic identities. In addition to high rigor associated with advanced classes, many of their teachers were African American, which further promoted an educational image with an African American identity (Nasir et al., 2009).

Nasir et al. (2009) also found some participants embraced variations of the two types of identity configurations. Identity for some participants was fluid and fluctuated over the two-year period of the study. These participants vacillated between identifying as a "street savvy African American and …a school oriented and socially conscious African American identity" (Nasir et al., 2009, p.97). Although these participants were consciously aware of
race, its role in society, and hardships associated with street life, the researchers suggested these participants' personal issues and peer influences were inhibiting the participants' commitment to a school oriented identity (Nasir et al., 2009). The participants who had a fluid identity between the two personas experienced pressure to embrace a persona incompatible with academic achievement and remained uncommitted in their identity choices.

In summary of the qualitative findings, Nasir et al. (2009) suggested the participants’ value of personal style, including the use of Ebonics and a clothing style associated with rap and hip-hop music was not related to school orientation. The participants who developed a "school oriented and socially conscious African American identity" (Nasir et al., 2009, p. 97) did not experience a burden of acting White." Nasir and her team (2009) posited the school context was an important factor in contributing to the identities of the participants: the school oriented participants experienced a school setting, "where they were not required to choose between being African American and being high achievers" (Nasir et al., 2009, p. 101). The participants who chose the identity of a "street savvy African American" (Nasir et al., 2009, p. 97) were affirmed by the school context that limited their academic instruction and expectations. For those who experienced dissonance with their sense of identity; the school was one more opportunity to confirm either identity but personal issues and peer influences were obstacles to these participants embracing a school oriented identity. All participants expressed a commitment to their communities, but what the commitment meant for the individual determined the identity and educational achievement. Those participants who saw themselves as proactive agents of change for their friends and families identified with the "school oriented and socially conscious African American identity" and achieved
academically at a high level. While those participants whose commitment to families and friends only meant loyalty, identified with the "street savvy African American" (Nasir et al., 2009, p. 97) and experienced low levels of academic achievement.

In phase two, Nasir et al. (2009) designed and implemented an extended survey to examine the relationship between participants’ academic achievement, connection to school, and academic and racial identities. The team measured academic achievement with three questions: “1) Have you been on the honor roll in the last year? 2) Have you been enrolled in an AP course in the last year? 3) Have you failed a course in the last year?” (Nasir et al., 2009, p. 83). The participants’ connection to school was assessed through the Academic Identity Scale, Cronbach’s Alpha =.73 (adapted from Osborne, 1977). The Academic Identity Scale evaluated participants’ responses to questions such as, “How important is doing well in school to you?” (Nasir et al., 2009, p.82). The Ethnic Identity Scale was adapted from the Multi-group Ethnic Identity measure, Cronbach’s Alpha = .80 (Phinney, 1992) as a way to understand the participants’ racial identities. To further understand the racial and ethnic meanings of the participants, the researchers held two focus groups to solicit the participants’ perceptions of what it meant to be an African American. From the focus group data, the researchers created a checklist survey that compiled all the traits and behaviors the focus group participants attributed to being African American. There were five different categories “1) history of African Americans, 2) behaviors / beliefs that support school success 3) behaviors / beliefs that do not support school success 4) personal style including a particular clothing style or using Ebonics and 5) behaviors/beliefs that support a gangsta persona” (Nasir et al., 2009, p. 83). Participants received either a score of zero for an unchecked item or a one for a checked item. Higher scores indicated the student perceived
membership in African American racial group as associated with that category (Nasir et al., 2009). One hundred twenty-one participants were surveyed: 31% were 9th graders, 18% 10th graders, 29% 11th graders, and 22% were 12th graders. The sample was mostly balanced along gender lines, racially: there were 68 African American, 13 Asian, 9 mixed, 8 Latino, and 17 students who did not identify their race/ethnicity. The team presented only findings related to the African American participants.

Nasir et al., (2009) presented their findings related only to the African American participants’ perceptions of each category and its association with African American identity. Seventy-five percent of the males and 64% of the female participants embraced understanding African American history; positive school behaviors were accepted by 40% of male participants and 40% of female participants; personal style was selected by 31% of males and 23% of females; negative school behaviors were embraced by 14% of males, 7% of females; gansta persona was accepted by 23% of males and 7% of females. Using survey data, ANOVA results showed African American participants (males n = 28; females n = 33) were not significantly different along gender lines in regards to endorsing each category of racial identity meaning (df = 1, F = 4.22, p < .05). Thus, the scores were collapsed into one group because the scores for each gender were not significantly different.

Nasir et al., (2009) ran bivariate correlations to understand the relationships between these five meanings of African American identity. Significance was found between understanding African American history and positive school behaviors (p < .01). Significance was found between positive school behaviors and personal style (p < .05). Significance was found between personal style and negative school behaviors (p < .01).
Significance was found between gangsta persona and personal style ($p < .01$). Significance was found between gangsta persona and negative school behaviors ($p < .01$).

Nasir et al., (2009) then sought to investigate the relationships between these five categories of identity with participants’ achievement and academic identities. Results from a linear regression suggested the participants’ associations to African American identity did not significantly predict academic identity or achievement. Near significance was found for participants’ association of African American identity to positive school behaviors and values with achievement, ($t = (59) = 1.77, p < .08$) but only accounted for minimal portion of the variance, ($R^2 = .036$). The researchers suspected their measurement of achievement (three questions) may not have been an effective method. These findings did not strongly support the case study findings, which indicated participants who perceived African American identity associated with African American history and positive school/behaviors/values were also academically high achieving.

Results from bivariate correlations on the individual items measuring academic identity showed significant relationships with the categories of African American identity (Nasir et al., 2009). “The African American identity category of positive school behavior was mildly and negatively correlated with both coming late to class $r(59) = -.270, p < .05$ and coming to class unprepared $r(59)p < .05$ (Nasir et al., 2009, p. 104). The African American identity category of negative school behaviors was negatively correlated with feeling comfortable talking to teachers, $r(59) = -.255, p < .05$. These findings supported case study findings that suggested a relationship between achievement and beliefs about school: participants who associated positive school behaviors with African American identity were less likely to come to class late or unprepared, while those participants who associated
negative school behaviors with African American identity were less likely to feel comfortable talking to teachers (Nasir et al., 2009).

Lastly, Nasir et al. (2009) ran regression analyses individually for each participant with high ethnic identity and participants with low ethnic identity (using a mean split). Results suggested positive school behaviors predicted achievement for participants with high ethnic identity, \( B = .825, t(59) = 2.26, p = .03 \), but not for participants with low ethnic identity. Further, bivariate correlations between ethnic identity and academic identity was significant, \( r(59) = .254, p < .05 \). These results supported case study findings that suggested participants who identified with African American identity may have higher rates of academic achievement (Nasir et al., 2009).

Nasir et al., (2009) reported both quantitative and qualitative data that presented a complex understanding of participants’ racial identities, academic identities, and academic achievement. The statistical analysis of Nasir et al. (2009) suggested participants who perceived African American identity associated with understanding African American history also associated being African American with valuing school and appropriate behaviors. Participants who associated African American identity with a “gangsta” persona also associated it with expressing personal style, including Ebonics and hip-hop clothing style and with negative school behaviors. The data indicated most participants, those that associated with both positive and negative school behaviors, perceived African American identity associated with personal style such as, Ebonics and hip-hop clothing style.

Nasir et al., (2009) reported the clustering of positive school behaviors with understanding history and the clustering of negative school behaviors with gangsta supported qualitative findings. The stronger the participants’ ethnic identity was, the stronger the
relationship between positive school behavior and academic achievement. Thus, participants who perceived being African American meant understanding African American history and valuing school were more likely to have a high academic achievement. Participants who embraced the negative stance towards school and identified with the street savvy identity may have been doing well or poorly in academic achievement and may have struggled with the school oriented and socially conscious African American identity. “The quantitative data suggest[ed] what seems to be more important is the extent to which students [participants] embrace a positive stance toward school as part of an African Americana identity” (Nasir et al., 2009, p. 106). The researchers emphasized the context of the study played a role in supporting the identity configurations of the participants as either a “street savvy African American identity” or a “school oriented and socially conscious African American identity” (Nasir et al., 2009).

**Stereotype**

This section addresses the theme of “stereotype” as the literature relates to the present study’s themes and significance. Given research that made salient African American males’ meaning of racial identity and group belonging as factors that shape their values of school behaviors and achievement, researchers have sought to better understand the effects of stereotypes on academic experiences and achievement. Howard (2008) sought to understand the African American male experience in school and investigate the role, if any, stereotypes played in academic achievement. Over one year in a large west coast city, Howard (2008) surveyed 200 African American middle and high school students about their school experiences. The participants were from a range of schools that included urban, with primarily African American and Hispanic American students, as well as suburban, with
mostly Caucasian American middle class students. Then, a subsample of 100 was interviewed for a deeper understanding of their educational experiences and perceptions. Lastly, a case study was conducted with 10 African American participants from the range of schools previously described.

One of the central findings was the participants were very conscious of the negative racial stereotypes about African American men (Howard, 2008). As one participant stated, “I always have to think ‘What are they thinking about me?’ If they think I am going to gang bang, rap, and act stupid, then I just work on doing the opposite” (Howard, 2008, p. 970). The participants perceived their race affected their peers and teachers’ perceptions of them. As a result, many participants felt they were often working against the negative perception of African American males. The participants perceived their teacher’s expectations were justified because many African American males were performing poorly in school, yet the participants wanted to be recognized as individuals (Howard, 2008).

Howard (2008) reported many participants were challenged in experiencing their individuality because of their African American race. Because they were African American, the participants felt viewed by the school at large as members of a group. Howard (2008) included in his report, a poignant voice for this experience: “Teachers never let you forget that you are Black” (Howard, 2008, p. 971). “Most of the young men attributed much of the academic success to the desire to challenge negative stereotypes for Black males” (Howard, 2008, p. 969)

Howard (2008) suggested participants experience many micro-aggressions in school because of their racial identity, including low quality instruction that put them at a disadvantage for high stakes exams and for college readiness. Howard (2008) provided
strong evidence through the voices of his participants demonstrating the difficulties African American males experienced because the school institution and its personnel displayed subtle but powerful messages supporting negative racial stereotypes of African American men. Howard (2008) suggested many African American males’ perception of lost individuality because of their racial identification was salient to understanding the educational experiences of these young men.

**Stereotype Threat**

“Stereotype threat” as a theme is addressed in this section as it relates to the themes found in the current study. Steele and Aronson’s (1995) study on stereotype threat has been helpful in deepening the understanding of African American educational experiences given the research on African American identity and its understanding of the impact of racial group belonging on academic achievement. Stereotypes are judgments of individuals based on their membership in a particular racial or social group (Cameron, Alvarez, Ruble, & Fuligni, 2001). “Traditional stereotypes are that Black people have poorer abilities in all academic subjects relative to their White and Asian counterparts” (Evans, Copping, Rowley, & Kurtz-Costes, 2011, p. 2).

Steel and Aronson (1995) posited “Whenever African American students perform an explicitly scholastic or intellectual task, they face the threat of confirming or being judged by a negative societal stereotype—a suspicion—about their group's intellectual ability and competence” (Steele & Aronson, 1995, p. 797). The researchers sought to create a variety of conditions for testing, one of which was the presence of stereotype threat to determine how the condition affected test performance on a difficult test.
This study randomly assigned 114 African American and Caucasian American college students into three experimental groups: diagnostic, non-diagnostic, and non-diagnostic-challenge. Participants were told they would complete an exam similar in format to the SAT to assess certain personal factors that were related to verbal and reading abilities. The test administrator emphasized to the participants that they should not expect to get many problems correct. Afterwards, the participants would gain feedback about their strengths and weaknesses.

In the non-diagnostic condition and the non-diagnostic-challenge condition, participants were given the same SAT formatted test but the administrator’s instructions made no reference to verbal ability. Instead, the administrator explained the purpose was to gain an understanding of psychological factors involved in verbal reasoning. The participants were told they would receive feedback, but it was intended to help them on future tests. In the non-diagnostic only condition, the test’s difficulty was explained by the researchers’ interest in verbal problem solving. The participants in the non-diagnostic only condition received an explanation that the test provided a challenge to even highly verbal students, including genius level. The administrator emphasized in all groups the importance for the participants to put forth their best effort. However, in the non-diagnostic only group, participants received the additional instruction to “Try hard even though we’re not going to evaluate your ability” (Steele & Aronson, 1995, p. 799). In the non-diagnostic challenge group, participants received the additional instruction, “Please take this challenge seriously, even though we will not be evaluating your ability” (Steele & Aronson, 1995, p. 800).

The test contained 30 verbal items and 3 anagrams. The scores were analyzed for the total number correct and the number of attempts made, which comprised a ratio called an
accuracy index. A self-report related to the participants’ thoughts on their academic competence was completed by each participant. Participants also completed a cognitive interference scale allowing them to indicate the frequency of distracting thoughts experienced while completing the exam. Participants then reported their opinion of the test’s difficulty and bias on a 15-point scale and were asked to circle the phrase that described the purpose of the test they had just completed to verify the testing conditions.

Chi-square analyses were utilized to assess the participants’ understanding of the testing condition. An effect on condition was found $x^2 = (2) = 43.18, p < .001$ indicating that the participants were more likely to believe that the test’s purpose was to evaluate their abilities in the diagnostic condition than in the non-diagnostic condition or the challenge condition.

An ANCOVA was performed to examine the participants’ test performance. Their self-reported SAT scores were used as the covariate (African American mean = 592, Caucasian American Mean = 632). Results indicated a significant main effect, $F(2, 107) = 4.74, p < .02$. Participants in the non-diagnostic–challenge group performed higher than the participants in the other two groups. A significant main effect for race, $F(1, 107) = 5.22, p < .03$, was also reported with Caucasian American participants performing higher than African American participants. African American participants in the diagnostic group performed worse than African American participants in the non-diagnostic condition, $t(107) = 2.88, p < .01$, or the challenge condition, $t(107) = 2.63, p < .01$, as well as significantly worse than Caucasian American participants in the diagnostic condition $t(107) = 2.64, p < .01$ when using Bonferroni contrasts with SAT scores. There were no reported significant interactions.
Another ANCOVA was conducted to assess the participants’ accuracy as indicated by the ratio of correct responses to the number of questions attempted. Participants’ self-reported SAT scores were again utilized as a covariate. No significant main effect or interactions were found. Bonferroni tests revealed that Black participants in the diagnostic condition were reliably less accurate than Black participants in the non-diagnostic-only condition and White participants in the diagnostic condition, \( t(107) = 2.64, p < .01 \), and \( t(107) = 2.13, p < .05 \), respectively. Significance was not found for condition nor interaction effects for the number of items completed or the number of attempts (all \( F_s < 1 \)).

An ANCOVA indicated there was a significant main effect for self-reported test bias and race, \( F(1, 107) = 10.47, p < .001 \). No significant condition effects were reported for the self-report measures of academic competence and disruptive thoughts during the test. Significant main effects were reported for the participants’ perceived test performance, \( F(2, 106) = 7.91, p < .001 \), and their perceived performance in comparison to other participants, \( F(2, 107) = 3.17, p < .05 \). In the non-diagnostic only condition participants perceived their scores were higher (\( M=11.81 \)) than the participants perceived scores in either the diagnostic (\( M=9.2 \)) and non-diagnostic challenge (\( M=8.15 \)) groups. African American participants in the diagnostic condition (\( M=4.89 \)) saw their relative performance as poorer than African American participants in the non-diagnostic-only condition (\( M=6.54 \)), \( t(107) = 2.81, p < .01 \) and those African American participants in the non-diagnostic-challenge condition (\( M=6.30 \)), \( t(107) = 2.40, p < .02 \). Test description had no effect on the self-perceptions of Caucasian American participants.

African American participants performed worse than Caucasian American participants when the assessment was perceived to be a measure of their ability, while their
scores improved greatly, even matching the scores of Caucasian American participants, when they perceived the test to be more of a challenge than an assessment of ability.

The race by testing condition interaction did not reach significance. The frequency of interfering thoughts as expected as a result of stereotype threat was not affected by the testing conditions. Thus, a second study was conducted to assess the reliability of the predicted interaction between race and the diagnosticity interaction and to determine the effect of stereotype threat on performance. The researchers randomly assigned 20 African American and 20 Caucasian American female undergraduate students into either diagnostic or non-diagnostic conditions. Participants in all conditions completed a timed version of the test administered in study one where they controlled the pace of the test. Participants then completed the Spielberger State Anxiety Inventory (STAI) and the self-reported measures used in the previous study. They also completed a self-report on the effort exerted, frequency of guessing, experience of frustration resulting in giving up and feelings of test bias. The purpose was to test the hypothesis that the effect of stereotype threat on performance was mediated by the participants’ anxiety over confirming the negative racial stereotype of African Americans.

An ANCOVA (covariate adjusted SAT mean score; in race-prime condition: African American $M = .402$ and Caucasian American $M = .438$ in the no-race-prime condition African American $M = .541$ and Caucasian American $M = .520$) was conducted on the percent correct of the problems attempted. A significant main effect of race was found $F(1, 35) = 10.04, p < .01$. There was a significant race and test condition interaction $F(1,35) = 8.07, p < .01$. African American participants in the diagnostic condition performed significantly worse than African Americans in non-diagnostic condition $t(35) = 2.38, p < .02,$
and their scores were significantly lower than Caucasian American participants in the
diagnostic condition $t(35) = 3.75, p < .001$, and significantly lower than Caucasian American
participants in the non-diagnostic condition $t(35) = 2.34, p < .025$.

With the accuracy ratio, African American participants in the diagnostic condition
had lower accuracy ($M = .392$) than African American participants in the non-diagnostic
condition ($M = .490$) or than Caucasian American participants in either diagnostic condition
($M = .485$) or non-diagnostic condition ($M = .435$). The interaction for condition by race was
also significant $F(1, 35) = 4.18, p < .05$.

African American participants completed fewer items than Caucasian American
participants, $F(1, 35) = 9.35, p < .01$, and participants in the diagnostic condition completed
fewer items than those in the non-diagnostic conditions $F(1, 35) = 3.69, p < .07$. The overall
interaction did not reach significance. African American participants in the diagnostic
conditions finished significantly fewer items ($M = 12.38$) than African Americans
participants in the non-diagnostic conditions ($M = 18.35$), $t (35) = 2.50, p < .02$; fewer than
Caucasian American participants in the diagnostic condition ($M = 20.39$) $t(35) = 3.39, p < .01$,
and fewer than Caucasian American participants in the non-diagnostic condition ($M = 21.45$),
$t (35) = 3.60, p < .01$.

Steel and Aronson (1995) suggested these results strengthened the reliability of the
condition by race interaction for test performance that was only marginally significant in
Study 1. The researchers asserted that the results of Study 2 indicated that African American
participants’ poor rate of completing items and the accuracy of their work in the diagnostic
testing condition were typical behaviors associated with test anxiety or competitive pressure.
Because no significant differences were found on the other measures, the researchers conducted another study.

The third study was designed and implemented to measure the effect of the testing condition on the participants’ arousal of self-doubts and stereotypical thoughts. The researchers also wanted to investigate the role disassociation from race would have on the African American participants. Study Three was based on the researchers’ findings that when African American participants completed a difficult test measuring intellectual acumen the participants experienced anxiety about confirming a specific negative racial stereotype and their thinking about that negative racial stereotype became activated. Thus, the researchers hypothesized, African American participants’ self-doubts should become aroused and the participants in the diagnostic condition should perform worse than the participants in the non-diagnostic condition and Caucasian American participants in both conditions. To do this, the participants’ preferences for such things as styles of music, some of which were stereotypically African American, and other associated activities were measured to assess the participants’ further validation of their racial identity or disassociation from it. The third study was designed and implemented to measure the effect of the testing condition on the participants’ arousal of self-doubts and stereotypical thoughts.

Study three consisted of 35 African American participants; 9 male, 26 female and 33 Caucasian American participants; 20, male, 13 female, who were undergraduate college students. The participants were randomly assigned to diagnostic, non-diagnostic, or control condition, with 10 -12 participants per condition. Study 3 used a 2 X 3 design with race (African American or Caucasian American) crossed with condition (diagnostic, non-diagnostic, control). Diagnostic and non-diagnostic conditions were the same in the previous
studies, while control condition participants completed the measurements without expecting to take a test of any sort. In the experimental conditions, the dependent measures were administered just after the test directions. These included a measurement of stereotype activation using word fragments reflecting either a race related construct or image associated with African Americans, self–doubt activation was measured using word fragments associated with self-doubt. Stereotype avoidance was measured using word associations related to African American life. Participants in the diagnostic and non-diagnostic conditions were told the measurements were to help the researchers assess the psychological aspects of the other measurements; the control participants were told these measurements were taken to understand college students’ interests. Participants also completed a questionnaire as one more way to assess their willingness to distance themselves from the stereotype. Willingness to self-handicap was measured using a self-report measurement with various excuses for limiting cognitive functioning.

Results from the ANCOVA (covariate SAT score; African American $M = 581$, Caucasian American $M = 650$) indicated main effects for race $F(1, 61) = 137$, $p < .001$ and for experimental condition, $F(2, 61) = 5.90$, $p < .005$. There was significant interaction for race and condition $F(2, 61) = 3.30$, $p < .05$. The diagnostic condition significantly increased the African Americans race related completions but not of Caucasian American participants. African American participants in the diagnostic condition provided more race related completions ($M = 3.70$) than their counterparts in the non-diagnostic condition ($M = 2.10$), $t(61) = 3.53$, $p < .001$, or all other participants in all conditions $ps < .05$ indicating the arousal of stereotype thinking.
Self-doubt activation was analyzed using an ANCOVA which indicated significant main effect of experimental condition, $F(2,61) = 4.33, p < .02$, and a race and condition interaction, $F(2,61) = 3.34, p < .05$. African American participants in the diagnostic condition generated the most self-doubt related completions, significantly more than African American participants in the non-diagnostic condition $t(61) = 3.52, p < .001$, and more than participants in any other condition, $ps < .05$. African American participants expecting to take a difficult diagnostic test of their ability showed significantly greater self-doubt than all other participants in the other conditions.

An index of stereotype avoidance was compiled from the six preference and stereotype items described previously (music, activities, etc.). Scores ranged from 6, indicating high avoidance to 42, indicating low avoidance (Cronbach’s alpha = .65). Using an ANCOVA, these scores yielded a significant effect for condition, $F(2, 61) = 4.73, p < .02$, and a significant interaction for race and condition, $F(2,61) = 4.14, p < .03$. African American participants in the diagnostic condition were the most avoidant of conforming to stereotypic images of African Americans ($M = 20.80$) more so than African American participants in the non-diagnostic condition ($M = 29.80$), $t(61) = 3.61, p < .001$, and Caucasian American participants in either condition, $p < .05$.

The self-report measure to gauge participants’ distancing from race indicated only 25% of the African American participants in the diagnostic condition would be willing to indicate their race on the questionnaire, while 100% of the African American participants in the other conditions would be willing to indicate their race. Using a zero (for refusal) or one (for willing) conversion for the response frequencies, an ANCOVA yielded a marginally significant effect of race $F(1,61) = 3.86, p < .06$, a significant interaction for race and
condition $F(1,61) = 6.60, p < .01$. The African American participants in the diagnostic group were the only African American participants unwilling to indicate their race suggesting a tendency to avoid associating to their race.

Self-handicapping was measured by four assessments; participants in the control were not asked to complete these measures. An ANCOVA was used to separately analyze 2(race) X 2 (diagnosticity) interactions. Hours of sleep as participants’ excuse for performance yielded a significant effect for race, $F(1,39) = 8.22, p < .01$, and significant effect of condition, $F(1, 39) = 6.35, p < .02$ with a significant race and condition interaction, $F(1,39) = 4.1, p < .01$. Participants’ excuse as ability to focus yielded main effect for race, $F(1,39) = 7.26, p < .02$, and condition $F(1,39) = 10.67, p < .01$, and significant qualifying interaction $F(1,39) = 5.73, p < .03$. For the participants’ responses for how tricky or unfair the test was, the ANCOVA yielded a race main effect $F(1, 39) = 13.24, p < .001$, condition main effect, $F(1,39)$ and a marginal significant qualifying interaction, $F(1,39) = 3.58, p < .07$. Placing these measures into the diagnostic condition had significant effects on three of the four measures. African American participants in the diagnostic condition had a greater tendency to make excuses for their performance than all other participants who were tested on this measure.

However, Steel & Aronson (1995) had some doubt that stereotype threat was in itself enough to hinder the performance of African American participants on a task that was not diagnostic in nature. The researchers also had doubt that the testing condition (diagnostic, non-diagnostic, diagnostic-challenge) was mediated by stereotype threat. They asserted: “Showing first that test diagnosticity disrupts Black participants’ performances and then separately that it causes in these participants to be threatened by the stereotype, does not
prove that the effect of test diagnosticity performance was mediated by the stereotype threat it caused” (Steele & Aronson, 1995, p. 806). Therefore, the researchers designed and implemented a fourth study that addressed these doubts.

Study four was a 2 (race: African American, Caucasian American) by 2 (testing condition: race prime, no-race-prime) design. Participants included 24 African American undergraduate students; 6 male, 18 female and 23 Caucasian American undergraduate students; 11 male, 12 female. Two participants were withdrawn because of their suspicions about the racial focus of the study and one Caucasian American participant was withdrawn because of a lack of one SAT score. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the conditions.

The testing conditions of study four matched that of the non-diagnostic condition of study one and study two. However, after providing the purpose and instruction for the test, participants were asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire. This questionnaire was identical for all participants, except for those participants who were randomly provided the race prime questionnaire that asked the additional question of racial identification. The questionnaires were completed immediately before a 25-minute test and the test administrator remained blind to the status of participants until the conclusion of the test interaction. During the test, participants indicated their guesses, and after the test, provided additional information on a 11-point scale (1 = not at all, 11 = extremely) the extent to which they experienced difficulty on the test, exerted effort, repeated questions, and felt the test was biased.

Following this survey, participants then completed a questionnaire that measured their stereotype threat by marking on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly agree, 7 = strongly
disagree) the degree of their agreement to such questions as, “Some people feel I have less verbal ability because of my race” (Steel & Aronson, 1995, p. 806). To measure the participants’ academic identification, nine items on the same style 11-point scale (1 = not at all, 11 = extremely) addressed the participants’ value of verbal and math skills in relation to their education and career goals with such prompts as, “verbal skills are important to my career” (Steel & Aronson, 1995, p. 806).

The results were analyzed using an ANCOVA with a covariate of SAT scores (African American $M = 591$, Caucasian American $M = 643$). African American participants in the race prime condition, which means their racial identity was activated though the testing questionnaire, performed significantly worse than African American participants in the non-race prime condition, $t(39) = 2.43, p < .02$, and significantly worse than Caucasian American participants in the race prime condition, $t(39) = 2.87, p < .01$. African American participants in the race prime condition performed worse than Caucasian Americans participants in the non-race prime condition, but not significantly. The comparison of African American participants in the race primed condition to the other three conditions was highly significant $F(1,39) = 8.15, p < .01$).

In study four, an ANCOVA, with SAT scores as the covariate, was conducted and indicated a significant trend $F(1,39) = 4.07, p = .05$ for the participants in the race-prime condition to have the worse accuracy in identifying the correct answer (African American participants $M = .402$. Caucasian American participants $M = .438$) compared to the no-race-prime condition, (African American $M = .541$, Caucasian American $M = .520$). The comparison between African Americans in the race-prime condition with African Americans in the non-race condition was marginally significant, $p < .08$. These results suggest
decreased accuracy is an aspect of the impairment of stereotype threat that results in inhibited performance.

In study four an ANCOVA, with SAT scores as the covariate indicated a race by race-prime condition interaction for the number of test questions answered \( F(1,39) = 12.13, p < .01 \). African Americans in the race-prime condition \((M = 11.58)\) answered fewer questions than Caucasian Americans \((M = 20.15)\), \( t(39) = 3.83, p < .001 \). In the no-race-prime condition both Caucasian Americans \((M = 15.32)\) and African Americans \((M = 13.03)\) participants answered about the same number of test questions. The results suggested that priming African American participants’ racial identity before a test that was not diagnostic in nature impaired their performance as measured by the number of test questions completed.

The post exam data of study four indicated no significant differences on the degree of guessing the participants self-reported after completing the test. However, the number of guesses indicated on the participants’ actual test sheets were analyzed in an ANCOVA and revealed a significant race and race-prime-condition interaction, \( F(1,39) = 5.56, p < .03 \). In the race-prime condition, African Americans made fewer guesses \((M = 1.99)\) than African Americans in the non-race-prime condition \((M = 1.58)\). Caucasian American in the race-prime condition also made more guesses \((M = 4.23)\) than the Caucasian Americans in the no-race-prime condition \((M = 1.58)\). The results suggested that priming African Americans participants’ racial identity before a test that was not diagnostic in nature increased the participants’ willingness to complete a problem without using the guessing strategy. However, this would have been evident in the data that measured the participants self-reports of how hard they worked. Steele and Aronson reported no significant effects for this measure.
Study four used a MANOVA to analyze participants’ response on the stereotype threat scale. Results indicated African American participants experienced more stereotype threats than Caucasian American participants $F(9, 31) = 8.80, p < .01$. Significance was not reached on any other measure. The participants’ responses to questions regarding their personal value of math, verbal skills, and sports indicated African Americans participants reported they valued sports less than Caucasian American participants $F(1, 39) = 4.11, p < .05$. Like study three, this suggested African Americans participants were, attempting to differentiate themselves from the negative stereotype of the academically limited African American athlete (Steel & Aronson, 1995). Correlations between participants’ estimated test scores and their ratings of the importance of sports revealed that as African Americans participants’ expectations of their scores decreased, the importance the African Americans placed on sports also decreased, in the race-prime condition ($r = .56$) and in the race-prime condition ($r = .70$). The correlation results suggested again the tendency for stereotype threatened African Americans to distance themselves from images that are stereotypically associated with African Americans.

Steele and Aronson (1995) conducted one more investigation into the role anxiety and race played in this phenomenon. A similar test was administered on a computer to only African Americans participants in two conditions (race prime and no-race-prime). The computer recorded the amount of time spent on each question and included an anxiety measure at the conclusion of the test. As in study four, race-prime participants had significantly fewer correct answers ($M = 4.4$) than no-race-prime participants ($M = 7.7$), $t(18) = 2.34, p < .04$, they were less accurate, but not significantly, ($M = .334$) than no-race-prime participants ($M = .395$), $p = .10$ and they answered significantly fewer questions ($M = 13.2$).
than no-race-prime participants, \((M = 20.1), t(18) = 2.34, p < .04.\) Race-prime participants spent more time \((M = 79s)\) on the questions in the test’s beginning than non-race-prime participants \((M = 61s) t(18) = 2.27, p < .04,\) and race-prime participants were significantly more anxious than non-race-prime participants, \(t(18) = 2.34, p < .04\). Race-prime participants had a higher mean score \((M = 48.5)\) on the STAI (20, low anxiety to 80, high anxiety) than non-race-prime participants \((M = 40.5)\). The findings indicated that a race prime condition reliably decreased the African American participants’ performance on a difficult exam, and created reactions that may have been a response to stereotype threat similar to an anxiety based perseveration (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

The extensive research of Steele & Aronson (1995) provided insight into the effects of the negative intellectual stereotype for African Americans. The psychological threat of African American participants being judged in comparison to a negative intellectual racial stereotype depressed their scores relative to Caucasian American participants on difficult verbal tests that were either diagnostic or non-diagnostic (Steele & Aronson, 1995). The experiment conditions designed to alleviate these threats did result in increased scores (Steele & Aronson, 1995). The research on stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995) suggested that for African Americans, the seemingly subtle differences in the testing conditions and associated questionnaires, even the solicitation of racial identification, can impair performance on academic oriented tests. The phenomenon of stereotype threat and its impact on the academic performances of African Americans contributed to the understanding of African American males’ educational experiences.

Gayles (2006) investigated the role stereotype threat played over an extended period of time on African American high school students’ educational experiences. Whereas, the
research of Steele & Aronson (1995) on stereotype threat was based on test scores, Gayles (2006) investigated the long term effects of stereotype threat on the academic efforts of five high achieving African American males in their senior year of high school. This research explored a new context for the experience of stereotype threat: two different types of high schools. Gayles (2006) also explored the effect of stereotype threat differently; it was not focused not on immediate test performance, but rather the lasting effect on African American students’ educational experiences.

A purposive sample of five participants were selected for the exploratory case studies using five criteria: senior African American males, top 10% of their class, non-mobile (enrolled at same high school all four years), not a participant in magnet programming, and home-school continuity-defined by the researcher as attending a non-affluent school and living in a non-affluent home (Gayles, 2006). The participants came from two different high schools on different ends of the socio-economic scale in a large city in Florida: BHS was a non-affluent school and EHS was an affluent school. Gayles (2006) defined affluence and non-influence using a complex formula using data from the 2000 United States Census that considered median household income, and rates of free or reduced lunch, and African Americans’ per capita income, among others (Gayles, 2006). Data were collected through unstructured participant interviews and observations. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed to identify emergent themes (Gayles, 2006). Contrasting evidence was sought before confirming and presenting the results. Findings (Gayles, 2006) suggested that socioeconomic status of the high school and its community had an effect on the participants’ perceptions of stereotype threat.
Gayles (2006) suggested participants in the non-affluent school experienced lives that were racialized. Three participants from the non-affluent school perceived negative racial stereotypes for African Americans as stated by one participant: “Basically, when people think of academic achievement and Black people, they think of failure because most Black people don’t succeed like White people” (Gayles, 2006, p. 23). The BHS participants’ daily experiences of home, community, and school made them aware of their place on the socioeconomic scale. The participants in the non-affluent school believed African Americans were at a disadvantage because of a continued racism against African Americans, whereas the affluent school participants did not hold this belief to the same degree (Gayles, 2006). The non-affluent participants regularly experienced many aspects of the negative racial stereotype. Therefore, participants from the non-affluent school were unavoidably associated with these stereotypes, including an association to them made by others in school, and out of school (Gayles, 2006). The negative racial African American stereotypes were perceived by the participants as addressing them. The researcher reported the participants felt “the stereotypes were about ‘Us’ and this ‘angered’ them seriously” (Gayles, 2006, p. 25).

Because participants in the non-affluent school possessed awareness of a negative stereotype for African Americans and possessed a strong sense of identifying as an African Americans, the stereotype threat was made salient. Data suggested the participants from BHS were strongly motivated to disprove and break stereotype threat. Gayles (2006) reported participants from BHS had motivation to succeed because they we exhausted by the negative stereotyped image of African Americans as unable or unwilling to succeed. The threat of confirming an image of African Americans as uneducated and stigmatized helped create in the non-affluent participants a high degree of agency and determination to succeed.
in school and in their lives. Stereotype threat was not found to match with Steel and Aronson’s (1995) finding that stereotype threat depressed the academic performances of African Americans.

Gayles (2006) suggested participants in the affluent school (EHS) experienced race differently than the participants in the non-affluent school. Participants from the EHS failed to perceive racial influences in their school experiences and they rarely referred to the African American race during the study. The participants in the affluent school characterized their school as safe, excellent, and implied it was mostly a White institution (Gayles, 2006). The affluent school offered the participants a de-racialized experience. While in school they perceived themselves, and felt perceived by others not as members of a racial group, but as individuals. Gayles (2006) reported the participants’ supposition led the participants to create a dichotomous relationship between them and their school experiences and the other school (BHS) and its poor minority students (Gayles 2006). The participants in the affluent school perceived themselves as an exception in many ways to the African American experience. Although, in their lives out of school, “Blackness as a fixed biological identity … [was] most certainly not optional” (Gayles, 2006, p. 23).

In the affluent participants’ activities outside of school, their African American status was a central reference marker for them and they often chose to spend time with their African American friends, however their identity remained distant from the racial category of African American. Affluent participants were reported as having friendships across racial lines and having many experiences where race was not an issue. The negative stereotypes of African Americans did not apply to participants from the affluent school because their lives were not in that other [added by author] school, community, or group that demonstrated many aspects
of the stereotyped African American (Gayles, 2006). “So in terms of stereotype threat, stereotypes about Blacks, especially school-based stereotypes do not apply to them because in school, they do not primarily regard themselves, nor do they believe they are primarily regarded as, racialized or Black” (Gayles, 2006, p.27).

The findings of Gayles (2006) suggested stereotype threat did not affect the academic achievement of African American participants who did not acknowledge the presence of a negative African American stereotype and also by participants who recognized and worked to refute the claim made by the negative stereotype. The participants from BHS experienced stereotype threat, however rather than experiencing a decrease in their academic performance, achieved through their own determination high levels of academic achievement. Gayles (2006) suggested that ignoring stereotypes empowered the participants. Thus, Gayles (2006) recommended schools need to develop opportunities to openly discuss and dissect stereotypes as a way to help students assess their situations and respond with actions that bring their best interests to fruition. The suggestion to develop school practices that respond to cultural needs of students as a way to help African American students achieve academically, has been the focus of important research (Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Tatum 1992).

**Culturally Relevant Teaching**

“Culturally relevant teaching” as a theme of the literature is addressed in this section as it relates to the themes and significance of the present study. In the highly acclaimed book, *Dreamkeepers*, Gloria Ladson Billings used the term “Culturally relevant teaching” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 17) to describe pedagogy that successfully empowers African American students to grow academically, socially, emotionally, and politically by using
cultural referents (Ladson-Billings, 1994). *Dreamkeepers* reported on the author’s case studies of eight successful teachers of African American students in a city of Northern California.

The participants were selected based on the nominations of parents of African American students in an elementary school. The parents were asked to provide names’ of teachers the parents perceived to be effective for their children. “Effective” was considered by the parents to include good grades, scores on standardized test, and importantly, helped their children maintain a positive regard for their culture (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Parents nominated 17 teachers. Then, the school principals where these 17 educators worked were asked to nominate educators they considered to be “Effective” teachers of African American children, as defined by the same criteria the parents used, plus two more: classroom management skills and attendance rates. The principles provided names of 22 classroom leaders. Through cross checking both lists of names, the researcher identified nine teachers nominated by both groups. Eight of these nine teachers agreed to participate in the study. Of the participants, 3 were Caucasian American and 5 were African American and all had taught more than 10 years.

Data were collected through interviews and follow-up interviews, which were recorded, transcribed, member checked, and hand coded for themes. Following the interviews, a group meeting of the participants provided them the opportunity to collectively discuss the work they did as teachers. The participants also agreed to videotape their teaching so that the group could watch and discuss each other’s classroom practices. To gain further data and triangulation, the researcher observed the teachers at work for a period of two years. Each participant was observed weekly for one to two hours. Two participants
were observed an additional 20 times to better understand their literacy instruction. Field notes were collected and post-observation conferences were held and recorded, later transcribed. After six months, the researcher videotaped the participants during the observations. Showing these videotapes was part of the 12 group meetings held over the course of the study in which participants met to discuss and analyze teaching practices. Eventually, the participants were able to identify and establish a model of best teaching practices that helped all students succeed. To confirm this model, the researcher created a questionnaire with a Likert scale that asked participants to respond to statements about culturally relevant teaching and assimilationist teaching practices (Ladson-Billings, 1994). All participants scored high on the culturally relevant teaching aspect of the scale.

Ladson-Billings’ (1994) data analysis revealed a theme related to the participants’ conception of self and others. This finding suggested the participants had a high self-regard and valued the profession of teaching. There were numerous instances where this self-concept and professional esteem was evidenced. The researcher posited this self-conception carried over to the high expectations they had of themselves and their students, and was a source for continued professional growth. The participants’ perceptions of African American students was not based on the historical past of African Americans or based on a concept of color-blindness, but rather incorporated an appreciation for each student’s individual differences and included their race. The researcher suggested, “If teachers pretend not to see students’ racial and ethnic differences, they really do not see the students at all and are limited to meet their educational needs” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 33). One component of culturally relevant teaching included the premise of teachers holding themselves in high personal regard and respecting each student as an individual with a set of unique traits.
Ladson-Billings (1994) suggested participants perceived themselves as a part of the schools’ community. The participants reported their teaching was part of their care for the community and saw their work as a way to give back to the community that many lived in or felt connected to in some way. Through various activities in the community, the participants were able to interact with their students and students’ families in environments beyond the typical school day. These activities often served as positive experiences that helped bring the school and community members closer. Additionally, the participants emphasized a sense of community in their classrooms, which meant they stressed students cared for each other. This theme was anchored by the participants’ dedication to teaching and to the community. The participants were not there to gain experience and move on, nor did they perceive themselves as stuck. In contrast, the participants loved what they did, where they did it, and saw it as their personal mission (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Ladson-Billings (1994) suggested participant’s perceived unlimited potential for all students. The researcher suggested the participants’ beliefs contrasted with an attitude often held by teachers that included an expectation of status quo and its implication that some students will fail (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Data including classroom organization, classroom management, and energetic and caring instruction suggested the participants maintained high expectations for all of their students. Ladson-Billings (1994) suggested the participants’ culturally relevant teaching practices were founded upon an optimistic mindset.

Another finding of Ladson-Billings (1994) included the theme of “Community, national, and global identities” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 49). This finding further explained the participants’ value in acknowledging their students’ racial and ethnic identities. Data suggested the participants consciously connected lessons to student identity in the greater
community, nation, or planet. The participants worked to affirm the students’ attributes as well as show their interrelatedness to all life. In numerous ways the participants stretched the curriculum and helped make it relevant for the students. Data also suggested these participants perceived their students possessed knowledge that was connected to the curriculum and made efforts to find it. Ladson-Billings (1994) contrasted this approach with that of some teachers who perceive students as empty vessels. The participants’ views of students helped build a culture in their classrooms that empowered the students and respected them as learners.

Ladson-Billings (1994) suggested culturally relevant teachers structured social interactions with their students to emphasize respect and an affirmation of the students’ best self. The participants’ were effective in establishing relationships and practices that valued the students’ culture and helped the students bridge the dominant culture. The culturally relevant teachers were found to be effective because they believed they were part of the classroom community and could make a positive impact on the level of collaboration in the classroom. The message that success often requires collaboration and cooperation was communicated in their classrooms. Students were made to feel as valued members of a group that encouraged and nurtured academic success for all of its members. The participants’ attitudes, expectations, and supportive care helped make them especially powerful teachers for African American students.

Ladson-Billings (1994) suggested participant’s perceived the school curriculum as an opportunity to affirm students’ experiences and knowledge as well as, extend their knowledge of the dominant society and its views. The participants’ teaching practices involved the students in the process of creating knowledge. Students were taught to be
critical processors of knowledge and learned to make connections that were respectful of their differences.

Lastly, Ladson-Billings (1994) reported overarching tenets of instruction that were common among the participants and representative of an ideology about teaching students who are most vulnerable. The participants counteracted the perception that African American boys were outcasts by providing models of successful African American males and helped their students view themselves as academically successful. The participants embedded instruction within related and broad contexts that made learning relevant and interconnected. The participants’ worked to connect student experiences to the texts of the classroom and used this connection to make the texts relevant to the students’ lives. The participants allowed their students to ask their own questions, they were not confined by the curriculum and allowed the complexity of knowledge to unfold. The participants worked collaboratively with students in striving to break from racial patterns of low achievement and maintained high expectations. Participants were aware of their political presence in the lives of their students and used it to help students work away from a cultural deficit model and towards cultural excellence as a method to create better lived experiences for all (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Ladson-Billings (1994) suggested the findings explained the participants’ proven teaching practices that were critical to ensuring African American students’ emotional, political, and academic growth. She recommended that participants’ collective wisdom needs to find its way into teacher education programs so that all students can achieve academic excellence.
Milner (2011) used a case study approach to investigate a Caucasian American science teacher’s process of culturally relevant teaching in a middle school classroom located in a southeastern city. The school received Title I funds, extra federal money to provide instruction for students. The school’s student body was 59% African American, 6% Hispanic, 32% Caucasian American, 3% Asian American, and less than 1% American Indian. Of the 27 faculty members of the school, 45% were African American and 55% were Caucasian American. The setting was selected because it was regarded by many community members as one of the better schools in the city. The researcher stressed the school’s attributes as clean, safe, and managed with effective systems. The teacher, Mr. Hall (a pseudonym) was previously selected as a Teacher of the Year and was still relatively new to the teaching profession (less than five years).

To deepen the understanding of how a Caucasian American teacher developed cultural competence in his students, Milner (2011) spent two years observing and interviewing Mr. Hall. Some interviews were semi-structured, recorded and transcribed, while others were informal, without recording or transcription. Multiple informal interviews were recorded in field notes. Additional field notes were taken by the researcher to record his observations and experiences as a non-participant and participant observer during the two years he spent studying Mr. Hall’s teaching practices (Milner, 2011). Data were hand analyzed and coded to identify thematic categories. Triangulation was secured by using the multiple data sources: interviews, Mr. Hall’s pedagogy, and his students’ behavior and work (Milner, 2011).

Milner’s (2011) analysis of data found a theme of supportive relationships. Mr. Hall was observed to be caring and responsive to students’ individual needs. He did not believe in
a “one size fits all approach to teaching and learning because he had developed some deep knowledge of the students” (Milner, 2011, p. 78). Mr. Hall’s supportive disposition was attributed to his belief that his students deserved second chances and to be treated with dignity. He believed that students’ mistakes should not affect the student-teacher relationship; each day was a new opportunity to learn and grow. Furthermore, this successful teacher of mostly African American students perceived his students, “like his family” (Milner, 2011, p. 85). This belief was a reflection of Mr. Hall’s commitment to support his students. In essence, Mr. Hall held his students to high standards and never gave up on them. This did not mean, “Students took him for granted or saw him as weak … the students realized Mr. Hall was not going to allow them to quit or give up” (Milner, 2011, p. 78). His nurturing demeanor and optimistic view of students shaped his pedagogy and had a positive effect on his students (Milner, 2011).

Milner’s (2011) analysis of data revealed a theme of race. Mr. Hall was often reminded by his students that his Caucasian American status did not match his students’ race. This difference between races often allowed the teacher and students to address issues of race that were present in the urban context of the school. Together, in the journey the students and teacher took to get to know each other, understanding about racial differences deepened (Milner, 2011). Mr. Hall learned that ignoring the issue of race was not productive to creating effective relationships with his students. Together they learned from each other different aspects of identity. For Mr. Hall, it was through sharing about his children, wife, or experiences as a brother that helped his students see him as a human who had multiple identities. For the students, it was their experiences in an urban neighborhood or playing sports they shared with their teacher that communicated different aspects of their identities.
Mr. Hall acknowledged and engaged the importance of identity and race with his students which served as a bridge in terms of building relationships with them (Milner, 2011). Milner’s (2011) analysis of data revealed a theme of community. “He [Mr. Hall] was able to develop and sustain strong family-like and community relationships in the larger school community in other ways as well” (Milner, 2011, p. 86). Mr. Hall found opportunities to help other teachers and to get to know other students, especially younger ones. These relationships throughout the building strengthened his reputation as a committed and active agent for positive school behaviors. Evident in this finding was Mr. Hall’s belief that the school was actually one interconnected community that must work together to make a difference in the lives of the students (Milner, 2011).

Milner’s (2011) analysis of the data found a theme of cultural competence. The finding suggested Mr. Hall was successful in helping students develop their cultural identities while gaining new academic competencies. His students were not confronted with losing their “cool” status or with a burden of acting White in striving to achieve academically. Ladson Billings (1995) described cultural competence as a part of culturally relevant teaching that helps students “maintain their cultural integrity while succeeding academically” (p. 476). Milner (2011) cited evidence that included Hall’s “meaningful and authentic” (p. 76) relationships with his students as proof of his ability to affirm their identity while expecting and nurturing academic achievement. The data suggested Mr. Hall understood his students had “multiple layers of identity” (Milner, 2011, p. 76) and helped his students understand them. Mr. Hall addressed issues of race and used them as opportunities to build cultural competence. The researcher reported the teacher considered learning a “community affair” that served to build an exchange of respect and learning between him and his students.
Milner, 2011, p. 76). These aspects of Mr. Hall’s pedagogy, beliefs, and attitudes were culturally relevant to his diverse students and positively impacted his students’ academic achievement, well-being, and the school as a whole (Milner, 2011).

Researchers (Ladson Billings, 1994; Milner, 2011) suggested culturally relevant teaching as one way teachers and schools as a whole might positively impact the educational experiences African American male students. Researchers have known for some time that schools as a whole provide physical, intellectual, social, and emotional environments that impact students (Dewey, 1916). The concepts of culture and climate of schools have been recognized as overlapping by scholars (Miner 1995). The National School Climate Research Center (NSCRC) (2012) stated: “School climate is based on patterns of people’s experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures” (NSCRC, 2012, p. 2).

School Climate

This section of the literature review is related to the theme of “school climate.” The National Center for Disease Control (2014) recognized healthy school climates decrease at risk behaviors such as tobacco use, alcohol abuse, violence, and gang involvement. Research (MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009) indicated healthy school climates are positively correlated with academic achievement. The benefits of a positive school climate are numerous and include students’ preparation for active citizenry in democratic societies, students and staff feeling respected and connected to each other with a common purpose, as well as many other factors related to higher academic achievement (NSCRC, 2012, p. 4). Researchers (Kreft, 1993; Tucker, Dixon, & Griddine, 2010) have begun to analyze and measure various components of school climate to learn what can be done to improve the educational outcomes
for all students, but especially African Americans and other minority groups. Most researchers agree that school climate is multifaceted and has four dimensions: Safety (physical and social-emotional); Relationships (respect for diversity; school connectedness; social support for personnel and peers); Teaching and Learning; and the Physical Environment (schoolclimate.org).

School climate impacts all students and was recognized to be critical support for at-risk populations, including African American males (schoolclimate.org). Schools that provide a climate that promotes and values all of its students are best situated to have students who engage in academic and extracurricular activities that serve their intellectual and social-emotional development. The National School Climate Research Center (2012) recognized a “Safe, caring, participatory, and responsive school climate tends to foster greater attachment belonging to school, as well as, provide the optimal foundation for social, emotional and academic learning” (p. 2). When school personnel exert efforts that result in students feeling they matter and belong to the school community, the foundation is laid for the best educational outcomes.

Tucker, Dixon, and Griddine (2010) investigated a critical component of school climate, students’ experiences of belonging. The phenomenological study (Tucker et al., 2010) included nine African American males in their junior year of a small Midwestern high school. The school provided vocational and college preparatory programs for students in 10th-12th grades. Many of the enrolled students had previously performed poorly or failed at another school during their 9th grade year. The school offered small class sizes and pathways to various associate’s degree programs as a way to reach students who were at-risk of dropping out. Racial composition of the student body was 47% Caucasian American, 37%
African American, 10% Hispanic, 5% Asian, multiracial, or Native American; 48% of students qualified for free or reduced lunch.

The study focused on nine African American males who were juniors and had GPAs of at least 2.0. The participants varied socioeconomically, by family composition, and by educational level of parents. Data were first collected through individual interviews with each participant that typically lasted about one hour. Then, one large focus group, lasting about two hours was organized in order for the participants to discuss experiences of “mattering” to others at their school (Tucker et al., 2010). The focus group examined specific persons at the school who mattered to the participants and who the participants reported mattered to them. The researcher also investigated the participants’ perceptions of how these people impacted the participants’ academic success. All interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were reviewed by participants to ensure accuracy.

Tucker et al. (2010) analyzed data using transcendental phenomenology. Three stages of transcendental phenomenology were employed: phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of meanings and essences (Tucker et al., 2010). An audit trail was created and member checking was used to strengthen the dependability of the findings (Tucker et al., 2010).

Tucker et al. (2010) first performed a textural analysis of the data as a way to summarize the participants’ voices (Tucker, Dixon, & Griddine, 2010). Secondly, the researchers analyzed for a structural description of the participants’ lived experiences (Tucker et al., 2010). The “Composite textural description” (p. 8) of the participants’ perceptions of the school provided a comparison of the difference between the new school
and the previous high school. All participants attended other traditional high schools as freshman where they experienced school personnel who participants perceived as disconnected from the participants’ well-being. At the participants’ current school, school personnel were perceived to be sincerely concerned about the participants’ well-being (Tucker et al., 2010). This feeling was related to the participants’ valuing the small size of their school. The participants reported that it was easier to get know administrators and school counselors because the school had fewer students than their previous schools. The participants also perceived less negative peer pressure at this school than at their previous schools. The smaller class sizes promoted positive influences among the participants and their peers.

An additional finding reported by Tucker et al. (2010) suggested the participants perceived school personnel in their current school held high expectations for the participants’ academic success. Additionally most participants had key adults in their lives who expected the participants to achieve success in high school. Together, the expectations of school personnel and family members created an environment where the participants experienced pressure to do well in school (Tucker et al., 2010). Participants who did not report having academic support from home, instead reported they held high expectations of themselves that helped them achieve academic success. The high expectations were related to the participants’ beliefs that an education was critical to live a life that was not subjected to poverty. These participants compared their prior experiences in other schools with many students who were distracted by chaotic home or social lives. At the participants’ current school, they were positively influenced by the many students who were focused on future
goals. The positive peer relationships at their current school were part of the participants’ experiences of mattering to others (Tucker et al., 2010).

A “Composite Structural Description” was used to report that the school climate helped participants feel protected and nurtured (Tucker et al., 2010, p. 9). School personnel were perceived with endearment by some participants and referenced with familial positions, such as, “school mom” (Tucker et al., 2010, p. 9). There was a high level of support and care experienced by the participants at the current school. The participants perceived care included encouragement and being listened to. “The school climate achieve[d] a balance between freedom and responsibility” that participants perceived was an important factor of their success (Tucker et al., 2010, p. 10). Although some participants perceived themselves as atypical, they still felt they mattered at school. Connections with school personnel were effective in communicating to these participants that they were valued. The available supports made the participants more able to preserve and hold the belief their futures were their own responsibility (Tucker et al., 2010). There was a theme of self-efficacy and support that helped manage the pressure participants experienced at times. Most participants mentioned feeling as if they were role models for younger siblings or students which helped them at times to stay on a positive path (Tucker et al., 2010).

The synthesis statement of Tucker et al. (2010) posited that the participant’s experiences of being valued by others at school, including peers and personnel, and by family members helped them develop and maintain aspirations for academic success. Participants experienced the feeling they mattered to others which contributed to the participants’ self-efficacy and self-confidence. A critical component of school climate, the feeling of
mattering to others, was suggested by Tucker et al. (2010) as the building block for the participants’ desire to productively engage in school.

**Self-efficacy**

This section addresses self-efficacy as it intersects with the present study. Self-efficacy in various forms has been suggested by researchers as an important component in the educational experiences of high school students (Bandura, 2001; Caprara et al., 2008). Self-efficacy affects an individual’s choices, efforts, and willingness to complete tasks (Bandura, 1977). Bandura's early concept of self-efficacy (1977) led to the understanding of academic self-efficacy which can be defined as an individual’s belief in his ability to meet the requirements of his academic challenges. Further research suggested self-regulation is strongly positively correlated with high school students’ academic achievement (Caprara et al., 2008). Because of differences between Caucasian American and African American cultures, some researchers have examined self-efficacy with samples of only African American participants to better understand factors related to academic self-efficacy of African American male students (Alliman-Brissett, Turner, & Skovholt, 2004; Metofe, Gardnier, Walker, & Wedlow, 2014).

Alliman-Brissett, Turner, and Skovholt, (2004) investigated the relationships between African American parents’ communication of self-efficacy information with their children’s self-efficacy to strive towards educational and career goals. Measurement of the parents’ information matched the four dimensions of self-efficacy information in Bandura’s theory (1977): career planning and exploration, knowledge of self and others, career decision making, and school to-career transitions.
The research of Alliman-Brissett, Turner, and Skovholt, (2004) involved 162 African American 8th grade students (81 males, 81 females) who attended one large public school in a major metropolitan area. School demographics included approximately 50% of students lived at or below the poverty level, and approximately 50% lived at middle-income level (Alliman-Brissett et al., 2004).

Data were collected during the regular school day as part of their class curriculum. Instruments included a demographic form and two questionnaires. Participants were asked to consider how their families, whether it was one or both parents, foster parents, or extended family supported the participants while they completed the questionnaires (Alliman-Brissett et al., 2004). Each participant received a copy of the summary report of their survey results. To measure the parent support, researchers had all participants completed four subscales of the Career-Related Parent Support Scale (CRPS; Turner, Alliman-Brissett, Lapan, Udipi, & Ergun, 2003). Participants completed the Instrumental Assistance (IA) subscale with a Cronbach’s Alpha of .71, which measured the participants’ perceived parental support of the participants’ performance accomplishments that connect to career related skills (Alliman-Brissett et al., 2004). Next, participants completed the Career Related Modeling (CM) subscale reported to have a Cronbach’s alpha of .78 for girls and .80 for boys. This subscale measured the participants’ perception of their parental modeling of career related behaviors. Then, participants completed the Emotional Support (ES) subscale, with a Cronbach’s Alpha of .83 for girls and .85 for boys, which measured the participants’ perceived social and emotional support from their parents as related to the participants’ academic and career growth. Finally, students completed the Verbal Encouragement (VE) subscale reported to have a Cronbach’s Alpha of .77 for girls and .65 for boys, which measured the participants’
perception of their parent’s praise and encouragement for the participants’ striving towards academic and career goals.

To assess the participants’ educational and vocational development, they completed an additional five subscales from the Missouri Comprehensive Guidance Survey (MCGS; Gysbers, Multon, Lapan, & Lukin, 1992) reported to have a Cronbach’s Alpha values from .71 to .96. The Career Planning and Self-Exploration Self-Efficacy Scale (CPEE) subscale measured the participants’ efficacy for educational and vocational development competencies (Alliman-Brissett et al., 2004). The subscale, Knowledge of Self and Others Scale (KSOS) attained a Cronbach’s Alpha of .96 for both girls and boys. This scale measured the participants’ efficacy to know themselves and others in educational and career contexts (Alliman-Brissett et al., 2004). The Educational and Vocational Development Self-Efficacy (EVDSE) subscale was reported to have a Cronbach’s Alpha of .95 for girls, and .92 for boys and measured adolescents’ school to career transition efficacy (SCTE). This subscale assessed the participants’ confidence in understanding the relationship between education and work (Alliman-Brissett et al., 2004).

Additionally two subscales from the Middle School Self-Efficacy Scales (MSSE; Fouad et al., 1997) were completed by the students. The Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy subscale (CDMSE) with a Cronbach’s Alpha of .64 for girls, and .90 for boys was designed to measure the participants’ career decision making self-efficacy. The Career Decision-Making Outcomes Expectations (CDMOE) subscale was reported to have a Cronbach’s Alpha of .89 for girls and .90 for boys. This subscale was designed to measure the participants’ positive outcome expectancies when engaging in career decision making and (Alliman-Brissett et al., 2004).
Results from the statistical analysis of the data were reported separately for each gender. Only the results for the male participants are reported here. Stepwise Regression Analyses with the four parent support variables placed as the independent variables and each of the self-efficacy and outcome expectancies scales were the dependent variables (Alliman-Brissett et al., 2004).

The parents’ Career Related Modeling predicted the male participants’ Career Planning and Exploration Efficacy \((F = 5.35, p = < .037)\), the participants’ Career Decision Efficacy \((F= 23.78, p < .011)\) and their Career Decision-making Outcome Expectations \((F = 18.00, p < .011)\) and the participants’ school to career Transitions Efficacy \((F = 6.22, p < .022)\) (Alliman-Brissett et al., 2004). The participants’ knowledge of self and others efficacy was predicted by the parents’ Career Related modeling, their Instrumental Assistance, and their Emotional Support, \((F = .19.95, p < .022)\) (Alliman-Brissett et al., 2004). A one-way ANOVA indicated no significant differences between boys and girls on their perceptions of their parents providing the four supports (IA, CM, ES, VE).

Regarding African American males, Alliman-Brissett et al. (2004) reported that 25% of the variance in these students’ confidence to engage in career planning and exploration, 29% of the variance in their confidence to transition from school to career, 56% of the variance in their confidence to engage in career decision-making, and 49% of the variance in their positive career decision making expectations were predicted by their parents’ career related modeling in a stepwise regression analysis (Alliman-Brissett et al., 2004). Further, the participants’ parents’ career related modeling predicted 82% of the variance in the participants’ confidence to know themselves and others (accounted for 57% of the variance), their parents’ instrumental assistance as the participants developed career related skills.
accounted for 11% of the variance, parental emotional support as the participants learned about themselves accounted for 14% of the variance. The parents’ career related modeling was either the only or the primary predictor for the male participants’ efficacy and outcome expectations (Alliman-Brissett et al., 2004).

The findings of Alliman-Brissett et al. (2004) supported three of the four sources of self-efficacy as suggested by Bandura 1977, instrumental assistance (IA) career related modeling (CM) and emotional support (ES) while parental verbal encouragement (VE) did not predict male participants’ self-efficacy or outcome expectations. These findings strengthened the supposition that having positive and supportive adult role models in African American males’ lives improves their self-efficacy in education and career development (Alliman-Brissett et al., 2004).

Uwah, McMahon, and Furlow (2008) investigated the relationship between students’ perceptions of mattering to others and belonging, educational aspirations, and academic self-efficacy. Participants included 40 African American males in 9th or 10th grades enrolled in a small public high school with about 95% of the student body of African American race. The high school, located in a large southeastern city was designed to foster a strong sense of school community and had been open for only two years (Uwah, McMahon, & Furlow, 2008). During a three-week period, participants completed a series of questionnaires and surveys related to the variables under study.

Uwah et al. (2008) utilized a demographic questionnaire to collect information about participants’ history and family. The researchers measured participants’ educational aspirations with the question, “What is the highest degree you expect to earn?” with response categories ranging from (1) high school to (5) doctoral degree, and an open-ended category
of other with space to explaining alternative options (Uwah et al., 2008). The Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (Goodenow, 1993) measured the participants’ sense of school membership, Cronbach’s Alpha was .81.

Utilizing literature on the topic, researchers developed three subscales to measure school belonging: Perceived Likeness and Inclusion (PLI) measured the extent participants perceived they were liked by school peers and personnel; Feeling Encouraged to Participate (FEP) measured the extent to which participants perceived they received recognition for their strengths and were requested to participate in activities; General Feelings of Belonging (GFB) measured the participants’ perceptions of school belonging and feeling welcomed as member of the school community (Uwah et al., 2008). The researchers gained content validity for the three subscales by asking recognized experts to assign each item to its appropriate scale; inter-rater reliability was 100%, and Cronbach’s Alpha ranged from .63 to .76 (Uwah et al., 2008).

Uwah et al. (2008) asked participants to complete The Academic Self-Efficacy Scale (ASES) which was adapted from the School Ability Self-Concept Index (Bachamn, 1970). This instrument was previously used with other research (Johnson-Reid et al., 2005), and secured a Cronbach’s Alpha of .74 in this study (Uwah et al., 2008).

Using SPSS 14.0, demographic variables were calculated: 10% of the participants expected to earn at most, a high school diploma, 7.5% of the participants hoped to earn a Bachelor’s degree, 60% desired to earn a Master’s degree, and 22.5% aimed to earn a Doctoral degree (Uwah et al, 2008). Descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients were calculated for all scales and subscales indicating these participants held a moderate degree of
school belonging and generally high perception of their academic self-efficacy (Uwah et al., 2008).

Correlations between all variables indicated the PSSM scale, the GFB subscale, and the PLI subscale were not significantly correlated with academic self-efficacy (Uwah et al., 2008). However, Academic Self-Efficacy and Feeling Encourage to Participate were significantly related ($r[38] = .42, p < .001$), and Academic Self-Efficacy and Educational Aspirations were significantly related ($r[38] = .39, p < .05$).

Multiple regression modeling using educational aspirations, PLI, FEP, and GFB predicted Academic Self-Efficacy scores (Uwah et al., 2008). The regression equation was significant $F(4, 35) = 3.38, p < .05$, adjusted $r^2 = .196$, medium effect size, and explained a portion of the variance in academic self-efficacy. The two predictors, the FEP scale ($B = .39, p < .05$) and educational aspirations ($B = .33, p < .05$) significantly predicted academic self-efficacy.

The research of Uwah et al. (2008) suggested that an overall general feeling of belonging to school was not positively related to the participants’ academic self-efficacy. However, the findings indicated Feeling Encouraged to Participate was significantly predictive of self-efficacy scores. The data suggested the most powerful aspect of school belonging was the participants’ perception that they were directly invited to participate in school activities (Uwah et al., 2008). Although other aspects of school belonging may be valued by the participants, those aspects did not influence academic self-efficacy within in this study. The findings of Uwah et al. (2008) supported other research (Booker, 2004) which suggested when students interacted with school personnel that motivated and
encouraged them to stay after school or participate in activities, the students’ sense of school belonging increased.

The findings of Uwah et al. (2008) indicated educational aspirations were significantly predictive of academic self-efficacy, suggesting that the level of education the participants desired to attain predicts their sense of academic competence. The researchers suggested that African American males may benefit from participation in activities and a career guidance program that works to develop and enhance students’ career aspirations, thus positively impacting their academic self-efficacy (Uwah et al., 2008).

**Conclusion**

The search for relevant literature provided different paradigms of the African American male student experience: (a) African American students’ interpretations of culture led them to hold an oppositional culture that placed academic achievement in opposition to their status as African Americans (Diamond et al., 2007; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Tyson et al., 2005), (b) African American students’ identity and awareness of negative stereotyped images for African Americans played a role in their educational experiences and achievement (Cokley et al., 2011; Gayles, 2006; Howard, 2008; Spencer et al., 2001; Steel & Aronson 1995), (c) African American males’ academic success is related to their self-efficacy and the school climate (Alliman-Brissett et al., 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Milner, 2011; Tucker et al., 2010; Uwah et al., 2008) This study seeks to add to the body of literature related to this topic and was not an attempt to discredit or isolate the previous studies. The related literature served as only as grounding for theoretical insight into the emerging research. “Potential theoretical sensitivity is lost when the sociologist commits himself exclusively to one specific preconceived theory” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 46). In addition to knowledge of related
literature, the researcher’s 16 years of experience teaching African American male high school students aided the researcher in sensitivity and awareness to the participants’ experiences, responses, and information collected in this study.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This researcher explored the academic experiences of African American male secondary school students. This chapter reports the methodology used to investigate this topic and is organized into the following sections: (a) researcher biography, (b) ethics statement, (c) setting, (d) participants, (e) research design, (f) research questions, (g) instrumentation, (h) data collection, (j) data analysis, (k) coding, (l) timeline, and (m) trustworthiness.

Researcher Biography

The researcher is a 16-year veteran special education teacher with diverse professional experiences that include working in public middle and high schools in some of the nation’s poorest and richest neighborhoods. He also worked in alternative schools that served the students deemed unsuccessful, or expelled from their home districts. His diverse teaching experiences provide him with knowledge of a broad range of high schools and students. These teaching experiences have helped him develop sensitivity to the nuances of social environments and student experiences in schools. He is currently a faculty member in his seventh year in the same high school where the study was conducted.

The researcher attempted to remain unbiased and withhold judgment while conducting this research. He utilized a reflexive journal to expose his inner dialogue to himself and expose any judgment that may have been accumulating through the research process, to question its veracity and suspend its impact on analysis. Reflexive journals are recognized as a cathartic tool and a means to build trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Although three former students participated in the study, those relationships were not actively maintained following the time they were enrolled in his classes; thus, no participant
was a student of the researcher and the researcher had no supervisory capacities with participants. The researcher’s investigation into the perceptions and educational experiences of former student participants was similar to the other participants, requiring the researcher’s full attention to learn of their perceptions and educational experiences. Personal reflections, ongoing peer and advisor discussions, copious and layered coding and the use of an audit trail helped to prevent the invasion of prejudice that can impede the dependability of research.

The purpose for this research was to explore the educational experiences and perceptions of African American male juniors and seniors in a diverse urban high school. This research was undertaken to help school personnel, families, and researchers better understand the perceptions and educational experiences of adolescent African American males in this setting.

**Statement of Ethics**

In December of 2013, a proposal for this research was submitted and approved by the Institutional Review Board of the university. Permission from the district superintendent and school principal of the study’s setting was gained in February of 2014 (see Appendix A and B). An invitation, describing the research, the requirements of its participants, and the rights of withdrawal was made to all potential participants in February of 2014.

Written assent was granted by all participants and their families’ written consent was granted. All participants were assured of their confidentiality, thus the use of pseudonyms were used in place of their names and the school’s name in any report or presentation of the research. All participation was voluntary.
Setting

The research study was conducted within a large (1,529 students) urban high school in the northeast serving grades 9 through 12. The district served its economically and racially diverse students through 12 elementary schools, four middle schools, one small alternative high school, and two large comprehensive high schools. Demographics of the student body of Normal High School (a pseudonym) indicated: 37% qualified for free or reduced price lunch; 10% special education students; 6.4% not fluent in English; 44.4% were Caucasian American; 30.7% were Hispanic; 20.4% African American; Asian American 3.8%; 0.5% two or more races; 0.1% American Indian (CSDE, 2013). The building principal and district superintendent granted permission to conduct this study (see Appendices B and C).

Normal High School, a tan three story high concrete structure stood boldly on top of a small hill in a residential neighborhood. The school was built on this site in the 1970’s. A recent renovation added a three story wing dedicated to science. This newest part of the building shined in a silver metallic siding contrasting with the dreariness of the fading tan concrete structure. Parking spaces and athletic fields surrounded the school on all sides. The field adjacent to the main entrance had a track sandwiched between stadium seating. The school’s campus was simple and seemed to offer the necessary conveniences of ample parking and adequate facilities for high school sports.

The inside of Normal high school was comprised of common materials for schools, likely chosen for their durability and cost. Linoleum lined corridors and fluorescent lights allowed approximately 1,600 students to travel across the long three story building. Pipes and duct work ran along many of the ceilings. In some hallways, the duct work was low
enough that students often took small leaps to slap the ducts as if the ducts were a basketball backboard.

Inside most classrooms, linoleum flooring and fluorescent lighting were in good condition. Classrooms were equipped with new student desks and smart boards, or similar technology was commonly seen. During this research, security guards were observed at highly visible locations throughout the building and were seen exchanging pleasantries with diverse groups of students during passing times. During these passing times, many teachers stood outside of their classrooms, adding another layer of supervision and interaction between school personnel and students. The school’s bustling atmosphere seemed to be a mix of purpose and social activity.

Participants

A purposive sampling method was employed. In purposive sampling, “the researcher selects particular individuals or cases because they will be particularly informative about the topic” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 110). To recruit participants the researcher made a brief introduction of the study in each junior and senior-level English class, explaining its purpose, the commitment required of the voluntary participant, and its requirement of African American self-identity to participate. An invitation letter with participant assent form and family consent forms (see Appendices D and E) were provided to each potential participant who identified as African American. A total of 11 students completed both student assent and family consent forms, one decided against participation due to a conflict beyond his control. All 10 participated for the duration of the study. The academic transcripts were accessed by the researcher to verify the participants’ GPA. The medium achieving students (GPA= 2.0 to 2.9) and high achieving students (GPA ≥3.0) were first to
express an interest and willingness to participate. The participation of lower achieving students required more encouragement and patience from the researcher. Eventually, three participants with low GPAs (<1.90) volunteered to participate and submitted completed consent and assent letters. The GPA values were divided in this manner to resemble other research such as, Diamond, Lewis, & Gordon (2007) that utilized this division of GPA to describe high school students’ achievement levels. Further, the range of GPA characteristic of the participants ensured a rich sample that offered a comprehensive range of student experiences and perspectives related to the phenomenon under study. Pseudonyms are used for reporting. Table 2 provides details of the participants. A brief profile of each participant is provided here.

**Participant Profiles**

**Low achieving participants.**

Pseudonym: River, Junior, GPA 0.8.

River was a lanky 17 year old with energy bubbling through his eyes. He was quick to smile and take everything lightly. He initially avoided responding to my invitation to participate in this study. After his reluctance to participate in this study, he became committed and curious about the research. River seemed to enjoy sharing his insider information.

River stated he grew up in the local district and lived with his mother, a health care worker who had some college education. He had no information about his father. River was enrolled in both low and middle level classes the core subjects. River stated his housemaster placed him into the two higher classes because River was frequently being referred for behavior problems. Also the housemaster told River he could do the more challenging work
in the higher level English and history classes. River stated he went to church occasionally, played in recreational basketball games, but was not involved in any school related activities. River believed his mother wanted him “to get a good education, me to do good.” He reported his aunt had a son about his age and River had recently joined them in a visit to two local colleges. River reported he was presently not in good academic standing and had few options for college beyond the local community college. River recognized he needed to take his academic growth more seriously, if college was going to become a reality for him.

Pseudonym: Darwood, junior, GPA 1.0

Darwood was a soft spoken young man who readily agreed to participate in the study. He required a few reminders to return the required forms but always seemed sincere in agreeing to volunteer. Darwood said he played basketball but did not make the school team. He reported he would like to take cooking classes in the future. Observations of Darwood suggested he had a rich social life.

Darwood reported he had recently returned from a family vacation trip to Disney World. This was his not his first time there. He stated he lived with his mother, a 12 year old sister, and a 5 year old brother. Darwood also stated he had an older brother attending college in North Carolina. Darwood said his mother worked as an accountant and his father drove a truck. Darwood had difficulty envisioning his life after high school but hoped college might be an option in his future. However he realized his low grades would make college acceptance difficult when he stated: “Not with these grades, I’ll stay here [high school] forever.”
Pseudonym: Jah, junior, GPA 1.9

Jah’s status as a former student in my 10\textsuperscript{th} grade English class worked to establish immediate rapport. Jah attended the focus group and met with me twice in interviews. Jah’s parents were divorced. His father lived in another state but was staying in town because Jah’s younger sister would be graduating middle school in a few months. Jah stated that he talked regularly with his father and visits him during school vacations. Jah lived with his mother and younger sister. He liked his neighborhood and wanted to live in a similar one when he grew up.

Jah reported that he did not listen to his mother although he seemed proud that his mother was a graduate of Columbia University and was a well-paid accountant. Jah reported having had a mentor since elementary school and wanted to be successful like him. Jah elaborated that his mentor had a nice family, nice wife, good job, and was a nice person. Jah aspired to attend college, “I definitely want to go to college” but was unclear as to his major. He was currently interested in cooking, business, and computers.

Medium Achieving participants

Pseudonym: Adam, junior, GPA 2.4

Adam was a respectful participant with a serious and intense demeanor. He promptly joined the study and submitted both forms. During our time together, Adam’s intensity carried into his criticism of his own performance on the school varsity football team. Adam was of average height and had a thick powerful body that appeared to make him a good match for the sport. During the focus group, Adam participated actively and was respectful of his peers. Adam was not interested in pursuing other sports and instead wanted to find part-time employment afterschool.
Adam’s parents divorced when he was in middle school. Adam related how he did not have a positive relationship with his father, who lives in town with a girlfriend. At the time of this interview, Adam lived alone with his mother who worked as a home nurse aid. According to Adam, his mother’s job required she work many hours and to sleep out on most nights. Adam stayed in touch with his mother through a cell phone. He seemed to respect his mother and desired to please her. He was mindful of curfews set by his mother and also cognizant of her desires to keep the heat and electric bills as low as possible. He said his mother wanted him to go to college: “she doesn’t want me to end up like her, like living in our neighborhood. Who wants their kids to grow up and live in the projects?” He had similar sentiments: “I always wanted to go to college to make a better life for myself.”

Pseudonym: Izzy, senior, GPA 2.6

Izzy was an active participant in the ROTC program. He was on its drill team and often volunteered with many of the program’s community service projects. During our time together, Izzy’s pride in being a participant in the ROTC program became quite clear. Izzy’s relationships with the ROTC instructors added a significant rich dimension to his high school experience. Izzy enjoyed most of his classes but found math especially rewarding. He aspired to further his math skills in the military or as engineering major in college.

Izzy lived with his mother and two sisters. Izzy stated one of his sisters was attending the local community college and the other had dropped out from the same college after gaining full-time work with a parcel service company. His parents were divorced and his father lived in New York City. Izzy did not know about his father’s education and reported his mother attended two years of college. Izzy felt his mother helped motivate him to aspire to go to
college: “she convinced if I get good grades and go to college and do what I am supposed to, I can achieve.”

Participant: JC, senior, GPA 2.3

My familiarity with Caz as a former student in Sophomore English helped in establishing his trust for this research. Caz had an easy going and respectful demeanor. Observations of him and the information he shared suggested he enjoyed intimate relationships with a few friends at school. Caz participated with the wrestling team and during the off-season, he spent most afternoons in the weight room.

Although Caz self-identified as African American, he later spoke about his Haitian heritage and the experiences associated with it. Caz reported he had an older brother in college, a younger sister, and lived with his mother who worked in health care. He had no information about his father. During the participant interview, Caz shared how his mother wanted to become a nurse: “back in Haiti, she didn’t finish school and had to come here [US] and find a job. Now as a parent she doesn’t want to see me go through the same thing.” Caz said he was interested in the field of nursing and aspired to become an RN first, and then continue studying to earn the LPN status. He reported he talked over his plans with his mother and his teachers. Given his interests and his abilities, they agreed his plan was a good one.

**High Achieving participants**

Pseudonym: Xavier, senior, GPA 3.3

Xavier often appeared comfortable dressed in jeans and a t-shirt. However, his horn rimmed eyeglasses and his upright posture created a sense of intensity that he carried with him. As a teacher in the building he had gotten my attention because of his accomplishments
as a musician. During my research, I noticed Xavier had a distinct way of speaking; his speech pattern communicated intelligence, quick thinking, and self-confidence. Xavier was aware of this. During the participant interview he reflected, “lot of people call me the Whitest Back guy they know because of the way I am. I’m so polite and talk so well and write well, and all of that.”

Xavier reported he grew up in Chicago and moved during middle school to this school district with his mother and a younger sister. Xavier stated his father was, “gone. Just Gone.” Xavier seemed to have a high level of respect for his mother. He said his mother as an adolescent “wanted to go [to college] but they couldn’t afford it. So I am really proud to be going to college.” Xavier was proud to be planning on attending a local state university to study music. He aspired to become a professional musician.

Pseudonym: Easter, Senior, GPA: 4.1

I met Easter as I was finishing up my invitation presentation to Ms. K’s Honor’s English class. Easter arrived late to class and Ms. K delayed starting her class to make sure I had the chance to offer my invitation to him. Easter, dressed in blue jeans and a dress shirt listened politely to the explanation of my research and participant requirements. When I revisited the classroom a few days later, he inquired again about the time commitment and explained how he often worked at a part-time job after school. I reassured him of my flexible schedule and he agreed to volunteer for the study. Ms. K pulled me aside and shared how she thought he would make an important contribution to the diversity of the sample in my case study.

Easter reported he lived with his mother, father, and an older sister who was attending and Ivy League college. Easter explained how both of his parents went to college and set
high expectations for him. “They kind of instilled excellence in us” he said as a way of attributing some of his success to his parents’ influences. In addition to Honor’s English, he was enrolled in Honors Physics, Honors Anatomy and took two high level math classes. Easter was also in the African American club and in a youth group at his church. Easter enjoyed art and science and wanted to combine these interests in his future plans. He reported he was awarded a scholarship to a competitive private college and seemed to have found the perfect major, “I am going to do medical illustration.”

Pseudonym: Max, GPA: 3.7

Max was a tall, strong-looking young man, full of energy. When I learned he was in the ROTC program and planned to enlist in the Air Force after High School, I thought of the strong impression he would make as an airman in uniform. Max believed math and science were where his strengths laid as a student. He was currently enrolled in AP Economics and Honors Physics. Max spoke fondly of his experiences with the wrestling team and how he developed strength and endurance because of the rigor in the team’s conditioning exercises. He felt physically and academically prepared for the Air Force.

Max lived in a nearby city with both parents and two younger siblings. Because his mother worked as teacher in the district, he was able to attend Normal High School. Max perceived his father, who worked in an office, “has a hard work ethic. He is like always constantly doing things work wise.” He then added, “My mother, she has that too.” Max seemed to have taken his parents’ lead as he reported to be working very hard to meet the demands of the AP Economics class that was particularly challenging for him. Max was excited to be graduating and to begin his adulthood in the Air force. He explained his mother was also excited: “She can’t wait to get rid of me!”
Pseudonym: Red, GPA: 3.3

I recognized Red through his frequent picture in the local newspaper because of his success as a running back on the school’s football team. Red was a little below average height, but above average in girth. Through his participation in the study, Red was cooperative and punctual. He participated actively in a focus group and at times shared his perspective that contrasted with the other participants’ in his group. Red was enrolled in high level math and science classes. Upon high graduation, he planned to attend a private college to study physical therapy. Having grown up in the school district, Red felt he knew most of the kids in the high school. He lived with his father who had a high school diploma and his mother who had recently earned a Master’s degree. Red also had two older brothers, both in college. His mother’s recent accomplishment, Red explained was an important event for him, “that motivated me and made me realize how much school was important.”
**Description of Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Focus group</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Adults at home</th>
<th>Educational level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Darwood (DH)</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Two parent</td>
<td>Mom -2 yr. college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jah (JA)</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Mom-Master’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dad- Bachelor’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>River (OW)</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Single mother</td>
<td>Mom- some college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam (AD)</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Two parent</td>
<td>Mom-high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dad- high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Izzy (ID)</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Single mother</td>
<td>Mom- some college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caz (JC)</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Single mother</td>
<td>Some college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easter (EB)</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Two parent</td>
<td>Mom-college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dad- college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max (MB)</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Single mother</td>
<td>Mom-college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red (CJ)</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Two parent</td>
<td>Mom-Master’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dad- high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xavier (JH)</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Single mother</td>
<td>Some college</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Design

Various traditions of qualitative research methods were considered as a method to investigate the issue. Case study design was selected as the most appropriate. Case study is used to investigate “a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 1994, p. 13). The ideological framework applied to this research is based on Sociocultural Theory first advanced by Lev Vygotsky. Sociocultural theory posits children learn and develop through interactions with individuals, society, objects and culture (Vygotsky, 1978). In a Vygotskian perspective, learning cannot be separated from the social aspects of school. Therefore, interplay between the participants and their school environment was recognized. The research included the conditions of the school environment as relevant to the phenomena under study. The researcher sought to understand 11 African American males’ perceptions and experiences of Normal High School. Thus, a case study approach is well matched with this investigation.

This researcher used an exploratory case study case design (Yin, 1994). The participants were bound by self-identification as African-American, by grade-level 11th or 12th, and by setting. This study followed Yin’s (1994, pg. 49) suggestion that “each individual case study consists of a ‘whole’ study, in which convergent evidence is sought regarding the facts and conclusions for the case; each case’s conclusions are then considered to be the information needed for replication.” Trustworthiness was sought through a diverse sample of participants in three levels of achievement: low, medium, and high. Case study design allowed for the exploration of differences within and between cases which provided an effective way to answer the research questions (Yin, 1994).
This study examined the perceptions of African American male juniors and seniors on their educational experiences in a diverse urban high school. The student responses and autobiographical information were analyzed to understand how these students perceived their educational experiences and what factors they believe affected it. Also, the characteristic of students' academic levels (low, medium, high) was explored as to its relation in describing the African American male experience and perception in a diverse urban high school. The following questions helped guide the investigation:

1. How does an African American male’s GPA (low: > 2.0; medium: 2.0 to 2.9; high: >3.0) affect his perception of the academic achievement for African American male secondary students?

2. How does an African American male secondary school student’s perception of African American males’ academic achievement affect his attitude towards school?

3. How do African American male secondary school students perceive the contributing factors leading to academic achievement?

Instrumentation

The researcher used four instruments during data collection. A researcher created protocol, Participant Demographic Form (see Appendix F) was used to collect information pertaining to the student’s age, grade level, extracurricular interests, and make-up of the student’s household and the educational levels of its members. In addition, The Focus Group Protocol (see Appendix G), created by the researcher was used to pose open-ended questions to the 3-4 participants in each focus group that was formed according to academic achievement levels (low: < 2.0, medium: 2.0 to 2.9, high: 3.0 or >). The Observation Record
Form (see Appendix H) was used by the researcher to record observations about the participants’ dress, relations, and behaviors in unstructured areas of the school, such as the cafeteria or lobby. The Student Interview Protocol (see Appendix I) was used for the in-depth student interviews. The Student Interview Protocol (see Appendix I), also created collaboratively with other professional educators and the university advisor was used to question the participant around the following general themes: role models outside of school, most influential adults in the school setting, influence of peers on achievement, postsecondary goals, and personal struggles for academic success. There were 20 questions in total and the interviews lasted approximately one hour.

These instruments were created collaboratively with professional educators, including Multi-media, Science, and Special Education teachers and the university advisor. Previously, these instruments were field-tested in a mini study in 2014 and in informal discussions with tenth and twelfth-grade African American males. Feedback from the mini study was used to refine the instruments to their present form.

Data Collection

Data collection was performed on the school premises in an unused classroom that offered a quiet, comfortable, and private atmosphere for participants, and in various settings within the school premises. All focus groups, interviews, and follow-up interviews were recorded and transcribed. To begin the data collection, the researcher conducted three focus groups that were formed according to GPA as determined by school transcript: (low: < 2.0, medium: 2.0 to 2.9, high: 3.0 or >). “Focus groups are group interviews that are structured to foster talk among the participants on particular issues” (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007, p. 109). The Focus Group Protocol (see Appendix G), created by the researcher, was used to pose
open-ended questions related to the phenomenon under study. Focus groups were initially used because they “are particularly useful when the topic to explore is general…to stimulate talk from multiple perspectives so that the researcher can learn what the ranges of views are” (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007, p. 109). There were two participants in the high achieving focus group, two participants in the medium achieving focus group, and two low achieving participants and one medium participant in the low achieving focus group. Although all members were notified of the scheduled focus group, some members were not in attendance. The question from the Focus Group Protocol were then included during the time for in-depth student interviews for those participants that were absent from a focus group. Knowing that, “Skin color, race, and cultural identity sometimes facilitate, sometimes complicate, and sometimes erect barriers in fieldwork” (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007, p. 96) the researcher purposely used his experience as a former teacher of some participants, and his knowledge of all participants’ interests to establish trust and build rapport. Focus groups were designed to gain a sense of trust with the participants and to explore their individual and collective experiences and perspectives of Normal High School that could then be deepened through individual interviews.

Following the focus groups, 10 interviews, and six follow up interviews over a five-month period were conducted to answer the research questions. Individual participants met the researcher in an unused classroom that offered a quiet, comfortable and private atmosphere for participants. “The interview is used to gather descriptive data in the subject’s own words, so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world,” (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007, p. 103). The Student Interview Protocol (see Appendix H) provided a semi-structured framework of open-ended questions for participant
interviews intended to collect the informant’s perspective on many factors related to educational experiences and aspirations. Using information and trust gained from the focus groups, the interview process was fluid and evolved organically. The researcher made every effort to place the participants at ease, communicate interest, gain clarification as needed, and probe for specifics or examples as suggested by Bogdan and Bilken (2007). Follow-up interviews allowed the researcher to address confusion or questions that arose later during the ongoing coding and observations of the participants and further provided an opportunity for member-checking and emergent and ongoing restructuring of the data collection and analysis. Interviews concluded with an expression of gratitude by the researcher and an expression of his desire to maintain some level of communication in the future based on his professional and personal interest in their futures.

Additionally, the researcher collected further data by observing the participants in non-formal school environments multiple times to learn of their experiences related to their school environment and peers. The researcher’s employment in the building made his appearance naturalistic to the setting; however, he made efforts to be discreet and not to upset the natural environments of the participants. The researcher logged approximately 1.5 hours of non-participant observation of each participant and completed the researcher created, Observation Record Form (see Appendix H). The Observation Record Form (see Appendix H) was an additional source of information regarding students’ behaviors in the library, school lobby, and cafeteria that helped the researcher understand the participants’ perceptions of their academic experiences.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) support this triangulation of data collection because “Different kinds of data give the analyst different views or vantage points from which to
understand a category and to develop its properties” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 67). Saturation is the point when additional data cannot be found that would add to the properties of the category (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). “As he sees similar instances over and over again, the researcher becomes empirically confident that a category is saturated” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 61). The various sources of data succeeded in providing a substantive amount of information related to the phenomenon under study and provided saturation through subunits’ consensus within each case.

**Data Analysis**

A constant comparative procedure was used in an inductive analysis of the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Participants’ responses, information, and observation data were jointly recorded, interpreted, and coded on an ongoing basis to decipher emerging meaning, concepts, and categories, which further informed ongoing data collection. The researcher analyzed each word and line of data for meaning, withholding conclusion, while also aggregating issue relevant instances throughout the data analysis, to allow a new understanding of a phenomenon to emerge. Together, these strategies found from the voices of the African American male high school students, who participated in this study, themes around school climate, racial identity, academic achievement, peer influence, teacher influences, adult influences, role models, and future aspirations.

**Coding.**

All coding of the data was done manually. Inductive analysis began with the initial marking of each word or phrase deemed relevant to the phenomenon under study. The marked words and phrases were interpreted for meaning. Analysis of differences and
similarities and unique phenomena were made in each case and across cases using all sources of data.

The next phase of coding involved aggregating data under codes related to similar instances (See Appendix J). “Two strategic ways that researchers reach new meanings about cases are through direct interpretation of the individual instance and through the aggregation of instances until something can be said about them as a class” (Stake, 1995, p. 74). During this phase, the meanings were aggregated into themes that reflected the participants’ voices and experiences.

The last phase of coding required multiple, and deeper analyses to find the essence of the participants’ experiences and perceptions. Stake (1995 p. 77) suggested that research benefits from time to help “tease out relationships, to probe issues and aggregated categorical data.” Category codes were reconsidered, some collapsed, and accurate themes were finally teased out (see Appendix K). The proposition of the research helped focus the analysis towards some data and delimit other data (Stake, 1995). Through a collection of repetitive instances, a saturation point was reached, which gave rise to a clear understanding of the phenomena. With this foundation, themes were developed, supported by the data and checked by committee members and an objective third party through an audit trail (see Appendix L).
**Procedural Timeline**

The procedure for this research followed the timeline outlined in Table 3.

Table 3

*Dissertation Timeline*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Review Board (IRB) obtained</td>
<td>Applied to Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval of study</td>
<td>December, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruited participants with completed assent and consent forms</td>
<td>Solicited potential participants by distributing letters of consent and assent</td>
<td>March, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducted focus groups and gather data</td>
<td>Set dates and conducted three focus groups</td>
<td>March, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coding of participants’ responses</td>
<td>Analyzed responses for identifiable patterns and patterns</td>
<td>March 2014 through November 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn about students’ behavior in unstructured environments within school</td>
<td>Conducted observations of informal student activities (library, cafeteria)</td>
<td>March through June, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recorded research in systematic method</td>
<td>Generated field notes and memos throughout the duration of the study</td>
<td>Duration of study</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued
Table 3 Dissertation Timeline Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persisted in gathering responses and information</td>
<td>Set dates and conducted follow-up interviews repeated as needed for clarification and elaboration</td>
<td>March through June, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to ensure saturation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcribed focus groups and interview data</td>
<td>Transcribed</td>
<td>Duration of study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzed participant responses</td>
<td>Transcription and coding of transcripts</td>
<td>March through November, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducted member checking.</td>
<td>Arranged with participants to check for veracity of research</td>
<td>May, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducted confirmability audit</td>
<td>Reviewed and discussed research</td>
<td>February, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed and published research</td>
<td>Wrote summary of research</td>
<td>August through February, 2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Trustworthiness of the Study**

This section addresses limitations of the study and measures taken to address various aspects of trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend naturalist researchers establish trustworthiness with four components: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is the claim that the data are true and accurately represent the reality being studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To achieve this, the researcher limited imparting bias into the research through the researcher journal, noting possible biases as part of the data collection and analysis which informed further data collection and analysis, in a reciprocal way. The research report was thick with context and portrayed unique realities of participants’ perceptions on their educational experiences in their school. Rich description
further enhanced trustworthiness. “Member checking…to obtain confirmation that the report has captured the data as constructed by the informants, or to correct, amend, or extend it” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 236) was performed to ensure the participants’ voices were accurately portrayed. In this process, the researcher reviewed and discussed with one or more participant from each of the focus groups his own interview transcription to ensure accuracy and meaning. Field notes collected from the non-participant observations in the school cafeteria, and other unstructured times in the school were cross referenced with responses from the focus group participants and participant interviews and provided a triangulation of data sources. An independent auditor examined the audit trail, consisting of samples of student information and responses, field notes, instruments, transcriptions, coding procedures and decisions. The auditor agreed with 100% of the themes (see Appendix L). Alternate theory development further enhanced the trustworthiness of the research. Throughout this process, the researcher challenged his themes with alternate explanations to ensure the interpretations were objective and credible, and free of preconceived ideas or other biases, as the researcher was an active participant in the process.

Transferability is the extent to which the conclusions developed by researcher are applicable to another context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In qualitative research, the transferability is not the responsibility of the researcher, but the researcher’s obligation is to enable the reader to assess transferability on his own. To that end, a thick description of all aspects of the research was provided so readers will be able to find similarities in the research context on their own (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To enable transferability, the research process was transparent in its reporting and used the participant’s own words to ground the themes. Thick, rich description aids in the prevention of over-generalization of results from this
research and suggests a contextualized outcome for the research. The cases are suggestive of a representative population, but the small number was a limitation of the study. Through thick description of the participants’ characteristics and the context of this research, future researchers are enabled to make judgments about the potential transferability of this work to other settings.

Dependability refers to research that is reliable and if it were repeated in the same context, the results would be similar (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 317). The researcher upheld the standards of scientific research involving human subjects. The study was approved of by the Internal Review Board of Western Connecticut State University which provided review of the ethical considerations employed in this research to protect the participants. The research was performed by one researcher who addressed and exposed any biases that may have interfered with the trustworthiness of the research. A reflexive journal was used to compile time spent in the field, logistics, feelings, possible biases, and other meta-cognitive reflections. This journal as a source of data was an opportunity for the researcher to face emotional and intellectual reactions and curiosities that surfaced because of his race, gender, profession, or other reasons. The researcher guarded against over involvement with the participants and sought only to find the reality as presented by the participants’ responses and information. Finally, a third party performed an “Inquiry Audit” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 317) to review the entire research process and its report as a means to ensure the work is dependable.

Confirmability is the concept that refers to research that is objective, grounded in the data, and a true representation of its characteristics (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure the multiple realities of the participants were presented objectively; data from focus groups,
interview responses, and observations, served to create triangulation for data analysis. Triangulation is the use of different sources over time to collect the same information (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Further, the audit trail, the researcher’s field journal, and the clarity and thick description present in the report of the data analysis provided an objective third party with a clear path to examine the work from its start to its conclusion, including its final presentation.

**Chapter Summary**

This study was designed to explore the perceptions of African American male secondary students’ on their educational experiences. This chapter presented the research design and method and included: (a) researcher biography, (b) ethics statement, (c) setting, (d) participants, (e) research design, (f) research questions, (g) instrumentation, (h) data collection, (j) data analysis, (k) coding, (l) timeline, (m) trustworthiness. The next chapter provides the results of the research.
CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF DATA AND EXPLANATION OF THE RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to gain a deep understanding of the participants’ perceptions of their educational influences, experiences, and aspirations in the particular context of a high school. Secondarily, this research intended to understand participants’ perspectives regarding suggested improvements for African American males to increase achievement levels within this context.

The research sought to understand how African American males experienced their education at Normal High School. The study included the conditions of the school environment as relevant to the phenomena under study. The study used a case study approach for the exploration of differences within and between the ranges of participants (Yin, 1994). This approach was selected as the most effective way to answer the research questions:

1. Does an African American males’ grade point average affect his perception of the academic achievement for African American male students?

2. How does an African American male secondary school student’s perception of African American males’ academic achievement affect his attitude towards school?

3. How do African American male secondary school students perceive the contributing factors leading to academic achievement?

Chapter Four presents the themes related to the phenomenon under study from three data sources—the focus groups, interviews, and non-participant observations with 10 participants. The researcher conducted three focus groups, 10 interviews, and six follow-up interviews over a five-month period to answer the research questions. Additionally, the researcher
collected further data by observing the participants in non-formal school environments multiple times to learn of their experiences relating to their school environment and peers. Focus groups and interviews were the main data sources that provided opportunities for the participants to voice their perspectives of their experiences at Normal High. Non-participant observations provided further data and triangulation about the ways participants navigated a diverse urban high school in the Northeast.

According to Stake (1995) two strategic ways that researchers reach new meanings about cases are through direct interpretation of the individual instance and through the aggregation of instances. Instances in the data led to classes of relationships that defined and gave meaning to the phenomena of study. The researcher analyzed each word of the data for meaning, withholding conclusions while also aggregating issue-relevant instances throughout the data analysis, to allow a new understanding of a phenomenon to emerge (Stake, 1995). From this research protocol, nine themes with related subthemes emerged (see Table 4).
### Table 4

*Themes Found in Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Number</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Social Dimension of School Climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Academic Dimension of School Climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Factors Related to Academic Achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five</td>
<td>Peer Influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six</td>
<td>School Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven</td>
<td>Family Influences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eight</td>
<td>Future Selves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nine</td>
<td>Recommendations for Progress</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Theme one emerged from instances related to the participants’ identity as African Americans. The theme of identity emerged from the participants’ perceptions of their own identity within the school community. The theme of identity was further explained through subthemes of: stereotype of race, the burden of acting White for high achieving participants and their reaction to it, and the experiences of two Haitian American participants.

This theme emerged from the way participants’ perceived their identity as a reflection of the family who raised them and not within society’s singular construct of race based on skin color. Some participants had multiracial parents, and two Haitian American participants, who experienced prejudice from African American peers, recognized society often did not differentiate the Haitian culture from Black or African American identity. The
participants also perceived their identity as African Americans in contrast to negative stereotypes that associated low academic ability and performance with African Americans. The high achieving participants’ break from the negative stereotype led them to experience a burden of acting White. In this context, high achieving participants experienced racial comments that challenged their identity as African Americans because of their high academic achievement. Despite these experiences, high achieving participants humbly maintained visions of themselves as individuals striving to be their best selves.

Theme two examined instances related to the participants’ experiences and perceptions of their relationships with peers and school personnel. The relationships of students and staff and the treatment of all students are recognized as aspects of the social dimension of school climate (Loukas, 2007). Subthemes for the social dimension of Normal High School included one among many, equality not unity, and school personnel and race which elaborated the participants’ experiences in the social dimension of their school. The participants’ perceived the student body to be friendly, inclusive, and accepting of racial diversity. However, the participants perceived interactions with some peers and some teachers at times reinforced negative racial stereotypes and adversely affected the participant’s relation to the school. The social experiences of informal areas of the school, such as the lunchroom, where patterning along racial lines was made visible also heightened the participants’ race consciousness.

Theme three revealed the participants’ experiences and perceptions of peer influences on academic achievement. High achieving participants and medium achieving participants perceived peer influences were supportive of academic achievement. Low achieving
participants perceived peer influences did not impact their academic achievement but had negative sanctioning for poor or failing grades.

Theme four related to the participants’ academic experiences and perception of instruction and their relationships with teachers. The quality of instruction, teacher expectations, and student achievement are recognized as aspects of the academic dimension of school climate (Loukas, 2007). Despite the racial imbalances due to tracking patterns, participants perceived class enrollments were appropriately determined by ability and interests. Data revealed high achieving participants navigated a “burden of acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1985, p. 177) within academic contexts with little negative effect.

The low, medium, and high achieving participants reported different perspectives of their classroom experiences. The participants’ perceptions and experiences of the academic dimension aligned with the “Tripod of pedagogy” an assertion that effective teacher instruction stems from three factors: relationships, content, and pedagogy (Ferguson, 2007, p. 225). In the academic dimension of school climate, high achieving participants engaged with the content of their classes, had effective relationships with teachers and peers, and perceived pedagogical practices as effective. Medium achieving participants had a mix of experiences within the academic dimension; one participant questioned the valued of the classes’ content whereas, the other two medium achieving participants perceived a connection to the content and linked it to future college studies. One medium achieving participant had difficulty engaging with the pedagogy of the classroom and establishing strong relationships with teachers, while the other two medium achieving participants enjoyed the pedagogy and formed strong relationships with teachers. The consensus of low achieving participants revealed they experienced difficulty valuing the content of their classes; did not perceive the
pedagogy of their classes as effective; and did not have effective relationships with teachers. Most participants perceived educational experiences and social experiences were so different between high achieving students and low achieving students that they perceived Normal High school was two schools within one.

Theme five related to the participants’ perceptions and experiences of factors affecting their academic achievement. Analysis of data revealed all participants experienced a difficult freshman year. The high achieving participants’ drop in GPA in their freshman year led them to develop time management skills and an increased motivation for academic achievement. The medium and low achieving participants reported a dependence on periods of study hall within their school day as a way to complete school work and increase their academic achievement. The high achieving participants perceived self-efficacy was a factor that led to academic achievement.

Theme six related to the participants beliefs about Normal High School and their expectations for it. Researchers have identified student beliefs and expectations for school are aspects of the phenomenon called school culture (Hindi, 2004). The participants’ school culture held their school in positive or neutral esteem.

Theme seven related to the participants’ perceptions of family influence on academic achievement. Both medium and high achieving participants perceived their parental influences contributed to the participants’ desire for academic achievement and influenced their plans for after high school graduation. Low achieving participants perceived their parents did not affect the participants’ desire to achieve academically or help them connect high school education to specific plans for after high school. A subtheme of parent approval elaborated on how low and medium achieving participants perceived their parents did not
approve of the participants’ academic achievement, whereas the parents of high achieving participants did. Lastly, the subtheme of the roots of academic success revealed all participants perceived parents as playing a critical role in explaining why some students succeed academically.

Theme eight related to the participants’ vision of their future selves. Low achieving participants lacked a clear and specific postsecondary goal and had difficulty describing what their life would be like five or ten years into the future. Medium achieving participants had a vision of their future self after high school that was still in the process of developing, but were able to identify some specifics of their future selves that linked high school education to their future goals. The high achieving participants elaborated clearly and specifically about what their future selves would be doing five and ten years in to the future. Every participant perceived role models could have a beneficial influence on students’ aspirations for the future. The participants linked positive outcomes for high school students who connected with adults in relationships that modeled and supported guidance towards future goals.

Lastly, analysis of the data included themes related to the participants’ suggestions for ways to help all African American males experience increased academic achievement at Normal High School. Participants’ suggestions aggregated into six subthemes that emerged from analysis of the data regarding the participants’ suggestions for school changes that would make a difference in the education of African American male students at Normal High School. The participants perceived that African American males would benefit from spending more time studying as a way to improve academic performance. The participants suggested that Normal High school add or alter existing school programs to provide additional teacher supports in relaxed, flexible environments as another way to improve the
academic performance of African American males. Another suggestion to improve the academic performance of African American males was to increase the minimum GPA requirement for participation in school athletics. The participants also suggested the school add an enhanced rewards or recognition program to better recognize African American males’ efforts. The participants suggested the school find ways to address how African Americans seem to not care about school and perceived it was a factor that needed to be addressed to help African American males achieve academically. Finally the participants suggested the school utilize mentoring programs as a means to help all African Americans males improve academic performance.

**Theme One: Identity**

“To society, you just a shade of Black” (Adam, Focus group 1).

**Identity of race.** The data contained instances related to the participants’ sense of identity. The participants perceived a weak connection to the identity of African American or Black race. All participants perceived their identity in comparison to a negative stereotyped image of African American male ability and behavior in school. Analysis of the data had a consensus that high achieving participants experienced a “burden of acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1985, p.177) teasing that reinforced low expectations for African Americans and high expectations for academic skills and achievement for Caucasian American students. A subtheme of identity revealed that racial comments or teasing of high achieving participants’ identity as African Americans did not impede their academic achievement or impact their attitude towards school. Two participants who self -identified as Black or African American also identified themselves as, Haitian American. These two
participants experienced derogatory treatment from African American peers, but maintained pride of their Haitian heritage and culture.

The participants who self-identified as Black or African American, Adam and Caz, perceived the color of their skin often led many people to consider them as racially, African American or Black. Although participants understood the terms, “African American” and “Black” encompass several ethnic groups, participants also noted that society often did not make a differentiation and thus lacked a clear connection to the identity of Black or African American. “Much of the literature on ethnic identity has viewed ethnic identity as a measure of how much one identifies with and participates in the practices of his or her ethnic group” (Nasir et al., 2009, p. 74). Adam recognized his lack of a strong identification with the African American or Black Identity when he said, “I am Haitian-American but there is no box for that.” When Darwood was talking about his parents’ mix races and his own light skin, a focus group member commented, “To society, you just a shade of Black.” This comment illustrated how some participants negotiated their racial identity with the values they perceived society having.

Many of these participants believed racial identity was not a singular concept. The young men reported being African American to the researcher during the recruitment phase, but when probed in focus groups and interviews, provided elaboration. For example, Easter explained his identity as being, “International” because his mother is Panamanian and his father is Jamaican. Darwood said, “I’m African American but my mom is Spanish and my dad is Black and White.” Two other participants, who had a strong sense of being Haitian American, considered themselves Black or African American because they saw that race was a construct of society. One of them, Caz summarized that despite their unique traits, their
dark skin color meant, “We get treated like one [African American].” These participants perceived the box on many applications and forms marked African American was an inadequate and incomplete descriptor of them.

The participants perceived their racial identity did not impact and explain their educational experiences of high school. Izzy noted the term Caucasian American was a large concept that obscured unique traits. Izzy explained “Most of the kids in there are White, but they could be Russian, Canadian, British, um and whatever.” Izzy’s perspective helped him see his own identity as an individual with a set of unique characteristics, although his dark skin color was a trait he shared with others. The participants believed a better explanation for the way they conducted themselves in high school was their values and attitudes they developed from the family members who raised them. Adam stated the participants’ views well. “It’s race in school? - No. It’s just being the way you are brought up, not the color of your skin.” Adam, like the others believed the school did not differentiate for a student’s race, and one’s racial identity had no impact on a student’s performance.

In summary, data suggested a consensus among high, medium, and low achieving participants. They did not perceive themselves as simply, Black or African American males. Research suggests that racial identity is a highly individualized process (Bennett et al., 2006). “There are developmental differences specific to individuals over the span of their lifetime, as well as tremendous variability within any given ethnic group in terms of strength of ethnic identification” (Bennett et al, 2006, p. 538). For some, multiracial parents and for many, a sense of individuality were two factors that limited a strong identity or sense of belonging to one particular race although they self-identified as Black or African American. The participants did not link their race as a contributing factor to school performance.
**Stereotype of race.** An aspect of the participants’ identity was related to their experiences involving negative associations for African Americans. Research suggests that in schools, “African American males are arguably the most stereotyped and stigmatized group” (Corprew & Cunningham, 2012, p. 72). Although the participants were comfortable in this school, experienced an inclusive and respectful student body, and enjoyed friendships that crossed racial lines, the participants were at times affected by the negative messages of racial stereotypes that were on the fringes of the school climate. The participants reported navigating negative peer and teacher behaviors and comments that resulted from the participants’ identity as African Americans.

Xavier, a high achieving participant perceived: “There is a stigma that rings true for a lot of African American males at this school… they are rowdy, rambunctious, they don’t care about their education. It rings true around the school a lot.” For Xavier, the idea that African American males are disengaged behaviorally and motivationally from the educational process was real. Xavier recognized a stereotype of African Americans fit some of the African American students at Normal High and he had to work against it. Xavier’s high grades and achievements showed his teachers and classmates were a strong contradiction to the negative stereotype he perceived.

Adam, a medium achieving participant said, “I mean being Black, you just automatically looked at.” He added that “African Americans have it hard. Especially in class they think they are dumbest people in here.” However, Adam admitted, “I mean sometimes I am the class clown, but like, I never was a slow reader. I read well. I am a speed reader. I’m like always sentences ahead of everyone; that’s not an issue.” Adam’s abilities contradicted the low expectations he perceived others held for him because he was
African American. Although Adam indicated his behavior could be seen in some contexts as disruptive, he recognized there were times when it was best not to express his good natured sense of humor.

A low achieving participant, River expressed a general statement about African Americans that portrayed them as underachieving and unmotivated, “Just African American males don’t care about anything ... they don’t care about school.” This statement seemed to describe his and other low achieving participants’ relation to school and its purpose. Another low achieving participant, Darwood, expressed a similar sentiment, “I don’t try.” In the focus group, Darwood explained his perspective on how negative stereotypes came about, “Certain people from certain ethnic groups put that on themselves, [and] they do things to make people think wrong of them.” Darwood saw stereotypes reflected in some African American students’ behaviors in the school and had difficulty perceiving himself beyond its light.

In summary, low, medium, and high achieving participants reported navigating negative stereotypes of African Americans in school. Researchers have suggested that common stereotypes for African Americans associate them with low ability in all academic subjects relative to other races and especially Caucasian Americans (Evans, Copping, Rowley, & Kurtz-Costes, 2011). The instances in the data aggregated to show that high, medium, and low achieving participants’ sense of identity was impacted by their perception of a negative stereotype of African American males in the school. The participants believed others in the school community perceived them at times through a negative stereotype based on their identity as African Americans.
**High achieving participants’ burden of acting White.** Instances in the data regarding the participants’ identity included an aspect related to the idea of “Acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1985, p. 177). Research studies (Fordham & Ogbu, 1985, p. 177) have used the term “burden of acting White” to describe how some African American students were conflicted with adopting successful student behaviors that they associated with behaviors of White people. These behaviors included “Speaking Standard English, listening to White music … spending a lot of time in the library studying, working hard to get good grades, getting good grades, i.e., being known as a ‘Brainiac’” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1985, p. 178).

Analysis of the data revealed high achieving participants endured an association to a negative racial stereotype while earning grade point averages above 3.0 and participating in honors and AP classes. Because high achieving participants’ academic performances broke from the negative stereotype of low achievement for African Americans, the participants experienced a social cost challenging their racial identity. Xavier, spoke about this difficulty for high achieving students:

> I mean it’s kind of weird. A lot of people call me ‘The Whitest Black guy they know’ because of the way I act, which in of itself still reinforces the stereotype that Black people are kind of the opposite of the way I am - because I am so polite and talk so well and write well and all of that.

Xavier and other high achieving participants reported that students from all races at Normal High School subjected the high achieving participants to teasing remarks related to their identity as African American.
The high achieving participants experienced at times teasing from peers that questioned the high achieving participants’ identity as African Americans. This teasing was perceived as an obstacle to the social and emotional well-being of the participants and reinforced negative expectations regarding school performance for African Americans was perceived as an obstacle. Easter explained this was not easy for him, “Being an African American is always hard because when they see, like we are in honors classes, they call us White.” These high achieving participants navigated a difficult layer of socialization in the school climate. In an interview, Easter, explained further:

What it really is we are just trying to be a better person. We are trying not to live up to that stereotype. We are trying to be better than that. So people don’t understand that, so they automatically think.

Easter’s humility, like the other participants’ was striking. He was aware of his own success while being aware of those who saw him at times only in racial terms and held low expectations for his level of achievement based on race. He continued:

And I really hate that. They say White, not that it’s White, but why would automatically you assume that’s White [referring to good grades and honors classes]? Why can’t it just be the right thing? So, I do feel like that’s offensive to Caucasian people. So say a Black person is acting White, what is so bad about White people or Caucasian people? I don’t know.

Easter considered some of his peers’ connection of academic achievement to White culture offensive to both Caucasian American and African American people. He questioned his peers’ lack of understanding and he resolved the tension by looking beyond the racial
reference to an individual level where he saw himself in terms of an individual striving to improve his education and quality of life.

Another high achieving participant, Max was also offended that some students in the school community were quick to judge based on race. He explained:

I feel like a lot of people insinuate sometimes all these ghetto kids don’t want to do their work. What defines a ghetto kid - when they see a lot of Black kids in the hallway yelling and screaming? I think they think everybody is like that. Me and Isaiah are kind of quiet guys. So I feel like a lot of students want to stereotype it. Max felt slighted by the generalizations made by his peers that reflected negatively on African Americans, yet saw that this was a tendency for humans in general. “Every day you see some race do something, then people assume everybody in that race has to do the same thing.” Max recognized that people should refrain from generalizations, “It doesn’t have to be groups; it can just be individuals.” The high achieving participants experienced a presence of stereotypes for African American males in Normal High School. The participants managed these negative associations from some peers, security guards, and teachers by asserting their individuality in light of the stereotype of African American male students being disengaged and unsuccessful to achieve at high levels.

In summary, high achieving participants were bothered by racial comments that suggested scholastic success as the prerogative of Caucasian American students and reinforced negative portrayals of African Americans students. The high achieving participants navigated an emotional burden that researchers identified as “The burden of acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1985, p. 177).
High achieving participants’ reaction to stereotypes. The high achieving participants’ reaction to challenges associated with their identity as successful students and African Americans was found in the data. The research of Diamond et al. (2007) found that an equivalent number of high-achieving African American and high-achieving Caucasian American high school students experienced negative peer pressure related to their academic achievement. Both Caucasian American and African American students in that research perceived the teasing based on good grades as, “Only a limited distraction and did not affect their behaviors” (Diamond et al., 2007, p. 656). In the present study, high achieving participants’ reaction to the negative verbal sanctions did not seem to hinder their performance. Red explained how he reacted to teasing and racial comments emphasizing his good grades and African American identity, “I’m not even going to respond to their ignorance, because I just feel like I am sorry for trying to do something with my life [italics added by author].” He and Easter laughed at how some peers derided the participants’ success in high level classes. Easter possessed a self-assuredness that served him well in class and out of class. He elaborated on his self-confidence: “I guess with a certain air about us not that we are like … better than anyone else, but that we are confident I guess.” These participants learned to navigate the school community while being true to their aspirations and minimizing the negative pressure from peers.

Xavier too was well aware of negative stereotyping of African American males and responded that “I would say it hasn’t affected my identity a lot.” He described himself as stubborn:
I kind of don’t give up who I am. I don’t change my perspective for anybody unless I am presented with new evidence. I don’t give up my perspective for anyone once I am who I am. I don’t give up. I am not going to change to conform to anyone else. These high achieving participants responded to reverberations of negative stereotypes or racial overtones with steadfastness to their purpose and a strong sense of their individuation. Xavier also said that for him low expectations or negative comments: [Perceived racial comments] Makes me push harder. It makes me respect my education more. It makes me push harder.” His positive reaction was noted by the researcher and he continued, “I know a lot of people who just go along with it. They say, ‘you don’t think I can do this, than I won’t. Because I’ve been told a lot that I can’t, so I’m just going to go along with it.’ Xavier perceived that some African American male students gave in to the stereotype of low academic achievement. However, for Xavier this was clearly not the case as he enjoyed being an exceptional student. Xavier added that he viewed his racial status as beneficial since he pursued an interest in the clarinet that few African Americans did. Xavier spoke of this:

It hasn’t been a negative against me. It actually has been a positive in a lot of situations like in college.... Because a lot of aspects I go into, there are not a lot African Americans there. For example like when I performed in the Western Regional- out of the 173 people that performed, there were only two African Americans and I was one of them.

Xavier, one of the high achieving participants recognized he was experiencing success in an arena that few African Americans did. Therefore, his minority status in that area could play positively in his efforts to gain entry into college or a competitive music program.
In summary, high achieving participants perceived their race was not a significant obstacle in educational experiences. The participants’ reactions included perceiving the negative racial associations as symbolic of ignorance and actively working to ignore them. Additionally, the negative racial association was used as inspiration to achieve and one instance made a participant realize his minority status could be beneficial in the context of competitive programs or college admissions.

**Black, but Haitian American.** Within the data related to identity were two instances of Haitian American identity. This study selected only participants who self-identified as African American. However, Caz and Adam expressed in focus groups and interviews how they were also Haitian Americans. They revealed in focus groups and interviews how their Haitian heritage led them to experience prejudice from other African Americans. Caz said, “I’m Haitian, but sometimes I’m treated differently by African Americans because of things that happened where I’m from.” Adam added that they were disparaged by peers at times, “like you are dirt poor.” Caz felt, “People will judge you because where you from” and experienced negative sanctions by African American peers because of his Haitian heritage.

The two participants who described themselves additionally as Haitian American witnessed their culture as a differentiating mark within the Normal High School community. They reported that a prejudice existed amongst some African Americans that made them feel inferior. Despite these experiences, the two participants expressed pride in vibrant Haitian culture and dismissed the negativity from peers as a function of ignorance.

In summary, two participants provided further identification as Haitian American. These two participants perceived discrimination from African American peers because of their Haitian heritage. Despite the derogatory comments, the participants remained proud of their heritage.
and did not report any specific hardships associated with the negative messages from some peers.

**Conclusion of Theme One and Relation to Research Questions**

Theme one presented the participants’ experiences and perceptions related to their identity with subthemes that included: racial stereotype, high achieving participants acting White, high achieving participants’ reaction to stereotypes, and Haitian American experiences. Together, these themes revealed how the participants’ perceived a weak connection to African American or Black identity as constructed by society and instead saw themselves as individuals and a reflection of the family who raised them.

Despite feeling included and considered equal members of the social community, the participants perceived a negative stereotype of African Americans at Normal High School. Participants across cases perceived many of their peers held low expectations for the behavior and performances of African Americans in school.

The high achieving participants perceived a social and emotional hurdle as they broke from a negative stereotyped image of African American males’ low academic achievement. The high achieving participants’ academic success and striving was seen as an instigator of racial teasing from peers that stressed negative school behaviors and low achievement as the norm for African American males. The high achieving participants perceived these racial comments as emblematic of ignorance and maintained their resolve to achieve academically at high levels.

For two participants, their Haitian American heritage presented additional aspects of their identity. The two Haitian American participants perceived some African Americans at Normal High were contemptuous of their Haitian culture and treated the participants
disparagingly. The two participants maintained pride in their culture and integrity as they dismissed the prejudice.

In conclusion, the normative process of identity development for teenagers was complicated for the participants because of their identity as African Americans which associated them to negative stereotyped images of low academic achievement and ability. This theme two is related to research questions one, two, and three.

Research question one asked how an African American males’ grade point average affected his perception of the academic achievement for African American male students. This theme revealed participants of all GPA levels perceived a negative stereotyped image that associated low academic ability and performance for African Americans. All participants across GPA levels experienced their identity in contrast to this image and society’s singular construct of African American or Black race.

Research question two asked how an African American male secondary school student’s perception of African American males’ academic achievement affected his attitude towards school. This theme revealed the high achieving participants navigated a “burden of acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1985, p. 177), perceived a negative stereotype for African Americans, and developed greater motivation to be their best selves despite peer teasing and challenges to their racial identity. This theme suggests the attitudes of medium and low achieving participants were negatively impacted by experiencing a perceived negative stereotype for African American males that expected low ability and performance in school.

Research question three asked how African American male secondary school students perceive the contributing factors leading to academic achievement. The theme of identity revealed the participants did not consider race a factor leading to academic achievement.
The participants perceived their identity as a reflection of the family who raised them and the values they were taught at home. These values were perceived as factors that affected the participants’ academic achievement.

**Theme Two: The Social Dimension of School Climate**

“When I come to school, I am not saying I forget that I’m Black when I get here… I’m just Easter” (Easter, Interview 1).

**One among many.** The data contained instances of social relationships that led to a consensus for participant perception of the social dimension of school climate. Additional sub-themes of equality not unity and school personnel and race were additional aspects of the social dimension theme. “Most researchers agree that it [school climate] is a multidimensional construct that includes physical, social, and academic dimensions” (Loukas, 2007, p. 1). Analysis of the data found instances related to the participants’ perception of the school’s social dimension of the school climate. “The social dimension is built around interpersonal relationships between and among students, teachers, and staff; and involves equitable and fair treatment of students by school personnel and a sense of competition and comparison between students” (Loukas, 2007, p. 1).

The participants experienced friendships that went across racial lines and positively affected their connection and attitude towards school. The participants had at times a heightened sense of racial consciousness when they perceived racial patterns in unstructured time and places within the school context. Race was not perceived as a barrier in relating to peers or teachers, however some teachers were perceived to demonstrate a soft racism. Participants perceived some teachers held low expectations for African Americans and
hyper-enforced school rules at times for African Americans. Data presented a theme that participants experienced comfort in and perceived belonging to the school community, although to some degree the participants perceived a negative association with their race.

The participants experienced Normal High School’s social dimension as a complex web of interpersonal and group relationships. This web managed old friendships, new friendships, within classroom relationships, and racial consciousness. Almost all of the participants reported having a long history of friendships with peers that were not limited by race. As Red said, “I had the same friends since probably the sixth grade up to now.” When asked about his friends, Red replied, “They are just a mix. I have Hispanic; I have Asian friends, Caucasian, and Black.” All participants had friendships that crossed racial and ethnic lines. Racial differences were not perceived as important by the participants. The researcher needed to use further probing questions in follow-up interviews to obtain racial descriptors of people participants mentioned.

Although the researcher was direct about the purpose of learning about the participants’ educational experiences, the participants seemed to attach little, to no meaning to race or ethnicity. The participants’ friendships reflected the diversity of the student body. Max said it simply. “Yeah, I have friends, like every race!” Even Caz who talked about his identity as a Haitian American, described his best friend, a Caucasian American person, “He’s not Black or Haitian. It’s like being able to be yourself … He is respectful and open minded.” He, like other participants found relationships that provided them with a sense of esteem and belonging that were not based on race.

Participants expressed a sense of comfort and perceived the school climate as friendly. Regarding his fellow students, Darwood stated, “They get along good. Everyone
talks to everyone.” Izzy saw the students’ daily routine of standing for the *Pledge of Allegiance* as a symbol of their general conduct and level of respect. The participants found within the large student body relationships that connected them to the school in ways that transcended race. The participants’ friendships shaped many of the social experiences they lived at Normal High School.

Most participants reported equanimity in the building. Izzy said, “I feel just that normal teenage kid.” Within the regular school day, the participants navigated the school climate by seeing themselves as an individual and representative of their upbringing, not as a member of a racial group. As Easter said, “When I come to school, I am not saying I forget that I’m Black when I get here… I’m just Easter: I have friends, we have fun. I guess when you walk through the doors, race is not an issue to anyone, and it’s just you: a person.”

Some participants expressed an appreciation for the African American student presence, as they make-up roughly 20% of the student body. As River said, “It feels regular. There’s a lot of African Americans [*sic*].” Another student, Darwood pointed out that if this were not the case, like at [another neighboring school], “I would feel a kind of way because the kids in the school are primarily White.” Darwood felt at ease in a school where he was not one of only a few African American students. He speculated that if he were one of only a few African American students at school, he would have difficulty getting along. When Adam reflected on his time at a private, predominately White school, he added, “There were four or five [Black] kids in my grade. The whole majority were White or Hispanic. I felt like I was, as I would say, out of place.” Adam and the other participants experienced a level of comfort because of the diversity of the student body of Normal High School. Being one among many African Americans at the school was an important aspect of their school
experiences. The participants felt equal as members of a diverse, large, and inclusive student body.

To summarize, data suggested participants perceived a sense of belonging and maintained friendships that went across racial lines while at Normal High School. The low, medium, and high achieving participants were able to connect to peers from a variety of races and ethnicities to form meaningful friendships with common interests. Race was not expressed as a barrier in relating to peers. Participants reported that the large racially and economically diverse student body of Normal High School provided friendships that positively affected the participants’ attitude towards their school experiences. The social dimension of the school climate was positively affected by these established friendships that integrated across race.

**Equality not unity.** Analysis of data found instances related to voluntary separation that made racial patterns visible at Normal High School. A longitudinal study at Berkley High School (Noguera, 2008) examined racial separation at a large urban high school. Berkley High school is similar in demographics to Normal High School. The study noted, “Across the sprawling campus, students can be seen huddled in racially distinct groupings” (Noguero, 2008, p. 148). The visible voluntary separation of student associations along racial lines may have suggested that this is what the students at Berkeley high school preferred, but the study attributed it in some degree, to the involuntary divisions in the classroom associated with tracking (Noguera, 2008). The racially divided classroom associated with tracking led to friendships out of the classroom that led to racial patterning.

The participants of the present study perceived a general comforting sense of diversity and equanimity in the social dimension of the school climate, according to the
above theme. As Jah, a low achieving participant said, “I don’t feel discriminated against or anything. It’s fine.” Adam, a medium achieving participant said, ‘For me, I never really had that racial prejudice…I never really had that someone say, ignore me because I’m Black.’” However, further interviews and observations revealed a theme of visible racial patterns. Despite the previously discussed perception of a sense of comfort in the school environment, most participants additionally reported they observed racial disparities in the different levels of classes, seating arrangements in the cafeteria, and in race conscious remarks made by peers, resulting in a perception of racial patterns in specific contexts within the school. Participants perceived themselves as equal and valued members in the school community, but at times, had a sense of separation by race.

In focus groups and interviews with the participants, many expressed a recognition that division along racial lines occurred at times. Darwood said that being an African American in this school, “feels good,” but continued:

Being African American, it still feel[s that] we are racially discriminated. To me people don’t understand what they are doing at times. People know every time I’m on the [school] bus. Everybody should, I feel like, whoever gets on the bus should sit wherever they want, but on the school bus they Black kids sit in the back /sic/. Some participants perceived racial patterns when in large unstructured school environments, like on school busses, even though their own social experiences of an inclusive school climate did not necessarily match these perceptions. A self-consciousness of race became heightened during these specific instances. Many participants noted the voluntary seating patterns in the cafeteria, described by Darwood as “The Black people sit in certain areas.
White people in the middle, and the Spanish people by the window side.” In this informal environment, many students noted unease. Darwood explained:

It’s kind of like having beef in the streets, East and West. In the cafeteria, you feel weird, like some kind of chill walking in the middle of the cafeteria that where the White people sit. And the Spanish people are on the other side.”

This visible racial patterning in different contexts seemed to be accepted by all participants. Adam and others tried to explain some of this as, “It’s not like a conscious thing. It just comes to you, it’s second nature to you, it just happens, you just let it go.” Adam said, “It hasn’t gotten worse, it’s just mutual.” Caz explained it this way:

My perspective is that a lot of people are judgmental toward other cultures. It doesn’t matter if you are Haitian; you have to appear a certain way to be accepted by them…But like so now as a Haitian you have to find other Haitians like yourself to hang out with because they are like the same culture and you can relate yourself to them. That’s why in the cafeteria you see Black with Black or White or White or Spanish with Spanish.

Although Caz voiced this racial pattern for students’ seating in the cafeteria, he did not adhere to it. Caz, like other medium and high achieving participants, broke from the pattern he described and was regularly seated at a racially integrated table on the window side—the supposed “Spanish side.” Caz was often eating lunch next to a student who appeared Caucasian American, someone he identified as his best friend.

Max, a high achieving participant involved with the ROTC program, agreed with the general layout of seating patterns in the cafeteria, yet explained his experience was different. He explained how he sat at a table that was well integrated:
It was just all Black guys where I used to sit. Now we have a whole bunch of friends sit with us. And I think that’s how it should be… It doesn’t really matter anymore. We sit by the windows. I noticed kids that don’t speak English sit together and a lot of Hispanic kids sit together. But I think kids should sit around and sit together. I don’t think they mean to do it on purpose, but it kind of looks like that a little bit.

Max’s perspective revealed the default separation in the seating array that outlined racial characteristics, but also told how that arrangement was no longer accurate. When asked how much other factors might play a part of it, Adam, a medium achieving participant explained, “I would not say status as much because everybody’s status is regular.” Adam perceived the social hierarchy to make little designation for other factors such a student’s socioeconomic status or athletic ability. Although all of the participants felt equal and comfortable among their peers in the larger realm of the school, the participants experienced self-consciousness related to racial patterns in the cafeteria where the larger trends of the school became visible. Although the participants experienced a perception of racial divisions being present in the school cafeteria, they were not restricted by them. Instead most participants (eight out of 10) opted to sit with racially mixed students.

The researcher’s observations of the large cafeteria that held approximately one third of the student body for the half hour lunch shift triangulated the general racial patterns described by the participants, but also found many exceptions and blurred racial and ethnic boundaries where whole tables appeared integrated. Numerous times, the participants were observed sitting at tables in locations that did not fit the pattern they described and with students of varying races. The researcher’s observations of the cafeteria’s middle section being “Where the White people sit” (Xavier, Max, and Darwood) did mostly match the
students’ perspectives. This area was predominantly filled with students who appeared Caucasian American, but there were often one or two minority students sitting at tables filled predominantly by students who appeared Caucasian American. Xavier was one of the participants who sat in the middle section of the cafeteria. The other sides of the cafeteria, the wall and window, were more racially mixed than participants suggested in interviews and focus groups. The wall side was not occupied by only students appearing to be of African American heritage nor the window side only occupied by students appearing to be of Hispanic heritage. Both sides of the cafeteria appeared to be filled with students from both African American and Hispanic races, mixed with student appearing Caucasian American.

The researcher found the participants’ lunchroom behaviors predictable over the course of the study and observed them sitting at the same or nearby tables with similar students repeatedly. For example, Izzy and Caz both medium achieving participants, were always found at the same table at different times, often with both genders of apparently Asian American, Caucasian American, Hispanic American, and African American heritages. This was the first table on the window side closest to the center section. Similarly, Easter, a high achieving participant sat near the wall of windows with only male students that appeared to be Caucasian American, Hispanic American, and African American. The wall side where the participants perceived African Americans sat was where Adam and two of the three low achieving participants regularly sat. Sometimes their lunch mates were females but they always sat with students who appeared only to be of African American heritage. Only one of the participants, Xavier was observed sitting in the center section- the area participants designated as the White section. Xavier a high achieving participant sat at a table filled with both genders of students who appeared Caucasian American. Xavier, like all of the
participants, was seen laughing and engaged in conversations with his peers. The participants always appeared comfortable and behaved and dressed much like the students they were seated with.

To summarize, instances in the data formed a consensus that described the participants’ perception of a school climate that was characterized by racial patterning in the cafeteria and other informal areas of the school. The participants perceived default racial patterns but mostly appeared comfortable and free to integrate into the wall and window sides of the large space, and less comfortable to sit in the middle section that was regularly filled with Caucasian American students. The arrangement of the cafeteria seating pattern these participants believed existed was only adhered to by three of the 10 participants, two low achieving participants and one medium achieving participant. The remaining seven participants opted to integrate across sections of the cafeteria and join students from diverse races.

The discrepancy between the participants’ perception of default racial patterns in the school cafeteria and their actual seating choices suggests participants experienced dissonance regarding the impact stereotypes had on their experiences of the school’s social climate, particularly the medium and high achieving participants. Schools are often considered to be a microcosm of society, and “race still remains one of the least understood, yet most provocative and divisive elements of our society” (Howard, 2008, p. 960). However, the participants did not experience what they expected- reflections of a divided society in the context of the school cafeteria. Instead, many participants experienced racial integration powerfully as they sat with friends from diverse racial backgrounds that mirrored the diversity of the student body. The prevailing notions of a segregated cafeteria that inserted
itself in the school climate were contradicted by the seven participants’ behavior that chose to
break the racial patterning in the school cafeteria. This sub theme’s effect on the social
dimension of the school climate was mostly positive as it led to unrestrained participant
interactions as evidenced by their seating at integrated tables. Most participants (seven of the
10) were not adhering to the racial clustering trend noted by the researchers at Berkeley High
School (Noguera, 2008). The participants’ freedom to sit and interact with their friends
despite preconceived ideas about cafeteria seating patterns suggests a positive impact on the
social dimension for the participants.

**School personnel and race.** Instances in focus groups and interviews were found
related to the participants’ perceptions of teachers lacking racial prejudice or not
demonstrating it. “Because of their stereotypes, urban males may face a myriad of negative
experiences…such as harassment by police, individuals in the community, and school
officials” (Corprew & Cunningham, 2012, p. 572) The participants’ responses did not
include experiences of racial prejudices in this school directly from teachers or school
personnel. A high achieving participant, Red stated, “I really haven’t seen anything” and
Darwood, a low achieving participant asserted, “Teachers are not racial.” Participants
perceived that teachers were mostly free from prejudices that were based on race.

Adam, a medium achieving participant offered an example of how the high school
security team treated him: “I was like how come you [security] treat me differently? They
were like because you are a good kid. You never get kicked out of class.” This was
unexpected since he had cousins who were frequently in trouble with school authorities and
Adam thought this association would work against him. Adam was expecting an antagonistic
relationship with the security personnel at Normal High, but instead was treated with a
dignity he did not expect.

The participants viewed teachers and school personnel to be mostly fair and offered
equal treatment to all students, except for some who believed teachers may have favored
certain types of students, but with no link to race. When it came to the participants
perceiving teachers’ behavior, most participants indicated an absence of racial prejudice.
However, in a few instances, a participant perceived disparate teacher attitudes based on race.

Xavier explained that racial prejudice could be seen when “Teachers sometimes don’t
expect much from you. They seem like they don’t care or expect you to learn and succeed. I
think they have low expectations most of the times.” Xavier believed that some teachers’
anticipated low levels of work from African American students or invested little into their
learning. He was disappointed by this because he aspired to go to college to develop into a
professional musician, “My Mom and I expect a lot.” Xavier perceived some teachers held
low expectations for him and he perceived these as obstacles to his academic success.

A low achieving participant, River, said, “Some teachers are prejudiced sometimes.
Couple of teacher’s prejudice I think [sic].” He was unable to be more specific about his
classroom teachers but provided an example from a different school setting: “Like say if a
couple of Black kids walking down the hallway, security, teachers will stop ‘em and ask for a
pass, if a couple of White kids, they wouldn’t stop ‘em [sic].”

In summary, all low, medium, and high achieving participants perceived that school
personnel were mostly fair and treated all students equally. However, some participants also
perceived soft racism, or different attitudes in their teachers, including low expectations and
hyper sensitivity to school rules because of the participants’ race.
Conclusion of Theme Two and Relation to Research Questions

Analysis of the data suggested that consensus emerged among the participants’ perceptions of the social dimension of the school climate at Normal High School. The theme related to the social dimension of the school climate emerged from related issues of the participants experiencing comfort in the presence of other African Americans, a sense of equality and acceptance among diverse friends, a heightened sense of race consciousness in the unstructured contexts of the school, and interactions with school personnel. A sense of belonging or connection to school is an important factor contributing directly to academic success (Roybal, Thornton, & Usinger, 2014). Although the participants perceived a negative aspect of the social dimension with their perception of soft racism by some school personnel, the social dimension was a mostly positive experience for the participants and suggests the social dimension had a positive effect on the academic achievement for the participants.

The social dimension was perceived as an environment that afforded the participants with meaningful relationships with peers and mostly fair treatment by school personnel. The participants’ social experiences of Normal high school provided a sense of belonging and equality among a large heterogeneous student body. The social climate of Normal High School had a positive impact on the participants’ attitude towards school.

Research question one asked how an African American males’ grade point average affected his perception of the academic achievement for African American male students. Theme two suggested all participants across GPA levels perceived academic achievement of African American males to be mostly unaffected by the social dimension of their school’s social dimension of the school climate. Because participants experienced friendships that crossed racial lines and felt equal and included in the student body, their perception of
academic achievement was that it was based on student ability and interest. Although participants perceived a soft racism was exhibited in some interactions with school personnel, the participants still held the school personnel in neutral or favorable regard and only minimally affected the academic achievement of African American males.

Research question two asked how an African American male secondary school student’s perception of African American males’ academic achievement affected his attitude towards school. The low, medium, and high achieving participants’ mostly positive experiences and perspectives of the social dimension of the school climate suggests the social dimension had a positive effect on the participants’ attitudes towards school. The participants experienced a connection to school and a sense of belonging which suggests it positively impacted their attitudes towards school.

Research question three asked how African American male secondary school students perceive the contributing factors leading to academic achievement. Research (Amit, et. al, 2012) has identified that school climate directly impacts many factors of student learning and well-being. This theme revealed that the participants perceived the social dimension of school climate to be a mostly positive experience. However, the visible racial patterning and soft racism in some instances may be factors that limited the positive impact of the social dimension towards academic achievement for the participants.
Theme Three: Peer Influence

“Everyone—all different types of ethnicities. They get to class on time; they get good grades” (Darwood, Interview 1).

Instances in the data aggregated into a consensus related to the participants’ perception of peer influences at Normal High School. Medium and high achieving participants perceived their friendships were supportive of academic achievement and did not exhibit pressure towards negative school behaviors such as skipping class or not doing homework. Low achieving participants perceived their friendships had no effect on the participants’ grades and did not exert pressure towards negative school behaviors. However, low achieving participants experienced embarrassment related to failing or low grades when in context with peers.

High achieving participants’ peer influence. All of the participants articulated information about the influences, if any they felt from friendships at Normal High School. From these data, analysis revealed that high achieving participants’ peer influences were mostly positive and valued school achievement. As stated earlier, researchers (Diamond, et al., 2007) found that both high achieving Caucasian American and African American students experienced a degree of negative peer sanctions for academic striving and achievement. When seen as overly studious, or academically skilled, the high achieving participants in this study received negative attention from their peers in racial connotations, previously noted, as “Acting White” (Fordham, 1985, p. 4). However, further analysis of the data revealed instances related to high achieving participants perceiving positive peer influence toward academic striving and achievement. These instances characterized high achieving participants’ peer relationships as supportive of academic achievement. A positive
academic dimension of the school climate can have a profound impact on students’ motivation, achievement, behavior, and emotional states (Loukas, 2007, p. 2). The effects of this positive academic dimension may be related to the value placed on achievement by the participants’ peer relationships at Normal High School. The support experienced by the high achieving participants’ peer relationships may have countered negative peer sanctions related to the “burden of acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1985, p. 177).

A collective view of the high achieving participants was that their peers’ influences were mostly supportive and encouraging of academic success. These participants reported a predominance of friends that were bound for college. Red described his friends, “All my friends are good students …they’re all accepted into college.” Red, like the other students in this group esteemed their friend’s success in the classroom.

The high achieving participants’ friendships were characterized by support for purposeful academic behaviors and generally a good will towards each other in the academic arena. Xavier expressed it directly, “And we encourage each other. We’ll study together or help each other out with questions and stuff. We all want to do well.” Some of the high achieving participants also articulated their independence in regards to peer pressure, “I can make my own decision without pressure.” These young men noted positive behavior of their friends but downplayed it with a reiteration of their own agency in school. Additionally, none of these students reported any peer pressure for negative student behaviors.

In summary, the high achieving participants reported their friends provided a positive influence and encouragement for academic success. Additionally, high achieving participants articulated a lack of pressure from peers to participate in negative behaviors.
Medium achieving participants’ peer influence. Research conducted in a desegregated public high school in Shaker Heights, Ohio, found that a larger percentage of Caucasian American than African American students believed that friends would agree that being competitive about grades is not cool. “The research did not support that Black students’ peer culture in Shaker Heights is more oppositional to achievement than Whites” (Ferguson, 2008, p. 168). Analysis of data in the present study found instances of medium achieving participants who reported having friendships with peers who sought a college education. Izzy spoke about his friends, “Basically the kids who want to succeed in life…and we talk about going to college.” Izzy found friends who were actively seeking success after high school and sought a college education. Medium achieving participants reported their friends mostly demonstrated appropriate student behaviors and aspired to academic success.

The medium achieving participants experienced friendships that were close and encouraged academic achievement. Caz talked about one such friend, “He wants to get things done as early as possible … So that made me want to do the same thing. We actually have little competitions, like who can have a better grade in this class.” Caz’s friendship was characterized by encouragement and promoted scholastic achievement. Caz and his friend are planning to attend college after high school.

In summary, medium achieving participants reported experiencing friendships at Normal High School that were free from negative sanctions for academic success, free of pressure towards inappropriate behaviors, but supportive of positive student behaviors.

Low achieving participants’ peer influence. Researchers (Diamond et. al, 2007) report that low achieving African American students were found to receive high levels of
positive peer pressure for school achievement among their peers. In the present study, low achieving participants reported their peers had little to no influence on their academic performance. When the topic of friendships was discussed in an interview with River, he described his friends as, “Average students, couple low [level of achievement], couple higher [level of achievement].” His friendships were with peers across the range of achievement levels, which was common for the students in this group. Darwood described his friends as, “Everyone- all different types of ethnicities. They get to class on time, they get good grades.” Darwood like the other low achieving participants interacted with peers who were racially diverse and had a range of achievement levels.

The low achieving participants reported their grades were not influenced by friends. The low achieving participants experienced friendships that were mostly free from pressure to skip class or other inappropriate behaviors. They denied or minimized any influence from friendships. In interviews, the topic of how friends can have influence on teenagers to do negative or positive acts was explored. River said he had not experienced peer pressure for neither negative nor positive actions, “No probably not, no type of pressure.” Jah was the only one to concede to some small negative peer pressure. He said, “A little bit, um, peer pressure to skip class, or do something you’re not supposed to.” These participants said they were unaffected by peer influence for positive student achievement but hinted at some negative sanctioning for low grades such as snickering or critical comments received because of poor test scores or other grades.

However, deeper analysis revealed low achieving participants ‘valued their peer’s esteem. Darwood said, “I feel embarrassed when my report card comes.” He expressed the low value his peers placed on poor grades, and was embarrassed by his place in this low
ranking. Because he and the other low achieving participants have friends with a range of achievement levels, they felt in certain instances inadequate in regards to their report cards. The low achieving participants perceived their friendships to have little if any positive or negative influence on their academic performances, but they date suggested negative attachment to poor performance in school among the participants’ peer group.

In summary, low achieving participants reported experiencing friendships that went across racial lines and achievement levels. These friendships offered little influence or pressure on the participants towards academic success or to engage in negative behaviors detrimental to academic success. However, the peer relationships exhibited negative sanctioning of failing and poor grades.

**Conclusion of Theme Three and Relation to Research Questions**

In conclusion, instances in the data were related to peer influences. High and medium achieving participants perceived their friendships were supportive of academic achievement and did not encourage negative school behavior such as skipping class or not studying for tests. Low achieving participants perceived friendships with a range of peers that were not influential towards academic achievement nor towards negative student behaviors. However, low achieving participants did experience negative comments from peers for poor or failing grades. This theme is related to research questions one, two, and three.

Research question one asked how an African American males’ grade point average affected his perception of the academic achievement for African American male students. Medium and high achieving participants’ peer influences supported and positively affected their perception of academic achievement. The peer influences for medium and high achieving participants perceived academic achievement with esteem. The low achieving participants’
peer influences had little impact on their perception of academic achievement. However, the low achieving participants’ peers’ negative comments associated with poor grades suggests the peer influences had a positive perception of academic achievement.

Research question two asked how an African American male secondary school student’s perception of African American males’ academic achievement affected his attitude towards school. Peer relationships of medium and high achieving participants were suggested to have a positive impact on the participants’ attitudes towards school. Peer relationships of low achieving participants were found to have a slight but positive effect on the low achieving participants’ attitude towards school.

Research question three asked how African American male secondary school students perceived the contributing factors leading to academic achievement. Peer relationships were perceived by medium and high achieving participants as a factor that supported academic achievement. Low achieving participants did not perceive peer relationships as contributing towards academic achievement, but their peers made negative comments about low or failing grades.

**Theme Four: Academic Dimension of School Climate**

“So I like it when teachers do that—take the time and try to make a student’s life easier; try to understand where they are coming from and help them out and not to give up on them” (Caz, Interview 1).

Analyses of the data resulted in instances related to the participants’ perception of the academic dimension of the school’s climate. The academic dimension is shaped by the “Quality of instruction; teacher expectations for student achievement; and monitoring student
progress and promptly reporting results to students and parents” (Loukas, 2007, p. 1). Research (Ferguson, 2007) reports the instructional tripod of content, pedagogy, and relationships as three components that teachers need to attend to in order to effectively engage students in learning. The quality of instruction can be measured by these three aspects of what teachers do to enable students to learn within a classroom. Analysis of the data revealed the participants experiences of the academic dimension of Normal High School aggregated into subthemes related to relationship, pedagogy, and academic content. High achieving participants reported enjoying effective relationships with teachers that combined positively with content and pedagogy to profoundly shape the students’ immediate objectives of improving their grades and setting future goals that were for some, a college degree. Results related to medium achieving participants were mixed. The results for medium achieving participants in the area of teacher relationships varied between weak and strong connections to a teacher; with engagement to content, the instances also varied between strong engagement to weak engagement with content; and with pedagogy instances varied between appreciation for their teachers’ pedagogy to a critical perspective of their teachers’ pedagogy. The data revealed the low achieving participants did not perceive strong relationships with their teachers, lacked connection to the content of their classes, and did not engage with their teacher’s pedagogy.

**Academic relationships for high achieving participants.** Despite advances towards more equitable rates of educational opportunity and achievement, African American male participation in honors or AP level classes remains disproportionately low (NCES, 2012). Instances in the data related to classroom experiences of high achieving participants, revealed they perceived effective relationships with their teachers and peers. High achieving
participants perceived they were the only African American student or one of a few in their high level classes. Max, a participant in honors and AP classes, stated that he was one, of only two or three African American students in these classes. He described the classes:

I got kids younger than me helping me with math or me helping other kids my age or younger with whatever they need help with. I think everybody should help everybody. Like in my Physics, there are only like two seniors and the rest are juniors. They are little geniuses. I kind of like that when there is diversity like that. It’s pretty cool.

Max noted the age differences in the class as an important quality of the classroom and not the racial makeup. His classroom experiences were similar to the general climate of inclusiveness that was present in the social dimension if the school climate. His comments were similar to those of other participants who described the sense of community they experienced in classes. In an interview, Max discussed his AP Economics class, this time highlighting the racial gap:

I’m the only Black kid in my AP Economics class. There [are] two Spanish boys.

Yeah, I don’t really feel out of place. I kind of like it in there, but yeah, there’s a gap.

I’m one in like 30 kids in there, so yeah there is that gap.

Max’s experiences of the racial disparity in high level classes did not leave him feeling inadequate or misplaced. Max saw himself as someone who wanted to challenge himself, and felt that this trait was the outstanding characteristic that he shared with the other students in his AP classes. Max reported that he enjoyed the classroom community despite being the only African American student in the class. His experiences indicated the sense of
community that students in high-level classes experienced, notwithstanding the low level of African American enrollment.

An important aspect high achieving participants experienced in the community of the classroom was the personal connection these participants made with a teacher. Max expressed a sincere admiration for the instructor in the ROTC program and said it was partly the teacher’s influence that led him to plan on joining the Air Force upon graduating from high school. Max voiced how his ROTC instructor’s message emphasized hard work and academic achievement. Max said:

He’s another one telling us nothing is going to be given to you… This affects your grades especially, like he makes jokes. ‘You couldn’t get into prison with those grades.’ Definitely having that grandfather figure in your life motivates you to do your thing.

Max formed a valuable relationship with a teacher. This relationship provided warm support and a sense of humor that worked to help Max develop aspirations for academic success and influenced Max’s postsecondary goals.

Another high achieving participant, Xavier also reported that a connection to a teacher made a positive impact on his future aspirations and desire to earn high grades. Xavier explained:

Mr. R., the music teacher has really been helpful to me. He like fills that father figure to me. He has taught me so much. He has pushed me to get good grades and apply myself. And now I am off to college, I got into all the colleges I applied to. That felt really good.
Xavier’s music teacher played an important role for him. The participant called it a “Father figure” which implied someone who provided guidance, support, and high expectations and praise when appropriate. Xavier, like other high achieving participants, perceived his academic drive and success was positively influenced through the relationship he shared with his music teacher.

**Content for high achieving participants.** Common among the high achieving participants was their affinity for one or more subjects and its link to future aspirations. For Easter, it was Anatomy, something he chose as a major for college. “I like learning about the human body it’s interesting to me. We do labs and stuff and dissecting.” For Xavier it was the band and music classes. “I thoroughly enjoy the band program obviously because that’s my thing. I like the music program.” He was recently admitted to a nearby state college as a music education major. Another high achieving participant, Max, made a strong connection to the ROTC program and really enjoyed its emphasis on leadership and classes. Max enthusiastically shared with me, “I want to join the Air Force. Did I tell you that? That’s what I want to do as a career.” And Red, the fourth high achieving participant was a standout football player at Normal High School. He reflected on how much he enjoyed this experience and how he wanted to utilize it in the future. “I love sports and I love helping people. So I decided to put that together and make a career (as an athletic trainer).” He had accepted the offer of admittance to a competitive private college with a well-regarded program for athletic training.

**Pedagogy for high achieving participants.** “Most professionals and lay individuals alike would argue that teachers are one of the most vital sources of support in the school context” (Corprew & Cunningham, 2012, p. 575). Red, a high achieving participant believed
learning was not difficult but the teacher’s style was a factor of his success. “I mean learning to me is easy, it depends on how the teacher is teaching the material. I like to visually see something which helps me memorize things. I am more of a visual kind of guy.” He possessed confidence in his ability as a learner and his preference for teachers to use visual supports to reinforce instruction. Other high achieving participants also expressed an appreciation for teaching strategies that required higher level thinking. For example, Easter said, “I just like the way she made us read and analyze things.” Xavier another high achieving participant described his experience where the teacher’s assignments were challenging and effective:

We have to research and diagnose. We apply the knowledge. I enjoy a challenge so that is something that I like. We are given a problem- challenge kind of thing. In this example you are given an actual life example situation…It’s fun. It’s a lot better …It’s the fastest way I would know how to learn.

Xavier, like other high achieving participants, was able to express a preference for teaching and learning styles. The high achieving participants recognized that teachers and the work they assigned were an integral part of their classroom experience.

In summary, high achieving participants had classroom experiences that created a positive perspective of the academic dimension of Normal high School. The high achieving participants experienced effective engagement with the pedagogy of many of their classes. They experienced a pedagogical approach that required higher level and critical thinking. This perspective was linked to their self-confidence as learners. The high achieving participants reported having challenging teachers and assignments.
High achieving participants formed warm and effective relationships with their teachers. These relationships led to participant striving for higher grades and aspirations for after high school graduation. High achieving participants successfully engaged with content from one or more of their classes with high interest. This interest and achievement led to the participants’ desire to pursue further education in a related field.

**Academic relationships for medium achieving participants.** Instances in the data related to medium achieving participants’ experiences in the classroom, did not form consensus with instances related to teacher relationships. For example, Izzy often had classes where he was the only African American student. He explained this experience as, “Just being the only Black kid, it’s one of those things that just happen. It just happens that you are that one Black kid.” He did not attach any significance to it and related this observation to his idea that the other students who appeared Caucasian American could be, “British, Canadian, or Russian” in that he, like other students in this large school have unique characteristics. Whereas, the other two medium achieving participants experienced mostly mixed classes, or classes with mostly African American students.

Medium achieving participants experienced mostly effective relationships with their teachers. Caz explained how he related well to some teachers: “So I like it when teachers do that- take the time and try to make a student’s life easier; try to understand where they are coming from and help them out and not to give up on them.” The medium achieving participants perceived influences from their teachers. Izzy said it clearly, “Ms. Teber, she influenced me by getting me interested in math. So I decided I really do like math.” However, Adam did not perceive his teacher relationship as positively:
I don’t have any bonds with anybody here at school. I mean I tell her [my teacher] how I feel about football. And she will tell me this and that. And me skipping school; she tells me I need to go to therapy.

He expressed not having bonds with any personnel in the school, but seemed to have a close relationship with one of his teachers that he had for two years in a row.

**Pedagogy for medium achieving participants.** The medium achieving participants’ perception of classroom experiences related to pedagogy did not form a consensus. Adam was most critical of teachers’ pedagogy when he stated, “The teachers’ methods need to change a bit to be more proactive, cause like you being passively with it [sic]. We are not really going to care.” He suggested that to increase students’ buy-in, the learning activities need to be more relevant to their lives and require more effort from the students to create or discover learning. Whereas, Caz was better able to engage with the teacher’s style based on relating well to his teachers, “You actually want to learn more and you know you can go to them and they would help you out.” He, like the other medium achieving participant, was able to engage more easily with his classroom teacher’s instruction.

The medium achieving participants viewed teachers as being instrumental in their learning. Adam perceived that teachers’ extra help was needed because he was at times unable to acquire new learning. He explained:

It not like always you can do it [sic]. You need a bit of help from a teacher. You need an example to set you up. Sometimes, you need help from the teacher. Then the way you help me afterschool it’s good, but then that could have been done in that in class to help me learn better [sic].
Adam, like other medium achieving participants expressed a dependence on a teacher’s individual support to help master new skills. These participants expressed how teachers play a significant role for them. Whether in the classroom or in extra help sessions, the participants perceived they needed teachers to provide ways to understand the content and acquire new knowledge and skills.

**Content for medium achieving participants.** Analysis of the data lacked a consensus with instances related to medium achieving participants’ experiences connecting to the content of their classes. Some medium achieving participants had a higher interest in and connection to the content of their classes than others. For example, Adam questioned the relevance of the curriculum:

> What we are being taught? We don’t really need this at all. Why even try? We don’t need this stuff. How [come] stuff like income taxes or insurance, car insurance, health insurance, stuff you need to survive is not taught? We are just left out here on our own.

Adam perceived that the practical matters associated with adulthood would be a more stimulating and applicable curriculum. Adam added that he perceived he would be unprepared and unsupported in navigating these matters in the very near future as an adult.

Alternatively, Izzy, as noted earlier, was influenced to appreciate math by a teacher relationship developed in his math class. This strong interest in math helped make a meaningful connection to school for him that led to an educational dependent aspiration: “When I get to college I want to major in math, but I want to become an engineer.” Similarly, Caz explained his interest in science, “I find Biology interesting and learning about the body.” This interest led him to plan to study nursing in college.
**Academic relationships for low achieving participants.** All three low achieving participants reported lacking relationships with teachers or other school personnel that led to an increased desire to achieve academically or influence goals for after high school.

Research suggests that if students perceive their teachers as unsupportive, it may lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy of inadequacy and low self-esteem (Tenebaum & Ruck, 2007). In interviews and focus groups, these participants stated that there were no adults in the building they perceived as sharing an influential relationship or they considered a role model. For example, when questioned about this in an interview, River replied “No. Nope. Nope.” Darwood was equally direct in his response to the same question about having a relationship with an adult within the building that may have influenced him, “Nobody in school.”

Although the third participant conceded his guidance counselor and teachers were nice, he too did not report forming relationships with any teacher or other school personnel.

“Teachers and counselors disproportionately track Black men into low academic ability classrooms, whereas, many of their white counterparts are placed into advanced courses” (Palmer & Maramba, 2011, p. 433). Low and medium level participants experienced the other side of the uneven racial makeup of the leveled classes at Normal High School. Jah, a low achieving student explained his perception of classes at Normal high school:

> When I look around my classes, I am in mainly lower classes, so I’m in fives [lowest level] and most of my classes have African Americans, like my friend Ryan is White but he is normally always the only White guy, like there’d be one or two other White people.
Jah expressed how there were usually fewer than three White students in his core academic classes which have enrollments of up to 26 students. For these participants, the pattern of high African American enrollment in low level classes was visible. However, the participants did not designate any significance to the phenomenon. The participants’ interpretation of the racial pattern was explained by differences in the levels of student behavior, intelligence, and pace of instruction, not racial differences. Jah elaborated on his understanding:

Because my friends-I have known since elementary school are smarter than me and I barely get to see them. Like we used to be a clique and um in middle school and elementary school we would always hang out. [Now] they are like in honors and AP classes and I rarely get to see them in the classroom.

Jah’s low level high school classes separated him from his White peers and he missed sharing common learning experiences with them.

River, who had the uncommon experience of being enrolled in both the lowest level classes and a medium level class said, “Kids in five [lowest] are more rowdy bugging out. Level eight [higher] is more chill go faster – eight better than five.” His experiences of the low and the medium level classes led to his perception of differences in student conduct and rates of learning, in these classes and his value judgment of “Better” to the higher level class. The small percentage of African Americans enrolled in honors and AP level classes and the high percentage of African American students enrolled in low level classes was discussed in the interviews and focus groups but was not attributed to race by the participants.

**Pedagogy for low achieving participants.** “The disparate placement of minorities in low performing groups results in students of color receiving less academic instruction
because students placed in low-ability groups are often subjected to rote curricula that lead to inattentiveness and low attendance” (Smith, 2010, p. 1037). The low achieving participants complained that often their teachers use worksheets too frequently or lecture too long. Jah, a low achieving participant reported how one teacher regularly, “Gives out a paper and tells you to do it ...I get spaced.” These routines were seen as ineffective by the participants and made it challenging for them to stay engaged. Jah, continued, “Me, I get distracted. I get something in my head, I look at the window, or I look at my phone.”

The challenges of class size were discussed in interviews and focus groups, which led to discussion of small class sizes as a way to increase participant interaction with teachers and make the pedagogy more effective. Participant responses in the focus groups and interviews did not identify smaller class size as an effective way to increase performance. One participant saw the difference in smaller class size simply as a change in the physical number of students needing to be seated. Another participant recognized that the teacher can more easily see which students are following along but, recognized it was really the student’s job to be sure he was following along. Jah explained, “It’s a little bit easier because the teacher will make sure you are following along and stuff. But that’s my problem not the teacher’s; I got to follow along.” These students did not clearly identify any benefits to a smaller class size. It seemed the participants’ perceptions were best summarized by Darwood:

There are two sides to it. If it’s a smaller class, you can pay attention more, but at the same time you get bored. Then the teacher talks more, I end up falling asleep. If it’s a big class, you are either paying attention or socializing. So it can be both ways.
Smaller class size was not perceived by low achieving participants as an effective way to address the problem of the pedagogy of their classes. The low achieving participants communicated a lack of engagement with the pedagogy used in their classes.

**Content for low achieving participants.** Instances in the data related to low achieving participants’ connection to the content of their classes revealed a preference for elective classes. Darwood perceived “Elective classes teach you more stuff like that [practical skills and knowledge]” Low achieving participants perceived these classes provided them with skills they would use in adulthood. Instances in the data formed a consensus that showed a lack of connection to traditional curriculum. Darwod explained that “Mos’ classes, it just gets boring /sic/. So that means it’s hard to pay attention I guess.” Similarly Jah expressed, “I was just trying to get by.” Jah failed to engage with the curriculum because he did not see himself as interested in college: “I wasn’t really about college and stuff.” Low achieving participants experienced difficulty valuing the content of their core classes, which combined with an absence of effective teacher relationships and disconnection from classroom pedagogy to alienate them from the academic dimension of Normal High School.

**Two schools.** The participants’ perception of a visible separation of African Americans within Normal High School led to a discussion about the “Two school” (Noguera, 2004, p. 145) phenomenon that researchers have recognized in some public high schools. Noguera (2004, p. 145) suggested some public high schools are really two divided schools that provide two different experiences: one for the high achieving students bound for college and one for the others, as a default not perceived as college bound.
Researchers have studied the long term effects of tracking and linked it to diverging outcomes for students (Ferguson, 2007; Noguera, 2004). Tracking refers to an educational practice used by a majority of schools in which students are sorted by academic ability for the purpose of creating homogenous groups making advantages for instruction. Often the tracking pattern in large public high schools leads to a division between high achieving students – those bound for college and the low achieving students – those who drop out or those that do graduate but are ill equipped for competitive employment (Noguera, 2004). These different outcomes, in effect, create two schools in one. The participants in this present study had a range of views regarding a manifestation of this phenomenon at Normal High School.

Max recognized the two-school phenomenon at his school and likened it to the documentary movie *Little Rock Nine* that examined how the historically important public high school in Little Rock, Arkansas remains today divided along racial lines. He stated, “I saw this movie, *Little Rock Nine*. They showed it fast forward to now. There was still kind of like, that gap percentage from White to Black.” He was shocked by the film’s depiction of the limited progress of African Americans in the academic arena at the school. Max, who was in one AP class in his senior year, believed the two-school phenomenon existed because the students who were not enrolled in higher level classes experienced a lack of homework and other academic demands. He explained:

Yeah definitely it is a school within in a school. … I don’t even have to say AP. If I just say this English class is tough. They are like man; we don’t even get any work. I definitely got a lot of people say they take some easy classes where they don’t have to
do any work. I think like, How’s that? So I think it is. It’s kind of like a school within a school (italics added by author).

For Max, the absence of academic challenges that his schoolmates in low level classes experienced led him to believe the education they were receiving was clearly different than the education he was receiving. Because of this stark difference, he believed that the Normal High School did, in essence, have two schools.

Xavier held a similar view of the school and its matching the two school phenomenon:

This school—yes, definitely…because it’s completely like I see it all the time. The smart kids don’t associate with the “lesser-lesser” kids. Everyone who is smart hangs together and they all are in the AP and honors classes and they take 5 APs and two honors and have no study halls and play sports and are Captain America on the side. Xavier recognized that students in the more challenging classes often loaded their schedules and left no room for classes or study halls where they would integrate with other students who did not take honors or AP classes. In his view, the students who enrolled in the school’s most challenging classes developed friendships that carried out of the classroom and into the larger social circles of the school community, excluding the more racially diverse student population of the lower and middle track classes. Easter, a high achieving student explained how he became isolated from his African American peers as he began freshman year and was placed into the high level classes at Normal High:

As soon as I came here I was in all honors classes and I never got to see any of my friends. And I was like, only one or two African American students in all of my classes. So when it came to like show our report cards or class schedules or anything like that I would
see all honors classes and on their side …And then I would never get to see each other or compare notes. I never get to do projects with them or because see we would never be in the same levels or classes.

This social separation was a phenomenon that continued for him throughout his four years at Normal high. In a formal observation, the researcher observed Easter several times during the free time before classes began with a group of eight students. They were always males, mostly African American students with one or two appearing Caucasian American or Hispanic. Some in these groups often wore hooded sweatshirts or large headphones, while Easter appeared with dress shirts and jeans or, on some days wearing khaki pants and a jean jacket. In an interview with the researcher, Easter explained most of these students were his friends who were regularly not in his AP classes. Because Easter was in many high level classes, he was unable to connect and share educational experiences with his friends during the school day.

Red, a high achieving participant did not agree with the three other high achieving students regarding the two school phenomenon at Normal High:

I think there is one school; it doesn’t matter about the color of your skin, like I said before it really starts your freshman year, well actually in 8th grade because that’s when you pick your classes for freshman year. Like, when you’re a freshman, your teachers are observing you to see what class they are going to put you in. So with the two school thing everyone is given the equal opportunity.

Red’s perspective of the school was consistent throughout the study. He believed that a student’s educational experience was dependent on that student’s effort and ability. He further believed the school and its personnel treated all of the students equally.
Jah, a low achieving participant, perceived the concentration of African Americans in low level classes. He said, “I definitely see the people that have better grades are separate from the kids who have lesser grade. But I think that’s a good thing, so that class is like, co-taught and there are two teachers and that class is not that hard.” He affirmed the same reasons for tracking students but he too, paid a social cost. Jah felt that an implication of tracked classes, was that students in the higher tracks had little interaction with students in the lower tracks and, the phenomenon created isolation from his Caucasian American friends. Izzy, a medium achieving participant said that there was a difference in teachers that related to the academic separation within the school. He related his experiences with a teacher who had limited effectiveness. He said, “I have this teacher and she is not there. She tells us to do one thing, what the book tells us to do… Then those teachers I don’t like them, they just don’t know how to teach.” Izzy felt it was unfortunate to have a teacher who was unable to go beyond the textbook to provide instruction with a range of methods.

In summary, the participants, with the exception of one, perceived Normal High School exhibited a, “Two school phenomenon” (Noguera, 2004, p. 145). The high achieving participants expressed academic and social alienation from other African American students and medium and low achieving participants perceived similar distances from fellow Caucasian American students who spent little time in racially integrated classrooms. The results revealed that high achieving participants perceived their workload was drastically more challenging than their African American peers at the school and perceived this as an indication that many students had very different educational experiences than thier. In general, the social experiences and educational demands and experiences in the classroom delivered two different experiences for participants at Normal High School.
Conclusion of Theme Four and Relation to Research Questions

In conclusion, instances in the data aggregated into a description of the academic dimension of the school climate. Instances related to the classroom relationships of the participants, the participants’ perception of pedagogy, and the participants’ connection to the curriculum of their classes were aspects of the participants’ perceptions of the academic dimension. Additionally, six out of ten participants perceived a “Two-school phenomena” present at Normal High School.

The experiences and perception of the academic dimension of school climate were different for low, medium, and high achieving participants. High achieving participants perceived their experiences in academic classes with low African American enrollment alienated them from their African American peers and other minority students. Medium and low achieving participants experienced classes with high minority enrollments and experienced alienation from Caucasian American peers and high achieving African American peers. The participants’ perception of learning environments did not identify race as a factor contributing to achievement. The participants perceived the racial patterns of the classes to be reflective of student ability and interests and as a source of division in the social experiences of school. All high achieving participants and most medium achieving participants experienced influential relationships with teachers. Low achieving participants did not report close relationships with teachers. High achieving participants viewed classroom pedagogy favorably and expressed a preference for critical thinking and application activities. Medium achieving participants perceived teacher’s pedagogy without consensus: two appreciated the teacher’s instructional methods while one did not. All Low achieving participants perceived their classroom pedagogy critically and complained of rote
assignments and teachers’ styles that failed to hold their attention. All high achieving participants and most medium achieving participants developed strong interest in a particular content area which led them to desire a college education in a related major. Low achieving participants experienced disconnection to the content of their classes and a preference for practical, elective type classes.

Instances in the data from almost all participants related to the academic dimension led to a theme of a two school phenomenon at Normal High School. The different educational tracks created social separation, a perception that teachers with fewer instructional strategies taught lower classes and a lack of academic rigor for low level classes were in essence two separate school experiences. This theme is related to research questions one, two, and three.

Research question one asked how an African American males’ grade point average affected his perception of the academic achievement for African American male students. This theme suggests medium and high achieving participants perceived academic achievement for African American males benefited from influential relationships with teachers, pedagogy in their classrooms, and a strong interest in the content of one or more of their classes. This theme suggests low achieving participants’ perceived the academic achievement for African American males did not benefit from relationships with teachers, pedagogy in the low achieving participants’ classrooms, or the content of their classes. The theme suggests the participants’ perception of a “Two school phenomenon” affected their views on academic achievement for African American males (Noguera, 2008, p. 225). Because of tracking patterns that affected social and academic affiliations between high achieving and low achieving students, the participants perceived the academic achievement
for African American males was disparate, as if Normal High School was composed of two separate schools. The low achieving participants associated achievement with higher level classes that were perceived as “Better” (River) and where “Smart kids” (Jah) were enrolled.

Research question two asked how an African American male secondary school student’s perception of African American males’ academic achievement affected his attitude towards school. This theme suggested high achieving participants’ attitudes were positively affected by influential teacher relationships, the pedagogy in their classrooms, and a strong interest in the content of one or more of their classes. This theme suggested the medium achieving participants’ attitudes towards school were mixed; one participant viewed difficulty attaining academic achievement because of the pedagogical style of teachers and curriculum that did not hold value for him, and a lack of an influential teacher relationship. His value for academic achievement was unclear and perceived it as difficult to attain. The two other medium participants perceived academic achievement was related to the influential relationship of teachers, effective pedagogy, and a connection to the content of their classes. They possessed a positive perspective of academic achievement and aspired to a college education in a specific field.

This theme suggested low achieving participants’ attitude towards school were negatively impacted by their lack of influential teacher relationships, difficulty with teacher pedagogy, and difficulty connecting to the content of their classes and that perhaps even academic achievement was beyond their grasp and interest.

Research question three asked how African American male secondary school students perceived contributing factors leading to academic achievement. This theme suggested high achieving participants perceived relationships with teachers, classroom pedagogy, and the
content of their classes as factors contributing towards academic achievement. This theme suggested two of three medium achieving participants’ perceived relationships with teachers, classroom pedagogy, and the content of their classes as factors contributing toward academic achievement, while one medium achieving participant seemed indecisive in his assessment of the academic dimension’s benefit for him. This theme suggested low achieving participants perceived their inability to engage with the pedagogy, curriculum, and their teachers were obstacles to academic achievement.

**Theme Five: Factors Related to Academic Achievement**

“It’s like, I’ve been in school for six hour straight (*sic*) and I’m like, why do I have to do this homework? Nah.” (Adam, Interview #1).

Instances in the data aggregated into specific factors related to the participants’ perceptions of their academic achievement at Normal High School. All participants perceived their freshman year posed social and academic challenges that negatively affected their academic achievement. High achieving participants eventually recovered from the difficult first year, while low achieving participants did not experience a recovery from freshman year. High achieving participants perceived time management a skill critical of academic achievement, while medium and low achieving participants perceived study hall periods as an important factor contributing positively to academic achievement. High achieving participants’ perceived self-efficacy was also an important factor that contributed towards academic achievement, while low and medium achieving participants did not.

**Freshman year.** Research has shown that it is a common trend for students’ 9th grade GPA to be lower than their 8th grade GPA (Isakson & Jarvis, 1998). The participating
students experienced this drop. Many experts believe that freshman year is a make or break year because it creates a trajectory for the next four years. If a student is not promoted, emotional and academic penalties are paid. Research shows “Ninth graders have the lowest grade point average, the most missed classes, the majority of failing grades, and more misbehavior referrals than any other high school grade level” (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010, p. 2). Transition into high school can be especially challenging for minority students including African American males (Brenner & Graham, 2009).

Low, medium, and high achieving participants reported that their transition from middle school into freshman year of high school was difficult. Beginning high school meant leaving a well-known community as described by Adam, “In middle school, you had one group of teachers, you stick with same group of people for three years straight, you know their names, their mommy’s, their daddy’s name, and what not, everything.” Freshman year at Normal High School brought a new and a much larger student body to navigate, a much larger school building, and a several new teachers to get to know as well.

All participants reported instances related to earning lower grades than they previously earned in middle school. Darwood explained “Like before… previous, I had honors…My mom would come to high honors awards…and when high school came, it was just like,-it just went down [drastic decrease]. No awards, nothing.” Adam chimed in, “Everybody’s gone down /sic/.” These participants explained the drop in their Freshman GPA as a result of a lack of maturity and focus. Darwood thought that, “When you come to high school, there is a whole level of maturity that needs to straighten out.” He said those freshmen that were mature, would get straight A’s. Izzy, was not one of those mature students. He, like the other participants, did not come to high school with the maturity and
focus he felt needed. He said, “Well my first year, I feel like I wasn’t taking everything that seriously.” The participants said they were excited to be in high school and expressed that its large size and social opportunities may have been difficult to manage at first. Red explained, “As a freshman, like you want to experience high school- let go of things, go with the flow.” Caz expressed a similar sentiment about coming into high school: “There is more like reality… more life, more experience.” The participants’ need to find themselves and become acquainted with a new peer group meant a time of social change. Easter explained his experience clearly, “I wasn’t focused on school. I mean it was like clothes, sneakers, basketball, and girls. Not school [italics added by author].” The social pressures of the large high school often overran the participants’ concern for academics in their freshman year and they perceived this hindered their academic performances.

Additionally, the transition into high school for the participants required increased levels of academic responsibility and time management. Xavier explained, “In high school you are thrust into more responsibility faster than middle school.” The academic demands of high school classes and expectations for punctuality in attendance and on assignments were more stringent than in middle school. Max recollected, “When I got here I felt like I had to pick it up ….I was failing English with Ms. M…I was used to reading books that I wanted to read.” The differences in their classes were real and required more growth from them.

Easter reflected:

Middle school was so easy for me so I would basically not really study. I mean I did homework and do well on tests and all that. So I would get good grades. But coming to high school, you actually have to sit down and study for an hour or two and take notes and all that stuff.
Easter and the other participants were challenged by the increased demands of high school classes. The participants’ need to develop their study skills, learning strategies, and time management became clear in freshman year. Easter added: “Time management gets more important to you. You have to know what to do. Or else you like just gonna fall apart [sic].”

The freshman year was a period of struggle both to adjust socially and to increase academic skills.

All low, medium, and high achieving participants expressed regret their first year of high school resulted in such low grades. Jah, a low achieving participant lamented, “I wish I could start over though. It took me a while to get my grades up.” Even high achieving participants had set backs resulting from their 9th grade performances. Xavier explained:

My freshman year I started out in only one honors class and I slacked off a lot. So my guidance counselor said I shouldn’t take any honors classes. I was told I should stay in the 8’s and not go above. Because I was slacking off, my grades reflected that I couldn’t.

Xavier’s sophomore year did not include honors level classes because of his poor performance in his freshman year. All of the participants’ suffered low grades limiting their options for class selection and negatively impacting their cumulative transcript for high school. The high achieving students were eventually able to recover from this difficult first year as shown by Xavier’s elaboration:

That actually forced me to try harder, so I could beat those comments-those criticisms. So after that, I excelled and have taken more honors. And this year I am in honors and am taking two AP’s and passing all of them.
As Xavier continued through high school, he and other the high achieving participants said they increased their commitment to school. Easter stated that after freshman year “I got more focused. I think it’s because I got busier. So it made me appreciate the time I had to do work and stuff like that.” The medium and low achieving participants did not communicate this same message. All of the participants experienced a lower than expected level of success in school in their first year of high school as measured by GPA.

In summary, the aggregation of instances related to freshman year showed consensus that the participants’ transition to high school was difficult. The challenges of managing social and academic pressures overwhelmed their level of maturity in their freshman year and their grades were lower than what they earned in middle school. As they progressed through high school, the medium and high achieving participants involved in extracurricular activities grew their skill managing time, and communicated recovering from freshman year. The low achieving participants who did not pursue extracurricular activities, did not report successfully balancing their academic coursework with other interests or a message about recovering from that year.

**Time management and study halls.** Research has shown that difficulties with study skills including time management are better predictors of grade point average (GPA) above and beyond the impact of student intelligence (Langberg et al., 2011). The skill of time management was mentioned by low, medium, and high achieving participants as a valuable skill in high school, but only the high achieving participants emphasized its critical link to managing high school studies and afterschool activities. The medium and high achieving participants reported they were involved in activities that frequently filled their time after the regular school day. Caz, a medium achieving participant elaborated:
The schedule has been hard, keeping up and trying to find time to do things. I was an athlete as a wrestler, trying to manage homework projects and the sport itself. So we had practice, then when you go, you are exhausted and you forget that had homework for like seven classes and you go in the next day and teachers are asking you where is the homework and ‘I was afterschool playing sports’ is not a good answer. So you have to find time.

Caz struggled to find the stamina and time needed to compete in high school sports and complete regular assignments for his classes. Despite being tired from the busy day, he and the other medium and high achieving participants found the resolve to complete the assignments of their classes. Red, a high achieving student provided an example:

Like last night, I got home at like 8:30 from lacrosse practice. I was just drained. So, I took a nap from 8:45 to like 2ish, I got up um and I like took notes on the classes I needed to take notes in and I did two pages of homework. That was that. I went back to sleep.

Red, like other medium and high achieving participants found ways to maximize their time outside of class and activities. This often meant disrupting sleep patterns in order to meet the demands of the classroom and athletics. Although, the participants who did not participate in extracurricular activities did not express the same level of difficulty balancing academic workload and other demands, they said they experienced difficulty managing their assignments and preparing for tests.

Most of the low and medium achieving participants came to depend on study halls as an effective time and place to complete their school work and study before exams. Caz hypothesized, “I think if wasn’t for study halls, nobody do homework.” The study halls were
really important for them because they had a general disdain for homework and rarely completed homework at home. Adam, a medium achieving participant said, “It’s like, I’ve been in school for six hour straight (sic) and I’m like, why do I have to do this homework? Nah.. Why I am doing this extra bit of work for? Six hours in school and then this! Nah.” Despite knowing how important completing homework was to their grades, their willingness to complete homework was low. Darwood, a low achieving participant confessed, “I’m failing because I don’t do homework. I understand everything, but like when I home, I take it out and it’s just sitting there.. I’m just like no.” The difficulty of completing homework outside of school made study halls a great help in getting homework done. Adam explained, “If I had it [study hall] in my day, I never come home with it [homework].” The low achieving students did not express a development of time management skills during their high school careers and instead communicated reliance upon study halls as a strategy to get the assignments completed.

To summarize, the instances related to time management and study halls for low and medium achieving participants aggregated into a consensus that they perceived study halls as critical in providing a time and place to complete homework. For high achieving participants, time management was a skill they developed to manage homework related to full course loads and extracurricular activities. The high achieving participants perceived this skill as being critical to academic success. Research suggests the high achieving participants’ ability to develop and implement time management skills is a major contributor to their grades (Congos & Smith, 1983).

**View from the top.** The prominent research of Albert Bandura examined how “people are self-organizing, proactive, and self-regulating agents of their psychosocial
development” and considered this to be essential aspects of self-efficacy (Bandura, 2001, p. 187). Within the data were instances related to high achieving participants’ self-efficacy. Although all participants perceived that Normal High School afforded the opportunity to pursue their interests and development, only the high achieving participants perceived educational experiences of high school were ultimately in their own dominion. “Whatever other factors may operate as guides and motivators, they are rooted in the core belief that one has the power to produce effects by one’s actions” (Bandura, 2001, p. 187). The high achieving participants communicated a high degree of responsibility for their success, best expressed by Easter:

This school, I think there [are] a lot of like opportunities here if you look for them. Like, if you reach out and try to find it, people will reciprocate and try to help you as well. There are a lot of people here to help you, but if you want to do something you can. If you try to lay back, blend in, then no but, if you want you do something you can.

Easter perceived that as a young adult, he had power to exert and did not rely on the school community to look out for his needs. Other high achieving participants also employed their own agency to engage with the school personnel and programs. The high achieving participants also perceived that other students in Normal High School did not pursue activities that could provide a richer and more meaningful experience for them. Max said, “Lots of kids don’t take advantage of what is given them.” All of the high achieving participants sensed the missed opportunities for many of their peers. High achieving participants understood the school offered human and institutional resources that could help make a difference for all students, but their own efficacy was needed. The programs and
personnel they connected with were part of what endeared the school to the high achieving participants, as Red said, “I found my four years here actually wonderful. I am not going to regret anything.” His reflection underscored his perception that his experiences were largely a result of what he contributed to affect his positive outcome at Normal High School.

**Conclusion of Theme Five and Relation to Research Questions**

In conclusion, analysis of the data revealed instances related to the participants’ perception and experiences that affected academic achievement. Freshman year was a difficult experience for all participants that negatively affected their academic achievement. The high achieving participants’ perceived they recovered from that year and developed more motivation to achieve and improve their time management skills. The medium and low achieving participants perceived study hall periods were a factor that helped them achieve academically. High achieving participants perceived self-efficacy as a contributing factor of academic success at Normal High school. This theme is related to research questions one, two, and three.

Research question one asked how an African American males’ grade point average affected his perception of the academic achievement for African American male students. All participants across GPA levels perceived their freshman year negatively affected their academic achievement. Low and medium achieving participants perceived study hall periods positively affected their academic achievement, while time management skills were perceived as a contributor to academic achievement by high achieving participants. Self-efficacy skills were perceived by high achieving participants as an integral aspect of students who achieve academically.
Research question two asked how an African American male secondary school student’s perception of African American males’ academic achievement affected his attitude towards school. This theme suggests high achieving participants’ attitudes towards school were positively affected by their self-efficacy and skill with time management. This theme suggests the attitudes towards school of low and medium achieving participants were negatively affected by the need to complete homework and these participants’ difficulty devoting time to do so outside of study halls.

Research question three asked how African American male secondary school students perceived the contributing factors leading to academic achievement. High achieving participants perceived time management and self-efficacy were contributing factors towards academic achievement. Low and medium achieving participants’ perceived study hall periods as a contributing factor towards academic achievement.

**Theme Six: School Culture**

“Mostly everybody is equal. If you want an opportunity, then it won’t be prevented from you because you are a boy or girl, or any type of thing. Anybody can achieve what they want to” (Easter, Focus Group #2).

*Perspectives of the school culture*

The participants’ beliefs about Normal High School, the expectations they held for its student body and personnel, were related to their perspective of school culture. School culture is: “A set of tacit expectations and assumptions that direct the activities of school personnel and students” (Hindi, School Culture section para.1, 2004). Instances related to the participants’ beliefs and expectations of Normal High were analyzed and suggest the participants held a mostly positive perspective of school culture.
Darwood, a low achieving participant summed up his view of Normal High School as “It’s good.” Some high achieving participants, like Max expressed affection for the school. “I have to say, it’s my favorite school.” River, a struggling junior with a low GPA was less appreciative, “It’s okay I guess, nothing special- a regular school.” Most responses were favorable, with only a few critical comments. For instance, a high participant, Xavier said that there were some mediocre teachers –teachers that “don’t quite hit out of the park.” However, this critique, like others were tempered; as when the same participant made positive comments, “I had some awesome teachers.” The participants noted the attributes of the school included a large diverse student body and Easter, a high achieving participant added that, “There isn’t any type of racism or anything like that.” Easter perceived the school as a place that would not limit or restrict him because of his race and instead, offered opportunities and challenges to help him reach his potential.

The participants’ perceptions of the school included an abundance of computers, some worked well and others were slow to load. Some participants saw school as effective for learning; Max, a high achieving participant said, “I feel like um…we learn a lot of things every day.” While some medium and low achieving students questioned the relevance of their education. One of these students, Adam, a medium achieving participant exclaimed, “We don’t really need this at all. Why even try? We don’t need this stuff. How come stuff like income taxes or insurance, car insurance, health insurance, stuff you need to survive is not taught?” Adam struggled to accept the value of the curriculum at Normal High School. The participants’ appreciation of their school was mixed between a positive and grateful attitude to a less appreciative or neutral stance.
The participants perceived Normal High School as a place of opportunities, supports, and a place to connect with friends. Xavier appreciated the band program, “I thoroughly enjoy the band program obviously because that’s my thing. I like the music program also because it fosters an environment of a family.” School seemed to be a diverse and cohesive community for learning described by Easter as, “Mostly everybody is equal. If you want an opportunity, then it won’t be prevented from you because you are a boy or girl, or any type of thing. Anybody can achieve what they want to.” Easter, like other students perceived the school as a place where all students shared equal opportunities and could find success.

In summary, low, medium, and high achieving participants’ perceptions of the school culture may be categorized as positive or neutral. Some participants expressed gratitude for their school, while others verbalized acceptance of their school without enthusiasm and held some criticism of the curriculum. The participants generally held the school in favorable or neutral regard. The school culture was not experienced as an obstacle to success by the participants and instead was perceived as mostly a positive or neutral institution.

**Conclusion and Relation to Research Questions**

Instances related to the participants’ beliefs about and expectations for their educational experiences at Normal High School, which are aspects of school culture, indicated the participants held the school in favorable or neutral regard. This theme is related to research questions one, two, and three.

Research question one asked how an African American males’ grade point average affected his perception of the academic achievement for African American male students. This theme suggests high and medium achieving participants experienced and perceived the school culture in a mostly positive or neutral stance that was supportive of academic
achievement for African males. Whereas, low achieving participants experienced and perceived the school culture in a mostly neutral stance that was not especially supportive of academic achievement for African American males.

Research question two asked how an African American male secondary school student’s perception of African American males’ academic achievement affected his attitude towards school. Research suggests that students “Experiencing or witnessing inequality within schools may foster the type of animosity evidenced in oppositional attitudes of teenagers toward school” (Tyson, Darity, & Castellano, 2005, p. 583). None of the participants reported instances of strong opposition towards school. All participants perceived school culture at Normal High School as mostly free from inequality and led many of them to hold the school in favorable or neutral regard. This theme suggests high and medium achieving participants perceived the school with a positive attitude, while low achieving participants expressed a neutral attitude toward the school. “Research suggests that negative attitudes towards school are associated with lower achievement, lower expectations of future success, and anti-social behavior” (Brier, 1995, p. 281). Therefore, this theme suggests the positive or neutral perception of school culture held by medium and high achieving participants would not interfere with their academic achievement or attitude towards school, while the less favorable school culture experienced and perceived by low achieving participants may have had a negative impact on their attitude towards school.

Research question three asked how African American male secondary school students perceived the contributing factors leading to academic achievement. This theme suggests high and medium achieving participants perceived the school culture of Normal High as a contributing factor towards their academic success, while low achieving participants’
experiences and perspective of school culture did not lead them to perceive the school as a factor leading towards academic achievement.

**Theme Seven: Family Influence**

“You could either have two good parents that help you like, move along or, you could have one single mother and have good grades because you think good grades will help move your mom because your mom could be a single mother stressed out all the time” (Darwood, Interview 1).

Ferguson (2007) analyzed trends for parental expectations on children’s academic achievement. He reported that for African American, Asian American, Caucasian American, and Hispanic American students; the higher the education level of the parent, the higher their expectation was for their children’s grades. However, for African American parents, their expectations were the most tolerant of low grades. Ferguson (2007) found that “Black students whose parents are college graduates report on average, almost the same parental standards as Whites whose parents are high school graduates and have not attended college at all [italics added by author]” (p. 70). Instances in the data were related to the participants’ influence from parents and compiled a theme with subthemes for low achieving participants, medium achieving participants, and high achieving participants. Additional subthemes were parent approval, and roots of success. Together these themes revealed the influences of parent relationships on the participants.

Low achieving participants perceived their parents did not affect the participants’ desire to achieve academically or help them connect high school education to specific plans for after high school. One low achieving participant perceived a mentor relationship influenced him to achieve academically. The data revealed medium and high achieving
participants perceived their parental influences contributed to the participants’ desire for academic achievement and influenced their plans for after high school graduation. A subtheme of parent approval revealed that low and medium achieving participants did not experience parent approval for academic efforts and perceived their parents were ignorant of what their school experiences consisted. High achieving participants perceived their academic achievement met their parents’ approval. The influence of a parent was perceived by all participants as an important factor in explaining why some students are academically successful, but the high achieving participants emphasized the additional factors of the students’ own behavior and motivation as critical components of academic success.

**Family influence on low achieving participants.** Low achieving participants perceived their relationships with adults in their families lacked effective support and direction. For example, in an interview, River was discussing his low GPA and said about his mother: “Guess she is probably okay with it too, it’s not like my grades are 4.0 but they are better than freshman year. It’s just whatever…yeah.” Using his GPA from freshman year as a measure of achievement was very lenient and failed to address academic college requirements as the target of high school. River was unable to clearly state the influence his mother and uncle, the adults he identified as role models, had on him. Darwood also discussed the influences of his father with an unappreciative tone:

My dad drives a truck he went to school for about two years and did a whole bunch of other stuff. I don’t even know. He has conversations with me telling me I have to do better and stuff. Telling me how hard it was for him growing up. I should do better he doesn’t want me to live the same life he did growing up and stuff like that. It doesn’t stress me out. I show him [my grades]. He gives me the same speech.
Darwood’s statements about his father suggested that the participant may have been resigned to low academic performance and seemed to have grown immune to his fathers’ expectations. Darwood’s relationship with his father, like other low achieving participants’ relationships with family role models did not yield specific future plans or a desire for increased academic achievement.

Two low achieving participants (Jah and River) experienced living with single, or divorced parents. One of these participants, Jah lived with his mother who he described as a successful accountant. He explained her influence on his school work: “Well my mom went to a good school and she is a good influence, so she is always been pushing me like to get good grades and stuff. But I was just like- I was not listening.” The researcher understood that although the message from his mother was clear and positive about the value of education, the young man was not receptive to it. He was like the other low performing participants who failed to embrace messages from family members that emphasized the connection between effort and academic achievement.

Jah reported having been working with an adult mentor since second grade. This mentor provided a model for what Jah wanted his life to be like in the future. Jah was the only low achieving participant who reported having worked with a mentor. The junior participant revealed his feelings about his mentor:

I am very proud of my mentor. And I see that the life that he lives, I want to live the same life. He is nice and he is good to people. And he is … not like struggling for pennies. He has a good job; he has a good wife; he has children; and he has a good life. I want to be like him.
Jah embraced the adult he met through a school based mentoring network to be a role model. Jah perceived this relationship increased his desire to improve his grades. Jah said because of his mentor, he “felt good pressure though. Keep my grades up, work hard, and do stuff you’re supposed to do.” Jah, was unlike the other low achieving participants; he reported an increased desire for academic achievement as a result of a relationship with a mentor. However Jah and the other low achieving participants did get these same messages about valuing education and putting in effort from adult family members, but he like the other low achieving participants did not seem to internalize this direction and encouragement they received from their family members.

All of the low achieving participants reported their family members communicated expectations that they valued school as important. The participants perceived their parents as encouraging success, but felt the impact weakly. Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, (2013) found similar results. Parental expectations predicted GPA for African American males, in addition the educational levels of the parents and households with two parents were factors also positive predictors of GPA. Two of the three low achieving participants lived with their mothers in single family households. The parents of two low achieving participants were college graduates, while the other parent had some college education. The low achieving participants perceived little influence from their parents that positively influenced their high school grades and plans for after high school graduation.

In summary, low achieving participants expressed a sense of tense or failed communication with adult family members they identified as their role model. Two of these low achieving participants lived in single family households headed by their mother. One participant had both parents at home. All three participants had a parent with some college
experience or a college degree. The adult family member’s influence on the low achieving participants failed to create within the participants a desire to achieve academically and to connect their future to a high school education. One low achieving participant reported a mentoring relationship had a positive impact on his desire to achieve academically.

Family influence on medium and high achieving participants. In contrast to low achieving participants, the data revealed both medium and high achieving participants expressed a strong acceptance of the specific guidance and encouragement from family members towards academic achievement and future plans for after high school graduation. Research has identified that the factors of having two parents at home and their educational levels are positive predictors of GPA (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013). Three of the four high achieving participants had two parents at home with college or some college education. All three medium achieving participants lived with single parents with only some college education. Xavier, a high achieving participant talked about the influence of his mother, a single mother of two:

She really pushes and helps me be my best. She keeps me on track. She did not get to go to college. She wanted to, but they couldn’t afford it. I think she wanted to be pre-med. So I am really proud to be going to college.

Xavier articulated clearly his mother’s encouragement for him to work hard and achieve academically so that he could attend college. Xavier associated his mother’s desire for her son to her lack of attending college. The desire to achieve academically and earn a college degree where a mother did not was also reported by two medium achieving participants. Xavier’s verbalization of the pride he felt about his college acceptances indicated his affection for his mother and his strong sense of accomplishment. The information and
responses from Xavier spoke of a relationship that energized and directed the young man towards short term objectives and long term goals. This instance of being encouraged or “pushed” (Xavier, Max, CAZ, Adam) by an adult family member was common for the medium and high achieving participants.

Caz, a medium achieving participant reported this “pushing effect” was part of the relationship he had with his mother. He explained: “Sometimes in school, I don’t really find motivation at first to do well … Then my mom sees it and gets upset and talks and it kind of hurts, but it pushes me to do more.” Caz, like the other medium and high achieving participants articulated how a parent relationship helped them to find the inner resources to apply themselves academically.

Max, reported that his parents’ model of an ambitious work ethic influenced him. He explained:

My dad has a hard work ethic. He is like always constantly doing his thing, like work wise. My mom she has that too. They like both have that mentality like when somebody gives you an assignment to do, instead of starting it a week later; you should start it right away. Just knock it out of the way.

Discussions with Max showed he internalized his parents’ communication about the importance of hard work and the drive needed to excel in high school. He also said his parents stressed the importance of school and planning for his future. Max currently aspires to be a professional firefighter. He reflected on the talks he had with his parents about this: “They are supportive of that. My mom is just like once you turn 18 you’re out. She told me I need to start looking at my future, what I want to do. They support it though.” His parents talked to him about including college in his future. Since Max has a GPA over 3.5 and was
enrolled in many honor classes through high school, college seemed an option for him. Max instead believed it will be a wise decision to join the Air force as a path to becoming a firefighter. Part of his rationale included his awareness that currently many college graduates are unemployed or underemployed. Max’s information suggested his parents have been effective in helping him plan for and work towards his future.

Red, another high achieving participant asserted that his family also played an important part in supporting his efforts to achieve high grades and a college education. He has brothers who are in college and a mother who just earned a Master’s degree. He explained:

I have three brothers and two are away at school [college]. And my mom just graduated [Master’s Degree]. Well, like three years ago she went back to get her Master’s in social work. Basically, she went to get a better job and make more money. So that motivated me and that made me realize how much school was important.

Red’s discussion of his mother’s education which helped her secure a better and more lucrative job was a crystallizing moment for him. He was able to see clearly the links between career success and education. Additionally, Red talked about how his brother who consistently achieved Dean’s List at a private high school and accolades for his football skills, provided an inspirational model. He said about his older brother:

My oldest brother he is good role model to me. He went to Private School, now goes to College in Georgia, yeah, it’s a really good school. Then his first quarter [in high school] he made the Dean’s list... And he made it all four years. At times, he had the same motivations and he played sports the whole time… he was motivated to do
something. I feel like if he can do it at a tough school like Private School, I felt like I could do it here [at Normal High School].

Red’s brother, like his mother, provided for him a model that demonstrated motivation for high school achievement and college education. The high achieving participants clearly expressed a desire to reach their highest level of academic success.

Easter, a high achieving participant, was one of two children and lived with his both of his parents. He spoke of the effect his parents had on him:

Everyone in my family went to college. So, I guess excellence is kind of instilled in us. Like there is no reason for us not to do our best. It’s not like we have real hardships where we live or in our family. They instill in us excellence.

Easter, like the other high and medium achieving participants communicated explicitly the positive expectations about academic achievement and college education they received from their family members. The relationships these young men had with adult family members influenced them to develop an aspiration to achieve academically and strive towards a college education.

In summary, instances related to adult influences formed a consensus for the medium and high achieving participants. Both medium and high achieving participants perceived parents influenced them to achieve academically and helped connect their academic opportunities at Normal High School to plans for after high school. Instances in the data related to low achieving participants’ parent influences revealed these participants perceived their parents were not influential. Although the parents of low achieving participants communicated messages emphasizing the importance of an education, these three participants’ were not receptive to the communication.
Parent approval of low and medium achieving participants. Instances of parent approval or disapproval regarding school performance emerged from the data. In the research of Hines & Holcomb-McCoy (2013) parental expectations were found to be a factor that can interfere with scholastic achievement. The low and medium achieving participants perceived their parents’ expectations for their academic achievement were not met. The participants felt their family believed the participants could earn higher grades. For example, a medium achieving participant, Caz spoke about his family and their view on his achievement: “They don’t notice the effort. They think you actually want to try and fail. It’s not like I’m trying to fail. They don’t understand.” This participant perceived his family lacked understanding of his school performance. He believed his positive efforts were unrecognized by his family and they lacked understanding of his school experiences.

Adam, a medium achieving participant perceived his relationship with his mother had a gulf between them when it came to school grades. He talked about the dialogue with his parent: “The criticism is never really constructive. That’s the problem. It’s straight up. They say, *What’s wrong with you* [italics added by author]? Adam reported that he and his family did not have productive conversations regarding his performance. He added, “They like, not really know. They are not in my every day, day to day commute, activities, routine, they wouldn’t know how it go down *[sic]*.” When Adam’s family communicated with him about his grades, he seemed to be left with frustration and feeling misunderstood. Adam perceived his family was unaware of what his school experiences were. Izzy, a medium achieving participant, spoke about his mother, “I think she views it as I can do- I’m doing good, but I can do better.” He received some approval from his mother for his grades, but also a sense of her wanting more. Participants from low and medium achieving levels
perceived messages from their family that more improvement was needed for their academic achievement.

**Parent approval of high achieving participants.** All high achieving participants perceived their parents held a sense of satisfaction and approval for the participants’ academic achievement. For example, Red said “They think it’s good, they know it could have been better. ... They are proud of what I accomplished over all four years.” Red felt his parents approved of his performance. Xavier too had a family who held a positive view of his schoolwork. He said, “They think I do well actually.” High achieving participants perceived their school performances were approved by their parents.

In summary, most low and medium performing participants perceived their families wanted more from their school performances and had difficulty communicating with family about grades, effort, and school experiences. Research (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013; Lin, 2001) suggests that the more parents know about the schooling process, have relationships with others to access important information, and the ability to aide their son with the schoolwork, the more likely their son will obtain scholastic achievement. Low and medium achieving participants had relationships with family that were characterized by frustration and misunderstanding about their school experience. These relationships may have negatively impacted the participants’ experiences of school.

The high achieving participants reported enjoying positive remarks from their families regarding their school achievement. All of the four high achieving participants had parents with college experience and three of those had college degrees. The parents’ knowledge and experience of the educational experiences may have had a positive influence on the participants’ experiences with school.
The roots of success. Within the data of the present study were numerous instances related to the participants’ perceptions of parents as an important factor of student success at Normal High School. Research suggests that parenting is an important determinant of behavior for adolescent African American males (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013; McLanahan, Haskins, Garfinkel, Mincy, & Donahue, 2010). When it came to explaining why some students at Normal High School do better than others, the influence of an adult family member was mentioned by all participants.

Roots of success for low and medium achieving participants. The low and medium achieving participants perceived that most of the success students at Normal High School experienced was due to the student’s family but, included the role of the individual to a small degree. River, a low achieving participant associated a student’s valuing school as a result of the student’s family. He said, “If you don’t care about school, you probably come from a family that don’t care about school or didn’t graduate.” He said this was not the type of family he came from. He reported that his mother had two years of college and wanted him to have “A good education. Me to do good.” However, for River, his mother’s desire was not enough to make him care about school or achieve a GPA above a 2.0. He failed to emphasize his own individual meaning of school. River perceived that African American students who were not achieving success did not place a high value on school achievement. He felt his lack of an appreciation for school was similar to other African American students who were not achieving: “Just African American males don’t care about anything. I don’t. I say, they don’t care about school.” River viewed academic success in connection to caring about education and wanting to participate in the process, something he lacked. The contradiction in his lack of caring about school and his mother’s desire for him to get a good
education suggests that his mother’s concern was not enough to help him overcome all of the reasons for his low reasons.

Other low and medium achieving participants perceived students who did the best at Normal High School were strongly influenced by the adults who were responsible for them or had an inner desire because of the lack of parental support. Darwood explained why some kids do better at Normal High School than others. He expounded on his perspective:

I think like being freshmen - going all the way up to high school them doing good.. [sic] they either have two parents at home that help move them, …or else something else because you could either have two good parents that help you like move along or you could have one single mother and have good grades because you think good grades will help move your mom because your mom could be a single mother stressed out all the time and then it could be like that [sic].

Darwood perceived successful students as being produced from two different influences. One factor that positively affected a student’s grades was a supportive and stable home life with two parents. The other factor that contributed towards academic striving and success was the student’s positive reaction to family hardships associated with a single parent household. Darwood’s perspective showed an individual’s power to achieve in spite of weak family support and also, because of it.

Caz and other medium achieving participants perceived students were successful because of their family’s culture. Caz, a senior talked about how his family recognized his good grades: “But in my book, you don’t get allowance; you get, ‘Did you make your bed?’; ‘Did you clean your room?’” He perceived his family did not provide positive rewards for his success. Caz then explained his perception of the students who did well in school and
their family’s recognition of their work: “In some cultures, the more better grades you get the more rewards, cars, freedom, and all that.” Caz believed the students who were experiencing success at Normal High lived with families that provided extrinsic rewards for their achievement.

Izzy, a medium achieving participant perceived students who achieved success were a product of their home lives and study habits. Izzy viewed some students who achieved A’s or B’s came from home environments that strongly directed children towards positive student behaviors. He explained:

I would say the ones who get all A’s or B’s on their report cards- The kids that study a lot and the ones that first do what they have to do, then do other stuff. The kids that just keep studying (sic). Some of them might have strict parents that force them to do their studying.

Izzy recognized academic success was linked to extended studying and prioritizing schoolwork. He also believed strict parenting was often responsible for making these student behaviors occur. His perception did not place a strong emphasis on the individual acting as an independent agent towards achievement.

Roots of success for high achieving participants. High Achieving participants perceived academic success as a result of family influence, but included the student’s role as a significant factor. For example, Xavier stated; “I mean you got have someone pushing you. Without that, I could have been slacking off and lost. But you gotta’ have it yourself too. I want to do well.” Xavier’s inclusion of himself expressed the critical role he believed he played in his success. He viewed academic achievement as a result of positive support from an adult and the inner desire of an individual. This was part of what helped him achieve a
high GPA and various awards in music. The other achieving participants also placed a high value on the student’s efforts. Red talked about how his grades reflected his effort,

I see myself slacking off, I knew in my head exactly like the grade point average I was going to get. ... So like I knew exactly the amount of effort I put was exactly what I expected to get GPA.

Red perceived his own efforts as the responsible agent for his grade point average. He could base his expectations for grades on the level of effort he exerted in his studies. He like other high achieving students stressed that a student’s actions and motivations were essential for doing well in school.

In summary, a subtheme of family influence was the participant’s perspective on the roots of success for students. Low and medium achieving participants perceived academic success was attributed to supportive and strict households that valued academic achievement and rewarded it. High achieving participants perceived student success was rooted in both the student and a supportive family member.

**Conclusion of Theme Seven and Relation to Research Questions**

In Conclusion, instances in the data were found related to a theme of family influences. Subthemes included parent approval and roots of success. Low achieving participants perceived adult influences had limited to no effect on their desire to achieve academically. One low achieving participant perceived his desire for academic achievement was positively influenced by his mentor. Both medium and high achieving participants perceived their parents influenced them to achieve academically and helped connect their high school education to future goals. Instances related to parent approval in the data revealed low and medium achieving participants perceived a strained communication with
family about grades, expectations, effort, and school experiences. The low and medium achieving participants perceived their parents did not approve of their academic achievement. High achieving participant’s perceived their academic achievement met the approval of their parents.

Low and medium achieving participants perceived successful students were heavily influenced by their families. Low and medium achieving participants perceived that successful students were supported by strict two parent households that emphasized and rewarded academic achievement, or lacked that and were eager to achieve academically in response to family hardships. The high achieving participants perceived successful students possessed strong motivation to achieve and were supported and encouraged by family. These high achieving participants were previously noted as having a high degree of self-efficacy. This theme is related to research questions one, two, and three.

Research question one asked how an African American males’ grade point average affected his perception of the academic achievement for African American male students. Low achieving participants perceived parent influences did not affect their academic achievement. Low and medium achieving participants perceived their parents’ lack of approval did not help their academic achievement. Medium and high achieving participants perceived parent influences positively influenced their academic achievement. The roots of academic success were perceived by low and medium participants as mostly a result of supportive two parent households that valued and recognized academic achievement or in some instances, the academic success was a student’s reaction to family hardships associated with single parent households. High achieving participants perceived academic success was rooted in both the student’s own efforts and support of a family member.
Research question two asked how an African American male secondary school student’s perception of African American males’ academic achievement affected his attitude towards school. The family influences of low achieving participants had little to no positive effect on their attitude towards school. The family influences of medium and high achieving participant’s positively affected their attitudes towards school. The lack of parent approval for academic achievement from low and medium achieving participants did not positively influence these participants’ attitudes towards school. High achieving participants’ academic achievement was approved of by their parents and positively affected these participants’ attitudes towards school. The low and medium achieving participants perceived academic success for many students was often rooted by two parent households that supported and rewarded academic achievements. This perspective of low and medium achieving participants negatively impacted their attitude towards school. High achieving participants’ perspective that academic success was often rooted in a student’s own desire to achieve academically and the encouragement of a parent or family member positively affected their attitude towards school.

Research question three asked how African American male secondary school students perceive the contributing factors leading to academic achievement. Low achieving participants did not experience parental influences as a factor contributing towards their academic success. However, the subthemes of parent approval and roots of success suggested low achieving participants’ perceived parent influences were a contributing factor towards academic achievements for other students. Parental influences were seen as a factor contributing towards academic success for both medium and high achieving participants. Further the subthemes of parent approval and roots of success reinforced high achieving
participants’ perceptions that both a student’s motivation and the support of a parent were important contributors towards academic achievement. The subthemes of parent approval and roots of academic success elaborated on the medium achieving participants’ perspective that parent influence on their achievement was mixed but it was a contributing factor for academic achievement for many other students.

**Theme Eight: Future Selves**

“We can look up to our role models and become like them and achieve something as great as they have achieved like, the dreams they achieved, we could achieve something greater than that” (Izzy, Interview 1).

Adolescence is a period of development characterized by self-identity and a search for a productive future self (Erikson, 1959). Instances related to a future self in the data were related to the participants’ expectation of where they would be five years into the future. The ability to set a goal that was specific and time oriented is reported to promote academic achievement for adolescents (Destin & Oyserman, 2010). Within this theme, the student responses and information that specifically addressed future work, income, lifestyle, and personal relationships were evaluated by the researcher. The responses that provided a specific occupation or field plus some accurate information about income, lifestyle, and a vision for personal relationships were considered as “clear” by the researcher. The student responses that included a field or occupation, but lacked information about income, lifestyle, and personal relationships were considered “forming” by the researcher. The student responses that had only limited or no descriptors in occupation or field or included confusion, and limited or misinformation about income, lifestyle, and personal relationships in the future were considered “vague” by the researcher. Analysis of the data suggested low achieving
participants mostly lacked specific and realistic plans for themselves five and 10 years into the future. The data suggested medium achieving participants were had a “forming” vision of future selves with thoughtful considerations about interests and what impact their decisions might have in the future. Instances in the data related to high achieving participants formed consensus that suggested their vision of future selves were “clear.” High achieving participants identified specific career goals, with realistic salaries, and expressed ideas about lifestyles and relationships they wanted in the future.

The future selves of low achieving participants. “Students derive their aspirations and standards for academic performance from parents, teacher, peers, and ...their own sense of what is achievable” (Ferguson, 2007, p. 64). Reported earlier in the results, low achieving participants perceived a lack of support from personnel within the school, had difficulties with parents in regards to school performance, and experienced difficulty connecting to the content and instruction they received at Normal High School. Thus, it is not surprising that instances in the data revealed low achieving participants lacked a clear and specific postsecondary goal and had difficulty describing what their life would be like five or 10 years into the future. In interviews, these participants had difficulty envisioning and describing a future self. These participants’ expressions about their futures were either vague or at the early stages of being formulated. For example, when River was asked about what he would like to be doing five years from now responded, “I don’t even know. I can’t even think that far.” When he was probed further and encouraged to think about what he wanted his life to be like 10 years into the future, he was able to include college, but not its specific purpose. He said, “After college, I don’t know what I’ll major in yet, so I’ll have to figure that out.” River struggled to think constructively about his future. He was barely
progressing through high school, although he seemed to have a good intellect and reported to being academically successful when he applied himself. He seemed to curtail any thoughts about his life after high school and had a vague sense of what he would like to do after high school.

Similarly, Darwood, another low achieving participant had difficulty describing a possible future life in five years. He did communicate some desires, “Just to have a good life, and not to worry about anything. I am working some place where I enjoy going to work.” His vision for the future remained out of focus and he lacked commitment to any future goals. In the interviews with Darwood and the other low achieving participants, the researcher had a sympathetic and encouraging tone. Eventually, Darwood described a possible career interest. Darwood conceded,

Maybe…well yeah, yeah. It would be yes, if not college, it would be some college to take years of different math courses or business courses. I wouldn’t be that much far from 21 [years old] … maybe with one kid, a wife, a house. Working at a bank [sic]. They get paid a lot. I just like money. I’m good at math.

Darwood was reluctant to express his interest in using his strengths in math for a possible career in banking. After some encouragement and coaxing from the researcher, River added to his earlier communication regarding his future that it will hopefully include college: “Cause [you] have to [go to college]. Can’t live on the streets, gotta have a job [sic].” He stated that he would like to work in the future and that a college degree would help make that happen. Although River added the general plan of attending college, possibly for business or law his future vision remained vague or just beginning to form.
The other low achieving participant, Jah, articulated a “forming” vision of his future after high school. Jah provided some details and specific ideas about his future but revealed confusion and a lack of commitment at this time. Jah had given more thought to possible paths as an adult than the other low achieving participants. Jah revealed his confusion:

I have no idea. I definitely want to go to college. I want go to Johnson and whales. I want to be a chef, but I am still not sure yet. I am still finding myself… Well, I am mean I am not sure if I want to be a chef all my life, I could see myself working in an office…Um, I have no idea what… um …my future entails. I know I want to make a lot of money.

Jah had summer work experiences that included working in a kitchen that led him to consider the field of culinary arts as a possible career path, but was lacking conviction to it. He discussed other ideas involving computers, and office work but did not have enough information about himself or possible career requirements to see any of these as a clear choice for his future work. Conversations with Jah revealed that he had given more thought and sought information more so than the other low achieving participants. His vision for his future self was considered “forming” by the researcher.

In summary, the low achieving participants found it difficult to express specific and realistic plans for themselves five and 10 years into the future. One of these participants, Jah was able to articulate a “forming” vision of a plan for his future self while the other two in this group had only a “vague” sense of their future self in five and 10 years into the future.

The future selves of medium achieving participants. “Research on student motivation has shown that students who possess clear goals about the future and concrete plans for how they will achieve those goals are more likely to be successful in school”
Medium achieving participants had somewhat of a grasp on their future goals. Medium achieving participants expressed a “forming” vision of their future self after high school. Since these participants, as discussed in earlier results reported being engaged in school, having peers who supported academic achievement and were going to college, it is not surprising they had some grasp of what they would work toward after high school. One medium achieving participant was able to provide a logical sequence and plan for his life based on interests and a college education, while the other two medium achieving participants provided statements about desired futures in less clear and specific language. The medium achieving participants were still in the process of getting information about college majors and career interests. However, instances that expressed interest in pursuing a career were strong and contained some information about the career. For example, in his interview, Caz spoke about his future five years out: “I think I will probably start working, start my life, most likely doing something I like doing, something I am passionate about like nursing...Maybe move into my own place, I’ll be enjoying life.” His plan was based upon his interests and feedback from teachers and his mother. He added,

I find Biology interesting and learning about the body. Most teachers I talk to say going to NCC [local community college] is a good plan [for the Nursing program] and Mr. M. said it was a good plan... I talk to my mom, and in Haiti she was studying to be a nurse and she is really interested in that field and she knows a lot about it.

He then added a second step to his career path as he continued envisioning a 10-year time frame, “27 yrs. old, I’ll still be having fun but ready to settle down. Being an RN or working my way up to a nurse practitioner.” This participant revealed a deliberate and conscience thought about his future and what he wanted from it and what he needed to achieve it. His
perspective of high school identified it as a link for his future education in the nursing program at the local community college.

Adam also identified a specific career interest based on his personal experiences and attributes. He explained: “I always thought about, I mean it came to this year, I was always told I helped people out. Even though nobody helped me out. I thought maybe one day I will just become a therapist to help kids.” Adam expressed how he recently began to think about a possible career as a therapist working to help children. The interviews with him revealed he had thought about his personal attributes and values that matched the field of social work or psychology. He still had questions about these fields, but had already possessed basic information. Adam talked about how he hoped his future life might be like that of psychologist’s portrayed in a movie he saw recently. He said, “I saw this movie, The Sixth Sense, it had a psychologist, he lived in this house it was a nice house, a good looking house not like fancy extravagant, but like a house with a wife and what not.” Adam expressed a positive imagination for his future that included home ownership and personal relationships. Adam’s expectation for his future self was still forming, but it was made plain that options for a college major that involved working with children and adolescents in mental health interested him were already being considered. He imagined options in his future career that were associated with a lifestyle he would be comfortable with.

In summary, medium achieving participants perceived a high school education was a step along the path to a future life they wanted to create for themselves. They were able to express a “forming” vision that demonstrated deliberate and conscious thought about their interests and what their decisions might bring them five and 10 years into the future.
**The future selves of high achieving participants.** “We found the students that had the clearest goals were most likely to cite an adult—a teacher, a counselor, a parent, or a relative as the source of guidance related to future aspirations” (Noguera, 2008, p. 68). Since the high achieving participants reported relationships with parents and teachers that were supportive and encouraging of academic achievement, it was not surprising to find instances in the data related to their clear vision of future goals. The high achieving participants elaborated clearly and specifically about what they might be doing five and 10 years in to the future. For example, Easter expressed in an interview his plan for life after high school:

Yeah, I have a plan and I am just trying to stick to it. So 23, I will hopefully have a job, an apartment or a house. I am trying to get married young. So I will be married, no kids yet, and have a dog... I’m trying to be a medical illustrator.

Easter was able to describe a plan that he had of being married in his early twenties and expected to establish roots with home ownership. He also identified a specific career that he would be working in after receiving a college degree in that field. All of the achieving participants, like Easter expressed in specific ways what they were working towards, the field they would be working in, and a sense of having committed relationships five years in the future.

These young men also communicated ideas about their continued growth 10 years into the future. Most included a continuation and growth within their fields and personal growth by raising a child or maintaining a romantic relationship. For example, Max excitedly talked about the 10-year mark in the Air Force:
Probably living with my girlfriend, still working in Air Force, visiting friends probably. So when 10 years hit, I’ll be able to … I could anywhere and see anyone that’s 3 months (vacation time) that’s a good trip right there.

Max, like other participants expressed continuation with their fields and relationships. He like the others had some specific information that he tied into his imagined future life. These students also had accurate information about potential income levels.

Almost all high achieving participants knew about the average salary ranges within their planned careers. Easter had accurate information about income levels within his field and its effect on lifestyle. He said:

When I first saw medical illustrator, I didn’t really like it. It was a good salary to start, but I want to be comfortable. It’s like $60,000 to $80,000 and like I want to make something like $200,000 to $300,000. Something I know my bills are paid, my mortgage is paid, and I don’t have to pay for car and stuff like that, I don’t want to finance and all that and stuff.

Easter articulated specific and ambitious goals that revealed a clear understanding of the lifestyle he desires. Another high achieving participant, Red, knew about the income of beginning athletic trainers, which was his desired college major and career. He explained, In Norwalk or Fairfield County, a physical therapist or trainer starts at $70,000. They can work at a clinic or college team. That’s their first year, and then as they move up… On the pro level, I saw the most would be $120,000.

Red verbalized his college and career desires clearly and linked them accurately to potential income levels. This expression of a possible future life showed conscious thought
and evidence of research. The high achieving participants commonly showed knowledge and commitment to an imagined life five and 10 years into the future.

In summary, all of the high achieving participants expressed a clear and logical plan for their future selves. Many possessed clear ideas for a specific occupation or field, description of personal relationships, and accurate information about potential income levels. Their projection and understanding of their plans’ requirements showed proof of research and a mature thought process that accounted for their capabilities and desires.

**Role models.** Parental and community supports have been recognized as protective contributions against inherent contextual challenges experienced by young people (Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus, & Harpalani, 2001). Formal and natural role models have been tied to a variety of positive outcomes for adolescents (Hurd, Sanchez, Zimmerman, & Caldwell, 2012). Every participant perceived potential benefits for young people associated with role models.

Darwood, a low achieving participant, perceived that a role model was “Something to look forward to. You something to be like [sic]”. River associated the idea of a role model with a positive model for the future. Easter, a high achieving participant described his perception of the benefit of a good role model, “It helps them [kids] if you have a good role model you know what you can end up with because you know what you can strive for and see what success looks like [sic].” Easter perceived young people could become acquainted with success through a role model and develop aspirations for the future.

Participants across achievement levels recognized, a role model very often helps a person to establish objectives and a pathway to reach a long term goal. Max, a high achieving participant articulated how students’ goals can be linked to a role model’s
achievement. He explained, “I think in order to set that goal for yourself, I think it’s important to have someone to compare yourself to.” Max perceived that an individual’s goals can be positively influenced by another person’s success. Izzy, a medium achieving participant explained a similar perception of why a role model was important: “Frankly because so us teenagers, we can look up to our role models and become like them and achieve something as great as they have achieved like, the dreams they achieved, we could achieve something greater than that.” Izzy recognized that a role model’s inspirational effect on a student raises the student’s sights for his future achievement.

In summary, low, medium, and high achieving participants perceived that role models could have a beneficial influence on students’ aspirations for the future. The theme related to the participants’ perception of role models is similar to the literature that suggests programs that provide role models or mentors for African American students produce a variety of positive outcomes (Hurd & Zimmerman, 2010; Noguera, 2008). The participants linked positive outcomes for high school students who connected with adults in relationships that modeled and supported guidance towards future goals.

**Conclusion of Theme Eight and Relation to Research Questions**

In conclusion, analysis of the data revealed instances related to the participants’ perceptions of their lives five and 10 years into the future. These instances were related to future goals and were evaluated as; vague, forming, or clear. A related subtheme was the participants’ perception and benefits of role models.

High achieving participants expressed a clear and specific vision for their future selves that were education dependent. Their future self was connected to their high school education, was informed and included specifics related to career and lifestyle. Collectively
medium achieving participants held perceptions of their future selves that were still forming. The medium achieving participants expressed career interests but lacked specific information about the career requirements and average salary. Low achieving participants held a vague perception of their future selves with little information about their interests, strengths, and possible careers.

The subthemes related to role models revealed that all participants perceived role models can have a positive effect on their future selves. The instances from all participants related to role models aggregated into a consensus that the participants perceived role models could have positive effects on high school students’ academic performances and plans for after high school directly impacting the participants’ lives five and 10 years in the future.

Research question one asked how an African American males’ grade point average affected his perception of the academic achievement for African American male students. The high achieving participants had a clear vision of their future selves and perceived their academic achievement as important and building towards their future selves. Medium achieving participants had a forming vision of their future selves and perceived academic achievement as important and related to their future selves. Low achieving participants did not have a clear vision of their future self and did not value their academic achievement in direct relation to future goals.

Research question two asked how an African American male secondary school student’s perception of African American males’ academic achievement affected his attitude towards school. Both medium and high achieving participants’ attitudes towards school were positively influenced by their vision of a future self. Low achieving participants expressed
difficulty in setting goals for their future selves which appeared to be mediated by their poor attitudes toward school.

Research question three asked how African American male secondary school students perceived the contributing factors leading to academic achievement. Medium and high achieving participants’ perception of their future selves was a factor that increased motivation and value for academic achievement and was perceived by these participants as a factor contributing towards academic achievement. All participants across achievement levels perceived role models and the encouragement for academic achievement and influence for future goals associated with role models, as a contributing factor leading to academic achievement.

**Theme Nine: Participants’ Suggestions to Improve Academic Achievement**

“I just feel that for African Americans… there should be a certain GPA requirement for them, so that they actually know that they should try harder” (Red, Focus group 2).

Statistics regarding African American males’ academic achievement have a continued pattern of being the lowest among all groups in many key indicators (NCES, 2013). In interviews, participants made recommendations to help all African American male students at Normal High School improve their academic achievement. Analysis of the data regarding this topic led to the emergence of five topics in their suggestions to make a difference in the education of African American male students at Normal High School. The participants perceived that African American males would benefit from spending more time studying as a way to improve academic performance. The participants suggested that Normal High school add or alter existing school programs to provide additional teacher supports in relaxed, flexible environments as another way to improve the academic performance of African
American males. Another suggestion to improve the academic performance of African American males was to increase the minimum GPA requirement for participation in school athletics. Indeed, on a national level, the NCAA was in the process of implementing new requirements for academic eligibility of incoming freshmen athletes that would affect the high school policies governing student athletes (Hosick & Sproull, 2012). The participants also perceived that adding a rewards or recognition program to better recognize African American males’ efforts would help all African Americans improve their performance. The concept of African Americans not caring about school was identified as a factor that needed to be addressed to help African American males achieve academically. Finally the participants perceived mentoring programs as a means to help all African Americans males improve academic performance.

**More time studying.** In a study by Ferguson (2007), “Blacks on average spend 20 minutes less each night on homework than Whites do” (Ferguson, 2007, p. 77). However, when controlled for course patterns such as honors or AP classes, students of African American heritage spent more time on homework than students of Caucasian American heritage. Importantly, the study found regardless of class level, African Americans had a lower rate of homework completion, which can be linked to lower grades. Many of the medium and high achieving participants perceived the amount of time African American males spent on their schoolwork outside of the regular school day should increase. Max reflected on improvements he would have liked to have made and generalized it towards others: “Study more, not go out with friends as much. Save all my activities for the weekend instead of for the week. That’s probably what I should [have] done.” He thought African American student outcomes would improve if time was taken away from socializing. Easter
and Red remarked that some African American male students they knew did not do homework at all. Red explained:

Some of my friends that like, they just don’t do the work, but all of them play sports. I have friends since the 5th grade and um through middle school they got good grades, but as soon as he got to high school, um for some reason, he just refused to do the work.

Red and other participants, across achievement levels recommended that students’ lack of attending to homework and studying needed to change in order to increase performance.

Additionally, the medium and high achieving participants recommended struggling students seek out their teachers’ help regularly. Izzy suggested, “Come after for help from like teachers.” Teacher support was mentioned frequently and some said struggling students should meet regularly for extra help with their teachers, not just at the end of the marking period. Easter saw this action in connection to exerting more effort. He encouragingly suggested as if speaking to low performing students, “Get help if you need help, just actually try put the effort at the end of day.” Several participants suggested that extra help with teachers could be a part of an afterschool program that was mostly a place and time to get help from teachers and to complete homework.

School Programs. An afterschool program in a variety of forms was perceived by the participants as a way to help African American male students succeed with school. “Children experience learning in four major types of settings: at home, in school, with peers, and in out-of-school activities and programs” (Ferguson, 2007, p. 289). Some of the participants involved in sports had a team study hall before practice or games and perceived this type of study period could be a powerful way to help other African American male
students improve in school. Red reflected on the program, “[We had] teachers down here who are willing to use their free time after school to help you succeed. So I thought it was [a] great program.” This type of program was similar to what other participants who were once involved in afterschool programs suggested. Max, remembered his earlier involvement in an afterschool program, “I was in the program… like I got kicked out because I stopped showing up but I like had sports after school so I kept missing.” Students like Max did not have a productive experience in activities that were regimented and had strict attendance policies. He proposed the idea of a flexible structure in a study hall or program that allowed for student choice. “You could go to the library and get help from people, like not a club, you made it free for everybody to get help; you made tutors available.” Participants believed that making instructors available afterschool would boost student performance. Caz reflected on a program he did not take advantage of and thought it would have made a difference, “Actually go in to the teacher and ask them for help but I actually didn’t, I didn’t think of it then, but if could go back I would do that.” Caz’s suggestion involved making teachers available afterschool for individual or small group instruction and providing a comfortable environment. The participants perceived an afterschool program that was free and flexible as an effective way to help African American male students increase their studying time, access individual help from teachers and would eventually lead them to higher academic scores. To achieve effectiveness a system often requires layers of redundancy and back-up mechanisms. Education may need the same: teachers, parents, peers, and out-of-school providers that have the same and proper information and sufficient resources.

**School Policy and GPA.** The high achieving participants perceived that many African American males considered their participation in school sports as important and
worked to meet the academic requirement needed to participate. Studies show high school athletes tend to have higher grades, better attendance rates, and college attendance rates than do students not involved in sports (Demeulenaere, 2010). However, the high achieving participant’s perceived that many student athletes at Normal High School aspired to achieve only the minimum GPA required to be eligible for participation on the school sport teams. This minimum GPA requirement was perceived by the high achieving participants as too low.

Currently, Normal High School has a 1.7 GPA minimum requirement for school athletics eligibility. “I would set a higher GPA. That 1.7 is nothing,” Easter strongly suggested this as a positive change the school could make. The medium and high achieving participants viewed this low GPA requirement as a hindrance to raising the achievement levels of African American male students. Red, a senior participant said, “I just feel that for African Americans, along with Easter, there should be a certain GPA requirement for them so that they actually know that they should try harder.” Red, like other participants involved in athletics, viewed this requirement as a miscommunication to the students. These participants believed some students saw a 1.7 GPA as a goal and felt this unfortunately left them poorly prepared for life after high school. The low level of academic achievement may have impacted the low college graduation rates for college athletes, estimated at 48% to 56% for men’s’ division one sports teams (Southall, 2012). The participants perceived a higher GPA requirement from the school would better serve all students for the long term. Easter elaborated:

Instead of having a low one so they can stay on the team and pass through high school because if you don’t make it to college or NBA then what are you doing?(sic)
Maybe working at a mediocre job… and not really doing anything. I feel if you raise it higher, you give them more of chance to be somebody.

Several of the participants’ suggestions indicated that raising the eligibility requirement to participate in the high school sports program would be helpful to raising school performance. Their suggestion is in-line with the NCAA’s plan set to begin in 2016. The eligibility requirement will be raised to a GPA of 2.3 or with a sliding scale of 2.0 (Hosick & Sproull, 2012). This change will likely communicate to African American males a higher expectation of their academic achievement and leave them better prepared for transition into postsecondary education or competitive employment.

**Rewards and recognition.** Most participants recommended the school use rewards as a way to increase African American male student motivation. “Unfortunately, there is no magical remedy for motivating students. Humans are complex individuals, and when educators began identifying ways to motivate individuals they were treading on thin ice” (Petty, 2014, p. 259). Research has found that motivating students often requires a variety of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Emmett & McGee, 2013). A consensus among the medium achieving participants suggested school recognition of student efforts would increase academic efforts and lead to higher achievement. Some of the participants reported they struggled to stay motivated towards school achievement. Caz opened up about this, “So like when you are doing good and you don’t get recognized for doing good work, then you start to you know, lack motivation or push. So it’s not easy or reason to keep doing good [sic]… So I’m just doing enough to pass.” Caz believed that if he and other students like him were to receive positive recognition, then he could stay motivated towards school achievement.
Extrinsic rewards were explored in focus groups and in interviews as a possible way to help African American males do better in school. The idea of money as a possible reward for good grades erupted from a Caz during a focus group with low and medium achieving participants. These participants were enthusiastic about the idea. “You have no idea how much that would help [money].” said Adam. The participants believed financial compensation would lead to increased motivation for scholastic achievement for African American males. Izzy suggested extrinsic rewards of technology, like i-pads, because they would excite students to do their work. The participants suggested the school employ an extrinsic reward and recognition system as a means to improve the achievement levels of African American male students.

**Caring.** Analysis of data found instances related to ways of improving African American educational outcomes that suggested if African American Male students cared more about school, their school performance would improve. “When a student believes that performance on an academic assessment is important, and places value on the outcome, the student is more likely to engage in the task with greater levels of effort to perform at a higher level” (Emmett & McGee, 2013, p. 117). John Ogbu (2004) used the term “Ambivalence” (p. 15) to describe a coping strategy some African Americans used in response to the demands of a White dominated culture. This strategy employs a lack of caring and limits attempts to behave like Caucasian American people, including, achieving in situations controlled by White people. “Some ambivalents believed that obstacles facing Blacks in employment, wages, promotion, and education were racial; the fact they were Black, not because they did not behave or talk like White people was the key” (Ogbu, 2004, p. 15). This reaction by some African Americans to not attach value on education or workplace
success was a way for them to cope with the challenge between holding to their African American cultural identity and experiencing prejudice by the dominant White culture. Within the current research, the data indicated that the participants perceived African Americans behaved with ambivalence towards school success.

Darwood, a low achieving participant explained his perception, “Kids are not doing good in school probably because they just don’t care. They probably could do decent in school.” Easter also perceived some African American students lacked a high regard for school. He shared:

I feel like they care but not enough. I feel like they should care more they care just enough to graduate. You know to go to a local community college or something like that, or a college that is not really a challenge. If they cared more, they [could] go farther than they are.

Easter, believed much like other participants, that getting African American male students to care more about high school education would enable them to achieve at a higher rate and be admitted with greater frequency into more competitive colleges. The participants perceived the students’ involvement with role models and if needed, professional help could increase the level of caring.

**Role models and help.** Low, medium, and high achieving participants perceived role models helped students set goals and work towards them. Mentoring programs are successful interventions that can lead to students’ improved behaviors, attitudes, and academic performance (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011). Most participants perceived role models as something the school could help provide to get students to care more. Jah thought, “Maybe if Black people had more people to look up to they would
learn to work more, pay attention more to work.” Jah thought that a lack of positive role models explained why some students’ failed to work hard in school. Max also perceived a lack of positive role models as a problem for some African Americans students. He had a different suggestion to address this problem:

When people have their own family problems, like growing up in a bad area, instead of trying to do better, they think like this is happening to me, nobody cares. They forget the help is there, they just got to want it.

Max like other students hypothesized that problems in a student’s home life led them to feel disconnected from school. He recognized that help was available to students in a variety of forms. Other students expressed faith in the ability of professionals to make a difference for these students if they were sought. Easter recommended school officials do a better job of letting young African American males know: “Help is out there. There is people to talk to, there is programs you can join [sic].” Easter saw many visible signs of troubled African Americans that led him to suggest they get help which could improve their value of school and raise their academic achievement levels.

In summary, the participants perceived that some African American males’ lack of caring about education impacted the academic achievement for the African American males. The participants suggested a remedy that connected students to adults who could provide a positive role model. This role model might influence students to increase their value of school. Also, the participants perceived adults who work in professional roles could help struggling students adjust to their troubled home lives, if they were sought. A variety of assistance programs available to young African American students were perceived as a way
to help them increase their level of caring about school, which most students perceived as a critical step in improving the academic performances of African American males.

**Conclusion of Theme Nine and Relation to Research Questions**

In conclusion, the analysis of the data revealed instances related to the participants’ suggestions for school change to help all African Americans males improve their school performance. There were several specific recommendations pertaining to: more time studying, school programs, school policy for a minimum GPA, rewards and recognition, caring, role models, and help.

The participants perceived that their African American peers could improve their academic performance if they found ways to increase their time spent on studying. This ties-in with related literature that notes African Americans have lower rates of homework completion than their Caucasian American counterparts (Ferguson, 2008). The participants perceived that school programs and services that already exist could be better used by African American males to get whatever support they need. Also, the participants perceived that some of these after school programs could be adjusted, or recreated to allow for flexible attendance and less rigorous environments to welcome more of their peers.

The participants’ suggestions for school changes to help all African American males improve their school performance included raising the GPA eligibility requirement for sports participation from its current level of 1.7. The school will likely be forced to do this when the NCAA requires this change in 2016. In order for high school athletes to be eligible for collegiate play, the NCAA plans on increasing the minimum GPA to 2.3 or with a sliding scale of 2.0 (Hosick & Sproull, 2012). The participants believed that role models, and a system of rewards or recognition would be another means the school could use to increase
African American males caring about school, and striving towards goals for after high school. Related literature suggests these benefits would be likely if incentive programs, or mentor programs were established (DuBois, et al, 2011; Emmett & McGee, 2013).

**Summary of Chapter Four**

Chapter Four presented the analysis of data of one case comprised of 10 African American males bounded by grades 11 and 12, enrolment in one urban high school and self-identification as African American. Analysis of the individual instances in the data found common issues. Commonalities were aggregated to find a consensus within each case and compared across cases to identify related subthemes.

**Theme one.** Identity emerged from instances related to the participants’ experiences as African Americans. The theme of identity emerged from the participants’ perception of themselves within the school community. This theme was further detailed through subthemes of: stereotype of race, the burden of acting White (Fordham & Ogbu, 1985, p. 177) for high achieving participants and their reaction to it, and the experiences of two Haitian American participants.

Theme one revealed participants’ perceived their identity as a reflection of the family who raised them and not within society’s singular construct of race as defined by skin color. Some participants had multiracial parents, and two Haitian American participants experienced prejudice from African American peers, recognized society at large often did not differentiate cultures among from the African American identity.

The participants also perceived their identity as African Americans in contrast to negative stereotypes that associated low academic ability and performance with African Americans. The high achieving participants’ break from the negative stereotype led them to
experience a “burden of acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1985, p. 177). In this context, high achieving participants experienced racial comments that challenged their identity as African Americans because of their high academic achievement. Despite these experiences, high achieving participants humbly maintained visions of themselves as individuals striving to be their best selves.

**Theme two.** Low, medium, and high achieving participants’ experienced and perceived the social dimension of Normal High School in a similar way. The diversity of the school: 20.4% African American, 30.7% Hispanic American, and 44.4% Caucasian American, was seen as a factor that contributed to the participants’ feeling welcome and equal members of the student body. All participants perceived the social dimension of the school to be friendly, inclusive, and mostly race neutral. However, when in unstructured environments of the school such as the cafeteria during lunch, the participants perceived visible racial patterning and experienced a heightened sense of race consciousness. The visible separation along racial lines in places such as the school cafeteria or AP classes, led the participants to expect a greater degree of separation than they actually experienced. The dissonance between the participants’ experiences and expectations, and their multi-racial friendships helped maintain their perceptions of the school as inclusive.

All participants had similar experiences and perceptions of school personnel. School personnel were mostly seen as fair and respectful of all students. However, a form of soft racism by some school personnel that included low expectations and hyper enforcement of school rules for African American males was perceived across the cases.

**Theme three.** High achieving participants and medium achieving participants perceived peer influences were supportive of academic achievement. Low achieving
participants perceived peer influences did not impact their academic achievement, but experienced some negative sanctioning for poor or failing grades. Thus, low achieving participants were slightly negatively impacted by the social cost associated with poor grades. The diversity of the participants’ peers suggested race was not a significant factor in the participants’ friendships.

**Theme four.** The low, medium, and high achieving participants reported different perspectives of their classroom experiences. The participants’ perceptions and experiences of the academic dimension aligned with the “Tripod of pedagogy” an assertion that effective teacher instruction stems from three factors: relationships, content, and pedagogy (Ferguson, 2007, p. 225). In the academic dimension of school climate, high achieving participants engaged with the content of their classes, had effective relationships with teachers and peers, and perceived pedagogical practices as effective. Medium achieving participants had a mix of experiences within the academic dimension; one participant questioned the value of the classes’ content whereas, the other two medium achieving participants perceived a connection to the content and linked it to future college studies. One medium achieving participant had difficulty engaging with the pedagogy of the classroom and establishing strong relationships with teachers, while the other two medium achieving participants enjoyed the pedagogy and formed strong relationships with teachers. A consensus of low achieving participants experienced difficulty valuing the content of their classes; did not perceive the pedagogy of their classes as effective; and did not have effective relationships with teachers. Most participants perceived educational experiences and social experiences were so different between high achieving students and low achieving students that they perceived Normal High school as two schools within one. Despite the perceived racial
imbalances due to tracking patterns, where participants perceived class enrollments tended to be filled with Caucasian American students in the high levels and predominately filled by African American students in the low level, the classes were appropriately determined by ability and interests. Data revealed high achieving participants navigated a “burden of acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1985, p. 177) within academic contexts with little negative effect.

**Theme five.** Analysis of data revealed all participants experienced a difficult freshman year. The high achieving participants’ decrease in GPA in their freshman year led them to develop time management skills and an increased motivation for academic achievement. The medium and low achieving participants reported a dependence on study hall periods within their school day as a way to complete school work and increase their academic achievement. The high achieving participants perceived self-efficacy was a factor that led to academic achievement.

**Theme six.** Participants’ beliefs about Normal High School and their expectations for it allowed them to maintain the school in positive or neutral regard. Researchers have identified student beliefs and expectations for school are aspects of the phenomenon called school culture (Hindi, School Culture section para.1, 2004). The participants’ school culture did not negatively impact their attitude towards Normal High School, its personnel, or student body.

**Theme seven.** Both medium and high achieving participants perceived their parental influences contributed to the participants’ desire for academic achievement and influenced their plans for after high school graduation. Low achieving participants perceived their parents did not affect the participants’ desire to achieve academically or help them connect high school education to specific plans for after high school. A subtheme of parent approval
elaborated on how low and medium achieving participants perceived their parents did not approve of the participants’ academic achievement, whereas the parents of high achieving participants were perceived as approving the academic achievement of their high achieving sons. Lastly, the subtheme of the roots of academic success revealed all participants perceived parents played a critical role in explaining why some students succeed academically.

**Theme eight.** Low achieving participants lacked a clear and specific postsecondary goal and had difficulty describing what their life would be like five or 10 years into the future. Medium achieving participants had a vision of their future selves after high school that was still in the process of developing, but were able to identify some specifics of their future selves that linked high school education to future goals. The high achieving participants elaborated clearly and specifically about their future selves in five and 10 years into the future. Every participant perceived role models could have a beneficial influence on students’ aspirations for the future. The participants linked positive outcomes for high school students who connected with adults in relationships that modeled and supported guidance towards future goals.

**Theme nine.** Analysis of the data revealed participants recommended the school make changes to increase the academic achievement of African American males at Normal High School. The participants’ recommendations focused on ways to help African American male students increase their time studying. Formal or informal afterschool study programs were perceived as one way the school might address this and provide extra teacher help that many African American males perceived as helpful. The participants’ recommendations also concerned the GPA requirement for school athletic eligibility. High achieving participants
perceived this as, too low and recommended the school raise it. The higher GPA eligibility requirement was perceived by these participants as one way to help raise the academic achievement of many African American males. These participants believed many of their African American peers would work hard to remain eligible to play the team sports many of their peers’ valued. The participant recommendations also aggregated around a theme of rewards and recognition that suggested African American males would perform better in school if there were systems in place that applauded their efforts. Lastly, theme nine suggested that the school could make use of mentoring programs that could provide role models to African American males. The role models were perceived by all participants as a way to provide African American male students with guidance, motivation, and help increase the level of caring about school for African American males.

**Conclusion of Chapter and Relation to Research Questions**

Three research questions guided this study’s exploration of the participants’ educational experiences and perceptions of school achievement. The study’s purpose was to give voice to the participants’ experiences and their recommendations for school reform. Analysis of the data suggested themes in nine areas: identity, social dimension of school climate, academic dimension of school climate, factors related to academic achievement, peer influence, school culture, family influences, future selves, and participants’ recommendations for progress. The implications of these themes will be discussed in Chapter Five.
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter provides a brief synopsis of the study and explicitly addresses the themes in relation to the research questions. Implications of the themes are discussed in relation to theory and practice.

Synopsis of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain a deep understanding of African American males’ perceptions of their educational influences, experiences, and aspirations in the particular context of a diverse public high school located in the northeast. Secondarily, this research intended to understand and voice the participants’ perspective regarding suggested improvements to increase achievement levels for African American males within this context.

The study used an exploratory case study approach (Yin, 1994). The case was bound by “context and definition” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 109) as all participants were students at Normal High school, self-identified as African American male, and in 11th or 12th grade. A purposive sample was used to gain access to participants. Analysis of data collected through focus groups, interviews, and observations was performed to understand the similarities and differences between cases of low, medium, and high achieving participants. The researcher analyzed each word and line of data for meaning, withholding conclusion, while also aggregating issue-relevant instances throughout the data analysis, to allow a new understanding of a phenomenon to emerge (Stake, 1995). The emergent issue-relevant themes and associated subthemes are presented in relation to the research questions under study (Stake, 1995).
Research Questions

1. Does an African American male’s grade point average affect his perception of the academic achievement for African American male students?

2. How does an African American male secondary school student’s perception of African American males’ academic achievement affect his attitude towards school?

3. How do African American male secondary school students perceive the contributing factors leading to academic achievement?

There were nine main themes in this study: identity, social dimension of school climate, academic dimension of school climate, factors related to academic achievement, peer influence, school culture, family influences, future selves, and participants’ recommendations for progress. The significance of the themes and the implication for each practitioners and researchers are discussed in the following sections by research question and organized by the achievement levels of the participants, where data suggested that the subtheme of the case was significant.

Research question one. Research question one asked how an African American males’ grade point average affected his perception of the academic achievement for African American male students.

Low achieving participants. Low achieving participants, like medium and high achieving participants did perceive academic achievement for African American male students in light of a negative stereotyped image that associated low academic ability and performance for African Americans. The low achieving participants’ navigated their identification as African Americans around this obstacle to academic achievement.
Low achieving participants perceived a school climate that provided friendships that crossed racial lines and included these participants as equal members of a diverse student body. Low achieving participants perceived academic achievement was a result of student ability and interest. Although these participants perceived a soft racism was exhibited in some interactions with school personnel, these participants still held the school personnel in neutral or favorable regard, suggesting only a minimal if any effect on the academic achievement of African American males. The diverse peer relationships these participants experienced were perceived as having no influence on their academic achievement, but data suggested the negative social stigma for poor or failing grades may have worked to promote academic achievement on some level. Low achieving participants’ perceived academic achievement for African American males did not benefit from relationships with teachers, pedagogy in their classrooms, nor the content of their classes.

Data suggested the participants’ perceptions of a “two school phenomenon” (Noguera, 2008, p. 225) affected their views on academic achievement for African American males. Because of class tracking patterns that affected social and academic affiliations between high achieving and low achieving students, the low achieving participants, like the other participants, perceived the academic achievement for African American males was disparate, as if Normal High School was composed of two separate schools. The low achieving participants associated achievement with higher level classes that were perceived as “better” (River) and where “smart kids” (Jah) were enrolled. Cumulatively, the school experiences of low achieving participants led them to hold a mostly neutral regard for Normal High School that seemed to have a little or no impact on their perception of academic achievement for African American males.
Low achieving participants, like other participants, perceived their freshman year grades negatively affected their academic achievement. The low achieving participants experienced a difficult transition to high school and lower grades than they were accustomed to earning, suggesting they did not recover or grow from this difficult first year in high school. Low achieving participants found study hall periods positively affected their academic achievement.

Additionally, low achieving participants contributed much of a student’s academic success to the support of two parent households that valued and recognized academic achievement or, in some instances; the academic success was a student’s reaction to family hardships associated with single parent households. However, low achieving participants perceived their own academic achievement was not influenced by their family. The low achieving participants lacked a perception that linked their academic achievement with a clear vision of their future selves. These participants did not have clear and specific goals for five or 10 years into the future and did not perceive academic achievement as a critical component of their future goals, whereas the medium and high achieving participants did have a perception of their academic achievement connecting to visions of their future selves.

*Medium achieving participants.* Medium achieving participants, like low and high achieving participants, perceived academic achievement for African American male students in light of a negative stereotyped image that associated low academic ability and school performance for African Americans. The medium achieving participants navigated their identification as African Americans around this obstacle to academic achievement.

Like the other participants, medium achieving participants perceived a school climate that was inclusive. These participants experienced friendships that crossed racial lines and
these participants felt equal members of a diverse student body. Medium achieving participants’ perceived academic achievement as a result of student ability and interest. Although these participants perceived a soft racism was exhibited in some interactions with school personnel, these participants still held the school personnel in neutral or favorable regard, suggesting only a minimal if any effect on the academic achievement of African American males. The medium achieving participants perceived academic achievement as important and experienced friendships that supported this value.

Medium achieving participants, like high achieving participants, perceived relationships with teachers, classroom content and pedagogy positively affected academic achievement. These participants also perceived a “two school phenomenon” that affected their views on academic achievement for African American males (Noguera, 2008, p. 225). The participants perceived the academic achievement for African American males was disparate, as if Normal High School was composed of two separate schools because of tracking patterns that affected social and academic affiliations between high achieving and low achieving students.

Medium achieving participants, like the other participants, experienced a difficult freshman year. These participants’ transition to high school resulted in lower grades than they were accustomed to earning. The medium achieving participants perceived study hall periods positively affected their academic achievement. Cumulatively the experiences of medium achieving participants led them to experience and perceive the school culture in a mostly positive or neutral stance that was supportive of academic achievement for African American males.
Academic success was perceived by medium achieving participants as mostly a result of supportive two parent households that valued and recognized academic achievement or in some instances the academic success was a student’s reaction to family hardships associated with single parent households. Medium achieving participants perceived parents positively influenced their academic achievement, yet their parents’ lack of approval for the participants’ efforts were perceived by the medium achieving participants as a hindrance to their academic achievement. Medium achieving participants perceived academic achievement as important and related to their vision of their future selves that was still forming.

High achieving participants. The perception of academic achievement for African American male students was also held in light of a negative stereotyped image that associated low academic ability and school performance for African Americans by high achieving participants. The high achieving participants navigated their identity as African Americans and efforts towards academic achievement around the obstacle a negative stereotyped image that was related to stereotype threat and the “burden of acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1985, p. 177). Unlike other participants, high achieving participants perceived high academic achievement for African Americans was associated with racial comments from peers that questioned their racial identity. High academic achievement for African Americans was also perceived as causing isolation from other African Americans due to the low minority enrollment in high level classes.

High achieving participants perceived a school climate that provided friendships that crossed racial lines and included these participants as equal members of a diverse student body. These participants perceived academic achievement as a result of student ability and
interest. Although these participants perceived a soft racism was exhibited in some interactions with school personnel, these participants still held the school personnel in neutral or favorable regard, suggesting only a minimal, if any effect on the academic achievement of African American males.

High achieving participants perceived academic achievement as important and experienced friendships that supported this value. These participants perceived academic achievement of African American males to be supported by the social dimension of school climate of Normal High School. High achieving participants perceived academic achievement for African American males as benefiting from influential relationships with teachers, pedagogy in classrooms, and strong interest in the content of one or more of their classes. High achieving participants experienced and perceived the school culture in a mostly positive stance that was supportive of academic achievement for African males.

However, high achieving participants were similar to low and medium achieving participants in their perception of a “two school phenomenon” affecting academic achievement for African American males (Noguera, 2008, p. 225). These participants recognized the school’s class tracking pattern affected social and academic affiliations between high achieving and low achieving students. Thus the high achieving participants perceived the academic achievement for African American males was disparate, as if Normal High School was composed of two separate schools.

Also, similar to other participants, high achieving participants perceived their freshman year performance as negatively affecting subsequent academic achievement. High achieving participants reported time-management skills and a greater focus on academics grew out of that difficult first year in high school. Unique to these participants, self-efficacy
was perceived by these participants as an integral ingredient of academic achievement. The perception that academic success was rooted in both the student’s own efforts and support of family was held by high achieving participants. These participants perceived their academic achievement was positively influenced by their parents. Lastly, high achieving participants perceived academic achievement as important and connected to a clear vision of their future selves.

**Research question two.** Research question two asked how an African American male secondary school student’s perception of African American males’ academic achievement affects his attitude toward school. This question was intended to explore the variation across cases in participants’ attitudes towards school.

**Low achieving participants.** The low achieving participants’ mostly positive experiences and perspectives of the social dimension of the school climate suggested the social dimension had a positive effect on the participants’ attitudes towards school. Like the other participants, low achieving participants experienced a connection to school and a sense of belonging which positively impacted their attitude towards school. Peer relationships of low achieving participants were found to have only a slight but positive effect on the low achieving participants’ attitude towards school.

Data suggested the attitudes of low achieving participants were negatively impacted by experiencing a perceived negative stereotype for African American males who expected low ability and performance in school. The attitudes towards school of low achieving participants were negatively impacted by their lack of influential teacher relationships, difficulty with teacher pedagogy, and difficulty connecting to the content of their classes and that perhaps even academic achievement was beyond their grasp and interest. Further, these
participants did not express open opposition towards school. However, low achieving participants’ attitudes towards school were slightly negatively affected by the demands to complete homework which these participants had difficulty managing outside of study halls. Although these participants perceived school culture at Normal High School as inclusive, welcoming, and mostly free from inequality, these participants did not experience a warm or favorable attitude towards school.

Low achieving participants’ family influences had little to no effect on their attitude towards school. The lack of parent approval and difficulty in the parent and son relationship limited the impact on the participant’s attitude towards school. The low achieving participants perceived academic success for many students was connected to two parent households that supported and rewarded academic achievement. This perspective of two parent households being a contributing factor of academic achievement may have negatively impacted low achieving participants’ attitude towards school. It contributed to a gap in expectations regarding how these participants could achieve and what they expected their families to help them achieve. Lastly, low achieving participants’ attitudes towards school did not benefit from future goals because their vision of themselves five and 10 years into the future was unclear and failed to connect a high school education to later success.

Medium achieving participants. Data suggested medium achieving participants’ identity as African Americans negatively impacted their attitude towards school as related to experiencing a perceived negative stereotype for African American males who expected low ability and performance in school. However, these participants’ mostly positive experiences and perspectives of the social dimension of the school climate suggested the social dimension had a positive effect on the participants’ attitudes towards school. The participants
experienced a connection to school and a sense of belonging which suggested, the school climate positively impacted their attitudes towards school. Similarly, medium achieving participants’ peer relationships which supported academic achievement may have had a positive impact on the participants’ attitudes towards school.

The classroom experiences for medium achieving participants had a mixed effect on their attitudes towards school. One participant remarked about this difficulty attaining academic achievement because of the pedagogical style of teachers, curriculum that did not hold value for him, and a lack of influential teacher relationships. This one medium achieving participant did not clearly see the value of a high school education and questioned its worth.

The two other medium achieving participants seemed to have a positive attitude towards school as related to their experiences of influential relationships with teachers, effective pedagogy, and a connection to the content of their classes. These medium achieving participants possessed a positive perspective of academic achievement and aspired to a college education in a specific field. However, medium achieving participants reported difficulty completing homework outside of study halls, and generally did not relate well to school requirements beyond the regular school day. Cumulatively, medium achieving participants did not report instances of opposition towards school. All participants perceived school culture at Normal High School as mostly free from inequality and led many of them to hold the school in favorable regard, suggesting a positive attitude toward the school.

Medium achieving participant’s family influences positively affected the participants’ attitudes towards school. However, the participants’ perceiving a lack of approval for academic achievement by their parents may have limited the positive influence on the
participants’ attitudes toward school. The medium achieving participants perceived academic success for many students was often rooted by two parent households that supported and rewarded academic achievements that may have negatively impacted their attitude towards school. Lastly, medium achieving participants’ attitudes towards school were positively influenced by their vision of a future self which placed school as an important step towards their future selves.

High achieving participants. High achieving participants’ attitudes toward school may have been negatively impacted due to a “burden of acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1985, p. 177) placed on them as they strove to achieve academically at a high level. However, data suggested these participants developed greater motivation to be their best selves despite peer teasing and challenges to their racial identity. Despite these experiences, high achieving participants’ reported a mostly positive experience and perspective of the social dimension of the school climate, including friendship with peers that cross racial lines, suggesting the social dimension had a positive effect on the participants’ attitudes towards school. The participants experienced a connection to school and a sense of belonging which positively impacted their attitudes towards school.

Additionally, the classroom experiences of high achieving participants positively affected the high achieving participants’ attitudes because of the influential teacher relationships, the pedagogy in their classrooms, and a strong interest in the content of one or more of their classes. Further, high achieving participants perceived a student’s self-efficacy as a critical component in a proactive attitude towards school. These participants did not report instances of opposition towards school.
The family influences of high achieving participants positively affected their attitudes towards school. High achieving participants’ academic achievement won parent approval and positively affected the participants’ attitudes towards school. High achieving participants’ perspectives that academic success was often rooted in a student’s own desire to achieve academically and the encouragement of a parent or family member positively affected their attitude towards school and suggested their attitude toward school was proactive and positive in nature. Lastly, high achieving participants’ attitudes towards school were positively influenced by their vision of a future self, which placed high school as an important step towards their future selves.

**Research question three.** Research question three asked how African American male secondary school students perceived the contributing factors leading to academic achievement.

**Low achieving participants.** Low achieving participants did not consider race a factor that affected academic achievement. Parental influences were not seen by these low achieving participants as a factor that helped them succeed academically. However, the subthemes of parent approval and roots of success suggested low achieving participants’ perceived parent influences were a contributing factor towards academic achievements for other students.

Low achieving participants perceived the social dimension of school climate to be a mostly positive experience but did not perceive it, or their peer relationships, as contributing towards academic achievement. Also, the classroom experiences of low achieving participants included difficulty engaging with the pedagogy, relating to the curriculum and experiencing positive relationships with teachers. These concepts were viewed as obstacles
to academic achievement. Low achieving participants’ neutral experiences and perspective of school culture did not lead them to perceive the school as a factor leading towards academic achievement. However, study hall periods were perceived as a factor leading towards academic achievement. Low achieving participants’ perceived regular free periods within their school day that offered a time and place to complete homework or study, as a contributing factor towards academic achievement.

The low achieving participants, like other participants, perceived role models and the encouragement for academic achievement and influence for future goals associated with role models, as a contributing factor leading to academic achievement.

Medium achieving participants. Medium achieving participants perceived their identity as a reflection of the family who raised them and the values they were taught at home as contributing factors leading to academic achievement. The social dimension of school climate and peer relationships were perceived by medium achieving participants to be a mostly positive experience and factors that supported academic achievement. Two of three medium achieving participants perceived relationships with teachers, classroom pedagogy, and the content of their classes as factors contributing towards academic achievement, while one medium achieving participant seemed indecisive in his perception of the academic dimension’s benefit. Medium achieving participants perceived study hall periods as a contributing factor towards academic achievement.

Medium achieving participants perceived the school culture of Normal High as a contributing factor towards their academic success. Parental influences were seen as a factor contributing towards academic success for medium achieving participants. The medium achieving participants perceived parent influence on their achievement as mixed but they
perceived it as a contributing factor for academic achievement for many other students in the school who had two parents at home and could reward academic success.

Medium achieving participants’ perception of their future selves was a factor that increased motivation and value for academic achievement and was perceived by these participants as a factor contributing towards academic achievement. Similar to all other participants across achievement levels, medium achieving participants perceived role models and the encouragement for academic achievement and influence for future goals associated with role models, as a contributing factor leading to academic achievement.

**High achieving participants.** High achieving participants perceived the social dimension of school climate and peer relationships to be contributing factors leading to their high academic achievement. Additionally, relationships with teachers, classroom pedagogy, and the content of their classes and the general culture of the school were perceived as factors contributing towards academic achievement. High achieving participants were unique in their perception of emphasizing a student’s self-efficacy as contributing factors towards academic achievement. Related to this perception was the high achieving participants’ perception that the skill of time management was a contributing factor towards their high academic achievement.

The high achieving participants perceived their identity as a reflection of the family who raised them and the values they were taught at home, which were perceived as ingredients of high academic achievement. Parental influences were seen as a factor contributing towards academic success by high achieving participants. High achieving participants perceived that both a student’s motivation and the support of a parent were important contributors towards academic achievement. High achieving participants’
perception of their future selves was a factor that increased motivation and value for academic achievement and was perceived by these participants as a factor contributing towards academic achievement. Like other participants, high achieving participants perceived role models and the encouragement for academic achievement and influence for future goals associated with role models, as a contributing factor leading to academic achievement.

The themes found in the data related to this study’s purpose, in conjunction with, current literature ground this study’s significance and implication for theory and practice.

**Suggestions for Educators and for Future Research**

**Identity.** Despite the progress of racial integration in America and the inclusive school climate of the current setting, participants experienced identity in contrast to perceived negative stereotyped images for African Americans males that associated them with low academic ability and concern for school. The participants’ self-identification as African Americans challenged their sense of individuality and group belonging.

The medium and high achieving participants’ experiences of GPAs higher than 2.0 broke from the participants’ expected pattern based on a negative stereotyped image for African Americans and may be related to the phenomena of “stereotype threat” (Steele & Aronson, 1995, p. 797) and the “burden of acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1985, p.177). Steel and Aronson (1995) reported African American college students’ perception of being judged against a negative stereotyped image had a moderating effect on academic tasks. Steel and Aronson (1995) considered this fear of some African Americans of being perceived by others with the lens of a negative stereotyped image for African Americans as, “stereotype threat” (Steele & Aronson, 1995, p. 797). This threat led African American college students
to distance themselves from stereotyped images of African American culture when engaged in academic tasks (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Although the results in the present study did not directly support this effect on academic tasks, the results in the present study did indicate the participants perceived a negative stereotyped image for African Americans, although not necessarily for themselves.

The theme on identity also suggested the “burden of acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1985, p. 177) remained a salient phenomenon for high achieving participants. Fordham and Ogbu (1985) reported African American high school student participants felt striving to achieve academically was a betrayal of the students’ African American culture and thus, many opted to not pursue academic achievement. The African American high school student participants in the research of Ogbu and Fordham (1986) perceived academic success as the domain of Caucasian culture. The student participants in Ogbu and Fordham (1986) experienced a social and emotional burden when they chose to strive for academic achievement; it was as if they were “acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1985, p.177) and this placed them in conflict with their racial identity as they knew it to be. In a similar sense, the high achieving participants in this present study experienced a social and emotional burden related to peers’ racial comments that questioned the participants’ racial identity and reinforced the negative stereotyped African American culture of not valuing academic achievement. Similarly, in the research of Howard (2008), African American male middle and high school student participants’ felt viewed as a member of a group by their school at large, and were challenged in their identity because of this association to the negative stereotyped images of African Americans.
**Future research.** Further research is needed on the relationships between “stereotype threat” (Steele & Aronson, 1995, p. 797) and the “burden of acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1985, p.177) and ways to eliminate their negative effects. Future investigations into these two phenomena could make a valuable contribution to theory that may lead to increased academic achievement for African Americans male high school students. As our society becomes more racially diverse, the phenomenon of racial identification will likely continue to evolve. The effects of racial identity will likely change and would benefit from future research on the topic of racial identification.

**Practitioners.** For practitioners, the implications of the participants’ identity emphasized how the high school years can be particularly turbulent for all adolescents, but especially for African American males, as their identity was connected to negative stereotyped images. The participants’ experiences and perceptions of their identity as individuals and as African Americans suggested that practitioners might do more to help African American males develop a healthy and strong self-image. Schools could provide formal opportunities such as an elective class or coursework that provides healthy and safe ways for teens to reflect on and understand their self-identity. An addition of these experiences to high school curriculum offerings would be especially helpful to African American males who are challenged to navigate their racial identity as they grow towards self-actualized adults. Colleges are presently offering similar classes in the exploration of race.

One such college class that was developed to uncover and improve racial images is, “The Psychology of Racism” taught by Beverly Daniel Tatum. In her book, *Why are all the Black Kids sitting together in the Cafeteria?* she reviewed the important work she and her
students undertook during this class. Tatum reported the learning had a profound impact on all students including Caucasian students. A high school course such as this would likely make a profound impact on helping African Males formulate positive identities and include the relationship between individuality and race. Tatum also developed a similar course for secondary school teachers to help strengthen teachers’ understanding of the power of racial identity in the lives of children. Professional development opportunities that make use of Tatum’s or other researchers’ knowledge will likely help educators who are starving for increased effectiveness with African American males. Practitioners need to access the valuable academic information that is commonly found in scholarly journals and are absurdly underutilized.

To work against the “burden of acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1985, p. 177) phenomenon, practitioners would do well to devise school programs that promote an emphasis on education related to successful and positive images for African Americans. Research on racial identity (Nasir et al., 2009) found some African American males had difficulty developing identities that incorporated academic competence and value. School programs that promote positive images relating education to career success for African Americans may decrease the association of academic achievement as the domain of Caucasian culture and renew the strength of education in the African American culture. Other research (Cokley et al., 2011) focused on the impact racial identity had on academic achievement. Cokley and his team (2011) found that the strongest positive predictor of achievement for African Americans males was their self-concept while the importance of race was a significant negative predictor of achievement. This research (Cokely et al., 2011; Nasir et al., 2009) and the present study’s theme on identity make strong arguments
suggesting schools develop programs to help African Americans males examine their self-concept and the role race plays in their identity as an effort to improve the educational experiences of African American males.

**Social dimension of school climate.** The theme on social dimension of school climate supports the positive effects racial diversity in a student body had on African American males’ perceptions and experiences of school. Related literature suggests healthy school climates are positively correlated with academic achievement and play an especially critical role for minorities including African American male students (MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009). The participants in the present study reported having friendships that crossed racial lines and academic achievement levels that helped the participants feel included and valued. The qualitative research of Nasir et al. (2009) showed that a school climate offering African American males a broad range of student identities was particularly beneficial for African Americans. The school climate of the California high school in Nasir et al’s study, where African American males were not limited to choosing either being academically oriented or African American and not inclined toward academic achievement, enabled some African American males to choose identities that were more school oriented and could be strengthened by the positive influences of the school climate (Nasir et al., 2009). Similarly, the theme on school climate suggested the participants’ diverse friendships and the participants’ inclusion in a heterogeneous student body afforded them a range of identities that were not bound by race but by interest and ability.

Another characteristic of school climate suggested in related literature (Tyson et al., 2005) affecting the experiences of African American males was the wealth gap between White and African American student participants. Tyson et al. (2005) found that schools
with the greatest differences in household income along racial lines had school climates where the presence of the “burden of acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1985, p. 177) and negative effects of tracking were experienced by African Americans. The themes of the present study did not indicate economic status as a factor in the school climate, thus suggesting it was not present in the localized setting of Normal High School. However, it is important to note information about household income of the participants in the present study was not collected.

The theme on school climate suggested the visible racial patterning in unstructured areas and times, such as the school cafeteria, created within the participants a hyper awareness of race. Additionally the social alienation from other African Americans experienced by high achieving participants suggested more could be done to provide integration among the student body. Although there were negative aspects of the school climate in the results, it seems they were countered by the participants’ experiences of friendships and belonging to the school.

The component of being valued by others at school was also found to be a significant experience for the African American high school student participants in Tucker, Dixon, and Griddine (2010). Tucker and his team (2010) posited that their participants’ experiences of mattering to others at school, including among peers, helped the participants maintain and develop academic aspirations. The personal connections the participants in the present study made to teachers and peers were an important part of their school climate experiences and helped them overcome the obstacles of tracking and certain visible racial patterning. Although the school climate at Normal High school presented obstacles for the participants, they perceived and experienced the school as a positive and supportive environment.
The theme on school climate strengthened the support for the effects of a positive school climate on African American males (schoolclimate.org/climate/research.php; MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009). Similarly, Tucker, Dixon, and Griddine (2010) reported on the positive effects of a school climate supporting academic aspirations for African American males. Whereas, in the research of Tyson et al. (2005) the class stratum in the demographics of Dalton High school were implicated as a factor contributing towards a negative school climate, which negatively affected the school experiences of the African American student participants. The related literature and the school climate theme implicate school climate and specifically racial and class demographics to be worthy of future research to better assess the variables of school climate and their effects on African American males.

**Future research.** Investigations into the relationships between the social dimension of school climate, demographics, and African American males might yield important information to create more positive educational experiences for African American males. Future researchers might be better able to identify and measure how different characteristics of a school impact the social dimension of school climate which may positively impact the experiences of African American male students.

**Practitioners.** For practitioners, the significance of the theme on school climate suggests educators consider devising opportunities that explicitly create and support interaction between students who are unknown to each other. Although elementary schools often make opportunities like this occur when classrooms visit each other, or forge reading partners between younger and older students, or combine classes for specific purposes, these types of activities are uncommon in most high schools. If high school personnel made efforts like these, perhaps student relationships would become more diverse and the cohesion of
school climate would benefit. The segregating effects of tracking would also be diminished through programs that create opportunities for interaction between students who are unlikely to interact with one another. Further, considering alternative ways to educate high school students in classrooms without ability grouping may be appropriate for some content and would serve as another way to increase interaction across all members of the student body.

**Academic dimension of school climate.** The theme on the academic dimension of the school climate suggested medium and high achieving participants enjoyed connections to the content, pedagogy, and relationships of the academic dimension of the school but the low achieving participants did not. The medium and high achieving participants achieved GPAs of 2.0 and higher and were able to verbalize how they connected to the content, pedagogy, and at least one teacher relationship. Whereas, the low achieving participants in this present study experienced little connection and value for the academic dimension of their school, and lacked an influential relationship with school personnel. The experiences of the low achieving participants in the academic dimension of the school climate are salient for the attention of researchers and practitioners.

This theme supported the research of Ferguson (2007) on the instructional tripod of content, pedagogy, and relationships as three components that teachers need to master in order to effectively engage students in learning. Research suggested academically disengaged African American high school students were more likely to associate with a gansta persona and negative school behaviors, were uncomfortable talking to teachers, and were more likely to take on a “street - savvy African American identity” (Nasir et al., 2001, p. 91). The theme on academic dimension of the school climate in conjunction with related literature make salient the low achieving participants’ level of disengagement.
Another important subtheme of the academic dimension of school climate theme was the presence of aspects of a “two school phenomenon” (Nasir et al., 2009, p. 87) in the school context. The theme on academic dimension of school climate suggested participants had a range of perceptions on the presence of the “two school phenomenon” (Nasir et al., 2009, p. 87) at Normal High school but for most participants it was a significant factor in their perceptions of the school climate that divided high achieving mostly Caucasian students from African American students. Nasir et al. (2001) reported low achieving African American student participants experiencing the “street – savvy African American identity” and academic disengagement were predominantly from the second school of a “two school” context that offered only minimal academic rigor and very little nurturing for future options. The effects of a “two school phenomenon” (Nasir et al., 2009, p. 87) have also been implicated in furthering the achievement gap between African American males and their Caucasian counterparts (Noguera, 2008).

**Future research.** The implications of the experiences of low achieving participants in the academic dimension of the school climate for researchers are to further examine the intersection of identity, instruction, and academic engagement. Further research is needed to learn more about the identities of low achieving African American male high school students and how schools can create meaningful relationships with them.

For researchers, the implication of the “two school phenomenon” (Nasir et al., 2009, p. 87) and its effect in school climate is worthy of study. Stakeholders must understand how separation between students of different achievement levels, that are often by default also along racial lines impact African Americans males. The central principle in *Brown v. Board*
of Education, that separation is inherently unequal, and its context in class tracking patterns needs to be better understood as another way to create more inclusive and equitable schools.

**Practitioners.** Practitioners could benefit from strategies offered by “culturally relevant teaching” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 17) to adjust the tripod of pedagogy specifically for low achieving African American males. A recognized expert, Gloria Ladson Billings used the term “culturally relevant teaching” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 17) to describe pedagogy that successfully empowered African American students to grow academically, socially, emotionally, and politically. The experiences of low achieving participants in the academic dimension of the school climate suggested a dire need for practitioners to glean from the research and practices of “culturally relevant teaching” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 17).

Practitioners faced with the “two school phenomenon” (Nasir et al., 2009, p. 87) would also benefit from the suggestions made in relation to the theme on school climate. Opportunities that explicitly create and support interaction between students who are unknown to each other and on different achievement levels would decrease the isolation between high achieving students and other students to help eliminate the presence of a “two school phenomenon” (Nasir et al., 2009, p. 87). Further, considering alternative ways to educate high school students in classrooms without ability grouping may be appropriate for some content and would serve as another way to increase interaction across all members of the student body.

**Factors related to academic achievement.** The theme on factors related to academic achievement implicated the transition to high school as a significant area affecting the educational experiences of all participants. This theme suggested all participants
experienced a drop in GPA during their freshman year and only medium and high achieving participants grew and learned from their difficult freshman year. Research has shown that it is a common trend for students’ 9th grade GPA to be lower than their 8th grade GPA (Isakson & Jarvis, 1998) and other researchers (Brenner & Graham, 2009) suggested the transition into high school can be especially challenging for minority students including African American males.

Also salient in the theme on factors related to academic achievement was the time-management skills of high achieving participants. Medium and low achieving participants depended on study hall periods to complete homework while high achieving participants valued and developed time management skills as a critical skill for success in high school. The deficit of time-management skills is likely an important factor limiting medium and low achieving students. Congos and Smith (1983) showed instruction in time-management strategies resulted in better study habits, increased motivation and improved academic achievement.

The theme on factors related to academic achievement indicated the importance of self-efficacy as perceived by high achieving participants. Whereas medium and low achieving participants did not emphasize a student’s self-efficacy to make full use of the opportunities and resources of the school, as high achieving participants did. Self-efficacy in various forms has been suggested by researchers as an important component in the educational experiences of high school students (Bandura, 2001). The findings of Alliman-Brisse et al. (2004) reinforced the supposition that having positive and supportive adult role models in African American males’ lives improves their self-efficacy in education and career development. Uwah and McMahon (2008) suggested that within the school context for
African American male students their overall general feeling of being encouraged to participate was significantly predictive of self-efficacy scores.

**Future research.** Researchers could help all stakeholders by investigating what specifically is most troublesome for African American males in their transition to high school and suggest strategies to address them. Further research could address how technology is affecting high school students’ skills with time-management and direct practitioners towards the best way to utilize technology and mitigate technology’s negative influences on time-management.

**Practitioners.** Practitioners could consider programs aimed towards incoming freshman that prepare them for the transition year as one way to address and prevent the difficulties associated with freshman year. The idea of freshman study courses are not new. However, they remain scarce in many public high schools (NASSP, 2006). Research suggests multi-dimensional yearlong courses are likely to improve student outcomes and have made a positive difference in the state of Florida (Dedmond, 2008). Practitioners could teach time-management skills directly as part of a freshman study skills class or incorporate them into other curriculum as another way to help African American males improve academic achievement.

Practitioners should consider opportunities to develop the self-efficacy of medium and low achieving African American males as a way to improve their academic achievement. Specifically, creating encouraging and welcoming invitations for African American males to participate with a school’s resources and opportunities will likely help develop self-efficacy in these young men. Research on self-efficacy has been immensely informative in understanding its contribution to educational outcomes, but more can be done to find explicit
ways to develop it in students, in whom it is lacking. Underperforming students including many who are African American males could benefit from interventions that researchers develop to improve the critical attribute of self-efficacy that has been linked to academic achievement (Bandura, 2001).

**Peer influences.** The theme on peer influences made salient the presence of academically supportive peer friendships for medium and high achieving participants, whereas low achieving participants experienced only negative social stigma for poor or failing grades. Similarly, research has shown African American students’ peer culture was characterized as supportive of academic achievement and was similar to Caucasian students although low achieving African Americans had a tendency to hide their low achievement because of peer sanctioning for poor grades (Diamond et al., 2007; Ferguson, 2007).

**Future research.** Interested researchers could find consider new investigations into the identity configurations and peer influences of African American males to better understand the interactive processes between these two phenomena. Learning how to make the best use of supportive friendships to promote academic achievement is a worthwhile pursuit that would likely benefit the academic achievement of African American males.

**Practitioners.** Practitioners might do well to find ways to capitalize on the social force of peer influences to further the academic achievement levels of all African American males, but especially those who are academically low achieving. Incorporating the social fabric of the students’ lives and strengthening its positive nature into the aforementioned freshman transition programs would likely increase the sense of mattering to others and creating support networks for students, which have been found as contributing to academic achievement (Tucker et al., 2010; www.freshmantransition.org). Researchers could also
participate in increasing the understanding of why low achieving African American students failed to perceive positive influences from peers. Considering research on identity configurations for African American males and the lack of explicitly positive peer influences for low achieving African American students would likely lead to interventions that would improve academic achievement levels for all African American males.

**School culture.** The theme on school culture made salient the presence of a positive or neutral school culture as perceived by all participants as mostly supportive of their educational experiences. Researchers have identified student beliefs and expectations for school as aspects of the phenomenon called school culture (Hindi, School Culture section para.1, 2004). The participants’ school culture did not negatively impact their attitude towards Normal High School, its personnel, or student body. This theme implicates the characteristics of the institution as a factor contributing towards a positive attitude and relationship to school for African Americans males.

**Future research.** Researchers might consider studying the school’s organization, personnel, demographics, and the structure of the district to better understand how it created a mostly positive school climate for the participants. Creating a positive school climate has clear connections to student achievement and finding ways to shape a school climate that works for all students would be a worthwhile pursuit that would help improve the educational experiences for African American males.

**Practitioners.** Practitioners should strongly consider replicating many aspects of the school, in particular its offering of sports, art, and musical programs that many of the participants expressed gratitude for participating in. It was these programs that helped the diverse students develop friendships that crossed racial lines. The theme of school climate
indicates that stakeholders need to evaluate their school climate and be in search of ways to integrate a diverse student body.

**Family influence.** The theme of family influence suggested the families of high and medium achieving participants were perceived by these participants as positively influencing academic achievement, while low achieving participants perceived their family had no influence on academic achievement. Allman-Brissett et al. (2004) found that African American parents’ communication of some self-efficacy information could predict their children’s self-efficacy. Allman-Brissett et al. (2004) reported parental verbal encouragement did not predict self-efficacy or outcome expectations for African American students, but career related modeling, instrumental assistance, and emotional support offered by the parents positively affected the self-efficacy of the young men. Ferguson (2007) found that African American parents were more tolerant of low grades than any other parents, suggesting lower parental expectations negatively impacted the academic achievement of African American students.

**Practitioners.** Practitioners should help parents harness the power of career related modeling, instrumental assistance, and emotional support to help African American males become more proactive and improve their academic achievement. Educators would be wise to find ways to help their students’ families make use of the related literature that offers invaluable information to families about promoting academic achievement for their children.

**Future research.** For researchers, the low achieving participants’ failure to perceive family influence as positively shaping their academic achievement implicated this theme as a need for research. Future study might provide insight into uncovering strategies to help the
families of low achieving participants communicate and model more effectively their support for the academic achievement of their sons.

**Future selves.** The theme on future selves suggested high and medium achieving participants developed to some degree future goals that were linked to academic achievement, whereas low achieving participants did not. The theme on future selves suggested participants benefited from relationships with adults who modeled positive examples of professional success and provided encouragement and guidance for the participants’ futures. The theme on future selves suggested participants who had a better grasp on their future goals had higher GPAs than those who did not.

The theme on future selves supported the literature that suggested programs that provide role models or mentors for African American students produce a variety of positive outcomes (Hurd & Zimmerman, 2010; Noguera, 2008). Alliman-Brissett et al. (2004) reported that African American parents’ career-related modeling predicted their sons’ self-efficacy regarding career planning, career exploration, and setting high expectations for a future career. The findings of Uwah and McMahon (2008) indicated African American students’ educational aspirations were significantly predictive of academic self-efficacy, suggesting that the level of education the students desired to attain predicted their sense of academic competence. Uwah and McMahon (2008) also found a significant relationship between a student feeling encouraged to participate in school, academic self-efficacy, and educational aspirations. Career aspirations for secondary students are likely to help develop many positive characteristics that foster academic achievement.

**Future research.** The related literature and the theme of future selves suggested African American males may benefit from participation in activities and career guidance
programs that work to develop and enhance students’ career aspirations, thus future investigations into these specific programs might yield results that could further impact African American males’ academic self-efficacy, which will likely increase academic achievement. Researchers should consider improving the understanding of how race might impact self-efficacy within the school setting.

Practitioners. If schools can find avenues to facilitate student relationships with adults who can provide encouragement and guidance towards professional goals, then students who struggle to connect with and find value for academic achievement will likely develop a different perspective of academic achievement. Clarity about future goals and the motivation to attain them rarely comes from a student by himself (Steinberg, 1996). Most often students with clear goals cited an adult, a teacher, counselor, parent, or relative, as the source of guidance related to future aspirations (Noguera, 2008). Although parents are often a source for helping adolescents develop future goals, teachers and mentors can also help. When families are becoming increasingly stressed, practitioners should consider implementing mentoring programs that can help students grow a specific vision of their future self, which will likely lead to an improved relationship with school. One such program that has been growing in effectiveness since 1970 is the National Black MBA Leaders of Tomorrow mentoring program. This program’s primary purpose is to create relationships that foster economic and intellectual wealth in African American communities. Because the program matches business leaders who are African American with African American adolescents, it is well matched to fulfill the mentoring needs of African American males. This program and others can grow in reputation and effectiveness if researchers were to measure and understand the program’s effectiveness. African American male students
would likely benefit from research that would help them identify the type of mentoring that best meet their needs.

**Summary of Chapter**

The purpose of this study was to understand the voices of junior and senior African American males attending a diverse urban high school in the northeast. The researcher learned through focus groups, participant interviews, and observations about the participants’ educational experiences and perceptions of school. Analysis of the data suggested themes in nine areas: identity, social dimension of school climate, academic dimension of school climate, factors related to academic achievement, peer influence, school culture, family influences, future selves, and participants’ recommendations for progress. The significance of the themes and their implications for practitioners and researchers were offered and discussed.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this dissertation explored the educational perceptions and experiences of African American males in a diverse, urban high school. This work may contribute to the existing body of knowledge of African American males’ schooling experiences that will further inform families, school personnel, and researchers in how to provide effective educational opportunities, strategies, and programs to make a positive difference in the education experiences of African American males.
References


Appendix A: Overview of Related literature
Appendix A

*Overview of Related Literature*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme &amp; Citation</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Design</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burden of Acting White (Fordham &amp; Ogbu, 1986)</td>
<td>33 African American high school students</td>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>Participants experienced a burden of acting White while striving to achieve academically. Choosing to demonstrate successful student behaviors was considered acting White and in opposition to African American identity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning Burden of Acting White (Diamond, Lewis, &amp; Gordon, 2007)</td>
<td>African American (n = 35) and Caucasian American (n = 35) high school students</td>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>African American participants did not possess a burden of acting White and experienced inter-racial negative peer pressure. All participants had equal desire to attend college.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Questioning Burden of Acting White (African American high school students, n = 231) | African American high school students (n = 231) | Mixed methods   | African American participants from racially and economically diverse high schools did not possess a burden of acting White.
but those in a school with a great wealth disparity did.

Continued

Appendix A *Overview of Related Literature continued*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Findings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Spencer, Noll, Stolzfus, &amp; Harpalani, 2001)</td>
<td>562 African American youth in four schools.</td>
<td>Statistical analyses</td>
<td>High achieving African American participants were not found to identify with Caucasian values, but were instead pursuing positive Afro-centric values and held high self-esteem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Cokley, McClain, Jones, and Johnson, 2011)</td>
<td>96 African American high school students (41 males, 55 females)</td>
<td>Statistical analyses</td>
<td>African American males began schooling with a strong identification with academics, but lost this as they matured. Academic self-concept was a positive predictor of GPA, while age and racial identity were negative predictors of GPA. Racialized identity was characterized by stereotypical endorsements of</td>
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African American culture. This type of racial identity placed those African American males at risk for low level of academic achievement and oppositional attitudes.

Continued

Appendix A *Overview of Related Literature continued*

| Identity (Nasir, Mclaughlin, & Jones, 2009) | Disconnected participants - (total = 9; African American = 8, Asian =1). | Mixed methods Connected participants - (total = 11; all African American; males= 6; females = 5) | Participants with a “street-savvy African American identity” were predominantly from the educational trajectory in a two school environment that did not promote educational achievement worthy of college nor nurture career readiness. These participants were reported to lack introspective analysis of their racial identities and were not consciously adopting this identity but rather embracing an image provided for them from their communities, |
media, and schools. Other participants had a “school oriented and socially conscious African American identity” and were predominantly in the college bound trajectory of the two school context and may have had higher rates of academic achievement. These participants were attached to their communities and a historical African American community. They viewed their racial identity as being committed to school, and the positive development of family and community. Other participants embraced variations of the two types of identity. Their identity fluctuated over the two year period. These participants were consciously aware of race and its role in society and

Appendix A *Overview of Related Literature continued*
However, their personal issues and peer influences inhibited the participants’ commitment to a school oriented identity. The study suggested what seems to be more important is the extent to which students embrace a positive stance toward school as part of an African American identity (Nasir et al., 2009).

Appendix A Overview of Related Literature continued

| Stereotyped (Howard, 2008) | 200 African American middle and high school students were surveyed. Then, a subsample of 100 was interviewed. | Mixed methods | Participants were conscious of the negative racial stereotypes of African American men. The participants perceived their race affected their peers’ and teachers’ perceptions of them. Many participants felt they were often working against the negative |
Lastly, a case study of ten participants. Participants perceived teacher’s expectations were justified because many African American males were performing poorly in school, yet the participants wanted to be recognized as individuals. Many participants were challenged in experiencing their individuality because of their African American race. Participants perceived their school at large saw them as a member of a group, not as individuals, and the school personnel displayed subtle messages supporting negative racial stereotypes of African American men.

Appendix A *Overview of Related Literature continued*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stereotype</th>
<th>Male and female</th>
<th>Statistical analyses</th>
<th>“Whenever African American students perform an explicitly scholastic or intellectual task, they face the threat of confirming or being</th>
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<tr>
<td>Threat</td>
<td>college students</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(Steele &amp; Aronson, 1995)</td>
<td>numbering</td>
<td>approximately 150</td>
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</table>
in each phase of the study (Caucasian Americans n = 75, African American n = 75) judged by a negative societal stereotype—a suspicion—about their group’s intellectual ability and competence” (Steele & Aronson, 1995, p.797). The findings suggested that creating in African Americans awareness of their race through subtle differences in the testing conditions, associated questionnaires, and even the solicitation of racial identification, heightened their anxiety and significantly impaired their performance on academic oriented tests.

Appendix A Overview of Related Literature continued

| Stereotype Threat (Gayles, 2006) | Five high achieving senior African American students attending either a | Case study Participants in the non-affluent school (BHS) possessed awareness of a negative stereotype for African Americans and a strong sense of |
non-affluent school (BHS) or an affluent school (EHS) identity as African Americans, which resulted in experiencing stereotype threat. However participants from BHS were strongly motivated to disprove the negative stereotyped image of African Americans. Participants in the affluent school (EHS) failed to perceive racial influences in their school experiences. Participants in EHS perceived themselves as an exception to the common African American negative stereotypes of African Americans. Participants in EHS did not primarily regard themselves, nor do they believe they were primarily regarded as, African Americans but as individuals. Thus, stereotype threat did not apply to them. Findings did not match Steel and Aronson’s (1995) finding.

Appendix A Overview of
**Related Literature continued**

| Culturally Relevant Teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1994) | Eight successful teachers of African American students | Ladson-billings (1994) suggested successful teachers of African Americans students loved their job, where they did it and saw it as a personal mission. The participants’ perceptions of African American students were not based on the history of African Americans nor on a concept of color-blindness, but rather an appreciation for each student’s differences, race, and unlimited potential. Participants consciously connected lessons to students’ identities and issues in their world. The participants affirmed the students’ attributes and their interrelatedness to all life. Participants perceived students possessed knowledge and made efforts to find it. The participants’ were effective in establishing relationships that valued the |
students’ culture and helped them bridge the dominant culture.

Appendix A *Overview of Related Literature continued*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culturally Relevant Teaching</th>
<th>An award winning middle school science teacher</th>
<th>Case study</th>
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<tr>
<td>(Milner, 2011)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mr. Hall was observed to be caring and responsive to students’ individual needs. Mr. Hall’s supportive disposition was attributed to his belief that his students deserved second chances and to be treated with dignity. Mr. Hall was committed to support his students and help them experience success. The students and teacher worked together to develop an understanding of each others’ multiple identities and racial differences. The students were not confronted with losing their “cool” status or with a burden of acting White while striving to achieve academically. Mr. Hall had a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
reputation as a committed and active agent for positive school behaviors.

Continued

Appendix A *Overview of Related Literature continued*

| School climate (Tucker, Dixon, and Griddine, 2010) | Nine African American juniors and seniors | Phenomenological study | The synthesis statement of Tucker et al. (2010) posited that the participant’s experiences of being valued by others at school, including peers and personnel, and by family members helped them develop and maintain aspirations for academic success. Participants experienced the feeling they mattered to others which contributed to the participants’ self-efficacy and self-confidence. A critical component of school climate, the feeling of mattering to others, was suggested by Tucker et al. (2010) as the building block for the participants’ desire to productively engage in school |
Self-efficacy (Alliman-Brissett, Turner, and Skovholt, 2004) 162 African American 8th grade students (81 males, 81 females) Statistical analyses

The parents’ career related modeling was the primary predictor for the male participants’ efficacy and outcome expectations. The findings supported

Appendix A Overview of Related Literature continued

three (instrumental assistance, career related modeling, emotional support) of the four sources of self-efficacy as suggested by Bandura 1977). Parental verbal encouragement did not predict male participants’ self-efficacy or outcome expectations. These findings strengthened the supposition that having positive and supportive adult role models in African American males’ lives improves their
Self-efficacy in education and career development.

Self-efficacy (Uwah, McMahon, and Furlow, 2008) African American males in 9th or 10th grades (n = 40). Statistical analyses

The findings suggested that an overall general feeling of belonging to school was not positively related to the participants’ academic self-efficacy. However, the findings indicated the participants’ feeling encouraged to participate was significantly predictive of self-efficacy scores.

Appendix A

Overview of Related Literature continued

Data suggested the most powerful aspect of school belonging was the participants’ perception that they were directly invited to participate in school activities. The findings suggested when students interacted
with school personnel that motivated and encouraged them to stay after school or participate in activities, the students’ sense of school belonging increased. The finding suggested this feeling to participate directly attacked students’ stereotype threat and related beliefs about school personnel’s belief in negative stereotypes about African Americans. The findings indicated educational aspirations were significantly predictive of academic self-efficacy.

Appendix B: Principal Letter and Consent Form
December 2013
Dear Principal XXXX,

As you know I am a special education teacher at Norwalk High school. I am currently studying at Western Connecticut State University to meet the requirements of the Doctoral Degree in Educational Leadership. As part of this, I plan to conduct a research study that investigates how African American male students perceive their educational experiences. It is my hope that this work will add to the body of research that seeks to create more equitable educational outcomes for African American male students. This study has been approved by Western Connecticut State University’s Institutional Review Board.

My research will involve 18-24 African American male junior and seniors who volunteer to participate. The participants will not be enrolled in any classes that I teach. Since I work primarily with tenth graders, it is highly unlikely that any of these students will be enrolled in any of my classes. The student and his parent/guardian will be required to grant written permission and withdrawal can be made at any time. The school's name and students’ names will be changed.

The methods of gathering information will include focus groups, student interviews held after regular school hours, and observation in non-structured settings like the cafeteria and the library. To maintain confidentiality and privacy, the specific information collected will be kept in a secure location and will not be shared with any school personnel or other party. The data collected will be used solely for the purpose of this study. I am asking for your permission to carry out this investigation.

Sincerely,
Justin Zerega

I agree that the study described above can be conducted in Norwalk High School.

_____________________________________________________________________
Principal of XXXX High School                               Date
Appendix C: Superintendent Letter and Consent Form
Superintendent Letter and Consent Form

Dear Superintendent XXXX:

As you know I am a special education teacher at Norwalk High school. I am currently studying at Western Connecticut State University to meet the requirements of the Doctoral Degree in Educational Leadership. As a part of this, I plan to conduct a research study that investigates how African American male students perceive their educational experiences and outcomes. It is my hope that this work will add to the body of research that seeks to create more equitable educational outcomes for African American male students. This study has been approved by Western Connecticut State University’s Institutional Review Board.

My research will involve 18-24 African American male junior and seniors who volunteer to participate. The participants will not be enrolled in any classes that I teach. Since I work primarily with tenth graders, it is highly unlikely that any of these students will be enrolled in any of my classes. The student and his parent/guardian will be required to grant written permission and withdrawal can be made at any time. The school’s name and students’ names will be changed.

The methods of gathering information will include focus groups, student interviews held after regular school hours, and observation in non-structured settings like the cafeteria and the library. To maintain confidentiality and privacy, the specific information collected will be kept in a secure location and will not be shared with any school personnel or other party. The data collected will be used solely for the purpose of this study. I am asking for the district’s permission to carry out this investigation.

Sincerely,

Justin Zerega
I agree that the study described above can be conducted in Norwalk High School.

Superintendent of XXX City Schools  Date

Appendix D: Student Invitation Letter and Assent Form
Dear Student:

I am a teacher at Norwalk High school who has been working towards earning a Doctoral Degree in education. To complete this degree, I am researching what African American male juniors and seniors think about their educational experiences. I would really appreciate your volunteering to join my study. You must be an African American male and either a junior or a senior.

We will meet in groups of about 6-8 students for about one hour, one day after school (snacks will be provided). Then, at a mutually agreed upon time, we will meet for an in individual interview for about one hour. I will collect information about your background, interests, favorite classes, grade point average, school experiences, and plans for after high school. Also, I will observe you for one to two hours in unstructured places such as the cafeteria, library, study hall, or afterschool. Lastly, I will need you to check my report for accuracy which will take may take about 15-30 minutes.

The specific information that you share will be kept confidential and will not be shared with any person from this school. Your name and the school’s name will not be used in my reports. Your participation is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. I really hope you will agree to volunteer for this study. Please sign the attached statement below and return it to me along with the Parent / Guardian Consent Form by December 20, 2013. Keep one for your records.

Sincerely,

Mr. Zerega

------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

I acknowledge that Mr. Zerega has made clear to me the purpose of this research study. He has identified any risks involved and answered any questions I have. I voluntarily participate and grant permission for him to use my responses in the study.

Print Student’s Name: ____________________________________________________

Student Signature: __________________________________________ Date: __________
Appendix E: Family Letter and Consent Form
Family Letter and Consent Form

Dear Parent or Guardian:

I am a teacher at XXX High school who is working towards earning a Doctoral Degree in Education at Western Connecticut State University. I am conducting a research study that seeks to understand how male African American junior or senior students perceive their educational experiences. I will be collecting information about students’ background, interests, school experiences, grade point average, influences, and plans for the future. It is my hope that this work will help create more equitable educational outcomes for African American male students.

We will meet for about one hour afterschool in groups of six to eight students. Then on another day for about one hour, we will meet for an individual interview. I will also observe the students in unstructured venues such as the library or school cafeteria for about one to two hours. Lastly, I will need some of this information checked for accuracy which may take about 15-30 minutes.

Your son is not enrolled in any class that I teach and it is highly unlikely that I will have him in the future as a student. His participation is completely voluntary and he can withdraw at any time. The school’s name and his name will be changed in my reports. The specific information he shares with me will be confidential and will not be shared with any personnel from his school. If you have any questions, please reach me at xxx-xxxx or via email at zeregaj@xxxxx.org.

If you agree to have your son participate, please sign the attached statement below and return it to me by March 10, 2013 and keep the attached copy for your records.

Thank you!
Mr. Justin Zerega

I, _____________________________, am the parent or guardian of the student named below and am at least 18 years of age. I acknowledge that Mr. Zerega has made clear to me the purpose of this research, identified any risks involved, and offered to answer any questions. I voluntarily grant permission for my son to participate.

Student’s Name: ____________________________________________

Printed name of Parent/Guardian: ________________________________

Signature of Parent/ Guardian: ____________________________ Date: __________
Appendix F: Participant Demographic Form
Participant Demographic Form

Name: ___________________________________________  Grade level: _________

Birth date: _______________________________________

Please list all members of your household and their highest level of education or grade level.

Example: Mother - college, brother- 7th, sister - 9th, Grandma-H.S, Dad -College

__________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________

Please check the following classes and levels that you are taking and list the others:

[ ] English [ ] Math [ ] Science [ ] History [ ] English [ ] Math [ ] Psychology [ ] Other:

[ ] Business [ ] Cooking [ ] Transport. [ ] Language [ ] Art [ ] Yr.bk [ ] Journalism
[ ] Computers [ ] Science [ ] History [ ] English [ ] Math [ ] Psychology [ ] Other:

[ ] Football [ ] Soccer [ ] Cross-country [ ] Basketball [ ] Wrestling [ ] Track
[ ] Lacrosse [ ] Swim [ ] Band [ ] Choir [ ] Other:

Please list your interests and the activities you like to do.

[ ] Art [ ] Writing [ ] Reading [ ] Sports [ ] Video games [ ] Social/ Friends [ ]
family
[ ] Church/temple [ ] Work [ ] Afterschool program
Appendix G: Focus Group Protocol
Focus Group Protocol

1. Can you tell me about this school? (prompt for teachers, administration, peers, sports, facilities)
2. How do your experiences in high school compare with your experiences in earlier grades?
3. How hard or easy is it to do well in this school?
4. What causes some kids to do better in school than others?
5. Do you think different types of students are treated differently? If so how?
6. What kinds of kids do the best in this school?
7. How do you do in school?
8. How do your parents view your performances in school?
9. What are some things parents can do to help their sons do better in school?
10. How are you treated in this school?
11. How does it feel to be an African American male student at this school?
12. Do you think race plays a factor in how you are educated? If so, how?
13. Have you witnessed any prejudices in this school? If so can you please describe?
14. How does this affect you?
15. Do stereotypes play into prejudices? If so, how? With teachers, staff and peers?
16. Do you feel teachers and administrators understand you and your culture?
17. Is this important?
18. If you could make some changes to this school to help all African American males do better, what would you add, change, or take away?
19. What would you keep the same?
20. According to statistics, African American males fall far behind other groups academically. Can you give me your thoughts on this?

21. What else can you tell me about your school experiences?
Observation Record Form

Date: _______  Location: ________________________

Student Names

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

Appearances (affect, clothes, belongings,)

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

Peer Interactions

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

Teacher Interactions

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

Student Behaviors

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________
Appendix I: Student Interview Protocol
**Student Interview Protocol**

Theme: family and schooling.
1. How do you feel about school?
2. How important is it to your parent(s)/guardian that you do well in school?
3. How do you view your school achievement?
4. How do your parent(s)/guardian view your school achievement?

Theme: personal struggles for academic success
1. What has been hard for you at school? What has been easy for you?
2. How do you feel about what you have accomplished?
3. Do you think the grades you earned were fair and a good reflection of what you did?
4. What could have been done differently that might have helped you do better?

Theme: role models outside of school.
1. Is it important to have role models?
2. Is there someone outside of school who you would consider a role model?
3. How has this person influenced you?

Theme: most influential adults in the school setting.
1. Have you ever had a teacher or another adult that was particularly influential?
2. If so, can you describe him or her and how you were influenced?
3. Can having a person like this in school affect you and your grades? If so, how?

Theme: influence of peers on achievement.
1. What kind of students are your friends?
2. Do your friends affect your studies in any way? If so, how?
3. Do you ever feel pressure from them? If so how? (Continued)

Theme: postsecondary goals.
1. What would you like to be doing when you graduate high school?
2. What have you done to make this happen?
3. What do you do to find assistance with your plans for the future?
4. Where do you see yourself five years from now? And then five years after that?
Appendix J: Coding Process for Themes
Appendix J

Coding Process for Theme of Identity: Participants’ Perceptions and Experience of Racial Identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>African American Identity</th>
<th>Stereotype of Race</th>
<th>High Achieving Participants and the Burden of Acting White</th>
<th>High Achieving Participants’ Reaction to Stereotypes</th>
<th>Black, but Haitian American</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category code</td>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Racial identity</td>
<td>Stereotypes</td>
<td>Stereotypes</td>
<td>Haitian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category code</td>
<td>Family raised</td>
<td>Call us White</td>
<td>________</td>
<td>________</td>
<td>________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>African American Adam, Dar, Red, Easter, Xavier, River, Max</td>
<td>Judged Adam, Caz, Easter, Red</td>
<td>Call Us White Easter, Red, Xavier</td>
<td>Joking around AD. MB, JH Haitian Caz, Adam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>International Easter, Darwood</td>
<td>Color skin Adam, Red</td>
<td>Act White Easter, Xavier</td>
<td>How you present yourself Red Culture Adam, Caz</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>Light skinned Adam</td>
<td>Don’t think race has to do with it Red, Easter, Adam, Caz</td>
<td>Insinuate Max</td>
<td>Ignorance Easter, Red</td>
<td>Haitian Caz, Adam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>Saggin’ Easter, Xavier, Red, Max</td>
<td>Ghetto / Ratchet Xavier, Max</td>
<td>Joking around Adam, Max, Xavier</td>
<td>Trying to be better Red Eeaster</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>Black Adam, Caz, Max, Darwood, Jah, River</td>
<td>Grow up affects you Adam, Easter, Izzy, Red</td>
<td>Say things Red, Easter, Xavier</td>
<td>Assured / Confidence Easter, Xavier, Adam, Max</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>Being myself Easter</td>
<td>Stereotypes Easter, Xavier</td>
<td>Say things</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>Defines you</td>
<td>Say things</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix J

**Coding Process for Theme of Social Dimension of School Climate: Participant’s Perceptions and Experiences of Relationships and Social Interactions within the School Community.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>One Among Many</th>
<th>Equality Not Unity</th>
<th>School Personnel and Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category code</strong></td>
<td>School social experiences</td>
<td>Peers</td>
<td>School climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instance</strong></td>
<td>Diverse</td>
<td>Feeling out of place</td>
<td>Administrators nice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adam, Easter, River</td>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Big school</td>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>Caz, Darwood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jah, Izzy</td>
<td>Adam, Izzy, Xavier, Max</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instance</strong></td>
<td>Good group of us</td>
<td>Isolated</td>
<td>Guidance counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caz, Xavier, Easter, Red, Max</td>
<td>Adam, Max, Easter</td>
<td>Jah, Xavier, Easter, Red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instance</strong></td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>Not racial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Izzy, Caz, Adam Max, Easter, Xavier, Red, River, Darwood, Jah</td>
<td>Darwood, River, Jah, Max, Easter, Xavier, Caz, Adam</td>
<td>Adam, Darwood, Caz, Red, Max</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instance</strong></td>
<td>Feels regular - normal</td>
<td>Ostracize you</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>River, Darwood, Adam, Max, Izzy</td>
<td>Adam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instance</strong></td>
<td>Be yourself</td>
<td>Separate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Xavier, Caz</td>
<td>Xavier, Adam, Caz</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instance</strong></td>
<td>Everyone talks to everyone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Darwood, Adam, Max</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued
Appendix J

**Coding Process for Theme of Peer Influence: Participants’ Experiences and Perceptions of Peers’ Influence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtheme:</th>
<th>Subtheme: High Achieving Participants and Peer Influences</th>
<th>Subtheme: Medium Achieving Participants and Peer Influences</th>
<th>Subtheme: Low Achieving Participants and Peer Influences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category code</strong></td>
<td>Friendships</td>
<td>Friendships</td>
<td>Friendships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instance</strong></td>
<td>Friends Max, Easter, Red</td>
<td>Friends Izzy, Caz, Adam</td>
<td>Friends River, Darwood, Jah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instance</strong></td>
<td>GPA Xavier, Easter, Max</td>
<td>Competitions Caz, Izzy</td>
<td>People all over Jah, Darwood, River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instance</strong></td>
<td>Wasn’t able to interact with peers Easter,</td>
<td>Want to do something with their life Izzy</td>
<td>No – Nope River, Jah, Darwood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instance</strong></td>
<td>Different Max, Easter</td>
<td>Help each other Caz, Xavier, Max</td>
<td>I feel embarrassed Darwood, Jah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instance</strong></td>
<td>Smart kid-Do well Max, Easter, Xavier</td>
<td>Positive pressure Izzy, Caz</td>
<td>White friends Jah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instance</strong></td>
<td>Help each other Easter, Xavier, Max, Red</td>
<td>Different Adam, Caz, Izzy</td>
<td>No pressure, Darwood, River, Jah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instance</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Can be distracting Jah, Darwood</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued
Appendix J

*Coding Process for Theme of Academic Dimension of School Climate: Participants’ Experiences and Relationships Related to the Classroom.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>High Achieving Participants</th>
<th>Medium Achieving Participants</th>
<th>Low Achieving Participants</th>
<th>Two Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category code</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category code</td>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category code</td>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Content</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instance</th>
<th>Teacher Xavier, Max, Red</th>
<th>Teacher Adam, Caz, Izzy,</th>
<th>Teacher Darwood, Jah</th>
<th>Smart Izzy, Jah, River, Max, Xavier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>Learn Max, Easter, Xavier</td>
<td>Learn Caz, Adam,</td>
<td>Learn Darwood</td>
<td>Wasn’t able to interact with peers Easter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>Teacher methods Xavier, Easter</td>
<td>Teacher methods Caz, Adam</td>
<td>Teacher methods Jah</td>
<td>Gap Easter, Max</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>Don’t really need this stuff MB</td>
<td>Don’t really need this stuff Adam, Caz</td>
<td>Falling asleep Darwood</td>
<td>Teacher ID, MB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>Stereotypes EB, JH,</td>
<td>Stereotypes Adam</td>
<td>Big classes Darwood, Jah</td>
<td>Kids in class River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>Liked the class MB, AD, EB</td>
<td>Like this Izzy, Jah</td>
<td>Not paying attention Jah, Darwood, Caz</td>
<td>Only White kid Jah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>Best way / lessons JH, CJ, EB</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Only Black kid Easter, Max</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Don’t even get any work Max, Easter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>One school Red</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Two school Xavier, Max, Easter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued
Appendix J

Coding Process for Theme of Factors Related to Academic Achievement: participants’ perceptions of factors related to academic achievement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Freshman Year</th>
<th>Time Management and Study Halls</th>
<th>View from the Top</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category code</strong></td>
<td>Freshman year</td>
<td>Time management / study halls</td>
<td>Time management / study halls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category code</strong></td>
<td>____</td>
<td>Homework</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instance</strong></td>
<td>Mature Darwood, Easter</td>
<td>Study halls Caz, Adam, Darwood, Max</td>
<td>Opportunity Easter, Red, Max</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instance</strong></td>
<td>Push Caz, Darwood, Adam, Xavier, Easter, Izzy, Max</td>
<td>Tired Caz, Red, Max</td>
<td>Put in more time Max, Izzy, Red, Easter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instance</strong></td>
<td>Time Adam, Easter, Red, Caz</td>
<td>Takes effort Easter, Max</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instance</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>They just don’t do the work Max, Easter, Red</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instance</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Trying to be better Red, Easter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instance</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Push Caz, Darwood, Adam, Xavier, Easter, Izzy, Max</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instance</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Challenge yourself Easter, Max, Red, Xavier</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instance</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Want to do something you can Easter, Red</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Continued
Appendix J

Coding Process for Theme of School Culture: Participants’ Beliefs and Attitudes about Their School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtheme</th>
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<th>Beliefs</th>
<th>Attitudes</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>Opportunity</td>
<td>Easter, Red, Xavier</td>
<td>College Izzy, Caz, Adam Max, Easter, Xavier, Red, River, Darwood, Jah,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>Computer</td>
<td>Adam, Jah, Darwood</td>
<td>Belonging Adam, Izzy, Xavier, Max</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>Big school</td>
<td>Jah, Izzy</td>
<td>Diverse Adam, Easter, River, Darwood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>Big classes</td>
<td>Darwood</td>
<td>Feels regular River, Darwood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>Administrators nice Helpful</td>
<td>Caz, Darwood</td>
<td>Isolated Adam, Max, Easter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>Good school</td>
<td>River, Darwood, Max, Easter, Red</td>
<td>People all over Jah, Darwood, River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Xavier, Red, Easter, Izzy, Max, Easter, Red, River, Darwood</td>
<td>Not racial Red, Max, Easter, Darwood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>Sports, Programs</td>
<td>Darwood, Adam, Max, Xavier</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix J

Coding Process for Theme of Family Influences: Participants’ Experiences and Perceptions of Their Family’s Influence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Low achieving participants</th>
<th>Medium and high achieving participants</th>
<th>Parent approval of low and medium achieving participants</th>
<th>Parent approval of high achieving participants</th>
<th>Roots of Success For low and medium achieving participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category code</td>
<td>Family relationships</td>
<td>Family relationships</td>
<td>Approval</td>
<td>Approval</td>
<td>Family relationships</td>
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<td>Category code</td>
<td>Family expectation</td>
<td>Family expectation</td>
<td>____</td>
<td>____</td>
<td>Success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>Just want some cash</td>
<td>They don’t understand Caz, AD</td>
<td>Happy Darwood, Easter, Red</td>
<td>Don’t care OW,EB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>Money Jah, Darwood, River</td>
<td>Money Izzy, Adam, Caz, Easter, Xavier</td>
<td>What is wrong with you Adam</td>
<td>Parents Max, Easter, Red</td>
<td>Bad stuff at home DH, MB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>Parents Darwood, Jah,</td>
<td>Parents Izzy, Caz, Max, Red, Xavier</td>
<td>Parents Izzy, Caz, Darwood, Jah</td>
<td>College Max, Easter, Xavier, Red</td>
<td>Two parents at home AD, DH, JC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>Good news spreads Jah, Darwood</td>
<td>Good news spreads Adam, Caz</td>
<td>If they know your mom Caz</td>
<td>Mom Max, Red, Xavier, Easter</td>
<td>People to look up to ID, OW, EB, Mb, JH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>One single mother Darwood, Caz</td>
<td>How much it helps the household Caz, Adam</td>
<td>Haitian Caz, Adam</td>
<td>Push Max, Easter, Xavier, Red</td>
<td>One single mother DH, JC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>College River, Darwood, Jah,</td>
<td>College Izzy, Caz, Adam Max, Easter, Xavier, Red</td>
<td>College Izzy JC, AD, OW, DH, JA</td>
<td>Push Caz, Darwood, Adam,, Xavier, Easter, Izzy, Max</td>
<td>Push Caz, Darwood, Adam,, Xavier, Easter, Izzy, Max</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>Mom Darwood, Jah, River</td>
<td>Mom Caz, Adam, Max, Izzy, Xavier</td>
<td>Mom Caz, Adam, Izzy, Jah</td>
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</table>

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Appendix J

Coding Process for Theme of Future Selves: Participants’ Vision of Themselves Five and Ten Years into the Future

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Future Selves of Low Achieving Participants</th>
<th>Future Selves of Medium Achieving Participants</th>
<th>Future Selves of High Achieving Participants</th>
<th>Role models</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Future Career</td>
<td>Future goals</td>
<td>Future lifestyle</td>
<td>Role model</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>Mentor Jah</td>
<td>Money Izzy, Adam, Caz, Easter, Xavier</td>
<td>Money Red, Easter, Xavier, Max</td>
<td>People to look up to Izzy, River, Easter, Max, Xavier, Darwood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>Not worry $ Darwood, River, Jah</td>
<td>Guidance counselor Jah, Xavier, Easter, Caz</td>
<td>Liked the class Max, Adam, Easter</td>
<td>Mentor Jah</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>Make a lot of $ Darwood, River, Jah</td>
<td>Not worry $ Adam, Izzy</td>
<td>Not worry $ Easter, Red</td>
<td>African Americans don’t look to future Easter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>Guidance counselor Jah, Xavier, Easter, Caz</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hardest class Red, Max, Easter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>I don’t even know Darwood, Jah</td>
<td></td>
<td>Home Red, Xavier, Easter</td>
<td>Push</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>Can’t think that far River</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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Continued
Appendix J

Coding Process for Theme of Recommendations for Progress: Participants’ Suggestions for School Changes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>More time studying</th>
<th>School programs</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>Rewards and recognition</th>
<th>Caring</th>
<th>Role models</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>More time studying</td>
<td>School programs</td>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>Rewards and recognition</td>
<td>Caring</td>
<td>Role models</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>Put in more time</td>
<td>Teacher Xavier, Red, Easter, Izzy, Max, Easter, Red, River, Darwood</td>
<td>College Izzy, Caz, Adam Max, Easter Xavier, Red, River Darwood, Jah</td>
<td>Money Izzy, Adam, Caz, Easter, Jah</td>
<td>Don’t care River, Easter, Max, Jah</td>
<td>African Americans don’t look to future Easter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>Takes effort</td>
<td>Time Adam, Easter, Red, Max</td>
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<td>Parents Izzy, Caz, Darwood, Jah</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td>They just don’t do the work</td>
<td>Homework Adam, Jah, Darwood, Caz</td>
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<td>Bad stuff at home Darwood, Max, Easter</td>
<td>Push Caz, Darwood, Adam, Jah, Easter, Max, Izzy, Max</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instance</td>
<td></td>
<td>Study halls Caz, Adam, Darwood, Max</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Be Like River, Jah, Izzy, Xavier, Red, Adam, Max, Darwood</td>
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## Appendix K

### Final Theme and Related Theme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Final Theme</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| **Identity**                                             | **Stereotype of Race**<br>High Achieving Participants and the Burden of Acting White<br>High Achieving Participants’ Reaction to Stereotypes<br>Black, but Haitian American<br> |<br>| **Social Dimension of School Climate**<br>One Among Many<br>Equality Not Unity<br>School Personnel and Race<br> |<br>| **Peer Influence**<br>High Achieving Participants and Peer Influences<br>Medium Achieving Participants and Peer Influences<br>Low Achieving Participants and Peer Influences<br> |<br>| **Academic Dimension of School Climate**<br>Academic Relationships for High Achieving Participants<br>Content for High Achieving Participants<br>Pedagogy for High Achieving Participants<br> |<br>| **Academic Relationships for Medium Achieving Participants**<br>Content for Medium Achieving Participants<br>Pedagogy for Medium Achieving Participants<br> |<br>| **Academic Relationships for Low Achieving Participants**<br>Content for low Achieving participants<br> |<br>| **Two Schools**<br> |<br>| **Factors Related to Academic Achievement**<br>Freshman Year<br>Time Management and Study Halls<br>View from the Top<br> |<br>|<br>Continued
Appendix K: List of Final Themes and Subthemes
### Appendix K

**Final Theme and Related Theme**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Final Theme</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Family Influence on Low Achieving Participants</td>
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<td>Family Influence on Medium and High Achieving Participants</td>
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<td>Parent Approval of Low and Medium Achieving Participants</td>
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<td>Parent Approval of High Achieving Participants</td>
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<td>Family Influence</td>
<td>Roots of Success for Low and Medium Achieving Participants</td>
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<td>Roots of Success for High Achieving Participants</td>
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<td>Future Selves of Low Achieving Participants</td>
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<td>Future Selves of Medium Achieving Participants</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Future Selves of High Achieving Participants</td>
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<td>Role models</td>
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<td>Recommendations for Progress</td>
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<td>School Programs and GPA</td>
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<td>Caring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Role Models and Help</td>
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Appendix L: Audit Trail Report
Qualitative Audit for Mr. Justin A. Zerega

An audit of Mr. Justin Zerega’s qualitative research study was concluded on February 6, 2015, by Carol R. Marinaccio, Ed.D. Mr. Justin Zerega met with Dr. Marinaccio to review and explain the coding process used in his research and interviews. Dr. Marinaccio examined the code book and reviewed random parts of the qualitative data from the researcher, student interviews, and focus groups. All coding appeared to be accurate with 100% agreement between the researcher and the auditor.

The researcher explained that he used interviews and focus groups as the main data sources, and observations to record data and report themes from the research. Using the data sources from the interviews the researcher was able to determine nine themes that corresponded to themes as identified in Table 4. The data acquired from the interview process and focus groups, as well as, the observations provided the information necessary to answer the research questions. The conclusions and implications of this study were discussed, and this audit was completed successfully.

Dr. Carol R. Marinaccio
February 6, 2015

Dr. Carol R. Marinaccio
Date

Auditor

Justin A. Zerega
February 6, 2015

Justin A. Zerega
Date

Researcher