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ACCEPTANCE PAGE

This dissertation, THE EASY WAY VERSUS THE HARD WAY: MIDDLE- CLASS BLACK MALE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATION AS IT RELATES TO SUCCESS AND CAREER ASPIRATIONS, by RITA D. WILLIAMS, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctorate of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chair, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

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ABSTRACT

THE EASY WAY VERSUS THE HARD WAY: MIDDLE- CLASS BLACK MALE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATION AS IT RELATES TO SUCCESS AND CAREER ASPIRATIONS

by

Rita D. Williams

"Education is the key to success" is a common mantra on which schools base their goals and daily operations as well as the reason why most teachers enjoy job security. The majority of school personnel project two beliefs: (a) College is the appropriate next step after graduating from high school, and (b) white-collar occupations, such as professional, management, and supervisory positions, are desired career choices. However, after interacting with and observing the behavior of students in my classroom, I wonder how many young people agree with educators' thoughts on college and careers. Many Black males, in particular, do not enroll in college upon graduating from high school and often work in jobs that require less education (Joint Center Data Bank, 2003; Mincy, Lewis, & Han, 2006).

Herr (1996) believed people operate within an ecological context that included "the combination of physical, social, political, and economic environments that persons occupy and combine to create the circumstances in which each person negotiates his or her identity, belief systems, and life course" (p. 6 – 7). Within this context, individuals developed values that are personal and important. These values may or may not be

aligned to values that are prevalent in society. As such, it was worth conducting a qualitative study of how middle-class Black males perceived the role of education in success as well as their career plans. Any misalignment of thoughts between some middle-class Black males and school personnel could inform our understanding of why middle-class Black males, as a subgroup, academically perform lower than other similar subgroups.

Research questions included (1) How do middle-class Black males in a predominantly Black high school perceive the role of education in success as well the career aspirations of Black males? (2) What self-identified factors influenced their perceptions of education, success, and careers? Through interviews and focus groups, I gained insight on the academic and career perspectives of 13 middle-class Black males. Constant comparison methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and organizational displays (Miles & Huberman, 1994) guided data analysis. The findings reveal that, although all participants plan to attend college, most respondents believe additional routes, besides a higher education, lead to career and life achievement.

THE EASY WAY VERSUS THE HARD WAY: MIDDLE- CLASS BLACK MALE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATION AS IT RELATES TO SUCCESS AND CAREER ASPIRATIONS

by

Rita D. Williams

A Dissertation

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ABBREVIATIONS

AFG	Adam's Focus Group
GPA	Grade Point Average
HBCU	Historically Black College and University
I1 or I2	Interview #1 or Interview #2
WFG	Will's Focus Group

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As a mathematics instructor at a predominantly Black suburban high school, my primary focus was doing my part to prepare every student for success in a collegiate environment. At the start of each academic year, I conducted a student interest inventory to determine my pupils' career aspirations, which allowed me to highlight the numerical skill sets essential for excelling in their future college majors and occupational fields. I cannot remember all details surrounding my students' choices; however, a particular phenomenon stands out in my mind. Each year, the majority of my African American male students expressed plans to pursue employment in entertainment or sports. After reflecting on the popular employment choices of my Black male students, I realized that, outside of managing a salary and making financial decisions, entertainers and athletes do not utilize a vast amount of mathematics to maneuver through their respective fields.

As a result, I wondered if there was a relationship between career goals that do not require a high altitude of mathematical comprehension and the low level of achievement in the advanced math classes. While most of the African American males in my classes seemed capable of excelling, their grades and effort rarely reflected such capability. This quandary led me to speculate that some of my students' lack of accomplishment might be partly due to their rationalization that, if the math content was unnecessary for fulfillment of their career interests, then the need to master the lessons did not exist. Consequently, I began exploring the academic and career paths of Black

males to see if any research addressed my conjecture.

The uncovered statistics, though not disaggregated by social class, provided insight into the post-high school activities of African American males. Educational figures report that, in 2000, the percentage of Black male high school graduates, ages 14 to 24, that enrolled in college was 53% (Joint Center Data Bank, 2003). This data reflects that 47% of Black males who earned a high school diploma did not go on to college. To examine the occupational activities of 16 to 24-year old African American males who do not enroll in a university, I looked to *Black Males Left Behind*, a compilation of essays focused on the employment challenges of less-educated Black males. Mincy, Lewis, and Han (2006) used the term *less-educated* to describe young people who are not enrolled in school and have no more than a high school education. In 2001, more than half of less-educated 16- to 24-year old African American males reported zero earnings. For those who did report an income, their work in blue-collar positions, such as service and transportation jobs, resulted in a median weekly earning of $401, which amounts to a median annual salary of $22,456 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007).

As a result of the curiosity aroused by these statistics, I decided to conduct a qualitative study in order to further examine the *why* behind the *what*. Numerous researchers (Johnson, 2003; Lee, 1991; Fremon & Hamilton, 1997) highlighted the negative academic and career performances of some Black males but did not examine the thoughts that may contribute to the behavior. I want to join researchers, such as Ogbu (1978, 1987, 2003), Ogbu and Simons (1998), and Mickelson (1990), who do not take at face value the underachievement of Black males as a subgroup; rather, these investigators seek to understand the beliefs that influence the academic performance of African

American male students. I remember hearing somewhere that observers see only one-ninth of an iceberg, while water hides the remaining eight-ninths. If this is true, then scientists cannot know the nature of an iceberg by simply examining the portion that is visible above the surface level. The bulk of the iceberg's mass is under water; therefore, scientists must explore the visible element as well as the hidden component to better understand the characteristics and properties that make up the essence of an iceberg. Additionally, because water covers the majority of the iceberg's mass, it might be argued that the unseen can provide more information concerning the nature of the iceberg than the portion that is seen.

The same is often true with human thought and behavior. We cannot attempt to understand the observable deeds of individuals without examining the thoughts and feelings that drive that conduct. Society often judges Black males, as well as other marginalized subgroups, based on some members' harmful actions. Behaviors commonly associated with African American males are rebellion, lack of academic drive, employment in jobs requiring low educational skills, and violent acts; these connections may have a detrimental impact on educators' views of their Black male students. Knowledge is needed that will help educators consider pupils' behaviors as well as thought processes to help African American males progress in school and future employment settings. By exploring the academic and career perceptions of Black male students, I hoped to contribute to the existing knowledge base on strategies that address the academic struggles of many African American males.

Purpose of Study

"Education is the key to success" is a common phrase used to motivate students to

pursue academic excellence. The dominant culture, which is heavily influenced by the views and practices of middle-class White males, promotes post-high schools goals that include college and careers that require higher education. However, due to the academic performance of many students, it is difficult to determine if most pupils agree that education is necessary for success. Several Black males, in particular, do not enroll in college and often work in jobs that require less education (Joint Center Data Bank, 2003; Mincy, Lewis, & Han, 2006). Could this trend be the result of a belief that education is not the only key to success? Herr (1996) believed people operate within an ecological context consisting of "the combination of physical, social, political, and economic environments that persons occupy and combine to create the circumstances in which each person negotiates his or her identity, belief systems, and life course" (p. 6 – 7). Within this context, individuals develop values that are personal and significant, according to how they make sense of life experiences. Through qualitative methodology, I investigated the importance that some middle-class Black males place on education as it relates to success and their career aspirations.

Problem Defined

In the past few decades, the plight of Black males has been a frequently explored topic in all forms of media. In the *New York Times*, Eckholm (2006) reported that "although the deep problems afflicting Black men have been known for decades, the new data paint the most alarming picture yet" (A8). Although numerous African American males accomplish goals that are consistent with traditional values (i.e. college education, white- collar employment, home ownership), several despairing figures surrounding Black males suggest that, as a subgroup, Black males experience numerous challenges.

For instance, when compared to White and Hispanic males, Black males make up the smallest percentage of the population at large but the highest percentage of the incarcerated population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007; Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2005).

The following educational statistics also paint a dim portrait:

- In some cities, 60-69% of African American males never earn a high school diploma (Johnson, 2003).
- Black males drop out**,** or are pushed out, of school systems at higher rates than other ethnic/gender groups (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005).
- The overall mean achievement scores for African American male students are below those of other groups in basic subject areas (Lee, 1991).
- Black males only make up 8% percent of the entire school population but 15% of the special education population (Fremon & Hamilton, 1997).
- African American males are suspended from school more frequently and for longer periods of time than other ethnic/gender groups (Ferguson, 2001).

Numerous authors offer a variety of reasons why Black males encounter so many challenges at school. The reasons include low expectations from teachers (Freemon & Hamilton, 1997); difficulty relating to the curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 1994); disidentification, a self-protective strategy in which Black males focus on items, such as peers and hobbies, instead of academics (Osborne, 1999); and ineffective instructional strategies (Kunjufu, 2005). However, I believe a gap in the literature remains for two reasons. First, most studies focus on low-income and working-class African American males as study participants. Consequently, little is known about the academic practices and beliefs of middle-class Black males. The field of education could benefit from more

empirical studies on the educational perceptions of middle-class Black males, especially since recent studies (Nation's Report Card, 2007; Camara & Schmidt, 1999; Whittington, 1996) showed that middle-class Black students underperform when compared to subgroups of similar social class backgrounds. Furthermore, Whittington (1996) found that middle-class Black males were academically outperformed by middle-class Black females, which makes middle-class Black males the lowest performing racial subgroup among middle-class students. Second, most researchers approached the issue of Black male underachievement as if it were the result of solely unintended consequences. It is possible that some students have a hand in their underperformance, and this possibility warranted more investigation.

Data on middle-class Black students' academic performance present a bleak picture. The Nation's Report Card (2007) compared the average scale scores of White, Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaska Native students in the fourth- and eighth grades, who were ineligible for free or reduced-price lunch. On both grade levels, the subgroup of Black students performed the lowest in mathematics and reading. Camara and Schmidt (1999) discovered, regardless of parental education or family income level, African American students had the lowest grade point averages (GPA's) and standardized test scores when compared to students in four other racial/ethnic subgroups. Whittington (1996) found that the overall academic performance of Black students in an affluent suburb was lower than that of White students from the same suburb. Not only did the White students outperform the African American students on proficiency tests and the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), but the Black students had lower GPA's, poorer high school graduation rankings, and lesser enrollment in higher-

level courses. In the graduating classes from four consecutive years, 22 out of 310 Black students graduated in the top 20% of the class. On the other end, 295 out of 325 African American students graduated in the bottom 20% of the class.

Additionally, Whittington (1996) discovered that the Black females outperformed the Black males. Out of the 22 Blacks who graduated in the top 20%, 18 were females and 4 were males. Out of the 295 Blacks who graduated in the bottom 20%, 100 were females and 195 were males. Likewise, the average GPA of the Black male students was 1.99, while the average GPA of the Black female students was 2.42. When looking at college attendance, 79% of Black females went on to college, as opposed to 69% of Black males. Super (1990) and Vondracek and Skorikov (1997) suggested that students make decisions in high school that affect their attainment of post-high school goals. These decisions included course enrollment, the level of effort to put forth in the courses, and participation or non-participation in specific extra-curricular activities (Paa & McWhirter, 2000). Exploring the perceived role of education in success and the career plans of middle-class Black males could broaden our comprehension of why middle-class Black males, as a subgroup, underperform in school when compared to other subgroups with similar social class backgrounds.

Theoretical Framework

Before his death in 2003, anthropologist John Ogbu focused his research on understanding the academic performance of minority groups. In the first phase of Ogbu's work, he investigated why majority students in various countries outperformed minority students. In an earlier work entitled *Minority Education and Caste: The American System*

in Cross-Cultural Perspective, Ogbu (1978) conducted comparative research on what he called *castelike* minorities in Britain, India, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, and the United States (U.S.). He classified the minorities as castelike because:

> in every case they were a subordinate group in a stratification system more rigid than social class stratification. In every case, the minorities were denied *equal educational opportunities* in terms of access to educational resources, treatment in school, and rewards in employment and wages for educational accomplishments. (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 157)

Ogbu (1978) concluded that the lower academic performance of castelike minority students was a primary result of the barriers, which adults in their group encountered, for these students often believed there was a job ceiling that reduced the number of opportunities open to members of their subgroup. Subsequently, several castelike minority students did not think their academic achievement would result in the same rewards as the achievement of majority students produced.

In the second phase of Ogbu's comparative research, he investigated why some minority groups outperformed other minority groups. In particular, Ogbu studied why *immigrant minority groups* attain academic achievement at a greater rate than *nonimmigrant minority groups* (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Immigrant minority groups, which Ogbu also called voluntary minorities, are "those who have more or less willingly moved to the United States because they expect better opportunities (better jobs, more political or religious freedom) than they had in their homelands or places of origin" (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 164). There are two important distinguishing characteristics of voluntary minorities. First, voluntary minorities arrived in the United States of their own

free will, as opposed to being forced by White Americans or the government to live in the United States. Second, as a result of being U.S. citizens, voluntary minorities expect a better future for themselves.

Voluntary minorities usually encounter difficulties in their initial school years in the United States, due to discriminatory educational practices and language/cultural differences (Low, 1982). However, Ogbu (n.d., 1983, 1987) and Ogbu and Simons (1998) argued that voluntary minorities do not experience long-lasting difficulties in school because they are determined to achieve in U.S. schools, due to a conviction that academic achievement is the sure link to economic and social success in the United States. Examples of voluntary immigrants in the U.S. are "immigrants from Africa, Cuba, China, India, Japan, Korea, Central and South America, the Caribbean (Jamaica, Trinidad, the Dominican Republic), and Mexico" (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 164).

On the other hand, nonimmigrant minority groups, which Ogbu called involuntary minority groups, are "people who have been conquered, colonized, or enslaved" (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, 165). Two important features distinguish involuntary minority groups. First, involuntary minority groups did not personally choose to become U.S. citizens. Second, involuntary minorities felt that specifically Whites forced them to live in the country. Ogbu (1983, 1987), Ogbu and Simons (1998), and the Minority Education Project (n.d.) asserted that involuntary minorities are usually less academically successful than voluntary minorities because involuntary minorities do not espouse the same beliefs in the equality of opportunities in the U.S. that voluntary minorities do. Like castelike minorities, involuntary minorities do not necessarily believe that their hard work will result in the same benefits that White Americans enjoy; therefore, involuntary minorities

may not put forth their best effort in school thinking that to do so may be a waste of time. Examples of involuntary immigrants in the United States are

> American Indians and Alaska Natives, the original owners of the land, who were conquered; early Mexican Americans in the Southwest who were also conquered; Native Hawaiians who were colonized; Puerto Ricans who consider themselves a colonized people; and Black Americans who were brought to the United States as slaves. (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 166)

Ogbu (1998, 2003) and Ogbu and Simons (1998) called Ogbu's explanation of the variance in academic performance of minorities a *cultural-ecological theory*. Although Ogbu asserts that the cultural-ecological theory explains the low academic performance of involuntary minority groups in various countries, I will discuss solely how Ogbu applied the theory in the United States. Ogbu's cultural-ecological theory asserts that a minority group's perceptions of schooling in the U.S. are a direct result of the way the minority group arrived in the country as well as the treatment the group receives in larger society. Subsequently, the level of ill-treatment and discrimination a minority group encounters may affect the group's views of education and its benefits (or lack thereof) in the economic and social opportunity structures.

Through his cultural-ecological theory, Ogbu (1998, 2003) posited that societal and school factors, as well as community forces, impact minority school performance. He classified educational policies, pedagogy, and availability of job opportunities for the minority group as societal and school factors. Community forces included a minority group's perceptions and responses to schooling as a result of the actions that led to the minority group's arrival in the U.S. and the minority group's experiences with

discrimination. Ogbu believed that, if societal and school factors were the only determinants of the academic behavior of minority groups, then all minorities would perform poorly in school. The variance in the achievement of minority groups led Ogbu to believe that community forces contribute heavily to some minority groups academically outperforming others. As previously stated, the community forces, which influenced voluntary minority groups, persuaded students to believe that hard work will result in the attainment of the same economic and social opportunities that White Americans enjoy. The following illustrates Ogbu's assertion about the community forces of voluntary immigrants:

> Oakland Chinese Parent #227C: It is very important [for my children to make good grades] because the purpose for us to come is to let them have a good future and become successful. I sacrificed everything for them [to come and get American education].
>
> Interviewer: What did you tell your children about why they are going to school?
>
> Oakland Chinese Parent #223C: I told them to study hard and have a good future. I always tell them I had sacrificed a lot. The reason for us to come here is for them to have a good education. I always remind them about this. (Minority Education Project, n.d.)

The Chinese parents, whom Ogbu classified as voluntary immigrants, believed their children would succeed if they excelled in school. However, the community forces,

which influence involuntary minority groups, may persuade students to believe that, regardless of their academic efforts, they will always face barriers in the economic and social opportunity structures. As such, most involuntary minorities are also receptive to achieving success by means other than education. For example, when Black parents were asked whom they wanted their children to emulate, the parents named famous entertainers and athletes (Minority Education Project, n.d.).

It is important to note that Ogbu did not believe that an individual's membership in a voluntary or involuntary minority group automatically determines that person's views or academic performance. There are voluntary minorities who do not perform as well as some involuntary minorities; likewise, numerous members in involuntary minority groups believe that education will afford them access to the American Dream of economic and social status. However, dominant patterns discovered in Ogbu's comparative studies (1974, 1978, 1987) and the Minority Education Project (n.d.) allowed him to generalize. It is also worth noting that Ogbu and Simons (1998) acknowledged that there were variances between voluntary minority groups as well as within involuntary minority groups. The researchers asserted that there are differences in the degree to which individual minority groups reflect the beliefs and behaviors associated with other minority groups in the same category.

Ogbu's cultural-ecological theory is a part of the theoretical framework for this study because Ogbu (2003) used the theory to explain his findings in *Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb*, an ethnography that explores the academic performance and attitudes of middle-class Black students in Shaker Heights, Ohio. When compared to middle-class White students at all grade levels, the middle-class African American

students had poorer GPA's, lesser enrollment in rigorous courses, and lower college attendance rates. After interviewing middle-class Black students, their families, and members of the middle-class Black community in Shaker Heights, Ogbu (2003) concluded that the middle-class African Americans reflected the beliefs and behaviors of involuntary minorities as described in his earlier studies (Ogbu, 1987; Ogbu, 1998; Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Recall that involuntary minority groups may view education in light of their arrival to the U.S. as well as the treatment received while living here. The African American participants in Ogbu's (2003) study constantly compared their academic, economic, social, and political experiences to that of Whites in Shaker Heights as well as Whites in the entire nation. The middle-class Blacks felt that they experienced inequalities in those arenas, due to their former positions as slaves in the United States.

Furthermore, middle-class African Americans of all ages believed they have to put in twice the effort to receive the same academic, economic, social, and political benefits that Whites enjoy (Ogbu, 2003). The high school students frequently mentioned that Black employees work doubly hard to get the recognition from White employers that White workers with the same education and qualifications receive. As such, the students' perceptions affected their attitudes toward schooling. Several middle-class Black students, as well as adults, were skeptical that their hard work in school would produce the lifestyles they desired. As Mickelson (1990) found in her quantitative study, middle-class African Americans in Shaker Heights simultaneously held *abstract* and *concrete* beliefs concerning education. Abstract beliefs, based on the dominant ideology that education is the key to success, agreed that upward mobility is guaranteed to those who work hard in school. Concrete beliefs, which usually varied according to one's class and

race, used personal experiences to interpret the importance of education in upward mobility.

If a person has not observed that education results in job opportunities for significant people of the same race, then the individual's concrete beliefs will most likely reflect that education does not guarantee success for his or her race. Similarly, a person, whose parents and older siblings did not go to college and are satisfied with their jobs, may not consider a college education to be the only avenue to career success. The individual may perceive that education is beneficial but not imperative for success. Mickelson (1990) argued that a student's concrete beliefs about education may be similar or extremely different from his or her abstract beliefs; additionally, concrete, rather than abstract, beliefs determine academic performance. She discovered that middle-class and working-class African American students have high variances in their abstract and concrete beliefs; therefore, Black student underachievement is partly due to the uncertainty surrounding education being the key to success for Blacks.

Similar to Mickelson's participants, middle-class Blacks in Shaker Heights expressed, at times, that education was necessary for success (Ogbu, 2003). However, other comments as well as the academic performance of the Black students reflected a different mindset. For example, numerous students felt there were acceptable alternative strategies, which do not rely on formal education, to success. The most identified was athletics, but students also named entertainment and drug dealing as optional means to accomplishment. Like Mickelson, Ogbu (2003) argued that the students' concrete attitudes toward education influenced their academic performance, for numerous students admitted not putting forth their best effort in school. In fact, he classified the academic

behavior of the middle-class African American students as *academic disengagement*. Academic disengagement is the result of a conscious decision to not maximize one's potential in school, and, instead, putting forth low effort when completing schoolwork, participating in class, and studying.

Moreover, Ogbu (2003) claimed there are effects of discrimination that influence academic performance of which the Black community is unaware. The effects, which he calls "missing connections," are as follows:

1) Schooling is not perceived as a preparation for the job market.
2) Inadequate knowledge of educational requirements of future jobs.
3) How courses at school levels are related is not understood. (Ogbu, 2003, p. 254

First, the Black students in Shaker Heights generally did not view their schooling as preparation for future careers. Some high school students said they would be concerned with career preparation when they got older. Ogbu argues that these students' schooling lacked a specific focus. Second, the pupils did not comprehend the educational requirements needed to work in aspired career fields. For instance, some students who desired careers in engineering failed to understand the value in taking higher level math courses. Third, the learners did not appear to understand the sequence of courses from one level to the next. For example, the middle school students did not comprehend that their performance in middle school classes would determine the courses they would take in high school.

Research Questions

Using qualitative methodology, I expounded on Ogbu's (2003) work on middle-class Black students and Mickelson's (1990) work on concrete and abstract beliefs about education. Whereas Ogbu studied middle-class African American students who attended a racially-mixed school with a diverse faculty, I investigated the thoughts of middle-class students enrolled in a predominantly Black school with primarily Black administrators, teachers, and counselors. This variance in context influenced the findings in this study because the middle-class African American students in Ogbu's (2003) ethnography constantly viewed their educational experience and performance in light of their White schoolmates. Furthermore, I explored two of Ogbu's missing connections by examining if middle-class Black students who attend a predominantly Black high school 1) perceive their schooling as preparation for the job market and 2) have adequate knowledge of the educational requirements required for future careers.

Moreover, Mickelson's (1990) quantitative study revealed abstract and concrete beliefs toward education among African American students. However, because Mickelson did not explore the perceptions behind the thoughts, there was a breach in the literature, and my qualitative approach helped to fill the gap. In order to explore perceptions of success, education, and careers, the research questions were:

1) How do middle-class Black males in a predominantly Black school perceive the role of education in success as well as the career aspirations of Black males?
2) What self-identified factors influenced their perceptions on education, success, and careers?

Definition of Terms

The following terms are necessary for the reader to comprehend the content of this study:

African American- descendants of African people who were born in and currently live in the United States who do not claim a heritage from any other country; It is worth noting that all statistics concerning African American males generally include all men of African descent; however, because the percentage of foreign-born Black males is only 4.2%, percentages surrounding Black males are mainly driven by African American males (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005).

Black- In this study, *Black* will be, and has been, used interchangeably with *African American* and is defined in the same manner.

Middle-Class Students- Students who have at least one custodial parent/guardian who earns more than $50,000 annually, has a bachelor's degree or higher, and/or works in a white-collar occupation (Pattilo-McCoy, 1999; Ogbu, 2003; Shapiro, 2004; Lacy, 2007)

White-Collar Occupation- Position, such as a professional, managerial, or supervisory one, which typically requires a college degree (Lacy, 2007)

Study Limitations

First, all data were obtained in the respondents' homes; therefore, the participants might not have been completely honest in their responses if they were concerned about who was listening. Parents, siblings, and/or friends were often in the home during the sessions and were, at times, even in the same room. Second, although I tried to guard

against my biases as described in the methodology chapter, it is possible that my prejudices found their way onto these pages in some fashion. The education of Black males is such a passionate and frustrating topic for me that my preconceived ideas were probably working under the surface as I conducted the interviews and focus groups as well as analyzed and interpreted the data.

Outline of Study

This dissertation consists of the following five chapters: 1) introduction; 2) review of literature; 3) methodology; 4) findings; and 5) interpretation of findings. Chapter one provided the reader with the overall basis and intent of the study, including how the investigation was birthed, its purpose, the problem the exploration attempts to address, the theory underlying the scrutiny, primary and secondary research questions, definitions of pertinent terms, and study restraints. Chapter two provides a review of related literature on the Black middle class, adolescent definitions of career success, perceived dynamics of adolescent perception, factors that influence the educational thoughts and performances of African American males, and the career development of urban youth. Chapter three reveals the methodology of the study, including the research design and techniques utilized to gather, analyze, and interpret the data. While chapter four discloses the study's findings, chapter five includes my personal elucidations of the findings.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature includes sociological, psychological, vocational, and educational studies that are relevant to the study's primary and secondary research questions on middle-class Black males, education, success, and career choices. The first section contains a discussion of the Black middle class, and the second section includes research that suggests that some African American males have varying perceptions of success, which may not agree entirely with dominant ideology. The views of White middle-class males influence dominant ideology, which promotes post-high school plans that include college and white-collar employment. A discussion of adolescent definitions of career success comprise the third section, while the fourth section focuses on Paa and McWhirter's (2000) findings on the perceived influences of the career aspirations of adolescents. The fifth section is a presentation of researched factors that may influence the perceptions and behaviors of Black males, and the review of literature concludes with Blustein's work on career development and urban youth.

The Black Middle Class

Defining Middle Class

Several sociologists based middle-class status on salary, educational, and occupation requirements (Pattillo-McCoy, 1990; Ogbu, 2003; Shapiro, 2004; Lacy, 2007). However, the amount of salary, level of education, and the type of occupation

varied from one sociologist to the next. Salary is a vital indicator that usually dictates an individual's exposure to certain activities and opportunities, which require financial stability or abundance. Shapiro's (2004) study on the Black middle class included families whose household incomes range from $17,000 to $79,000. Shapiro asserted that this particular definition of salary requirements always produces 60 percent of the population, and limitless is the degree of variance between the lifestyles of those within the 60 percent. Ogbu (2003) provided a narrower range of salary in his study of the middle-class African Americans in Shaker Heights. Ogbu's participants had average incomes that ranged from $50,000 to over $100,000 a year. Similarly, Lacy (2007) argued that individuals who earn more than $50,000 annually make up the core of the Black middle class.

A college degree is a common marker that an individual is middle-class (Pattillo-McCoy, 1999; Ogbu, 2003; Shapiro, 2004). However, in *Black Picket Fences*, only 20 percent of Pattillo-McCoy's (1999) middle-class participants had a college education. Pattillo-McCoy asserted that the amount respondents who possessed a college degree was higher than the 12 percent of Blacks nationally who hold college degrees; therefore, the population's educational achievement was significant. Studies of the Black middle class also use white-collar employment- such as professional, managerial, and supervisory jobs- as an indication of middle-class status (Wilson, 1978; Oliver & Shapiro, 1995; Ogbu, 2003).

About the Black Middle Class

Wilson, Pattillo-McCoy, and Lacy provide more insight into our understanding of middle-class Blacks. In *The Declining Significance of Race*, Wilson (1978) claimed that

class is more of a factor than race when determining one's chances of upward mobility. Although Wilson did not state that race is no longer a factor, he asserted that civil rights legislation provides Black people adequate opportunities to break free from the economic bondage that previously held many Black people back. Wilson also posited that class stratification affects the Black community because middle -class Blacks enjoy economic and social opportunities previously dominated by Whites. As such, low-income Blacks experience marginalization. While sociological and educational studies tend to focus on low-income Blacks, Wilson's work suggested that, with the new opportunities afforded to African Americans, the Black middle class warrants more investigation.

Sociologists answered Wilson's call for more exploration of the Black middle class. In *Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril Among the Black Middle Class* (1999), Pattillo-McCoy studied the advantages and disadvantages that middle-class Blacks in a neighborhood on Chicago's South Side experience. Pattillo-McCoy asserted that middle-class African Americans do not enjoy the same benefits as middle-class Whites; housing trends that force middle-class Blacks to live in close proximity to low-income Blacks contribute to the variance in benefits. She stated that, unlike most middle-class Whites, numerous middle-class Blacks live in areas with high crime rates, poor municipal representation, and underperforming schools because of the community space shared with low-income Blacks. Sociologists Massey and Denton (1993) and Shapiro (2004) supported Pattillo-McCoy's (1999) assertions. They discovered that, although middle-class Blacks have more economic and social advantages than low-income African Americans, inequality in residential patterns and wealth distribution disadvantage the middle-class subgroup in comparison to subgroup of middle-class Whites.

Furthermore, Pattilo-McCoy (1999) asserted that middle-class status does not protect young Blacks from adolescent enticements present typically among low-income subgroups. The enticements include low academic performance, glorification of violence, gang involvement, drugs, ill-treatment of women, rejection of societal institutions, flashy apparel, and hypersexuality. Teenage pregnancy plagued the young participants in the Chicago study. It is important to note that Pattilo-McCoy described her middle-class participants, as well as most middle-class Blacks in the United States, as *lower middle class* because their educational attainment, income, wealth, occupations, and residential communities do not measure up to that of most middle-class Whites.

While Pattillo-McCoy explored lower middle-class African Americans, Lacy investigated middle-class and upper middle-class Blacks. In *Blue-Chip Black: Race, Class, and Status in the New Black Middle Class* (2007), Lacy asserted that individuals who earn more than $50,000 annually make up the core of the middle class. She distinguished upper middle-class Blacks as those earning more than $100,000 a year. Lacy examined the ways in which her participants negotiated their identities in various settings, such as work, recreational, and public spaces. In support of Wilson's (1978) argument, Lacy found polarization between the lifestyles of her affluent participants, low-income Blacks and, for the most part, lower middle-class African Americans. The prosperous participants enjoyed benefits similar to those of middle-class whites; the benefits included the freedom to live in the neighborhood of choice, strong political representation, and control over one's interactions with and proximity to low-income persons.

It is worthy to note that, although the affluent Blacks in Lacy's (2007) study had

similar economic, political, and social privileges as Whites, the participants did not attempt to transcend their racial identities. Instead, they fully embraced their African American identities and sought out opportunities to interact with other African Americans. Even the middle-class Blacks who did not live in predominantly Black neighborhoods intentionally connected with Blacks in other arenas. Lacy found additional distinguishing features that separated middle-class African Americans from upper middle-class African Americans. For example, middle-class Blacks viewed work as a moral obligation, whereas upper middle-class Blacks viewed work as a pathway to independence.

While middle-class Blacks believed that all able-bodied people are morally-obligated to work and only those who work hard should live the "good life," upper middle-class Blacks did not regard work as such a necessity. They believed that people, including themselves, who work do so because they must earn a living. Upper middle-class African Americans did not find fault with those who were in a financial position, which did not require hard work to maintain. In fact, the upper middle-class Blacks enjoyed their high-status occupations that afforded independence, such as determining their work hours or even the length of their work week.

Varying Perceptions of Success

Duneier's (1999) sociological study on Black males who worked as street vendors suggested that some Black males may have ideas of success that deviate from dominant ideology, which privileges college educations and white-collar occupation. For example, one participant made the decision to leave corporate America to provide a personally meaningful service to an assortment of people in New York's Greenwich Village. The

service helped motivate several people to attain their General Educational Development Diplomas (GED's) and empowered many others with knowledge. The participant factored in the impact he had on others, rather than status attainment, to assess his career success. Furthermore, the participant's self-proclaimed title of "public character" (Jacobs, 1961) implied that he appreciated his work environment on the street. A public character is "anyone who is in frequent contact with a wide circle of people and who is sufficiently interested to make himself a public character…His main qualification is that he is public, that he talks to lots of different people" (Jacobs, 1961, p. 68). The duties of a street vendor afforded the participant an ideal occupational setting to be a public character, which was an important personal goal for him.

Additionally, Duneier (1999) mentioned that another participant focused on his ability to provide for the needs of his granddaughter. The participant was unable to afford housing, but he was able to offer financial and social support when his granddaughter called on him. Once again, the participant did not measure his success by traditional measures that society espoused. Majors and Billson's (1992) theory of cool pose aids our understanding of the career choices of Duneier's participants. Cool pose is the practice of detaching one's self from the expectations of the prevailing culture and, in turn, finding alternative standards by which to exist and judge one's life choices. Majors and Billson claimed cool pose was a common practice among Black males. By engaging in cool pose, the participants relied on internal views to judge their careers and were, consequently, able to enjoy a self-defined level of career success.

Majors and Billson (1992) also argued that young African American males may employ cool pose to protect feelings concerning racism or not experiencing traditional

measures of educational success. This hiding of feelings may result in various Black males portraying a negative image that others see. For instance, some Black males possibly see the educational challenges that many in their subgroup experience and conclude that academic success is too difficult for Black males to achieve (Majors & Billson, 1992; Mickelson, 1990). Therefore, they may derive alternative ways, such as participating in sports or gaining popularity with females, to find affirmation at school. Ogbu's (2003) work supported this idea of several Black males embracing alternative measures of school success. He found that Black males may perceive striving for academic achievement to be uncool because many associate academic success with whites (Majors & Billson, 1992). Peers may accuse African American males who make good grades in school of "acting white" (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986) and ridicule them. Therefore, a positive correlation between the academic performance of many African American males and their true potential does not always exist.

Moreover, some Black males employ disidentification (Osborne, 1999), a self-protective strategy in which Black males take their focus off of academics and put it on other items, such as peers and hobbies. Disidentification guards school-aged African American males from feeling like failures because they do not even attempt to achieve academically. Consequently, social, rather than educational, aspirations become the goal of attending school. Finally, stereotypical media images contribute to the notion that Black males should aspire to non-academic standards. Common African American male portrayals include barbaric individuals who are preoccupied with money, sex, drugs, and violence. Instead of rejecting the negative portrayals, some Black males align their lifestyles with them. Ogbu's (1987) resistance theory helps explain why the males make

such choices. The resistance theory posits that a variety of sources within a societal arena may indict minority cultures. Therefore, Black males who feel devalued by the harmful portrayals may still embrace them because the males want to project pride in their racial and gender identity. If stereotypical behavior etches out an identity that is distinct from Whites and other racial groups, then some members of the subgroup may feel pressured to act accordingly. Resistance, in this sense, is a means of coping with a subordinated social position as well as preserving a distinct social identity (Ogbu, 1987).

Adolescent Definitions of Career Success

Mosconi and Emmett (2003) conducted a qualitative study to explore adolescent student definitions of career success. Mosconi and Emmett's findings suggested that, while students have multiple definitions of career success, several participants highly associated career success with enjoyment of job duties, which is an *intrinsic measure* of career success. Intrinsic measures, examples of which are job satisfaction, interest level, and feelings about one's occupational environment, come from sources within each person (Poole, Langan-Fox, & Omodei, 1991; Bozionelos, 2004; Kuijpers, Schyns, & Scheerens, 2006). Each individual determines these factors; therefore, it is possible for two employees who have the same position at the same company to have contrasting assessments of their achieved successes. One employee may feel a high degree of career success, based on personal job satisfaction and interest level, while the other may sense a low degree of career success when considering the same measures.

Also, participants in Mosconi and Emmett's study (2003) placed varying values on money, which is an *extrinsic measure* of career success. Extrinsic measures, which include salary and position titles, are more concrete factors determined primarily by the

individual's employer and work environment. Essentially, the number of student participants who preferred economic abundance equaled the amount who wanted merely financial stability. Furthermore, the findings suggested that the participants did not place a great emphasis on going to college, which implies that education may not be a necessary component in their conceptualization of career success.

Non-generalization, due to the racial composition and sampling of the participants, of Mosconi and Emmett's study (2003) was a limitation. Only 7% of the 54 participants were non-whites; therefore, the sampling did not include an adequate representation of racial minorities. Moreover, the participants came from one of two career exploration classes. More than likely, this non-random convenience sample did not reflect the views of a random group of adolescent students. The sample's participation in career exploration classroom activities probably provided the students with various knowledge and perspectives surrounding careers that the average adolescent may not possess, which, in turn, can influence the sample's views of career success.

Despite the limitation, Mosconi and Emmett's (2003) findings provided relevance, due to its focus on adolescent definitions of career success. Also, recall the aforementioned lack of value on college enrollment among Mosconi and Emmett's participants. Because their study did not adequately represent African American males, my study, due to its examination of how Black male adolescents perceive education in their post-high school plans, will further their work.

Perceived Influences of Adolescent Perception

Farmer (1985) developed a model comprised of the personal, background, and environmental factors that influence thought. Her model highlighted the affect of

background factors, such as gender, race, and socioeconomic status; personal factors, such as personality and interests; and environmental factors, such as parents and teachers, on adolescent career motivation. Farmer's (1985) work suggested that personal, environmental, and background factors could also influence adolescent career self-efficacy. Therefore, drawing from Farmer's work, Paa and McWhirter (2000) examined the personal, environmental, and background *perceived* influences of high school students' career goals and aspirations.

Perceived influences are influences that people feel have an effect on their individual thoughts and behavior. Paa and McWhirter (2000) asserted that perceived influences on student career goals and expectations are vital because such perceptions possibly manipulate career behavior. Consequently, perceived influences can affect how adolescents participate in the world of work. One study limitation is the non-generalization, due to the racial homogeneity of the participants, of the outcomes. Eighty-eight percent of the participants were White; therefore, the sampling did not adequately represent minorities.

First, personal influences "refer to psychological variables such as ability attributions, intrinsic values, and personality constructs such as competitiveness and independence" (Paa & McWhirter, 2000, p. 31). The researchers found that student interests, personality, and values were the most common personal influences. Second, environmental influences "include societal factors such as encouragement from significant others (e.g., parents, teachers) and the availability of role models" (Paa & McWhirter, 2000, p. 31). Parents and same-sex friends were the most prevalent environmental influences. Third, background influences "include 'givens' such as gender,

ethnicity, school location (inner city, suburban, or rural), socioeconomic status (SES), and age" (Paa & McWhirter, 2000, p. 31). Ability, role models, and media were the most cited background factors.

I must note, according to the researchers' definition of background influences, I am uncertain as to why role models and media are in the background category, as opposed to the environmental influences category. Nonetheless, my uncertainty does not provide reason to discount their findings that adolescent perceptions affect their personal career goals. Finally, ethnicity was among the least influential factors in the background category. However, given that 88% of the participants were White, this finding is understandable. Most Whites do not believe their Whiteness adds or subtracts from their choices and opportunities (McIntosh, 1990).

Influences on the Thoughts and Behaviors of Black Males

In chapter one, I discussed my concern for the underachievement of Black males, as a subgroup, when compared to other similar subgroups. I want to make sure that I communicate that not all Black makes exhibit academic *mis*behavior. Not only do I personally know high-school aged African American males who make A's and B's and are college-bound, but Maton et al. (1998) and Grantham (2004) studied Black males with high GPA's, college-appropriate SAT scores, and participation in gifted programs. However, although many Black males succeed according to traditional standards, in comparison to other subgroups, Black males often perform at lower level on coursework and standardized tests (Lee, 1991). Additionally, as a subgroup, African American males do not attain high school diplomas at the same rate as White males (Lee, 1991). For these reasons, as well as others mentioned in chapter one, I want to look at the findings of

psychological and educational researchers, which provide insight into the thoughts and behaviors of Black male students.

Black Male Identity

Psychologist Franklin (1994) found that many Black males feel that their "talents, abilities, personality, and worth are not valued or recognized because of prejudice and racism" (p. 4) because their gender-race identity makes their life experiences more challenging. Franklin asserted that most Black males encounter various people and situations that discriminate against them; these encounters become filters through which African American males view themselves and the world in which they live. Discrimination experienced in the school environment dampened the dreams of many Black males (Franklin, 1994); therefore, Franklin posited that schools do not adequately address any unique educational challenges of African American males. As a result, Black male students struggle to believe that education is a viable hope for personal upward mobility.

School Encounters

The School's Role in Maintaining the Status Quo

Ferguson (2001) shared a study on how schools create, shape, and regulate the social identities, perceptions, and behaviors of Black males. Based on an ethnography conducted at an elementary school, her findings showed that some school personnel view young Black males as problems needing correction through punitive measures. Ferguson's African American male participants experienced harsher discipline procedures and lighter academic loads than their White male counterparts. Ogbu (2003) discovered that, despite their socioeconomic status, middle-class Blacks males also

experience harsher disciplinary procedures and academic workloads than their White middle-class counterparts.

Ferguson (2001) used Bourdieu's (1977) radical schooling theory and Foucault's (1979) theory of disciplinary power to conceptualize how educational norms and procedures maintain racial order. Radical schooling theory states that schools have a hidden curriculum, which reflects the cultural superiority of middle-class White individuals and serves to reinforce and enhance this superiority by multiplying the inequalities for non-White children. Bourdieu asserted that eliminating the achievement gap between Black males and other ethnic/racial groups is not an educational concern; instead, maintaining White privilege (McIntosh, 1990) is goal of the school system.

With his theory of disciplinary power, Foucault (1979) exerted that discipline is a mode of domination that causes a person to embrace a certain identity as an individual who is "good," "bad," "gifted," "challenged," and so on. People in power use rewards and punishments to influence individuals to view themselves in a predetermined fashion. Ferguson (2001) claimed that the harsher punishments received by African American males influence them to take on the identity of troublesome individuals. As a result, Black males felt low achievement and inappropriate behavior were identity norms for their racial-gender subgroup. Both Bourdieu's radical schooling theory (1977) and Foucault's (1979) theory of disciplinary power asserted that the school system intentionally puts measures in place to hinder the academic and social progress of African American males and other minorities. While I do not fully agree that the school system intentionally hinders minorities, Bourdieu and Foucault exerted points to consider.

Whether anticipated or unanticipated, most schools have a hidden curriculum that favors Whites, in particular middle-class White, and disadvantages minorities (Bettie, 2003).

Influential School Factors

First, a lack of familiarity with the cultural styles of Black males may cause teachers to erroneously conclude that the males have limited critical and reasoning ability (Gay, 1994). Therefore, some teachers may perceive cultural differences as problems and respond by taking disciplinary actions, exhibiting low expectations, and providing culturally inappropriate instruction. Black males, in turn, may internalize low self-concepts and exhibit low academic achievement. Second, Tatum (1997) claimed that Black males do not succeed academically at the same level as White males is because Black males fail to see themselves adequately represented in the curriculum. School material lacks equal inclusion of African Americans in general. Furthermore, negativity often describes the insufficient presentation of Blacks in most curricula, which may incite feelings of inferiority within Black students. For example, slavery, a common school topic, depicts Blacks as property similar to livestock; many teachers may not adequately stress the cruelties of slavery and the barbaric acts of those who enslaved fellow human.

Franklin (1994) found that African American male peers are a significant influence on the thoughts and behaviors of African American males. For instance, he discovered that some Black males felt guilty about attaining educational and career successes because their Black male peers did not have the same opportunities. Several of the successful males felt their accomplishment violated some type of allegiance to their racial-gender subgroup. Consequently, many African Americans males downplayed their successes in order to feel comfortable among peers.

Furthermore, Bandura (1986) exerted the significance of vicarious reinforcement, which states that observing others teaches us the rewards and punishments of certain behaviors. A school-age Black male who notices the ridiculing of other Black males enrolled in gifted courses may avoid academic achievement not wanting to meet the same fate. He, in turn, may choose to act in a manner more acceptable among his peers. Bandura's (1986) also asserted that humans carry out actions to achieve a goal. Therefore, humans behave in ways that result in the attainment of outcomes that are anticipated and valued or the avoidance of outcomes that are undesired.

Human agency is a human's ability to make choices that lead to appropriate human actions (Bandura, 1986). Bandura (1997) and Bandura et al. (2001) asserted that the greatest mechanism of human agency is self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is "an individual's perception about his or her ability to successfully perform a given behavior or task" (Rollins & Valdez, 2006, p. 179). Self-efficacy undergirds all motivators and guides of human behavior; consequently, an individual's self-efficacy influences his or her thought processes, motivation, perseverance in times of adversity, quality of emotional well-being, and decision-making skills (Bandura, 1997; Bandura et al., 2001; Lent et al., 1994).

Bandura et al. (2001) explored how self-efficacy beliefs shape career aspirations. Bandura et al. found that children with high degrees of academic efficacy achieve academic goals and have a strong efficacy for career fields in science, education, and medicine, which require advanced educational development. The researchers also discovered that their child participants' academic efficacy had the greatest impact on the respondents' career efficacy. Furthermore, Barak's (1981) work on vocational interests

complemented Bandura et al.'s (2001) findings on how self-efficacy influenced career aspirations. Barak found that better understanding of how people perceive their ability to fulfill certain job requirements can lead to more understanding of how individuals set career goals.

Similar to self-efficacy, an individual's perceived ability is the level of confidence a person has when assessing whether he or she can accomplish a task (Barak, 1981). Therefore, if a student avoids a career in medicine because he or she thinks medical school will be too difficult, then the student's perceived ability influenced the decision. Barak claimed that actual ability is the aptitude a person has to complete a task based on more concrete measures assessed upon actually attempting the task. Barak (1981) also suggested that an individual's perceived ability is a better determinant of career interests than actual ability. Consequently, if a student possesses the actual ability to perform certain job duties but doubts his or her capability, then more than likely the student will choose a job that requires a lower measure of skill.

Career Development and Urban Youth

David Blustein is a major contributor to the research on the career development of urban youth whose work provides relevance to the study of middle-class Black males. I agree with Cooper and Sundeen's (1979) claim that residents within city borders are not the sole experiences of urban life. Common speech patterns, interests, dress fads, tastes, and personal aspirations among people within and outside of city limits suggests that geography does not dictate who experiences urban life. People who share the urban experience deviate from the dominant middle-class White culture and promote unique norms and values. As a result, non-White youths who live in suburban areas can share

similar behaviors and perceptions as non-White or disadvantaged students within city borders.

Chaves, Diemer, Blustein, Gallagher, DeVoy, Casares, and Perry (2004) found that the majority of the adolescent participants in their qualitative study did not view work as a way to neither contribute to society nor express themselves. Instead, the youth defined work as a means for acquiring money. Most of the participants in the study acknowledged solely the extrinsic value (Poole, Langan-Fox, & Omodei, 1991; Bozionelos, 2004; Kuijpers, Schyns, & Scheerens, 2006) of working, instead of recognizing as well the intrinsic gains. The researchers' focus on working-class young people is a study limitation. Chaves et al. (2004) concluded their work by calling for more examination of the relationship between cultural beliefs and conceptions of work, as well as the exploration of how conceptions of work relate to school engagement.

Kenny, Blustein, Chaves, Grossman, and Gallagher (2003) conceptualized the career development process as a reflection of the interplay between an individual and the various social contexts in which the individual operates. Blustein (2006) argued that the contextual factors related to work included potential barriers, such as racism and classism. Kenny, Gualdron, Scanlon, Sparks, Blustein, and Jernigan (2007) extended the work of Kenny et al. (2003) and Blustein (2006) by conducting a qualitative study on the perceived barriers that urban students believe may influence their goal attainment. Participants identified friends as the most frequent barrier to accomplishing their goals. Low achievers, in particular, mentioned that the anti-school values of peers are a powerful barrier.

Participants also named family as a barrier, due to family misfortunes and lack of care, which some participants encountered. Unlike high achievers, low achievers identified the quality of school factors, such as teacher expectations and curriculum, as barriers to goal attainment. Kenny et al. (2007) found that the majority of participants did not mention oppression and racism as barriers. The researchers did not know if this was due to the students' lack of knowledge concerning inequities or the interview protocol's failure to elicit such information. As a result, they called for additional research to explore how perceptions of race relate to school motivation.

Noonan, Hall, and Blustein (2007) studied how urban youths perceived their work environments and adult relationships within their places of employment. The researchers found that the participants' recognized class-based differences between their supervisors and themselves; the distinctions affected the participants' identity formation. Although some participants had a mentor-mentee relationship with their supervisors and other adults in their work environment, the participants' perceived differences in speech, language, and dress informed the youth of their social place within the occupational environment. The researchers exerted that the participants ultimately learned the rules and norms of social class as they interacted with adults in their work environment.

Noonan, Hall, and Bluestein's (2007) findings showed that urban youth perceive class distinctions, and these distinctions influence the youths' thoughts on identity and self-efficacy. The researchers recommended that the explorations of other factors, such as race, in the career development of minors; they also posited that the field of vocational psychology and career development needs to attend to the more phenomenological aspects of young people's transition from school to work.

Diemer and Blustein's (2007) work explored intangible factors, such as career commitment, work-role salience, and vocational identity, which affect the career aspirations and goals of urban adolescents. The researchers stated that career commitment, dedication to "the notion of a career and working in the future despite barriers" (p. 100) and work-role salience, "the degree to which work is important to an individual and concern with the career development process" (pp. 100 – 101) positively impacted the vocational development of urban youth.

Career commitment and work role salience helped young people overcome structural barriers, such as racism; as a result, the researchers asserted that urban youth must develop these motivating constructs. Diemer and Blustein (2007) posited the need for psychosocial and career development interventions that address the internal and external barriers, which urban adolescents face when choosing their career paths.

Summary

This chapter contained a critique of literature pertaining to the Black middle class, varying perceptions of success among Black males, adolescent definitions of career success, perceived influences of adolescent career choices, influences on the thoughts and behaviors of Black males, and the career development of urban youth. Sociologists (Patillo-McCoy, 1990; Ogbu, 2003; Shapiro, 2004; Lacy, 2007) used salary, educational, and occupational requirements to define middle-class status for African Americans. With more Blacks attaining middle-class status, Wilson (1978) called for more investigation of the Black middle class, and Patillo-McCoy (1990) and Lacy (2007) answered the call.

Duneier's (1999) work on African-American male who are street vendors implied that some African American males may have perceptions of success that deviate from

dominant ideology, which privileges college educations and white-collar occupations. Majors and Billson (1992), Osborne (1999), and Ogbu (1987) also suggested that many Black males have alternate goals that may not be aligned with those of the school system. Mosconi and Emmettt's (2003) study on adolescent definitions of career success implied that teens prefer jobs that provide internal fulfillment rather than external rewards. Paa and McWhirter (2000) found that adolescents identified factors such as parents, friends, gender, socioeconomic status, ability, and media as influences on their career plans.

Black male identity (Franklin, 1994), school encounters (Ferguson, 2001; Gay, 1994; Tatum, 1997; Bandura, 1986), and self-efficacy (Bandura et al., 2001) can affect the educational and career aspirations of Black males. While numerous studies (Majors & Billson, 1992; Franklin, 1994; Ogbu, 1987; Tatum, 1997; Ferguson, 2001; Kunjufu, 2005; hooks, 2004; Bandura et al., 2001; Barak, 1981) shared how concrete and abstract factors encountered at school may affect the academic and career performance of Black males, uncertainty about how these same factors influence Black male perception of education's role in personal success and career goals remains. Blustein's individual and co-authored work urban students suggested the need for interventions that address the psychological and social make-up, rather than merely the intellectual capacity, of adolescents in order to better understand their career development.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Tradition of Inquiry

Quantitative research (Nation's Report Card, 2007; Camara & Schmidt, 1999 Whittington, 1996) indicated that, as a whole, middle-class Black students on various grade levels do not perform academically at the same level as other middle-class subgroups. Additionally, since middle-class African American females outperform their male counterparts (Whittington, 1996), the achievement of middle-class Black males is ranked the lowest. While the figures presented in quantitative studies reveal *what* is the educational achievement of middle-class African American male students, the statistics do not contribute to the knowledge about *why* the performance is below that of other similar subgroups. Qualitative research "helps us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena" (Merriam, 1998, p. 5); however, few studies used qualitative methods to investigate the educational achievement of middle-class Black students. I conducted such a study to explore perceptions that may contribute to the academic performance of middle-class Black males. In order to effectively address the issue, practitioners may benefit from a more in-depth understanding of the thoughts behind the behavior.

Role and Bias of the Researcher

Because this was a qualitative exploration, I was the primary research instrument (Merriam, 1998); I collected, analyzed, and interpreted the rich data provided by the

participants. The integrity of the findings is subject to several personal biases. First, I have a special interest in the educational challenges experienced by numerous Black males. As a member of the African American community, I know countless African American males who are a part of my family, social network, church, and professional life. Unfortunately, a disproportionate number of these adult males do not have college degrees, are not working towards such a goal, and are financially instable. Moreover, in spite of their potential, the several known college-aged Black males are not in college, and, instead, work minimum wage jobs that do not finance basic needs. The entire situation is disturbing.

Second, I have a twelve-year-old middle-class nephew, J.T., whose academic achievement at the onset of this study was below my family's expectations. My nephew's former academic and disciplinary struggles at school, along with the apathy that I detected in my former high school students to whom I taught math, propelled me to explore the schooling of middle-class Black males. My nephew's academic performance did not reflect his potential or the standards set by his parents, who both hold master's degrees. I noticed that J.T. was allowing external factors, such as peers, to influence his academic and social behavior in school. Therefore, I am extremely interested in learning more about the perceptions that influence how he, as well as other middle-class Black males, determine the level of participation and effort put forth in school.

Third, I recognize biases as a result of my being an educator who achieved in the public school system and currently works in public school education. Although I believe the public school system has some flaws, I equally believe that the substandard performance, relative to other similar subgroups, of middle-class African Americans is an

outcome of factors that include more than the school system's flaws. Out of my experience working at predominantly Black schools as well as interacting with Black people, strong opinions about the academic performance of Black youth have risen within me. Finally, I am sensitive when it comes to research on African American students because research historically has reflected a negative view of Blacks (Majors & Billson, 1992; Osborne, 1999; Ogbu, 1987), and I do not want to contribute to any harmful perspectives.

To protect the integrity of the findings, I implemented peer debriefing and member-checking. Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined peer debriefing as "a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (p. 308). My peers consisted of an expert methodologist, a qualitative researcher, and a Black male counselor. I will fully discuss the primary data sources, which were two rounds of interviews and focus groups, in the *Data Sources* section. I shall mention the sources in this section to uncover how peer debriefers supported the study.

The participants underwent two rounds of interviews and a focus group session. During the period in which I conducted the first set of interviews, I met with the expert methodologist to share the organizational display (Miles & Huberman, 1994), which I will also further explain in the *Data Analysis* section, created to organize each participant's data. We discussed the hierarchy as well as the labels of the code categories, and I implemented the suggestions made by the methodologist about the category names. I visited the methodologist for a second time after I conducted the interviews and before I

held the focus groups. I shared the purpose, which I will discuss in the *Data Analysis* section, of the focus groups and the questions I wanted to ask the participants. The methodologist helped me fine tune the questions to increase the likelihood of my obtaining the desired information.

After the first round of interviews, I met with a qualitative researcher to discuss the preliminary analysis of data attained from the first round of interviews and the line of inquiry for the second set of interviews. Following the focus groups, I met with the Black male counselor who co-facilitated the sessions with me. As an experienced counselor who is Black and male, he used personal knowledge to validate my interpretations of the participants' statements as well as psychological familiarity to explain their responses. The peer-debriefing sessions just mentioned were planned meetings; however, other informal talks occurred as I discussed the data with my older sister and a Black male educator. Dialogue with my older sister prompted me to explore the participant's college preparatory steps during the second round of interviews, which led to a significant finding in the study. The educator and I had an intense conversation that helped me organize my thoughts on the various ways in which Black males may allow their racial identity to affect their behavior and attitudes toward schooling. This interaction helped me interpret the findings.

Merriam (1998) asserted that member checks include "taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking them if the results are plausible" (p. 204). I implemented member checks during the second round of interviews by allowing participants to confirm or refute my understandings of data attained from the first set of interviews. Not only did I ask each participant about the

analysis of his individual data, but I also sought the respondent's thoughts on the patterns that emerged from the entire group's replies.

Context

I conducted the study with students from Scott High School, a pseudonym for the actual school, which is a predominantly Black, non-Title 1 school located in the suburbs of a city in the southeastern part of the United States. Title 1 schools are institutions that educate a large percentage of students who receive free or reduced lunch; such schools are labeled as being economically disadvantaged in comparison to non- Title 1 institutions. Therefore, as a whole, the students at Scott High School are not an economically-disadvantaged population. It is interesting to note that, in 2007, Scott High School did not make adequate yearly progress, according to the guidelines of No Child Left Behind. The school did not meet the academic performance requirements in mathematics. Relevant demographics of the individuals who reside in the area surrounding Scott High follow:

- Eighty-nine percent of the population is Black.
- Sixty percent of the residents earn $50,000 or more.
- Forty-three percent, which is more than the national average, hold a bachelor's degree or higher.
- Forty-eight percent work in white-collar occupations. (US Census, 2000)

Numerous residents who live near Scott High are financially-stable, college-educated, and have white-collar positions.

Participants and Sampling

Sociologists categorized social class in terms of salary, education, and/or

occupation (Pattillo-McCoy, 1999; Ogbu, 2003; Shapiro, 2004). The major participants were 13 middle-class Black males who have at least one custodial parent who meets one or more of the following characteristics:

1) Earns more than $50,000 annually (Ogbu, 2003; Lacy, 2007).
2) Has a bachelor's degree or higher (Pattilo-McCoy, 1999; Ogbu, 2003; Shapiro, 2004).
3) Works in white-collar positions, such as professionals, managers, and supervisors (Ogbu, 2003; Shapiro, 2004; Lacy, 2007).

To be exact, eight participants have at least one parent who possesses all three characteristics; four respondents have a parent who possesses two; and the remaining participant's parent fulfills one characteristic for middle-class status.

I used chain referral sampling (Patton, 1990; Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999) to recruit the participants. A chain referral method "identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know people who know what cases are information-rich, that is, good examples for study, good interview subjects" (Patton, 1990, p. 182). I asked each participant to refer appropriate peers for the study until I had the commitments of 13 respondents. I began recruiting through four Black middle-class male students who attended Scott High School who know adults with whom I am associated. During initial contact of the parent (and grandparent- in one case) of each potential participant, I did the following: (1) explained how I received their contact information, (2) gave an overview of the study, (3) discussed what participation in the study would entail, (4) respectfully found out if his/her son or grandson was middle-class by the study's financial, educational, and occupational standards (Pattillo-McCoy, 1999; Ogbu, 2003; Shapiro,

2004), and (5) sought verbal consent for his/her son's or grandson's participation in the study. During this conversation, I also answered the parents' and grandparent's questions, then set up an interview appointment with those who consented to participation in the study.

Before I began the first interview, each participant signed a child assent form, and his parent completed the parental consent form. (I wrote the consent and assent forms on an eighth grade reading level to reduce literacy challenges. The documents also followed the other guidelines outlined by Georgia State University.) The parents were minor participants because they completed questionnaires. Each time I met with the participants for an interview or focus group, they received a $10 gift card to a nearby mall as a small compensation for the time devoted to the study (Noonan, Hall, & Bluestein, 2007).

Data Sources

Interviews

The data sources for this study chiefly include interviews and focus groups; the parent questionnaires are a secondary source of data. The interviews and focus groups addressed the research questions for this study, which follow:

1) How do middle-class Black males in a predominantly Black school perceive the role of education in success and their personal career aspirations?
2) What self-identified factors influence their perceptions?

The original intent was to interview each major participant twice; however, only 10 of the 13 participants underwent two interviews. The remaining three respondents participated in one interview due to scheduling difficulties. During the first interview, I asked questions about education and its role in success as well as the respondents' career plans

(see Appendix A for the list of preplanned questions for the first interview). I also inquired about the factors that the participants believed were influences on their thoughts about education, success, and careers. Throughout the second interview, I did member checks (Merriam, 1998) to evaluate my understanding of the participant's responses from the first interview. I also asked each participant questions to further investigate the themes and patterns that emerged from the entire group's first round of interviews (see Appendix B for the list of preplanned questions for second interview).

I digitally recorded all interviews. During the first two interviews, I typed each participant's responses on my laptop computer; however, this proved to have a detrimental effect. Typing distracted me from focusing entirely on the participant's responses, which affected my ability to ask appropriate follow-up questions; consequently, I abandoned the typing initiative. The first round of interviews ranged from 45 minutes to an hour, while the second round ranged from 20 minutes to an hour. The participants' personalities, moods, and health contributed to the variance in time.

The respondents who were more verbose than others provided a generous amount of data. Despite my best efforts to ask follow-up questions and use prompts such as "Tell me more about… " and "Please give me more information about…", I could not, at times, get some of the shyer participants to expound on their answers. Body language, such as diverted eyes, slouched posture, and the shrugging of shoulders, and truncated responses helped me detect a change in the participants' moods or attention span. Such detection led me to conclude the interaction as soon as I attained the needed information. Finally, one of the more talkative participants was not feeling well during his second interview, which led to a considerably shorter interview in comparison to his first one.

Since the major participants were individuals under the age of 18, I held each interview at the respondent's home. Because I did not personally know any of the participants or most of their parents, I believed it was wise to conduct the interviews in their homes with their parents present in the house. I wanted to avoid accusations of inappropriate behavior. Furthermore, most respondents could not participate if interviewed outside of their home. I could detect (and certainly understand) that the majority of the parents were not comfortable with my being alone with their son(s) outside of their home. Also, convenience was another prime factor, for parents did not want to drive their sons to another location.

Focus Groups

Ten participants, who participated in the interviews, also engaged in one of two focus groups, which I held in the homes of two different participants. Six participants, whose pseudonyms were Will, Paul, Gary, Phillipe, Fred, and James, gathered at Will's house, and four respondents, whose pseudonyms were Adam, Theo, David, and John, met at Adam's house. (I will further discuss each participant in the findings chapter.) I grouped the participants according to their pre-established relationships, in order to augment verbosity. I scheduled one hour only for each focus group, so I wanted the participants to feel comfortable as soon as possible.

A Black male counselor co-facilitated the groups with me. We asked the participants questions about the typical jobs and attitudes about education that Black males, as a whole, possess. The counselor and I also inquired about the influences of Black males' educational and career choices (see Appendix C for a list of the preplanned questions for the focus groups). The counselor's involvement fulfilled two purposes.

First, as an experienced counselor familiar with the study goals, he asked follow-up questions, which encouraged meaningful responses from the participants. Second, during the debriefing of the focus groups, the counselor enabled me to better understand the perceptions of the participants, since the counselor is also a Black male. I videotaped the focus groups.

Parent Questionnaire

The parent questionnaires were a secondary data source, which gave me a brief overview of the parents' views on education as it relates to success and careers (see Appendix D for a copy of the parent questionnaire). At least one of each participant's parents completed a questionnaire. Two sets of two brothers were amongst the participants, so 11 different parents provided responses. I implemented the questionnaire because Ogbu and other researchers (Paa & McWhirter, 2000; Farmer, 1985) discovered that parents have great influence on their children's perceptions toward school and careers. The findings of this study affirm existing research on parental influence. I compared each major participant's data with his parent's questionnaire responses to check for alignment.

Data Analysis

Interviews

I began a surface level of analysis while transcribing the first interview. Carefully listening to every word spoken allowed me to make written and mental notes about the responses. I repeated this process after each interview; therefore, I was able to determine which questions required modification, deletion, or addition, in order to illicit richer responses. Additionally, I used the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss,

1967), in which "the researcher begins with a particular incident from an interview…and compares it with another incident in the same set of data or in another set" (Merriam, 1998, p. 159). The constant comparative method helped me identify reoccurring issues in the interview data and collect more data during the subsequent interviews and focus groups that provided insight into the information significant to the sample. As I transcribed and read through each interview from the first round, I looked for and noted items that were mentioned in previous interviews. Then, during the second set of interviews, I asked the participants to expound on the most prevalent themes.

I used an organizational display (Miles & Huberman, 1994), which also contributed to the discovery of patterns and themes in the interview data. The display took the form of the hierarchy of codes (see Appendix E). Codes are "names or symbols used to stand for a group of similar items, ideas, or phenomena that the researcher has noticed in his or her data" (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 55). I used the research questions to determine the codes. After the first round of interviews, I completed an organizational display for each respondent by copying and pasting relevant interview quotes under each code in the display (see Appendix F for a portion Fred's organizational display).

I also used the displays to plan for each participant's subsequent interview because I was able to see the areas in which I lacked data. During the second set of interviews, I asked questions that allowed me to fill in void spaces in the organizational displays. Each respondent's display required several 8.5 inches by 11 inch sheets of paper. To ease the viewing capacity, I taped the pages on Post-It easel pad sheets that were 2.5 feet by 2.08 feet. I stuck the Post-It sheets side by side on the wall, which

enabled me to constantly compare the participants' responses. Lastly, I created displays (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to summarize portions of the participants' data (see Appendixes G through N).

Focus Groups

I began analyzing the two focus groups as well during the transcribing phase, for I wrote comments about the participants and their responses in the transcriptions. After I transcribed the focus group responses and recorded my initial thoughts on the data, I debriefed the focus groups with the co-facilitator, who is a Black male counselor. I digitally taped and took notes of our discussion of the participants' responses. The discussion included primarily the counselor's reactions to the respondents' comments, his relaying of psychological concepts related to the responses, and his explanation (from a personal standpoint) of the participants' views. The counselor's perspectives helped ensure that I am plausibly representing the data because, as a Black male who interacted with the participants, he affirmed my initial thoughts on the focus group outcomes. Although I did not transcribe the recording, I did refer to the notes as I interpreted the findings.

Furthermore, because I am a visual learner, I coded the data using five highlighters, instead of labeling the quotes with coding symbols. The method was different, but the product was the same. With an orange highlighter, I identified relevant quotes about the occupations of Black males. I highlighted in green the influences that shape the occupational choices of African American males. Utilizing a yellow highlighter, I illuminated the educational behaviors and attitudes of Black males and identified the academic influences with a pink highlighter. I highlighted in purple

enlightening quotes that relate to the choices and perceptions of Black males. After I highlighted both transcriptions, I looked for common themes as well as varying mindsets. The parent questionnaires solicited straight-forward responses that did not require analysis.

Confidentiality and Ethics

I incorporated confidentiality and adhered to a code of ethics throughout the data collection and analysis procedures. First, I did my best to protect the participants' identities and responses. I stored all typed data on my personal password- and firewall-protected laptop computer and personal computer. Throughout the study, I kept the digital audio recordings and the video tapings in a protected place in my home. By signing the parental consent and child assent forms, which contained statements about my using the data for subsequent studies, the participants agreed to my using the data for subsequent studies. I already deleted the digital audio recordings, but I will keep the video tapings (for possible further study) in the secure location. Furthermore, I assigned pseudonyms to the major participants (the students) and minor participants (their parents); therefore, I can keep the transcriptions and questionnaires without someone discovering the actual identification of the study respondents. I informed the focus group participants, prior to their involvement, that I could not protect their identity from other present respondents. I made sure that the participants understood that their involvement was not mandatory.

Second, the participants did not encounter any more risks than they would in a normal day of life. The data sources were interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires; consequently, I required the participants to provide solely verbal or written

communication. Third, I occasionally reminded the participants of their right to decline answering any or all questions as well as withdrawing from the study. Fourth, I interacted with the high school-aged participants in safe locations, their individual homes. Fifth, during all interactions with major and minor participants, I tried to ensure that my comments and body language did not reflect a judgmental attitude. Finally, using gift cards and appropriate verbiage, I constantly let all participants know how much I appreciated their involvement.

Research Design

Internal validity and reliability are tests used for judging a research design (Yin, 2003; Merriam, 1998). Internal validity assesses the consistency of the study findings with reality. Some scholars criticize qualitative research because the primary research instrument is the researcher; therefore, human interpretation, rather than concrete numbers and facts, drives the methods and findings. Internal validity helps ensure that more than the researcher's perceptions support the findings. I enhanced the internal validity by implementing triangulation, member checks, and peer-debriefing (Merriam, 1998). I incorporated triangulation by utilizing multiple sources of data, which included 13 major participants and 10 minor participants, to investigate the research questions. Moreover, most of major participants provided data in multiple forms, two rounds of interviews and a focus group. I met with three peer debriefers- an expert methodologist, a qualitative researcher, and a Black male counselor- throughout the data collection and analysis process. Additional conversations with my older sister and a Black male educator helped me revise my interview questions to explore an emergent theme and plausibly interpret the findings. During the second set of interviews, I employed member

checks to evaluate my comprehension of the data provided by each participant as well as the entire group. (See the *Role and Bias of the Researcher* section for a fuller description of my use of peer debriefers and member checks.)

Reliability addresses the potential for study replication, for a reliable study will produce similar results if conducted by another researcher. Human thought and behavior, which are investigated in qualitative studies, constantly change; therefore, qualitative researchers do not expect a comparable study to yield the same results (Merriam, 1998). Dependability is a determining factor of the reliability. A dependable study produces findings for which, after viewing the collected data, other researchers see the support. To enhance dependability, I created an audit trail by keeping an electronic journal that provides a thick description of my methods (Merriam, 1998). The journal includes my sampling rationale, interview questions, parent questionnaire, interview and focus group transcriptions, organizational displays, analysis methods, and personal thoughts on the study events and challenges. The journal contains pseudonyms to protect the identities of all participants.

Timeline for Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection and analysis period lasted from May to December 2008. I began recruiting participants and making interview appointments in May 2008. I recruited respondents until September 2008. I conducted the first set of interviews from June 2008 to September 2008. I accomplished the second round of interviews in October 2008 and held the focus groups in November 2008. I started analyzing the data in June during the transcription of the first interview and concluded the analysis in February 2009. I met with peer debriefers from August 2008 to December 2008 and achieved

member checks in October 2008. Table 1 illustrates the timeline for data collection and analysis procedures.

Table 1

Timeline for Data Collection and Analysis

Month and Year	*Procedures*
May 2008	Began recruiting participants and making appointments for the first round of interviews
June – September 2008	Conducted initial interviews Issued parent questionnaires Continued recruiting participants Started data analysis of interviews Met with expert methodologist
October 2008	Conducted second round of interviews Achieved member checks Issued parent questionnaires Continued data analysis of interviews Met with qualitative researcher
November 2008	Met with expert methodologist Held the focus groups Started data analysis of focus groups
December 2008	Discussed focus group data with Black male counselor Continued analyzing focus groups

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The data sources for this study primarily included interviews and focus groups; the parent questionnaires were a secondary source of data. The research questions for this study were:

1) How do middle-class Black males in a predominantly Black high school perceive the role of education in success as well as the career aspirations of Black males?
2) What self-identified factors influence their perceptions on education, success, and careers?

The original intent was to interview each participant twice. Ten of the 13 participants underwent two interviews. Due to their busy schedules, the remaining three respondents participated in one interview. Therefore, the data sources include 23 interviews. One parent of each participant completed a questionnaire. Two pairs of brothers were among the participants, so eleven different parents provided responses. All participants identified their parents as influences on their academic and career perspectives, and the parent questionnaires gave insight into why the trend occurred.

Ten participants contributed to the two focus groups, and each focus group took place at a participant's home. A Black male counselor and I co-facilitated the focus groups. The 13 participants were middle-class Black males who attended the same predominantly Black high school. Sociologists categorized social class in terms of salary,

education, and/or occupation (Pattillo-McCoy, 1999; Ogbu, 2003; Shapiro, 2004). Consequently, the middle-class participants had at least one custodial parent who possessed at least one of the following characteristics:

1) Earns more than $50,000 annually (Ogbu, 2003; Lacy, 2007).
2) Has a bachelor's degree or higher (Pattilo-McCoy, 1999; Ogbu, 2003; Shapiro, 2004).
3) Works in white-collar positions, such as professionals, managers, and supervisors (Ogbu, 2003; Shapiro, 2004; Lacy, 2007).

Eight participants had at least one parent who meets all three descriptors; four respondents had a parent who possesses two characteristics; and the remaining participant's parent fulfilled one requirement.

The first part of this chapter consists of the participants' profiles, which include their school behavior and thoughts, college and career aspirations, and parent information. Pseudonyms identify the participants. The second part of this chapter contains the findings from the interviews and focus groups as they relate to the research questions. A simple coding system distinguishes when the participants shared the referenced information. For the interviews, the code "I1" means that the participant shared the information during his first interview, while "I2" signifies the participant provided the insight during his second interview. Six participants- Fred, James, Paul, Will, Gary, and Phillipe- gathered at Will's house, and four- Adam, David, Theo, and John- met at Adam's house. The code "AFG" for Adam's focus group or "WFG" for Will's group identify quotes shared in the sessions. I labeled the remarks or data obtained from statements made in Adam's focus group with "AFG" and the comments or data

from Will's session with "WFG." The respondents oftentimes used colloquialism and broken English to express themselves; therefore, the quotes were edited, as indicated by [ ], to promote understanding and continuity of thought. However, I never altered the deliverer's meaning (Pattilo-McCoy, 1999).

Participant Profiles

Adam

Adam, an eleventh grader, was a year behind in school because he failed a grade. He was in the special education program and had a 2.3 grade point average (GPA). Upon inquiry of his school performance, Adam responded, "I'm doing good. I'm failing one class" (I1). His reply reflected an uncommon view of academic achievement because failing a class is not usually associated with doing well in school. Adam shared that in order to perform well in a class, "I need to like it to learn it" (I1), implying that he does not put his best effort into classes he does not enjoy. Adam did not give the impression that he enjoys many classes:

Rita: So when you're in your classes, what is going through your mind?

Adam: I'm ready to get out.

Rita: Do you enjoy your classes?

Adam: Well, only two. It's like that every year. I like two and hate two every year.

Rita: Which two do you like?

Adam: Getting on the bus and lunch…well, and going home. (I1)

Adam seemed to take more pleasure in the non-academic, rather than the educational, aspect of school.

Adam had an amateur rap group and produced music for his group as well as other recreational music artists. Adam turned his bedroom into a studio and his clothes closet into a recording booth. During our second meeting, Adam took me to his studio, shared a few music creations, and recorded a sample of my singing. Adam had more knowledge and experience with producing, as well as rapping, than most students who have the same interests. He planned to attend a technical college to strengthen his music production skills. However, he did not believe all of his peers were college-bound:

Adam: Everybody wants to go, but half are not going to make it to college.

Rita: Why do you say that?

Adam: 'Cause it's true. (Adam, I1)

Adam's father met the three descriptors for middle class, and his mother possessed two of the middle-class characteristics. Both of Adam's parents graduated from Jackson State University, one of the historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU's). Adam's mother was a realtor who also worked as a substitute teacher in the school system, and his father was an insurance agent who makes more than $50,000 annually.

Billy

Billy, a ninth grader, had a GPA that is higher than 3.0. Billy described his academic performance by saying:

> I'm doing good so far. [In] math, my grade [was] like a high 80 or 87. I think it moved up to an A…On my progress report, I only had one B. [It was] in engineering. It's an elective class [that was] chose[n] for [me]. That's the only B I

> ha[d], except for English. [My grade in engineering is] an A now [at the time of the interview]. (I1)

Billy felt pressured by parents to make good grades, for he said it is important to make A's and B's "because my parents force me to get those grades" (I1).

> Billy: I don't think I should really be stressing myself out like, "Oh gosh, I really need to be on it to get this job." Because I have my goals set out. So, I know what I need to do and when I need to do it. Like, most people stress out about educations and jobs [and] how they wanna live their lives and stuff.
>
> Rita: You're not stressed out?
>
> Billy: No. I'm calm. (I1)

Billy was more laid back in his academic approach and felt that he knew the steps needed to achieve his goals.

Billy desired to attend a four-year college and named the University of Georgia, University of North Carolina, Tennessee State University (TSU), and South Carolina State University (SC State) as universities that he may attend. TSU and SC State are historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU's). Billy was undecided about a single career path but was interested in the fields of entrepreneurship, account advertisement, professional athletics, and sports journalism.

Both of Billy's parents possessed all three middle-class characteristics. His father obtained his undergraduate degree from an HBCU and also had a master's degree; his mother attended a four-year college. Both were administrators in varying fields. Billy's mother was an administrator in the medical field, while his father worked in education.

David

David, an eleventh grader, was in advanced placement (AP) and honors classes. He had a 3.5 GPA and felt that a lot of students in high school were not academically focused. David used slang terminology to express that his Black peers cared more about other items than their schoolwork:

> Whereas at this school, where you got a lot of Black people, and they really off they rock or so, it's really kind of hard for people [like me] to concentrate as much as they could. (I2)

David had difficulty concentrating on his academics but tried not to let the behavior of the non-focused students affect his school goals:

> I'm putting in work right now… And I haven't missed school in the last three years…I don't get sick like that. In the 8th grade, the only reason why I missed the last three days of school [was] because I had to [move from] Oklahoma. Other than that, the whole entire year, I was there. And then, I avoid fighting situations, no matter what. I've been in a couple of times where I was about to fight someone in school, but I said, "I 'm not gonna do it right here." I don't want that to be on my permanent record. And I've never been tardy [to class] before. (I1)

David worked hard to ensure a positive permanent school record.

However, David mentioned a few times during both interviews that he was lazy, immature, and sometimes behaved inappropriately in class. He articulated, "That's my only problem. I don't take a lot of things [like acting inappropriately in class] seriously" (I1). David's teachers tried to make David understand that he has more potential than what he showed in class. He stated, "That's what every teacher says. There's a deeper

part to me, but I just don't show it. They say I'm very immature or whatnot" (I2). David's immaturity did not surface so much during his interviews, but it emerged during his focus group session.

David's occupational interests included a political appointment, sports analyst, news anchor, and journalist (I1). David's primary interest was in politics, so he planned to attend a four-year college in Virginia since Virginia is a "very political or government state" (I1). David's middle-class status came from his mother who met all three descriptors. At the time of data collection for this study, she was working on a master's degree and, as an accountant, earned more than $50,000 a year. David's father, who was formerly in the military and did not attend college, worked as a mechanic.

Edward

Edward, an eleventh grader, failed at least one course during his school career. Last year, in particular, his academic performance was subpar because Edward did not realize the effect his low test grades have on final course averages. He was more focused for the current year:

> Basically, since they changed the grading scale this year, and most of our test scores weigh like 45% of our class, I want to definitely make sure my test score is great- not good but great. Like right now, school has just started, and we've taken like ten tests in almost every class, and I've passed each one. And I'm trying to keep it that way because I didn't realize until last year, at the last minute, that test scores weighed so much in each class. So that kind of messed me up last year, but this year, I am determined that that's not going to happen. (I1)

Edward studied in order to ensure successful performance on tests, for he shared, "[Studying] is the only thing that is keeping my head above the water 'cause sometimes teachers don't thoroughly explain stuff, and you have to go home and look at it yourself" (I1).

Edward had a company that customizes cars. Originally, Edward was in partnership with one of his godfathers, who paid for Edward to take entrepreneurial classes; then, at some point, Edward's godfather gave Edward complete ownership of the business. Some of Edward's clients had luxury cars, such as Bentleys and Rolls Royce. After high school, Edward wanted to expand his automobile business. Edward had experience recording music and was doing an internship in fashion consulting to see how he can futuristically combine the three industries:

> I'm doing an internship with one of my friends who owns a fashion consulting company…The reason why I decided to take this internship in the fashion industry is because music, fashion, cars all tie in together…I can do a car show, have a fashion show in it, and a concert; so all these things [can] tie together into one industry. (I1)

Edward planned to attend a local technical college that specialized in the upkeep of luxury cars. Moreover, he wanted to attend Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU) or Morehouse College, which are HBCU's, to major in business administration and advance his business:

> [A college education is important] 'cause I plan on taking my business international, so I know I need to take business finance, international business, or

> just regular business administration. So I know I need to do certain things. That's why it's important to me. (Edward, I1)

He also wants to minor in criminal justice. The minor degree will prepare Edward for his second career interest, which was law enforcement. Edward lives with his grandmother as well as his mother, who meets one requirement for middle class having graduated from the University of Georgia. Edward's mother formerly held a management position at a corporation; however, the business recently down-sized, and she became a factory worker.

Fred

When I first interviewed Fred, he had just returned from a trip to China where he participated in an international leadership council for teens. Fred was a tenth grader who had a 4.0 GPA. Fred was academically motivated, for he said, "I do try to get the most out of school. I think every year I try to do better and better" (I1). He consistently studied for his AP and honors classes and rated his efforts in school "a nine and a half" (I1).

Fred desired to attend the Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech) to pursue a career in engineering and architecture. Fred had taken steps to prepare for his career because he networked with engineers and architects:

> I met with [the architect and engineer who built the house my mother and I were interested in], and I'm looking forward to probably calling him very soon 'cause he could actually give me an internship. Or [I can see] if he knows of any of his business partners that could give me an internship in the 12th grade. (I2)

Fred hoped his networking would result in an architectural or engineering internship in the 12th grade. Fred lived with his mother, who met all three descriptors for middle-class

status. She graduated from a Catholic university in New York and earned, as a registered nurse, more than $50,000 annually.

James

James, a tenth grader, had a 3.0 GPA. He consistently studied and believed that he took schoolwork "a little more serious[ly]" (I1) than his friends did. James explained that he did so "'cause I know I want to get my diploma, and I know I want to go to medical school" (I1). James wanted to become a pediatrician because he "like[s] helping out the kids for some reason" (I1). He did a lot of researching about colleges and medical schools on the Internet and wanted to attend "top" (I1) schools. James named Northwestern University, James Madison University, University of California- Los Angeles, and Georgetown University as colleges of interest.

Both James' father and mother possessed the three characteristics for middle-class status. James' father attended Clark Atlanta University, an HBCU, and made over $50,000 a year working with computers. James' mother graduated from a four-year college, taught at an elementary school, and earned more than $50,000 annually.

Paul

Paul, a twelfth grader, had a 2.7 GPA and remained busy with extra-curricular activities. He was a drum major, baseball player, and worker at McDonald's. Paul felt like he was doing an adequate job in school, especially given that he was busy with additional activities:

> I'm doing ok. I know I can push myself a lot more. I am still holding a C average; [it's] almost a B… I feel like I'm doing ok. If there was no baseball team, no band, no drum major, no nothing, just straight academics, then it would be a

> different story. Every day, we get out of school at 3:10; I don't get home until 8:30 [or] 9:00 at night. I'm busy all the time…Then, I have a job…Compared to what I do, I feel like I'm doing pretty good. If I got home every day at 3:10, I could probably be a scholar. (I1)

Paul sought to do well in his classes whether or not he had interest in the subject matter, for he remarked, "I haven't been interested in [a lot of classes], but I still have managed to pass them…regardless [of your interest], you still have to do the work" (I1).

Paul desired to attend Bethune-Cookman University (BCU), an HBCU, because of its dynamic music program. As a drum major and horn player, Paul wanted to continue his music education at BCU, even though he did not want to pursue a music career. Paul was unsure of the actual occupational path he would go down but was interested in becoming a videographer. Paul's mother met the three requirements for middle-class status; she graduated from a four-year college, had a government position, and earned more than $50,000 annually. Paul's father did not attend college and was a postal worker.

Theo

Theo, an eleventh grader, had a 2.9 GPA. He described his academic performance by saying, "I usually get all B's or three B's and an A. The last time I got all A's was in the 5th grade" (I1). During his sophomore year in high school, he earned a C in a Health Communications:

> Theo: I did everything I had to do, except [in] the class I got a C in.
>
> Rita: What was it about that class?
>
> Theo: I wasn't interested. It was Health Care Communications. The first part I was in with my sister. I did good. Then, I was in part two, and I wasn't

interested.

Rita: Why was it uninteresting?

Theo: It was boring. The class was really for if you wanted to be a doctor or medical stuff. I was really not with that.

Rita: So, if you are interested, you'll do better?

Theo: Yes.

Rita: So in the 5th grade, you had all A's. You were interested in school then?

Theo: See in elementary school, you get to do a lot of things. In middle school, it's boring. And in high school, I just want to get out.

Rita: What was it about elementary school?

Theo: Nothing. That's the point. It was just easy.

Rita: Now, it's getting harder?

Theo: Yep. (I1)

The Health Care Communications course content did not interest Theo, so he did not put forth his best effort in the class. Theo believed high school was difficult; therefore, he was ready to "get out" (I1).

Theo wanted to attend a four-year college to become a mechanical engineer. Initially, Theo declared that he aspired to attend Georgia Tech. Then, he commented that he "probably [is] not going to get into Georgia Tech" (I1) and went on to say, "I wanna go to an HBCU probably…. so I can get treated fairly 'cause I think that some colleges don't be looking out [for Black students]" (Theo, I1). Theo explained the comment by sharing an anecdote about a Black friend's cousin who was treated unfairly by a White professor at Georgia Tech. Theo's mother met the three descriptors for middle class. She

graduated from a four-year college and, as a teacher, earned more than $50,000. Theo's father was deceased.

Will

Will was a tenth grader who had a GPA that is higher than a 3.0. He possessed a high level of confidence in his ability to do well in school and believed himself to be a dedicated student:

> I'd say I am above average, and, of course, I always try. Like I said, I believe in this saying, "Never give up." When I'm just swamped with homework at times, [my parents are] like, "Just go to bed. It's going on one o'clock [in the morning]", and I'll say, "No." (I1)

Will persevered to complete his schoolwork even when tired, for he remarked, "I always try to pay attention in class any way, but there are sometimes you just want to put your head down and go to sleep. But you still try to do what you are supposed to do" (I1).

At the time of the interviews, Will was not interested in any particular college nor had he chosen a particular career path. Rather, Will contemplated employment as a politician, lawyer, dojang owner, or doctor. A dojang is a place where individuals practice Choi Kwan Do, which is a form of martial arts. Both Will's father and mother met the three requirements for middle-class status. They had master's degrees and earned more than $50,000 annually. Will's mother was a human resources manager, and his father was a human resources consultant.

The remaining four participants consisted of two pairs of brothers, Gary and Phillipe as well as John and Lester. To eliminate redundant reading, the parent information is included in Phillipe and Lester's profiles only.

Gary

Gary, an eleventh grader, said that he is "doing okay" (I1) in school and mentioned that he is trying to raise his academic performance. Gary did not let the behavior of others affect him:

Gary: There are a lot of fights at our school. Everybody's trying to be popular and stuff instead of trying to focus on school.

Rita: Does that affect you any that people are trying to be popular and stuff?

Gary: That doesn't really affect me much. I'm just trying to get out of high school and go to college. (I1)

Gary was interested in attending Ohio State University and the University of Georgia; he planned to pursue careers in both cartoon animation and professional basketball. Gary believed that athletes could be more successful than individuals with graduate degrees:

Rita: Let's say you have a Master's in engineering, and let's say you have a job, a good job. You're not rich, but you can pay your bills. Is that person successful?

Gary: Mmm-hmm.

Rita: Is that person as successful as Michael Jordan?

Gary: No.

Rita: Why not?

Gary: Because Michael Jordan has more money than he does, and he's more famous. (Gary, I1)

Gary participated in only one interview due to the complexity of his mother's schedule.

Phillipe

Phillipe is a twelfth grader who seemed to be doing well in school, for he said, "Well, right now, I have about one A and two B's. I'm trying to strive for A's" (I1). In response to why it was important for him to make A's, Phillipe responded, "I don't know if this information is correct, but I think A's would add a higher score to your GPA" (I1). His response implied that he did not have adequate knowledge of how GPA's are calculated. Phillipe said he studied when, "I really know that I don't know what's going to be on the test" (I1).

Phillipe had been interested in biology "forever" (I1) and desired to learn more about the animal kingdom as a biologist. Phillipe also had an alternate plan, for he remarked, "The orchestra is my second strength. I love to play music" (I1). Even though Phillipe was a senior, he did not have any colleges of interest. Like Gary, Phillipe underwent only one interview due to the complexity of his mother's schedule. Neither of Gary and Phillipe's parents went to college. Their mother possessed two middle-class characteristics, for she was an entrepreneur who made more than $50,000 annually. I am uncertain about the occupation of Gary and Phillipe's father.

John

John, whose GPA is below 3.0, was a year behind in school because he failed a grade. John, a tenth grader, started having troubles in school when he was in the sixth grade, and the troubles were still present:

> I probably started getting in trouble probably in the sixth grade, but it really wasn't my fault. That's when I had got suspended 'cause I had my rubber band on

> my knee, and it hit my teacher on the back of the neck…I got suspended for that, and, ever since then, it's just been trouble. (I1)

John was involved in band and thought that his participation kept him out of trouble, for he declared, "If I wasn't in band, I'd probably be in trouble a lot…'Cause if I can't fill something with my time, I'll probably get bad grades and stuff like that" (I1). The reason John gave for getting low grades was "I don't really like school" (I1). As a matter of fact, John believed most students did not like school. He explained, "I don't think most people like school. Some people probably come to school to just socialize and talk to people, meet new friends, [and] cause trouble" (I1). John did not feel that the majority of students focused on academics.

Initially, John shared that he wanted to pursue a band career, for he stated, "Actually, I'm in band right now, so I'm going to [pursue music as a career.] And then, if that don't work, I'll be an archeologist and study world history" (I1). However, when John mentioned his career plans, he mainly spoke of archeology. He considered attending the University of Southern California (USC) and Louisiana State University (LSU) "'cause [USC and LSU] got a good [band] program running over there." His rationale was career-related, since he may pursue a career in music.

Lester

Lester, an eleventh grader, was a year behind in school because he failed a grade. Lester shared some of his school challenges:

> I used to get kicked out of school all the time when I was in [middle school]. I got kept back before. I'm supposed to be graduating this year, but [not graduating on time] was one of the things that helped me realize this ain't no joke. [The

> teachers] don't care if you stay behind or not. It's up to you what you want to do. (I1)

Lester realized that the need to take responsibility for his learning and felt that he possessed the right attitude for excelling in school. Lester remarked, "What I think about all the time is, if the mindset I have now, I had in the sixth grade, I'd probably have a 4.0 right now" (I1). At the time of his interview, he was focused on his schoolwork.

Lester, who wanted to be an architect, expressed interests in attending Clemson University or Auburn University. Lester's college choices were career-related because he remarked, "Clemson and Auburn University both have good golf teams, but they also have good architecture schools" (Lester, I1). Lester planned to strengthen his career and hobby skills in college. Lester participated in only one interview due to scheduling conflicts. John and Lester lived with their father and stepmother. Their father met two middle-class descriptors having graduated from Jackson State University, an HBCU. In his blue-collar position, he earned more than $50,000 annually. John and Lester's biological mother was a massage therapist who graduated from FAMU, an HBCU. Table 2 provides a snapshot view of the college and career aspirations of the participants.

Themes

The findings from the primary data sources as they relate to the research questions are divided into three themes: 1) perceived role of education in the success of Black males; 2) perceived role of education in the career aspirations of Black males; 3) self-identified influences on the perceptions that Black males have on education, success, and careers. The three themes are followed by the results from the parent questionnaires, which were secondary data sources. The questionnaire solicited the parent's thoughts

about: a) education being the key to success; b) post-high school desires for his/her son(s); and c) good role models for his/her son(s). Eleven respondents identified at least one parent as an influence on the his academic and career perceptions, so the parent responses may inform our understanding of this outcome.

Perceived Role of Education in Success

In coding the data, I used the terminology *instrumental* and *conflicting* to describe the participants' thoughts about the role education plays in the success of Black males. *Instrumental* reflected a belief that education is necessary for success, and only two participants, Paul and Phillipe, consistently expressed that belief. Paul shared, "[Education is the key to success] because, being a Black male anyway, you can't do anything without education to really be somebody. [Being without an education is] not acceptable" (I1). Paul felt that Black males, in particular, must have an education in order to get a job and gain the respect of business leaders:

> If you're going to be a Black male, you have to be very smart. It's just hard out there for Black males these days. It's hard for jobs, everything, especially education. If you don't have an education, [business leaders are] going to look at you as nothing basically. (I1)

Phillipe remarked that education provided knowledge that was helpful in one's career:

> Nobody thinks math will be useful for later on, but we have architects, science, all kinds of formulas, and those same numbers or formulas may pop up again. And history [is vital because] it's important to learn what happened before America became America. You don't want to sit down [with someone] and be [seen as] stupid, if you don't know these events; and besides, [education] helps your career. (I1)

Table 2

Participants at a Glance

Participants	Grade	GPA	College Plans	Career Aspirations
Adam	11	2.3	Technical	Music Producer
Billy	9	At least 3.0	Four-Year HBCU	Entrepreneur Athlete Sports Commentator Advertising Executive
David	11	3.5	Four-Year	Journalist Politician
Edward	11	Unknown	Four-Year HBCU Technical	Entrepreneur Law Enforcer
Fred	10	4.0	Four-Year Graduate School	Architect Engineer
Gary	11	Unknown	Four-Year	Cartoon Animator Athlete
James	10	3.0	Four-Year Medical School	Pediatrician
John	10	Below 3.0	Four-Year	Archeologist
Lester	11	Unknown	Four-Year	Architect
Paul	12	2.7	Four-Year HBCU	Video Photographer
Phillipe	12	Unknown	Four-Year	Biologist
Theo	11	2.9	Four-Year	Mechanical Engineer
Will	10	At Least 3.0	Four-Year Graduate School	Politician Dojang Owner Lawyer Doctor

Phillipe also expressed his views on students who pursue sports and not a college education:

> There are lots of people who go and try to find the easy way out and just play sports for a living... Because we have a lot of people I met in school [who] say they're trying to find a career in either basketball [or] football. Many can try to go, but there's only so many that [the recruiters] do pick. And then what are you going to do with your career then, if you don't have any back up plans? (I1)

He thought everybody's post-high school plans should include a college education.

A label of *conflicting* meant the participants believed education was necessary for the success of some individuals but not all people. The remaining 11 participants had conflicting perceptions. Billy conveyed conflicting views by declaring, "I think [education is the key to success] to people that need [education for their jobs]; but some people don't need education… But education is the key to success" (I1). He stated that professional athletes were examples of individuals who did not need education to thrive. Initially, Adam expressed that education was the key to success when he explained, "Without education, you can't really do anything with your life" (I1). Adam's "anything" included "employment, making money, and being educated" (I1). However, Adam later stated that he knew successful people who had neither a high school nor college education:

> Rita: When you think in your mind about all the people who are successful, do they all have college educations?
>
> Adam: (Shakes head "no".)
>
> Rita: No? Who are some people you're thinking about?

> Adam: Everybody I know- mainly [rapper] Young Jeezy. He's a success. He's never been to high school. (I2)

Although he originally stated that education was the key to success, Adam modified his position when he communicated that education was not the only route to success.

At the onset of David's first interview, his responses reflected a notion that education was necessary for success:

> Basically, if you are going to be in the real world, you're gonna need education to be able to cooperate and be able to deal with life society. You're gonna need education in anything you do, so that's why it leads to success. (I1)

David felt that education prepared individuals to make various life decisions. In response to David's brother and cousin's recent quests to go back to school, David commented, "[My cousin and brother] want to go back to school because they know most jobs won't even let you get in the job unless you have some type of learning or experience" (I1). David believed that education would help his family members get jobs. Nevertheless, statements that David made during his second interview contradicted his original point of view. David declared, "I don't think you really need [education] because you can be a basketball player, and [people will] count that as successful. I don't think I did say that [education was needed for success]" (I2). Fred, who also originally agreed that education is the key to success, stated:

> I think college is more like another access of higher education. It's another connection- another learning tool, but, if you're very dedicated, very articulate, smart and intelligent, I think [you] don't really need college. Some people can

> start [working] right after they are finished with their high school [career]. (Fred, I2)

Fred felt that some individuals were well-equipped to enter the work force upon graduating from high school. He also articulated:

> Some [people without a college degree] do good even though they may have dropped out [of school] because of family circumstances- maybe [like having] a baby or something. Like some dropped out, but they still did well because they still were focused and maintained their goals in life. So they did eventually achieve them. Maybe it was a lot harder for them than the ones who did have a college education, but they still rose to the top. (Fred, I1)

He had family members whom he felt were successful although they did not possess college degrees.

Defining Success

The participants expounded on their personal definitions of success as well as how Black males as a whole determined success. They included signs of accomplishment and people they deemed as successful in their discussions. First, eight of the 13 participants mentioned material benefits, such as money, houses, and cars, as indictors of achievement. They identified Warren Buffet, Bill Gates, entertainer P Diddy, Michael Jordan, and certain family members as individuals with capital gain. James said, "[Warren Buffet] has a lot of success. He's earned a lot of money. [He] has $300 million dollars, more than that probably. Bill Gates [is successful because he is] rich" (I1). David

believed not having to struggle financially was an aspect of success and identified his mother, father, and uncle as examples of people who were fiscally independent:

> Anybody that doesn't have to [deal] with a [financial] struggle or nothing like that [is successful]…Like my mom… And my dad…[My dad is] getting a lot of benefits and whatnot. … My uncle…saved up a lot of money, and now he's working for the post office…And he [is] getting paid a lot there, too. (I1)

The participants thought that Black males as a whole were driven by material benefits, and the respondents believed money was a key determinant of how African American males chose their occupations because "[regardless of social class] all [Black males] want money" (Theo, AFG). Money provided for material possessions, so "when you think about the money, you think about what kind of car you're going to get [and] what type of house you're going to get" (Paul, WFG). John stated that money was the reason why a vast amount of Black males desired careers in entertainment and athletics (AFG). Will was of the same opinion: "because [of] what we [as Black males] see on TV, [it] seems like [playing sports and entertaining people is] so easy, and it's the easiest way to get a lot of money" (WFG). David felt like generating an income was priority and commented that going to college beyond four years was "a waste of time" because he wanted to "get the money now" (AFG).

Second, five participants articulated that making a difference in the lives of others was a sign of success and classified Oprah Winfrey, Bill Gates, Barack Obama, Martin Luther King, Jr., and a participant's father as change agents. Will shared, "[Winfrey] tries to help people. She doesn't just talk. She tries to help [as evidenced by] that school she started in Africa" (I1). Billy remarked that individuals were successful "when they make

an impact on someone else's life" (I1). John felt that Obama, like King, was dedicated to changing the world for the good of all people:

> I watched the Democratic Convention on television, and [Obama] spoke just like Martin Luther King…Obama can probably change everything, if Obama became president…I think he looks at the world as, if he can change it, he'll change it. That's what he wants. He's going to change the world. (I1)

John also mentioned that a lot of Black people "look up to" Obama.

Third, four participants declared that having a job is a characteristic of a successful person; only one participant spoke of a specific person when discussing this characteristic. Lester (I1) named entertainer Tyler Perry because Perry was once homeless but was currently a millionaire due to his work efforts. John, Lester's brother, communicated that an accomplished person has "a nice job" (I1), and David said, "[I will know I am successful when] I'll be going to my job every day" (I1).

Fourth, four participants expressed that intelligence was indicative of success, and associated family members with this category. John shared, "There's something about my dad. He's smart; he's real smart. If my dad was teacher, he'll probably tell you a lot about life" (I1). Adam thought his older brother was successful because "he's smart and intelligent" (I1).

Fifth, three of the 13 participants specifically mentioned education when speaking of success. Education was not included in the intelligence category because Ogbu (2003) found that middle-class Black students made a distinction between being "smart" and "intelligent" (p. 255) and having an education. Fred commented, "I think Bill Cosby [is

successful] because… [of] his knowledge. He has a lot of knowledge and education to back up his words" (I1). Paul shared:

> [When I am older,] I wouldn't be able to have all the nice stuff [that I want] without my education. In order to be successful, you have to have an education. A successful man would have an education- his high school and college education. (I1)

Paul believed people could not attain material benefits without education.

Sixth, three participants articulated that career achievement was an indicator of accomplishment. Participants associated entertainers Young Jeezy, Jay-Z, and Lil Wayne as well as Barack Obama and Michael Jordan with this category. Theo said Lil Wayne was successful "because he sold a million albums in the first week" (I1). Gary remarked, "I'll say Michael Jordan 'cause he was one of the best players in the NBA" (I1).

Seventh, two participants declared that having a family was a sign of success. Paul talked about his brother and other family members having families of their own:

> [My brother] has a wife. He has two kids. It's not that many people [in my family] [who] live by [themselves]. [If people do not have families, then that] doesn't mean they're not successful. That just may be their decision. But [having a family] would be being successful to me. That would be my, I guess you could say, American dream of what I want when I grow up. (Paul, I1)

Having a family was a vital part of Paul's perception of success for himself.

Eighth, two participants implicated ambition as a part of success and mentioned Oprah Winfrey and Tiger Woods. Lester communicated, "[Tiger Woods] fights and works for what he has, just like a man should… Even though he messed up his legs, he

still practice every day and play every day as much as he can" (I1). Fred named Winfrey "because of her ability to accomplish her dreams and goals and, too, her strive to strive. She never gives up" (I1). Fred declared, "That's a really good focal point to like want to be like [Winfrey]" (I1).

Ninth, individual participants stated that self-improvement (Billy, I1), war survival (David, I1), peace of mind (Fred, I1), independence (Paul, I1), blazing paths (Will, I1), belief in God (Edward, I1), and being responsible (Lester, I1) were additional signs of achievement.

I categorized the individuals deemed as models of success and highlighted the names that appeared repeatedly. First, participants cited entertainers 11 times and mentioned Oprah Winfrey and Lil Wayne three times each. Second, respondents identified family members nine times. In this category, they mentioned fathers four times and brothers three times. Participants did not highlight specific types of female family members, such as mothers and aunts, more than one time. Third, respondents recognized business moguls four times, and, in this classification, they named Bill Gates specifically three of the four times. Fourth, participants discussed Black leaders four times and explicitly identified President Barack Obama three of the four times. Fifth, respondents brought up athletes three times and mentioned Michael Jordan particularly two of the three times. Finally, one participant cited teachers.

Perceived Role of Education in the Career Aspirations of Black Males

Participants discussed the employment of Black males who are no longer in high school. Some participants observed Black males working in a variety of jobs or career fields, such as "picking up trash" (Will, WFG), "barbers" (Fred, WFG), "teachers" (Fred,

WFG), “[working] in Wal-mart” (Paul, WFG), “doctors” (Fred, WFG), “human resources” (Will, WFG), “sports [and] entertainment” (Gary, WFG). Will stated, “[Black males are] working everywhere…I can’t say I haven’t seen any Blacks do a certain career” (WFG). However, other participants had a more narrow view. They named “trapping, rapping, athletics” (David, AFG) and jobs “dealing with [one’s] hands” (John, AFG) as typical employment for Black males. *Trapping* is a slang expression that means “selling drugs;” “mechanics” and “builders” (John, AFG) are examples of professionals who have jobs “dealing with their hands.”

While participants witnessed Black males working in positions that required a college education, most participants believed that the majority of Black males were either interested in or working in positions that the participants classified as “easy” (Paul, WFG) relative to the level of education required to have the job. Participants also commented about Black male students choosing the “easy way out” by pursuing post-high school plans that did not include college. Paul stated:

> I don’t think [different people in my high school are] going to college. They just want [to] pick up what their dad [does]. If their dad is a mechanic, they want to take the easy route. [They say,] “I’m just going to work with my dad when I graduate, instead of [going to college]. There’s nothing wrong with that. They’re going to add on to their dad’s business. I guess they’re getting the easy way out, instead of going to college. (Paul, I1)

Phillipe expounded on this notion of the easy way by stating, “There are lots of people who go and try to find the easy way out and just play sports for a living (I1). Additionally, Gary shared, “[Going to college] means that you’re smart and that you

don’t have to take the easy way out to try to make money” (I1).

Many participants believed that the level of education was a key factor shaping the careers pursued by African American males. The level of education was vital because, “some people may not want to get the master’s and bachelor’s and doctorate degree. [They] just want a quick two-year training” (James, WFG). Paul claimed that some people, “don’t aim as high [in school]”, so they go to the “Marines, Navy, [and] Air Force...’cause they know it [doesn’t] take as much studying” (WFG) to get into the military. Paul also remarked:

> [Level of education is] the [factor] I hear the most. When most people [talk about] jobs and hear [that] you gotta go to school eight years and [time] like that, [they say], “I don’t want to go to school that long.” And [the level of education] automatically throws [their career plan] off. (WFG)

David was one of the students referred to by Paul because he declared, “I don’t want to go to college for eight years. That’s why I don’t want to be a lawyer” (AFG). John, who agreed that most Black males primarily used drugs, music, and athletics to make money, said that Black males did so because “they [are] probably not that bright to do nothing else” (AFG); David concurred by saying, “You don’t need education to do [jobs in sports or entertainment]” (AFG). Even college athletes can bypass education because they “can get through [college] without going to class” (David, AFG). Theo summed up several of the participants’ perceptions about Black males and jobs when he said, “Everything’s about taking the easy way out though. Nobody wants to go the hard way” (AFG). The participants in Adam’s group, in particular, believe education is “the hard way.” David gave his explanation as to why some Black males shun education:

> We [as Black males] have no faith in our brains, so we give up on anything that has to do with education and [pursue] something we can learn naturally- without school, books, and all that extra stuff. (AFG)

David thought that Black males doubted their educational ability and, instead, chose down non-academic career paths. David, who was in honors and AP courses, confessed his own reservations: "I [doubt] myself [by] thinking, 'can I actually be something dealing with politics?' Even though Obama is president; [he's] one person" (AFG).

College Education

Several participants expressed that a college education was unnecessary for everyone's success. Fred declared:

> I do have some family [members] who are very successful, and they did not go to college. Their family might have needed them to work for that time, so they might [not have] made it to college the first time or when they had supposed to. I think college is more like another access of higher education. It's another connection- another learning tool. But if you're very dedicated, very articulate, smart and intelligent, I think [you] don't really need college. Some people can start [working] right after they are finished with high school. (I2)

Likewise, Theo declared, "you can still get a good job, if you don't have a good education [and] just have a high school diploma" (I1). However, all 13 participants believed a college education was *instrumental* to their personal career success because their remarks consistently revealed a mindset that a college curriculum would be preparation for their career goals. Eleven participants planned to attend a four-year college; one respondent desired to go to a technical college; and one participant aspired to

attend both a four-year university and a technical college. Three participants included HBCU's among the four-year institutions of interest, and three respondents mentioned attaining education beyond the undergraduate level.

The participants were confident that a college education would propel them towards accomplished lifestyles. Will shared:

> I don't want to be put in the position where I have to work extra, extra hard for the rest of my life because of one decision I made. I want it to be as easy as possible, and the only way I see it being easier is going to college. (I1).

If Will does not attend college, he believed he would have to perform unnecessary tasks for life survival. Likewise, Billy thought college would provide the in-depth understanding needed to fulfill his career aspirations:

> It's important for me to go to college right now just to get that higher learning of what I want to do in life…Just to learn more about what I want to do 'cause, right now, I think I know the things I wanna do. But I have to learn about it even more- go deeper into it and stuff. (I2)

Gary believed that attending college would signify that he was making good use of his life opportunities:

> Rita: And what if your parents weren't making you [go to college]?
>
> Gary: I'd still go 'cause I want to do something with my life and not just stay at home and not do anything. (I1)

Edward and Adam, the two participants who believed a technical college education was instrumental to their career plans, had already begun their careers, as mentioned in the previous section.

College preparatory steps.

While all 13 participants planned to attend college, only six participants had taken definite steps towards college preparation. David deliberately enrolled in AP classes because he knew the courses were more impressive than lower level courses on his transcript:

> I figured, if I was taking advanced classes, I might as well take one that's going to look even better on my transcript… And plus, if you take [AP classes] now, you won't have to take them in college, depending on what college you go to, so that will also give me a college credit. Then, if you get an A in there, it gives you an extra, too, because instead of four points, I'll get five. So that will help my GPA out. (I2)

David also realized he could gain college credit and increase his GPA by participating in AP classes and doing well on the AP exams. Similarly, Fred declared that, in addition to maintaining a 4.0 GPA, he had taken steps "to do dual enrollment with [a local college] in the 11th grade" (I1), with the knowledge that the classes would help his engineering endeavors. Not only had James investigated the facts and admissions qualifications for certain colleges and medical schools, he had also examined the pathway for becoming a pediatrician:

> Rita: What degrees do you need in order to be a pediatrician?
>
> James: First of all, [you must] graduate high school, go to college, get your undergrad[uate degree], then I think get your grad[uate degree] from medical school. Then, you get…what's that called my mom was telling me about? MD?

Rita: Mmm-hmm. MD. Do you know what MD stands for?

James: Medical doctor.

Rita: Yep.

James: What's the last thing you have to do to be it?

Rita: Complete your residency.

James: Your residency.

Rita: How did you know that you had to go to medical school and do a residency?

James: Research on the Internet. (James, I1)

James attained his information from the Internet as well as his mother.

However, six participants had not done much more than strive to earn certain grades and complete school-mandated tasks, in order to prepare for college. Phillipe, a twelfth grader, had not taken the SAT and did not have plans to take the assessment:

Rita: Have you taken the SAT?

Phillipe: Mmm-mmm.

Rita: Not yet?

Phillipe: No.

Rita: Do you know when you are going to take it?

Phillipe: (Shakes head "no.") (I1)

A similar exchange took place with Phillipe's brother, Gary, who was in the eleventh grade:

Rita: So, when will you take the SAT? Have you already?

Gary: No. I'll take it this year.

Rita: Will you prepare for it or will you just go in and take it?

Gary: I guess I'll prepare for it. I'll take the PSAT maybe. (I1)

The "I guess" and "maybe" included in Gary's response reflected uncertainty about his plans to prepare for and take the PSAT and SAT. John, a tenth grader, said he was going to start preparing for college when he became an eleventh or twelfth-grader:

Rita: Now, what have you done to prepare for college?

John: Nothing… Probably when I get in the 11th or 12th grade, I'll start considering my options for college. (I1)

Though Billy, a ninth-grader, desired to attend college, he had not made any preliminary steps. Upon inquiry about his preparation, Billy replied, "I've just been taking it slow right now. [I am] just [making] A's and B's, and that's really it" (I2).

Benefits of college.

The participants shared their perceptions of the benefits of a college education. First, eight of the 13 participants named material benefits. The material benefits included higher salaries, better quality of life, homes, and cars. James commented, "Your quality of living will be drastically different, if you didn't have as much education as you needed" (I2). David perceived that financial gain was the sole benefit of a college education:

Rita: Ok. So you believe it's important to get more education and more degrees because of the money?

David: (Nods head "yes.")

Rita: Ok. Any other reason?

David: (Shakes head "no.") (I1)

To David, higher education only meant more money.

Second, eight participants named marketability as a college benefit. Billy thought a college education afforded an advantage when applying for jobs:

> When you want to get out [of college], [employers] are going to look at you like, "Ok. He knows something"...[You'll] get put in a higher position than somebody else who didn't go to college or doesn't have the same education as you. (I1)

Will shared, "How much education you have will depend on the type of work you have later" (I1).

Third, seven participants mentioned knowledge as a benefit. Gary declared:

> [Graduating from college] means that you're smart and that you don't have to take the easy way out to try to make money…It's better to have education than lots of money. (I1)

Likewise, Paul said, "You just want to know things really. You don't want to be out some where, and people are saying things, and you have no idea what they're talking about 'cause you didn't go to [college]" (I1).

Fourth, three participants named social benefits. Fred declared, "I think a PhD would help me a lot. I would get to know people in higher classes- higher social classes" (I2). Billy wanted to attend college "to meet new people and experience the life of college" (I1) and engage in activities he has "seen in movies about college" (I1).

Fifth, two participants communicated that a college education helped with family relations. Fred explained:

> Education also helps you with family issues, so when you grow up you can help your kids with their homework, and you'll be able to teach them things and show

> them your wisdom that you learned when you were a kid. (I1)

He wanted to use education to cultivate his future children's growth.

Sixth, one participant, Paul, said respect was a benefit of going to college. Paul communicated:

> As a Black male, you have to be more. If you're going to be a Black male, you have to be very smart. It's just hard out there for Black males these days. It's hard for jobs, everything, especially education. If you don't have an education, [White people are] going to look at you as nothing basically. That's how I look at it. (I1)

He thought education provided esteem for Black males.

Finally, one participant, Edward, believed a college education allowed for networking; he said, "Other than the classes and everything, [college benefits include] the whole networking thing" (I2).

High School Education

I also used the terminology *instrumental*, *unrelated*, and *conflicting* to categorize the participants' thoughts about the role of their high school educations. Five of the 13 participants believed that their high school education was *instrumental* to their career plans because the respondents consistently articulated that the entire curriculum was preparation for their employment goals. Lester declared:

> I can draw really good, and I took a class called Technology…It's a class that shows you how to do the floor plan and how to work and draw out the houses and everything. We build a lot in there…I'm good at math, and I love science. And I like to draw. (I1)

James stated that his teachers aided his college and career preparation:

> My teachers [are] pretty good at [giving information that will help me after high school]; they'll probably give me a good [educational] background. You'll need the information that you got through your high school [for undergraduate school and medical school]. High school helps you get to college. (I1)

Phillipe commented, "If you want to be a biologist, in high school, take biology. Go down the science path. That's one of the [career paths] I'm trying to go down" (I1).

One participant, Adam, felt that his high school education was *unrelated* to his employment goals because he did not think any of the curriculum was preparation for a music production career. Adam remarked, "Nothing in school involves what I'm doing. [My] mass communications [class]…well, not even that" (I1). He also stated, "We have [a] video-broadcasting [course], but it really does not help" (I1). Adam did not communicate that the mass communications and video-broadcasting classes were providing him with skills, such as effectively communicating in various arenas and recording, that he could directly use in his field.

Seven participants had *conflicting* thoughts surrounding the role played by their high school education because the respondents thought they needed only a portion of the curriculum for their anticipated professions. Many felt that, while certain courses were preparation for their post-high school plans, other courses were not. David, who wanted to pursue a career in politics or journalism, remarked:

> I need everything [I am learning in high school] 'cause all subjects are helping me for my life-goings. Even though [history] doesn't have anything to do with what I need to know, I'm still [advancing my] reading [in history class,] and reading advances my brain. (I1)

David did not express that his history courses taught him about government procedures, policies and practices, which he probably needs to succeed in politics. Likewise, John, who desired to be an archeologist, commented:

> I want to take a lot of history classes and a lot of science classes. Language arts, I understand punctuation and everything, but that's really not important. I mean, it's important, but it's not really important. If you go into a job, you're going to need to punctuate real good, but minor mistakes, that's ok. Don't take it too straight up. [Employers are not going to say,] "Person made a mistake. Not going to hire this guy." (I1)

John recognized that his history and science courses were preparing him for a career in archeology but did not articulate that his language arts courses would help him effectively communicate as an archeologist.

Theo, who wanted to be a mechanical engineer, knew that he needed good grades for college entry. Theo declared, "If I don't do all that well in high school, then I won't be able to go to college" (I1); however, he did not believe that the actual content of his courses provided the foundation for an engineering career:

> Rita: Do you see a direct relationship between school and your career plans?
>
> Theo: Not really. We have these academies- science, technology, engineering and medical (STEM); business; communications; and public services. Everybody does the same exact thing [and gets] the same exact work. (Theo, I1)

Theo was not in the STEM academy, which included an engineering component, for he shared, "I'm in a health academy, while I'm supposed to be in a mechanical academy"

(I1). Therefore, Theo's misplacement affected his mindset about the preparation that his high school education was providing for his future career in engineering.

Self-Identified Influences on Perceptions about Education, Success, and Careers

The participants identified relationships, the culture of their environment, racism, and media and media images as influences on the academic and career perspectives of African American males.

Relationships

Family relationships.

All participants communicated that relationships with various individuals influenced their personal academic and career perspectives. All respondents acknowledged interactions with family members, and the majority identified their parents distinctively. James' parents were his primary influences:

> Rita: Your parents [influence you]? If you listed the people who influence you the most, would your parents be first?
>
> James: First, of course.
>
> Rita: Why do you say "of course"?
>
> James: I'm with them every day [, so I] guess they know what are the best things for me. (I1)

James trusted that his parents were giving him the most excellent advice possible. Theo's mother encouraged him to go to college:

> My mom wants me to do good in school… She says, "You won't be [in my house] for the rest of your life. You have to leave some time." The only way I'll be able to do that is to do good and go to college. (I1)

Lester's mother suggested that he pursue architecture:

> [My mom] always used to talk to me about what kind of stuff I'm gonna do [after high school]. She said, "You can draw real good. You can try to be an architect. You're good at math." So I was like, "Alright. I'll try it," and I looked into it on the Internet. I was like, "That sound like I can do that." It shouldn't be that hard [since] I like to draw. (I1)

Lester took his mother's advice.

Gary said it is important that he go to college "'cause my parents are making me" (I1). When Gary mentioned students who were more concerned about being popular than attaining an education, he said the difference between those students and himself was parental impact. Gary stated, "I guess their parents don't really take their [children's] education seriously" (I1) unlike his parents. Will's parents had a great impact on Will's thought patterns concerning college: "I want to go to college because, since I was very young, my dad brought up something that made sense to me. It's better to have [a college education] than not to have it because it's getting a lot harder out there" (I1). Will's parents also motivated Will to consider a career in law or politics because of his eloquent speech:

> Well, my parents and everyone around me say that they notice that…I speak very fluently, and I'm very articulate. So I am thinking [about] something possibly in [a] field where I have to talk, like [law] or politics. (I1)

Will has not settled on a particular career path, but law and politics are among the possibilities.

Most participants also cited connections with other family members, including aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins. Fred attributed his academic success to the structure provided by his family:

> Rita: What do you think is the difference between what you've achieved and what some others have not?
>
> Fred: I guess it would be a strong family background. My grandmas, my aunties, [and] my mom really structured me [and] disciplined me very well. (I1)

Paul frequently spoke of his brother's influence on his post-high school plans:

> Yeah, I got a lot [of advice] from my brother. He told me a lot of things- what to do and what not to do. When you're young in college, you can get into a lot of things. So [my brother] basically told me things I need to look out for when I get down there [to college], so I can go down there and get out. (I1)

David's interest in a political career was encouraged by interactions with his grandfather and others:

> Me and [my grandpa] talk a lot about government and stuff like that. We be having some great topical debates about it, too. So maybe [a career in politics] should be the thing I should do, since everyone is like telling me about it. (I1)

David valued his talks with his grandfather.

Relationships with non-family members.

Teachers, friends, community members, A couple participants mentioned teachers. Fred's teachers added to the knowledge needed for Fred's college and his career aspirations:

> Fred: My teachers illustrate…[how] what we are learning…could affect us in the world today or how we'll eventually use it or need it in college or in our career. So they really do entwine our career goals into our class discussions.
>
> Rita: And how do you feel about them doing that?
>
> Fred**:** I like it because it helps me stay focused and also gives me confidence. (I1)

Knowledge shared by Fred's teachers was a part of his college and career preparation.

A couple participants identified relationships with friends. Lester explained that he and friends discussed each other's career goals:

> We are almost grown. We are getting to the age where we gotta start looking at stuff. Everything that is on our minds is not just girls and clubs. We talk about jobs and what we [are] gonna do. (I1)

Lester has conversations, which include occupational plans, with friends.

Edward mentioned mentors, godparents, and family friends. Edward believed he benefited from the connection between his grandmother and several prominent Black community members:

> Another influence would be [a prominent Black politician who is] a good friend of my grandmother's, and, when I was young, he really helped me decide what I wanted to do in life. I talk to him on a regular basis, and he helps me out. I have a

> couple of my grandmother's friends who are judges, and they help me out a lot. (I1)

The community members influenced Edward's decision-making.

Environmental Culture

Several participants mentioned that the culture of their environment influenced the academic and career perspectives of Black males. During his first interview, Adam commented that the African American males at his high school did not focus on education; instead, his male peers concentrated more on "money, gangs, and girls" (I1):

> Rita: Is there an academic culture at your school?
>
> Adam: What?
>
> Rita: Are a lot of people focused on academics at your school?
>
> Adam: (Laughs loudly.) No, [just] in the gifted class[es]. It's hard to explain. You gotta see it for yourself.
>
> Rita: What is everybody focused on?
>
> Adam: Getting money, gangs, girls. (Adam, I1)

Gary echoed Adam's sentiment by sharing, "There are a lot of fights at our school. Everybody's trying to be popular and stuff instead of trying to focus on school" (Gary, I1). During the focus group at Adam's house, Theo remarked, "I know some people who come to school just because they gotta come…[They come] just to eat lunch and play basketball" (AFG). Then, Adam responded, "That's half of [our school]" (AFG). Theo knows students who have "straight F's" (AFG), and Phillipe talked about students who get "kicked out of class," go "to sleep in class," sit in class "talking all day," and

"basically [do not do] any work" (WFG). Paul did not think education was "valued high" at his school and declared, "you hear more about how so and so got a full scholarship to Florida State playing football than somebody getting an academic scholarship" (AFG).

The respondents in Will's group believed larger cultures swayed the non-educational climate in their school. James perceived that the lack of educational focus was due to the culture in the South:

James: The northeastern part of the [country], like Massachusetts, they value education very highly. I don't know if they do that in the South. I don't think so.

Rita: Really?

James: Uh-huh.

Rita: What do they do in Massachusetts to make you say they value it more there?

James: 'Cause I was reading a story, I mean, watching on *60 Minutes*...the whole like the kids' attitudes towards it. They don't cancel school to do no Teacher Work Day or Columbus Day or nothing. They just go to school.

Rita: Ok. So the fact that they don't have the holidays, as many days off…

James: Yeah. The holidays. They don't have as many picky holidays, stuff like that.

Rita: So you say we might not celebrate [education] as much down here in the South?

James: Like the science [scores] is always down.

Rita: Ok.

Felix: So you think there's a geographical component…

James: (Shakes head yes and says…) Uh-huh.

Felix: To achievement.

James: Mmm-hmm. (WFG)

James expounded on this notion by saying that the high schools in the North were more academically-inclined because the schools were in "the region where Harvard, Yale, Princeton…[and] Brown" (WFG) and other Ivy League institutions were located. Will agreed: "Education isn't valued down here as much as it is in other places…There's more fun down here [in the South] than work, and up there [in the North], [students are] balancing [work and play] out" (WFG).

When people discuss the educational climate in the participants' school district, they commonly categorize the district in two regions- "North" and "South". While the northern part has a racial mixture of students, the southern area is predominantly Black. Many educators and parents espouse the belief that the academic culture of the schools in the North is superior to that in the South; the participants in Will's group had similar perceptions. Fred considered a "mixed [racial] environment," rather than a predominantly Black setting, to be a "positive atmosphere" because it had students who were "actually wanting to learn [and are] less lazy" (WFG). James shared that his mother tried to enroll him in a school in the North, but, at the time, the school was not accepting students who lived out of its zone (WFG). Paul declared that, although he had not been to any of the schools in the North, the "whole mindset [of people in the Northern schools] is just different" (WFG); Paul proclaimed that the school personnel and students in the North "focus on different things, unlike football and band and the things we [in the South] put

so much pride into, that [are probably] at the bottom of the list [for people in the North]" (WFG).

Fred summed up this portion of his focus group's dialogue by clearly stating that African-American culture as a whole did not praise academics. He explained, "African-Americans usually celebrate sports [and] entertainment" (WFG); when it comes to "achievement, educational [items, and] graduation," African-Americans did not "celebrate as much as we should" (WFG). Phillipe and Gary previously attended schools in the North. Phillipe stated that, when they moved to the Southern part of the county, the school environment was "kind of negative" because the "value of education wasn't really up there [in rank]" (WFG). Gary shared, "when I came down here, my grades were kind of different," due to an inferior "value of education" (WFG) embraced by the teachers; Phillipe concurred that the teachers were the cause of the discrepancy in the academic culture. Members in both focus groups complained about the inferior quality of some of the teachers in their school.

David commented on the difference between his current school and the racially-mixed school he previously attended in another state: "I've never seen people cuss out loud at the teachers [or] walk out of the classroom" (AFG). Three participants in Adam's group seemed to contribute to the non-academic atmosphere speaking with pride about how they, along with other students, "made fun of [a teacher] everyday" (John, AFG) and even "made one of [their] teachers quit" (David, AFG). Adam shared that he and classmates "act so ignorant" (AFG) in a particular class, and John expressed that he did not see the point in doing homework (AFG). As a result, instead of completing some assignments, John copied from other students' papers.

Some participants were the recipients of ridicule due to deviation from perceived cultural norms. Will and I had the following dialogue:

Rita: We all speak differently when we are with our friends. Let's say you were to speak with your friends like you are speaking to me now.

Will: I do sometimes. They laugh at me.

Rita: They laugh at you?

Will: [My friends] don't laugh at me. People who actually know me [are] fine with [the way I speak], but the people in school laugh a bit. (Will, I1)

During his interviews and focus group session, Will spoke articulately and shared that while his family and friends commend his vocalizations, other Black people respond negatively. Will commented, "People determine the color of your skin because the way you talk…Just because some people talk like they have a brain in their head, [other] people automatically say, 'You're White'" (WFG). The participants in Will's group believed society associated certain conduct more strongly with African Americans; also, society more commonly linked Whites to other behaviors. People typically correlated coherent dialogue with Whites. Fred reiterated this point: "People thought [Barack Obama] wasn't Black enough just because how he talks" (WFG). Fred went on to say that other factors such as "how [Obama] lived" and "the prominent, really good college" (WFG) he attended caused some Blacks to question Obama's Blackness.

Fred believed that some Black male students suppressed their intellect in order to gain acceptance from peers who may not achieve on the same level because "to fit in a group, you gotta be similar with your people around you" (WFG). Paul reported seeing students stifle their mental ability when with friends and then the same individuals in the

classroom proving to be "smarter than they seem" (WFG). The students manipulated their identity while with friends and "put on a front that they're something they're not" (Paul, WFG). One of the participants, David, made a similar remark about himself. David, who was in the National Honors Society, said, "I act smart in class, but, outside of class, that's a whole different [story]…I act dumb; that's just what I do" (AFG). In response to why he did not "act smart" outside of class, David said, "'Cause that's not who I am. Just because I am smart doesn't mean I have to act like it, too" (AFG).

David even created a term for the affect that his surroundings had on him:

Rita: I remember you said outside influences kind of make it challenging for you to go down the path you want to go. When you said outside influences, are you just talking about friends? Other kids at school? Peers? Close friends? What outside influences?

David: All of it goes together because you hear all of it. You hear all of it together, so after a while, it gets stuck in your vocabulary. And that can be from listening to anybody else's conversation that you're not even in.

Rita: And is there pressure to speak a certain way or…

David: Not pressure, but it's accidental intake. (I2)

From David's usage of the term, *accidental intake* occurred when people unintentionally allowed their surroundings to influence them. I do not know if it was simply accidental intake, but something had a major impact on David's perception of his race. David, an AP and honors student, also stated, "Black males have no faith in our brain, so we give up on anything that has to do with education" (AFG). He also doubted his ability to work in politics, "even though Obama is president" (AFG).

He had more thoughts about Barack Obama's ascent to the office of President, for he declared, "Even though Obama is president, the Black people are not going to change. Yeah, he gave a lot of hope to the Black people 'cause they think they can do something… [But] nothing's going to change" (AFG). The *nothing* that David referred to is the "ignorant" behavior of Black people. He made other pessimistic comments about African Americans. David commented that in his former school, "[The] White people kind of calmed the Black people down, so we didn't act as ignorant as we are" (AFG). His statement illustrated a perspective that being "ignorant" is a component of every African American's identity. Then David questioned, "But now [, in my current school,] we got all Black people in one setting" (AFG)?, as if to communicate that Black people cannot behave appropriately in all-Black environments.

Media and Media Images

The participants revealed that media or media images- including a television show, movies, authors, rappers, entrepreneurs, and an athlete- influenced Black males. Fred gained wisdom from authors Robert Kiyosaki and Donald Trump and stated that Kiyosaki's edition of *Rich Dad, Poor Dad* for children and Kiyosaki and Trump's co-authored book *Why We Want You to be Rich* "just gave me so much information and inspiration for me to become the best I can be" (I1). Rapper Lil Wayne made Theo think about being rich:

Rita: What makes [Lil Wayne] good?

Theo: The stuff he be saying. It makes me think.

Rita: Does it make you think about your life and what you want to do?

Theo: It makes me think about being rich. (I1)

Edward, who kept abreast of various entrepreneurs in the media, wanted to pattern his business steps after Warren Buffet, Carlos Smith, and Sean Combs [also known as P Diddy]:

> I do have a lot of celebrity influences I wanna go after like Warren Buffet, who is now one of the richest men in the world. He's an investor; He's a broker. My second one is Carlos Smith. He's a communications guru. He owns a communication company in Mexico, and his net worth is 48 billion [dollars]. And another one of my influences is Sean Combs [also known as P Diddy] definitely 'cause he started out doing one thing, then realized he can branch [out] and do certain things that tie into that one thing and that blew him up. I am a firm believer that doing one thing can open windows to other things, and you can expand from that. (I1)

Edward was well-informed of successful entrepreneurs.

Racism

Participants mentioned the influence of racism on the academic and career pursuits of African American males. Paul believed, as a Black male, he needed to attain a college education to get a decent-paying job:

> I don't want to say it's still too much racism, but [White people] still look at you [as inferior]. As a Black male, you have to be more. If you're going to be a Black male, you have to be very smart. It's just hard out there for Black males these days. It's hard for jobs, everything, especially education. If you don't have an education, [White people are] going to look at you as nothing basically. That's how I look at it. (I1)

Theo mentioned that it might be better for him to attend a HBCU, due to racism that he may encounter at a predominantly White institution (I2).

I held both focus groups on the Saturday following the election of Barack Obama to the office of President of the United States, and the participants in both sessions mentioned Obama's name several times. However, each group had a dissimilar perspective of Obama's victory. Participants in Will's group perceived Obama's win to be an indication that Black people "can be anything [they] want to [be]" (James, WFG). Will declared, "There's really no one who's saying, 'We can't do this because we are a certain color.' Because we just saw, 'Obama is president'" (WFG). On the other hand, members in Adam's group highlighted some negative effects of the election results. First, the participants commented that Obama was "probably [the] first and last" (Theo, AFG) Black president of the United States because "[White people ain't having [a Black person elected president] no more" (John, AFG). Second, they discussed racist acts that occurred and could happen in the future as a consequence of Obama's election (David, AFG; John, AFG; Adam, AFG).

Participants in Adam's group had negative experiences with Whites as well as harmful perceptions of them. John shared that he "got hit by a car by a White person, and [the White person] just hit [John] and ran" (AFG). Also, John was the recipient of discriminatory comments from a White teacher who currently taught him. Adam recounted that he has been called "nigger" (AFG) by a White boy. Moreover, the respondents said White people look at Blacks as "n-words [meaning niggers]" (John, AFG), "ignorant" (Adam, AFG), and "monkeys" (Theo, AFG). David inserted that, Blacks can "look at the White people that try to act Black" to ascertain "what [Whites]

think about [Blacks]" (AFG). To which, John responded, "[Those Whites] are trying to make fun of us like we don't understand" (AFG). Although he did not go into detail, John also declared, "I don't want to be like no White person."

Parent Questionnaire Responses

Two sets of brothers were among the participants, so 11 different parents completed the questionnaire. While all parents expressed agreement that education was the key to success, four parents also expressed that other keys, such as determination and hard work, were necessary as well. All parents wanted their sons to graduate from college. Adam's mother stated that she did not mind if her son enrolled in a technical college, which is the type of college Adam said he would attend. The parents listed a variety of role models, including parents, other family members, friends of the family, pastors, and prominent Black leaders, for their sons. Also, one parent named an entertainer. While the parents gave an assortment of reasons for choosing the role models, only four parents mentioned education as a reason. Each participant's responses and his parent's questionnaire results were in alignment.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE EASY WAY VERSUS THE HARD WAY: INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

The research questions for this study were:

1) How do middle-class Black males in a predominantly Black high school perceive the role of education in success as well as the career aspirations of Black males?
2) What self-identified factors influence their perceptions on education, success, and careers?

In the first section, I will use the findings to discuss how the middle-class Black male participants perceived the role of education in their personal success as well as in the accomplishments of Black males as a whole. In the second section, I will interpret the findings on how the participants viewed the role that education plays in their respective career aspirations as well as those of African American males. The third section contains a discussion of the factors that influence Black males' perceptions on education, success, and careers. I will conclude this chapter with implications for further study, urban leaders, and those who interact with Black males.

Perceived Role of Education in Success

The participants divulged their viewpoints about the role that education plays in the attainment of success, and the majority of the participants expressed conflicting perceptions about education being the principal means to achievement. While the

respondents did not refute the importance of education, they merely stated that other methods, besides education, can propel people to success. As a matter of fact, the participants rarely mentioned education when defining success. Common indicators of accomplishment included making a difference in the lives of others (Will, I1; Billy, I1; John, I1) and having a job (Lester, I1; David, I1; John, I1). Since we live in a materialistic society, I am not surprised that the participants named status symbols, such as money, houses, and cars, as the most popular gauge of success (Billy, I1; David, I1; James, I1). In an age where cable television and the Internet allow us to peek into the lifestyles of the rich and famous, the status benefits of entertainment and sports that seem easily attained entice Black males (Will, WFG; John, AFG).

The youth, sometimes, are not willing to take the road more difficult to travel, which is the path of academic achievement, when the glamorized highway of sports and entertainment seems to afford more rewards in less time (David, AFG; John, AFG). Young and impressionable minds do not, at times, consider that only a miniscule number of individuals rise to the top of the entertainment or athletic mountain (Will, AFG), and, instead, pursue dreams that are sure to be deferred. Success in rapping or "shooting hoops" may come to some Black males more easily than academic accomplishment. However, the youths do not always realize that, because so many of their peers are interested in music and athletics, the competition in these particular fields is steeper.

Middle-class Black males, who know college-educated adults and have parents who stress the vitality of education, are amongst those who glorify athletes and their way of life (Gary, I1). Gary believed that due to status and fame, Michael Jordan was more successful than an individual with a Master's degree in engineering. Gary's thought

contained evidence of anti-intellectualism (Hofstader, 1966). Hofstader contended that along with democracy, business and the thrill of pursuing wealth, kept Americans from philosophy and deliberations in thought. Hofstader (1966) even stated that people who "joyfully and militantly proclaim their hostility to intellect" (p. 51) were in charge of the U.S. school system. As such, he would probably claim that Gary's perception that a professional athlete due to monetary gain and popularity is more successful than an individual with higher education results from a devaluing of intellect and scholarly activity in American society. Moreover, most participants named material benefits and marketability, rather than intellectual stimulation or growth, as college benefits. When the respondents did mention knowledge as a benefit, they frequently described knowledge as a means to an end, instead of knowledge being the desired end (Edward, I1; Paul, I1; Gary, I1). Education was a tool they could use to accomplish goals that were not scholarly in nature.

Although only a few participants aspired to be athletes or entertainers, the desire to attain a similar amount of financial capital as these media personalities possessed was strong (David, AFG; John, AFG; Adam, AFG; Theo, AFG). Popular culture impedes some young people from grasping the realities of class differences and class struggles. Television shows and movies whose characters do not earn large salaries but still live prosperous lifestyles influence many adolescents (and some adults) to believe that people can easily attain wealth. Entertainers, such as Lil Wayne, made the participants "think about being rich" (Theo, I1), and some respondents could not "waste time" (David, AFG) pursuing graduate, law, or medical school degrees when there was money to be made.

Furthermore, the participants cited Bill Gates several times because, although "he dropped out of school (Theo, I1), he generated a vast sum of income and, consequently, is successful (Edward; I1; Gary, I1; James, I1). The frequency and manner in which the respondents mentioned Gates led me to believe that some participants felt justified in their thoughts about the non-necessity of education in accomplishment because they could identify a well-known wealthy White man who "either dropped out of college or didn't go at all" (Edward, I1). The perception seemed to be, not only are Blacks bypassing education to chase fiscal gain, but Whites are as well; therefore, the participants' thinking affirmed them because, if Whites are doing it, it must be acceptable behavior (McIntosh, 1990).

Thoughts about level of education added to the participants' opposing perspectives about education and success. While the participants communicated that a high school diploma or some aspect of postsecondary training was a requirement for achievement, the majority did not feel a college education was a pre-requisite for success (Fred, I1; Billy, I1; Lester, I1). A common belief was "you can still get a good job, if you don't have a good [college] education [and] you just have a high school diploma" (Theo, I1). Similar to the students in Ogbu's study (2003), the participants made a distinction between being "smart" and "intelligent" and having a college degree (John, I1; Adam, I1; Edward, I1). They believed individuals could succeed with mere intelligence (Fred, I2). African Americans value basic knowledge and common sense in a unique way most likely due to the alternate ways in which Blacks have had to survive in this country. Historically, Blacks had lesser educational opportunities than Whites; therefore, they

relied on wit and rationality to accrue financial gain and eke out a life of contentment in an oppressive society (Anderson, 1988).

Additionally, African Americans who received a college education did not always enjoy similar occupational and fiscal benefits as their White counterparts (Mickelson, 1990; Ogbu, 2003). The participants who had conflicting perceptions about education's role in success had college-educated parents who worked blue-collar jobs (John, I2; Lester, I1; Edward, I1); therefore, they were witnesses that a college degree did not result in the same outcome for all holders. Mickelson (1990) found in her quantitative study that middle-class African Americans simultaneously held *abstract* and *concrete* beliefs concerning education. Abstract beliefs, based on the dominant ideology that education is the key to success, agreed that upward mobility is guaranteed to those who work hard in school. Concrete beliefs, which usually varied according to one's class and race, used personal experiences to interpret the importance of education in upward mobility.

Mickelson (1990) argued that Black students had higher variance between their abstract and concrete beliefs education than White students. While the students in her study expressed the notion that education was the key to success, they also considered that African Americans faced barriers that education cannot always help them overcome. I suspect that, similar to Mickelson's participants, the young men in my study had higher variance between their abstract and concrete beliefs about education than similar Whites.

Furthermore, numerous Blacks do not have college educations for reasons beyond their control, such as admission requirements contingent upon racially biased tests (Fish, 1993); insufficient funds, due to the inequality of wealth (Shapiro, 2004) to pay for an undergraduate degree; or family issues (Fred, I1). Therefore, African Americans may be

reluctant to establish a college degree as a primary indicator of success. Only 14% of Black Americans have a bachelor's degree or higher (US Census Bureau, 2005), so to ascertain that success is contingent upon an undergraduate degree would denigrate the majority of the Black race. Family members whom the respondents esteemed as accomplished individuals (James, I1; Fred, I2) would be among those viewed as inferior for not graduating from college. Since family members had influence over the participants (Gary, I1; Billy, I1, Will, I1), I am not surprised that the participants considered their family members' lifestyles when determining ideas of success.

Additionally, continuing in a tradition that dates back to segregation, the middle-class participants lived in a predominantly Black community, which consisted of college-educated and non-college educated individuals as well as the affluent and those who can barely meet their financial needs (Patillo-McCoy, 1999; Massey & Denton; 1993; Wilson, 1978; US Census Bureau, 2000). The participants' high school educated a population of which 47% are economically-disadvantaged (Governor's Office of School Achievement, 2007) and was situated in an area that contained 51% of low-income families (US Census Bureau, 2000). Therefore, the participants knew people in the community who did not graduate from college, or even high school, but were known and loved by the respondents and deemed accomplished by their standards (Theo, AFG; John, AFG).

Moreover, the high school had a special education program in which at least one of the participants was involved. Relative to White males, Black males are disproportionately placed in the special education program and characterized as having mental and social disorders (Fremon & Hamilton, 1997; Kunjufu, 2005); consequently, to

maintain that education is the principal source of success would discount those who struggle academically within, as well as outside of, the special education program. The participants believed that the underachievement of their peers was not entirely the result of a lack of effort (Fred, WFG; Will, WFG); therefore, to devalue these individuals would betray their "brothers," which goes against the code of loyalty that many African American males embraced (Franklin, 1994).

Perceived Role of Education in Career Aspirations

The participants had varying ideas on the role that education plays in the career pursuits of Black males. However, I can sum up their ideas by stating that the respondents believed that, while some educational training is essential for the employment of African American males, a college education is helpful but unnecessary. The participants felt that Black males could get well-paying jobs without a college degree. In the following subsections, I will use the findings to discuss more specifically the participants' thoughts on the necessity of a college education and a high school education.

College Education

Despite their feelings about the non-necessity of a college degree for Black males as a whole, all participants planned to attend college- whether it is a four-year institution or a technical school. Each believed that a college education was instrumental to his career goals and each respondent consistently expressed that a college curriculum would be preparation for their occupational aspirations (Gary, I1; James, I1; Phillipe, I1). When I shared this finding with my older sister, she suggested that I explore the validity of their claims by asking about the preparatory steps made towards an undergraduate degree. I

took my sister's advice and found that the majority, most of whom were 11th or 12th graders, had not adequately prepared for college. Additionally, I found significance in Adam's remarks about his not attending college although they expressed plans to do so. Adam had insight pertaining to the post-high school paths of his peers, for he, as well as other participants (Paul, I1; John, AFG; Theo, AFG), communicated closely with persons who previously attended his school. Adam's comments, the participants' lack of college preparation, and the low college entry rate (53%) of Black males (Joint Center Data Bank, 2003) lead me to believe that some middle-class Black males who aspire to go to college do so in word only. This discovery is not astonishing to me because (1) the social status that college reflects makes college matriculation an appropriate goal, and (2) personal experience. I went to high school with several African American males who spoke of college plans that in no way materialized. Also, anecdotally as an experienced educator of predominantly Black students, I have encountered countless African American males who tell me they are going to college but never do.

I believe a contributing factor to this phenomenon is that the dominant ideology, which many Whites as well Blacks embrace, promotes the notion that college is the preferable next step after graduating from high school. As such, even though some educators do not believe their Black pupils are college material (Ferguson, 2001), most Black students are instructed to seek higher education at four-year institutions. I was one who advocated college matriculation for all my students, and teachers like me may cajole our learners to say they are going to college when, in reality, that is not their plan. Students may feel pressured to align their career aspirations with philosophy of teachers and other school personnel (Edward, I1). Feelings of inferiority may result for those who

deviate from the philosophy of teachers and counselors. In addition, several parents want their children to attend colleges, as indicated by the parent questionnaires. The findings for this study showed that middle-class parents were a strong influence on their sons (Edward; I1; Fred, I1; Lester, I1); therefore, the participants' existing goals to attend college possibly reflected their parents' desires more than their own. If the respondents do not fully share the dream of achieving higher education, as their lack of college preparation implied (Super, 1990; Vondracek & Skorikov, 1997), then they may never attain the dream.

Technical College

While the majority of the participants planned to matriculate through four-year institutions and have careers that required a college education, two participants, Adam and Edward, wanted to attend technical colleges and seek employment in areas that did not require an undergraduate degree. Another factor that makes these participants unique to the group is their current experience in regard to their career interests. Edward owned a business that customizes cars, and Adam has professional equipment, which he used to produce music for his amateur rap group as well as other recreational artists (Edward, I1; Adam, I1). Because of the participants' early discovery of and success in their areas of talent, they unashamedly plan to forego the popular four-college plan and rather, sought a technical school that would afford them specialized skills that were directly related to enhancing their existing careers.

While reflecting on this discovery, the practice of andragogy came to mind. Knowles' (1973) andragogical model took into account that adult learners bring into the classroom a variety of life experience useful for making meaningful connections.

Additionally, adults engaged in learning when they needed knowledge that would aid in the effective completion of a practical task. Adam and Edward exemplified what Knowles came to realize. As socially embedded individuals (Coleman, 1988), students never had a tabula rasa contrary to a once popular thought. By the time they attend high school, their mental slate is certainly anything but blank. Children, like adults, can enter the classroom desiring to learn only the topics that will advance their current work activities or interests.

Forcing young people to learn undesired topics can result in disconnectedness between student and school (Adam, I1). Adam perceived that his high school curriculum was unrelated to his career aspirations because "nothing in school involves what I'm doing" (I1). Edward's statement, "I'm learning stuff in school I'm not going to use when I get older at all" (I2), reflected that his thoughts were similar to Adam's beliefs on the matter. Consequently, since Adam failed a grade level and Edward had not passed at least one course, it is possible that the perceived irrelevance of the schoolwork contributed to the participants' academic struggles.

High School Education

While all participants expressed that a college education was instrumental to their career plans, almost all participants had either *conflicting* thoughts (Will, I1; Billy, I1) or felt their high school education was *unrelated* (Adam, I1; Paul, I1; Will, I1). The discrepancy between the perceived necessity of a high school and college education implied that the participants had unrealistic expectations of college. They may be ignorant of the fact that all courses required for a college degree are not in perfect alignment with the major academic discipline. Math majors, for instance, may be

required to take courses in physical education and English because four-year institutions promote balanced learning, as opposed to specialized training. Like the participants who desired to attend technical colleges, several four-year college-bound respondents were cognizant of the skills needed to work in their career field and seemed to appreciate the learning of those skills only (Billy, I1; David, I1; Theo, I1).

Ogbu (2003) found that what he called “missing connections” (p. 254) affected students. The missing connections included the following:

a) Schooling is not perceived as a preparation for the job market.
b) Inadequate knowledge of educational requirements of future jobs. (Ogbu, 2003, p. 254)

First, Ogbu discovered that the middle-class Black students in Shaker Heights generally did not view their schooling as preparation for future careers. Some high school students in the study felt that they were too young to be concerned with career plans. Second, Ogbu (2003) found that the students did not comprehend the educational requirements needed to work in their future career fields. Students who desired to be engineers did not realize that higher level math courses were a necessary component of career preparation.

Overall, the participants in this study acknowledged the positive relationship between high school proficiency and skills needed for college and careers. Contradictory to Ogbu’s (2003) findings, participants perceived school as preparation for their future occupational fields and had adequate knowledge of educational requirements for their desired jobs (Lester, I1; Will, I1, Billy, I2). However, while the participants believed certain courses prepared them for employment, the respondents did not perceive that every course contributed to their job readiness (John, I1; Will, I1; David, I1). It is worth

noting that a few courses, which the participants did not associate with their career aspirations, actually related to their employment interests (John, I1; David, I1; Adam, I1). John, who spoke of the non-importance of language arts skills, did not believe that they would help his capacity to effectively communicate in his planned career as an archeologist. This goes back to the respondents' lack of understanding of how perfectly aligned occupational knowledge as well related skills determine college and career success.

The common perspective that only a portion of the high school curriculum related to their career plans may give insight into the underachievement of some Black males in school. Theo, who was a straight A student in elementary school, was not performing to the same level in high school (I2) because, he said, of a lack of interest in some classes. Unfortunately, apathetic attitudes toward education among Black male students are not a foreign concept to me, which, as stated in the first chapter, was a motivation for this study. I frequently engage in discussions with fellow African Americans- educators as well as concerned community members- about the value (or lack thereof) that our children place on education. The lack of discrepancy between the manner in which many low-income Black students and their middle-class counterparts view education warrants further exploration. Some middle-class participants in this study expressed that they and their peers feel that college is "too long" (David, AFG) and "life's too short" (John, AFG) to spend it in school. David confessed that "I don't want to go to college for eight years; that's why I don't want to be a lawyer…That's a waste of my time" (AFG). David had a 3.5 GPA, took AP and honors classes, and was a member of the National Honors

Society, so his perception was not an outcome of intellectual inability or lack of academic success in school.

Again, Knowles (1973) andragogical model provided insight into this situation. Some learners did not focus on understanding the variety of content knowledge typically taught in grade schools. Rather, these individuals mastered certain concepts to a predetermined end, such as solving a personal problem or improving a job-required skill. Possibly, some Black males desire more autonomy in choosing their path of learning in order that their educational experience will be more interesting and meaningful to their career and life goals. Like adults, many students enter school with an agenda- though it may be more social than academic- and desire their school encounters to help them achieve their personal plans.

Therefore, the misalignment between the school's agenda and that of the students may contribute to underachievement and negative perceptions of schooling. Participants who failed grade levels and/or courses currently or at one time expressed apathetic attitudes toward school (John, I1; Adam, I1; Edward, I1; Lester, I1). Deschenes, Cuban, and Tyack (2001) posited that some students would benefit from educational practices and elements such as curriculum and instructional practices that considered the background of the student. They also suggested that, instead of following the "age-graded" model, which required learners to progress from grade to grade, students may benefit more from a system that set personal benchmarks for learning. Rather than having pupils follow a generic course of study based on their ages, school personnel could create for students individualized programs of learning that took in account personal information such as their career aspirations.

There used to be a day when students asked, “Why do we need to learn this?” and, whether or not they received an acceptable answer, the students still learned the information. A vast amount of pupils- both low-income and middle-class- in the predominantly Black schools in which I have worked in the past seven years have a varying perspective. If the students do not perceive for themselves that the information is worth learning, then many do not put forth the effort to do so and, thus, earn low grades. Do the students lack the ability? Of course not. They lack the motivation. Ogbu (1978, 1998, 2003) argued that community forces, such as the African American community’s perceptions of the job ceiling and experiences with racism and discrimination, impacted the academic pursuits of Black youth.

However, barriers that Whites put in place are not the sole impediments to some students’ progress. Another hindrance is the lack of self-efficacy influenced by the African American males’ socially embedded existence (Coleman, 1998). Society reinforces negative perceptions about what it means to be Black and male. These unconstructive thoughts about stereotypical Black male behavior are a byproduct of racism and discrimination, but the difference is, unlike the aforementioned barriers such as job ceilings, Blacks join Whites in embracing and perpetuating adverse mindsets about African Americans and their school and career abilities.

Self-Identified Influences on Perceptions of Education, Success, and Careers

The participants identified relationships, elements of the environmental culture, and media and media images as influences on the academic and career perspectives of African American males. All participants identified relationships with their family

members as influences on their personal perspectives about education and careers. This finding is in alignment with the studies highlighted in the review of literature in *Chapter 2*. In Paa and McWhirter's (2000) work on the perceived influences of high school students' career goals, they also found that parents were among the most prevalent influences. Moreover, Mickelson's (1990) study on the abstract and concrete beliefs of education revealed that the academic and employment experiences of family members affect students' perceptions about education and careers.

The middle-class participants had many distressing comment about the perceived norms of the environmental culture in which Black males operate. The participants believed that the perceived norms influenced African American males' views on education, success, and careers. The first perceived norm was that African American males primarily filled positions that did not require a college education because they wanted to take the "easy way out" (Paul, WFG; Phillipe, WFG). People often see family business ownership and loyalty as a positive endeavor. Numerous individuals gain financial stability from working in their family's business. However, the participants described the actions of individuals who expanded their family's business as taking the easy way out. Coleman (1998) claimed that social capital within a family affected the children's academic outcomes. Simply put, social capital is the benefit one received from his or her social environment as well as those who operate within that environment.

Although owning a family business is one form of social capital, the participants' parents, who espoused the belief that education was a necessity of success, provided another form. Their social capital influenced- whether successfully or not-their sons' convictions about college being the preferable next step after high school. Similar to

Paul, the perceptions of brothers Gary and Phillipe reflected evidence of social capital offered by parents. While Gary shared, "[Going to college] means that you're smart and that you don't have to take the easy way out to try to make money" (I1), Phillipe expounded, "There are lots of people who go and try to find the easy way out and just play sports for a living" (I1).

Theo summed up the mindset about Black males, occupations, and education: "Everything's about taking the easy way out though. Nobody wants to go the hard way. They just want to take the easy way" (AFG). I find it odd that young men who live in a Black community, which is full of doctors, lawyers, political figures, teachers, and other prominent people, consider that jobs requiring a low level of education are typical jobs of African American males. Additionally, the participants did not express that the non-college educated adults in their communities were taking the easy way out by working blue-collar jobs, so why did the respondents claim that Black males as a whole ordinarily chose to pursue a painless route?

It is possible that stereotypical images, projected by the media as well as numerous of White and Black persons, overshadowed what the participants knew to be true though their personal experience. I do not doubt that the respondents knew a vast amount of Black males who worked in non-college educated positions, but, I got the impression that the participants had negative perceptions of the educational level and work habits of Black males. During the focus groups, the respondents fluently spoke of African American males who did not finish school (Theo, AFG); were interested in entertainment or sports because of the lack of educational requirements (Gary, WFG; Adam, AFG); and worked as barbers (Fred, WFG) or Wal-mart employees (Paul, WFG)

instead of attending college. Yet, only two participants commented that they knew Black males who work as white collar professionals (Will, WFG; Fred, WFG). Again, since the participants resided in a predominantly affluent Black community, I know they encountered numerous Black males in academic positions. I find this to be extremely disturbing because it appears that the respondents, like other African Americans, readily embraced certain despairing information about our race, allowed it to shape their reality, and did little to alter this widespread negativity.

The second perceived norm was that Blacks were not as interested as Whites in academics, and intellectual success was more associated with White behavior than Black. The middle-class participants described predominately African American schools, including the high school they attend, as non-scholarly environments. The respondents believed that their educational experiences would be more academically-focused if they attended predominately White high schools such as those located in the northern region of their county. The participants felt "the whole mindset [at predominately White schools] is just different…[Whites] focus on different things, unlike football and band and the things we put so much pride into" (Paul, WFG). The troubling fact is, although the respondents made their claims with compelling convictions, the participants made the allegations without ever visiting one of the predominately White schools they mentioned. They counted as truth information obtained through hearsay. Similar to the first perceived norm, the participants seemed to have an idea of typical Black behavior and accepted anything that reinforced this idea without investigating its validity.

Morris and Monroe (2009) argued that scholars should consider geographical locales when empirically investigating Black student achievement. Specifically, as the

region that serves as home to most African Americans, the U.S. South- as it relates to race and academic attainment- warranted more exploration because it may provide further insight into the educational performances of Black youths. The remarks of my participants, who resided in the South, supported Morris and Monroe's conjecture that geography impacted academic perceptions. Not only did the participants think that the school climate in the northern part of their county had more intellectual focus than that in the southern part in which they live, but respondents also believed the U.S. North had more of an educational focal point than the U.S. South (James, WFG).

Although James never lived in the North, he considered that its academic climate was superior to that in the South based on the media. Furthermore, David, who formerly lived in Oklahoma, stated that, until he moved to the South, "I've never seen people cuss out loud at the teachers; people walk out of the classroom" (AFG). *Cuss* is a colloquialism for "curse." David thought the educational climate at his school was subpar to the climate at his former Oklahoma school. James and David's convictions affirmed Morris and Monroe's claims that various geographical areas may influence varying educational attitudes and behaviors.

Racism

Some of the middle-class participants gave the impression that they are more affected than others by perceptions of typical Black male occupations and attitudes toward schooling as well as other perceived norms (i.e. hip-hop attire and colloquial speech). Will, who persisted in speaking articulately although some peers ridiculed him (Will, I1), and James, who strived to make academic gains even though his classmates did not put forth equal effort (James, I1), chose to rise above the perceived norms and

forge their own path. Others, such as Adam, who said that he and his classmates “act so ignorant in class” (Adam, AFG) and John, who declared that “life’s too short” to spend time pursuing higher education, seem to derive a part of their identity from the perceived norms.

The most disconcerting case was David. Although he was an AP and honors student with a 3.5 GPA, David had internalized the stereotypical beliefs about Black males (David, AFG). David felt that African American males had zero confidence in their intellectual abilities; therefore, they pursued careers that do not require higher education. Furthermore, David thought that Black students benefited by going to schools with Whites because they helped African Americans act appropriately (David, AFG). (I have heard similar sentiments expressed from my Black high school students. When asked what could increase the academic focus in their school culture, my students replied, “More White students.”) Combined with structural impediments that privilege Whites (McIntosh, 1990), the negative internalization affected David’s level of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is “an individual’s perception about his or her ability to successfully perform a given behavior or task” (Rollins & Valdez, 2006) when considering internal insecurities and externally imposed limitations.

David’s uncertainty about his ability to work in a political position related to his observation that only one Black man achieved the office of U.S. president (David, AFG). This observation coupled with his internalized ideas about the capability of African American males nullified the achievement that he has already attained. Barak (1981) suggested that an individual’s perceived ability was a better determinant of career interests than actual ability. In other words, it is probable that a student can possess the

actual ability to perform challenging job duties; however, if he or she has a low degree of perceived ability in this area, it is extremely likely that he or she will choose a job that requires a lower measure of skill. As such, it is possible that David will not pursue a career in politics if he does not alter his perceptions.

David, along with the other participants whose behavior and remarks reflected the perceived norms, also mentioned personal and vicarious experiences of racism. Therefore, it is feasible that the racist encounters affected their willingness to pattern parts of their behavior after the perceived norms. As victims of racism, the respondents may have chosen to retaliate by separating themselves from White culture. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) argued that Black students who wished to distinguish themselves from Whites developed an oppositional identity. By projecting an oppositional identity, the students rejected behaviors that were popular among Whites (i.e. John's comment that "I don't want to be like no white person" [AFG]) and, instead, engage, at times, in behavior upon which dominant society frowns.

Implications for Further Study

Mickelson (1990) found that students' concrete beliefs about education affected their academic achievement. Unlike Mickelson's work, this study did not seek to determine if the participants' beliefs about education impacted their academic performance. However, since the participants who had conflicting perceptions were a motley crew when it came to academic performance (i.e. one is a 4.0 student in AP and honors courses while another failed a grade and has a 2.3 GPA) and social behavior, I believe the relationship between educational beliefs and performance warrants further study.

David- the academically accomplished student who experienced a decrease in self-efficacy due to an internalization of stereotypical beliefs about Black males - coined the expression *accidental intake*. From David's usage of the term, accidental intake occurred when people's surroundings unintentionally influenced them. I believe it was David's explanation for the effect that his social environment had on him. David's concept has merits because our social environment affects all of us in ways that we can and cannot detect (Coleman, 1998). If there is a way to investigate the existence and effects of accidental intake, I believe it could further inform our understanding of the interplay between individuals and their environment.

All the participants expressed plans to attend technical or liberal arts colleges. Following up with the participants' post-high school plans would add to educational and vocational research because it may provide insight on the relationship between the academic and career perceptions explored in this study and authentic educational and occupational pursuits. It could also validate my theory that students, who do not genuinely plan to attend college, feel pressured at times to express otherwise knowing that is not their intent.

Morris and Monroe (2009) called for scholars to explore how the "nexus of race and place" (p. 21) affected Black student achievement. In particular, the researchers encouraged more study on how dynamics in the U.S. South influenced the educational attitudes and performance of African American youth. Similar to Anyon (2005), Morris and Monroe (2009) asserted that a region's economic, political, and social policies affected schooling. The beliefs of the participants (David, AFG; James, WFG) in this study supported Morris and Monroe's conjecture that geography impacts academic

beliefs and behavior; therefore, I echo the call for more investigation of how the various types of policy in the South intersect to influence the intellectual mindsets of Black youth.

Implications for Urban Leaders

Many of the high school-aged participants did not believe that their current schooling was preparation for their future occupational pursuits. Although several adolescents of different racial and class backgrounds would probably agree that their schooling is not preparation for career goals, they do not take the license to disengage as many African American youth, particularly males, do. Scholars (Gay, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Franklin, 1994; Majors & Billson, 1992; Kunjufu, 2005; Ogbu, 2003; Osborne, 1999) offered various reasons- such as lack of culturally relevant teaching, cool pose, and disidentification- as to why Black males take such liberties. Culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1994) encouraged educators to relate the curriculum to the students' culture in order to promote lesson understanding and student affirmation. Cool pose (Majors & Billson, 1992) was a coping strategy in which Black males defined their sense of self worth outside of societal norms. Disidentification was a protective strategy that allowed African American males to privilege social goals over academic ones to avoid frustration from not attaining educational success. However, educators remain in the dark about how to adequately address their unique learning needs.

Findings from this study suggested that practitioners should consider the students' individual career choices when providing instruction. Therefore, in addition to culturally relevant teaching, educators can present *occupationally relevant instruction*, which sets the students' individual career interests in the center of the curriculum and connects their

interests to the state standards in order to provide more meaningful learning, which will serve as preparation for future employment. Occupationally relevant instruction is not equal to vocational education, for I do not advocate the placement of Black males into classes that merely teach vocational skills. Rather, I am suggesting that, as teachers instruct students in algebra, biology, language arts, etc, more of a focus should be on how the subject skills will prepare students for future employment. Teachers should be cognizant of each student's career aspirations and use that knowledge to provide relevance for the instructional content. Educators should consider providing such instruction to high school students in particular and see if the result is more alignment between the agendas of students and school personnel.

Furthermore, I join Cross (1991) and Tatum (1997) in arguing that Black students should acknowledge and develop their racial identity in a healthy manner. In my experience in predominately African American schools, developing a positive racial identity is not a part of the curriculum. For some time, I have advocated mandatory school courses that provide Black students the opportunity to discuss what it means to be Black in American culture. If African American students do not learn to critically judge what media and other parts of society say about them- as well as what the students say about themselves- then many may continue to internalize the negativity that is constantly associated with Blacks, especially Black males.

Ogbu (2003) found that middle-class African American students believed that Whites are intellectually superior to Blacks. These young people are not the only Black youths who previously felt or currently feel that Whites are superior to Blacks in some capacity. During the 1940's, Dr. Kenneth Clark along with his wife Dr. Mamie Clark

used Black and White dolls to ascertain the effects of segregation on African American children (Library of Congress, 2004). The psychologists found that Black children repeatedly attributed positive characteristics to White dolls and negative features to Black ones. Kiri Davis (2007) recently recreated the Clarks' experiment and attained similar outcomes. African American children in her study associated desirable characteristics with the White doll and preferred it over the Black doll.

Ogbu's (2003) participants also perceived that African Americans would never fully assimilate within American culture, due to racist beliefs, and Gallagher's (2004) assertions confirmed their thoughts. Gallagher posited that nonblack society is expanding the boundaries of Whiteness to include previously omitted groups, such as Asians and light-skinned Latinos. Whereas common racial descriptors were "white" and "non-white," the new descriptors will eventually be "black" and "nonblack." Counteracting the denigration of Blacks must be a part of the school curriculum if we expect African American students to rise above deconstructive perceived norms and reach their potentials. Urban leaders should include courses that will empower Black, as well as other minority, students realizing that the school cannot ignore the psychological needs of students.

Furthermore, the participants believed that teachers contributed to the academically-inferior climate of predominately Black schools (Gary, WFG; Phillipe, WFG; John, AFG). Only teachers, who believe that African American males can overcome the despairing stereotypes, should educate this marginalized population. Urban leaders should also provide continuous professional development on the Pygmalion effect (Tauber, 1998) and additional research about the effect of teacher expectations on student

performance. The faculty and staff must have leadership that focuses on tearing down stereotypes and negative perceptions about Black males if the students are going to benefit. Urban leaders should be committed to staying abreast of the latest research on educating African American males and be willing to implement innovative strategies that may aid in the success of Black males.

Implications for Those who Touch Young Black Males

I am guilty of adding to existing negativity concerning Black males, and I, too, have some not-so-pleasant perceived norms about African American culture. As the aunt of a precious Black male adolescent, the godmother of three African American males, an educator, and concerned member of the Black community, I must challenge my own beliefs and be cognizant of the words that I express. The participants in this study felt that they would receive a better education if they were students at a predominately White school. The respondents based their assumptions primarily on hearsay because only one of them had set foot in one of the mentioned predominately White schools. Anybody who contributes to the upbringing of Black males must be careful of the messages we convey about them and the African American community as a whole. In her book, *Racetalk: Racism Hiding in Plain Sight* (2005), Myers discovered that Blacks often included racist ideas in their conversations and expression, which reinforced negative self-images. Speech meant to be harmless was, in essence, extremely harmful.

Moreover, African American males should learn that Blackness is more than observable features. Common attire, peer selections, speech, music, career choices, and so on do not substantiate an individual's Blackness. As an African American female at the internalization stage of Cross' (1991) model of Black identity, I can include members

of various racial groups in my circle of friends, speak articulately, enjoy listening to Bon Jovi, and still be authentically Black. I am not, for the most part, looking to project outward indicators that I am a sista (Black colloquial for “sister”). My Blackness is the summation of my deep appreciation and admiration for my Black ancestors who were strong enough to survive that awful, inhumane voyage and flourish in a society that put policies in place to keep them powerless and subservient. My Blackness is also the zenith of the rich, nurturing upbringing provided by my parents and the current interactions that I enjoy with all family members today. No, I do not need to follow any stereotypes because Black is what I choose to embrace and not indicators I decide to display. Our African American males need to learn the same lesson.

Finally, Tatum (1997) included the titles and descriptions of several pieces of literature for children and adolescents that will help teach our youth about themselves and Black culture. At times, instead of watching biased situational comedies or movies that reinforce negative stereotypes, our family nights should include a more meaningful experience of making sure our children’s perceptions about education and careers will inevitably lead them to success.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Preplanned Questions for the First Interview

1. When you hear people say “education is the key to success,” what do you think?
2. What do you want to accomplish while in school?
3. How did you decide on your school goals?
4. What do you want to do when you finish high school?
5. How did you decide on these plans?
6. How are your school goals related to your career plans?
7. What have people told you about the relationship between education and jobs?
8. What will you tell your children about education and jobs?
9. Who do you ask for advice?
10. Who do you think should be on the cover of *Success* magazine?
11. Describe how you are doing in school.

APPENDIX B

Preplanned Questions for the Second Interview

1. Why is it necessary that you go to college?
2. What does a person in your desired career choice do?
3. What level of education is needed for your career?
4. What have you done to prepare for college?
5. What are the benefits of a college education?
6. Are the benefits of a college education different from the benefits of a high school education?
7. Do all people whom you think are successful have a college education?
8. Whose opinion do you value the most?
9. Whose views on education have influenced you the most?

APPENDIX C

Preplanned Questions for the Focus Groups

1. What are some careers/jobs that the Black males you know plan on having?
2. What are some careers/jobs that Black men normally have?
3. What factors do Black males think about when choosing their career/jobs?
4. What grades do your Black male friends want to earn in their classes?
5. What grades do your Black male friends normally earn on their report cards?
6. What factors do you think affect their grades?
7. Do you think Black males consider their identity when choosing a career/job?
8. Do you think Black males consider their identity when choosing how to act in school?

APPENDIX D

Parent Questionnaire

Georgia State University
Department of Educational Policy Studies
Parent/Guardian Questionnaire

Researchers: Rita D. Williams, GSU Student
Dr. Eric Freeman, GSU Faculty Advisor

Parent/Guardian's Pseudonym _____
Participant's Pseudonym_____

Please answer the following:

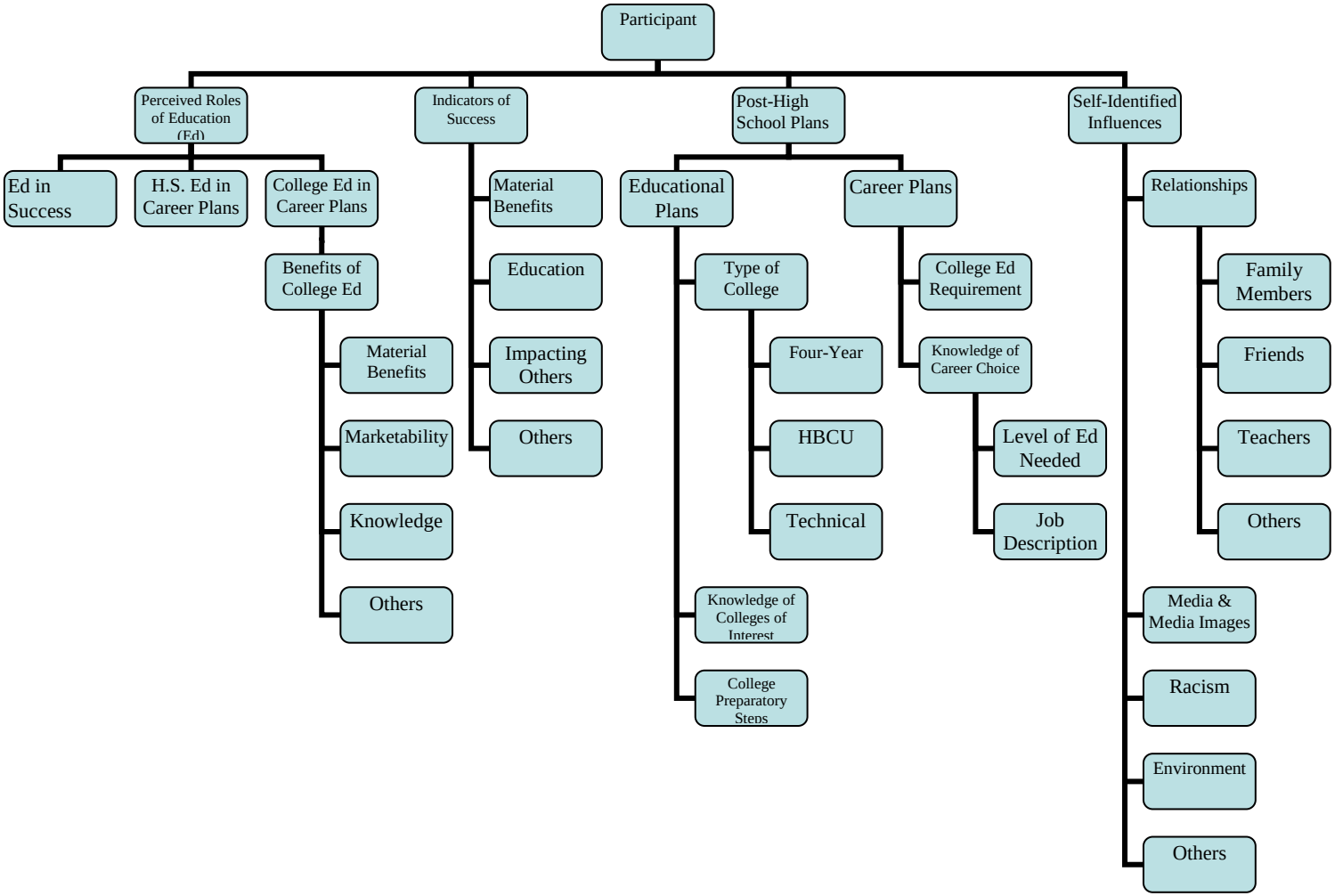
1. How do you feel about the statement "Education is the key to success"?
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

2. What would you like to see your son do after he graduates from high school?
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

3. Name 3 good role models for your son and briefly explain why you chose them.
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

APPENDIX E

Hierarchy of Codes



APPENDIX F

A Portion of Fred's Organizational Display

PERCEIVED ROLE OF EDUCATION

Perceived Role of Education in Success- CONFLICTING- (Fred)

I think education is the key to success because…if we didn't have education we probably wouldn't be where we are today. Like, for instance, an organized society. We wouldn't have common sense. I think education provides the basis to it. So I really think education is important. (16, I1)

In my mind a level of education you need for success is to at least graduate from college. Once you graduate from college, then you'll know how the world really is. Then, you'll be able to put those skills that you learned in college out into the real world into your career. (133, I1)

Rita: Do you believe all successful people have an education?
Fred: No. Some do good even though they may have dropped out because of family circumstances. Maybe a baby or something. Like some dropped out but they still did well because they still were focused and maintained their goals in life. So they did eventually achieve them. Maybe it was a lot harder for them than the ones who did have a college education, but they still rose to the top.
Rita: When you say rise to the top, what are some indications that one has risen to the top?
Fred: Mmm, risen to the top I guess would be peace of mind. Not running all the time. You know, um, a nice salary I guess you could say. And also, you know, keeping peace within the family. I guess you say rise to the top is, you know, having peace. (394, I1)

I think most people who do get an education can…will succeed in life at least better than the people who just gave up and didn't want to try. But I think success, cause if you graduate from high school and just stop, then you have education, but you didn't succeed. Unless that was your goal, just to get out of high school. But I think education is really important for you just to keep going cause you know you learn something new every day, so I think you should keep adding to the knowledge you already know. (280, I1)

No. I do have some family that are very successful, and they did not go to college. Their family might have needed them to work for that time, so they might of made it to college the first time or when they had supposed to. I think college is more like another access of higher education. It's another connection, another learning tool. But if you're very dedicated, very articulate, smart and intelligent, I think some people don't really need college. Some people can start right after they are finished with their high school. (248, I2)

APPENDIX G

Summary Display of Education Views

Educational Views	**Role of Ed in Success**	**Role of HS Ed in Career Plans**	**Role of Col Ed in Career Plans**
Adam(2.3 GPA)	Conflicting	Unrelated	Instrumental
Billy(At least 3.0)	Conflicting	Conflicting	Instrumental
David (3.469)	Conflicting	Conflicting	Instrumental
Fred(4.0)	Conflicting	Instrumental	Instrumental
James(3.0)	Conflicting	Instrumental	Instrumental
Paul(2.7)	Instrumental	Conflicting	Instrumental
Theo(2.9)	Conflicting	Conflicting	Instrumental
Will(At least 3.0)	Conflicting	Conflicting	Instrumental
Edward	Conflicting	Conflicting	Instrumental
Gary	Conflicting	Instrumental	Instrumental
John(below 3.0)	Conflicting	Conflicting	Instrumental
Lester	Conflicting	Instrumental	Instrumental
Phillipe	Instrumental	Instrumental	Instrumental
GROUP SUMMARY	Conflicting- 11 Instrumental - 2	Conflicting- 7 Instrumental - 5 Unrelated- 1	Instrumental - 13

APPENDIX H

Summary Display of College Benefits

Benefits of College	**Material Benefits**	**Marketability**	**Social Benefits**	**Knowledge**	**Family Benefits**	**Others**
Adam(2.3 GPA)	X	X				
Billy(At least 3.0)	X	X	X	X		
David(3.469)	X	X				
Fred(4.0)			X	X	X	
James(3.0)	X	X		X		
Paul(2.7)	X			X		Respect
Theo(2.9)		X	X			
Will(At least 3.0)	X	X		X		
Edward				X		Networking
Gary				X	X	
John(below 3.0)	X	X				
Lester						
Phillipe	X	X				
GROUP SUMMARY	8	8	3	7	2	2

APPENDIX I

Summary Displays of Indicators of Success and Successful People

Indicators of Success	**Material Benefits**	**Have a Job**	**Education**	**Intelligence/ Wisdom**	**Have a Family**	**Career Achievement**	**Making a Difference**	**Ambition**	**Other**
Adam				X		X			
Billy	X	X	X				X		X
David	X	X			X				X
Fred	X		X					X	X
James	X						X		
Paul	X			X	X				X
Theo	X					X			
Will							X		
Edward				X			X		X
Gary	X					X			
John	X	X		X			X		
Lester		X						X	X
Phillipe			X						
GROUP SUMMARY	8	4	3	4	2	3	5	2	7

Successful People Breakdown	
Entertainers	11 (Winfrey-3)(Lil Wayne-2)
Athletes	3 (Jordan-2)
Business Moguls	4 (Gates-3)
Black Pioneers	4 (Obama- 3)
Family Members	9 (Father- 4; Brother- 3)
Teachers	1

APPENDIX J

Summary Display of Educational Plans

Educational Plans	**Four Year College**	**HBCU**	**Technical School**	**Beyond Undergrad**	**Adequate Steps for College**
Adam(2.3)			X		No
Billy(At least 3.0)	X	X			No
David(3.469)	X				Yes
Fred(4.0)	X			X (Graduate)	Yes
James(3.0)	X			X(Medical)	Yes
Paul(2.7)		X			Yes
Theo(2.9)	X				No
Will(At least 3.0)	X				Yes
Edward	X	X	X		Yes
Gary	X				No
John(below 3.0)	X				No
Lester	X				Didn't Ask
Phillipe	X				No
GROUP SUMMARY	11	3	2	2	Yes- 6 No- 6

APPENDIX K

Summary Display of Career Plans

Career Plans	**Require College Ed**	**Does Not Require College Ed**	**Shared Adequate Knowledge of Career/Job Des**	**Adequately Knows Level of Ed Needed**	**Taken Steps for Career**
Adam(2.3)		X	Yes	No	Yes
Billy(At least 3.0)	X		Yes	Yes	
David(3.469)	X		No	Didn't Ask	
Fred(4.0)	X		Yes	Yes	Yes
James(3.0)	X		Yes	Yes	
Paul(2.7)	X		Yes	Yes	Yes
Theo(2.9)	X		No	No	
Will(At least 3.0)	X		Yes	Yes	
Edward		X	Yes	Yes	Yes
Gary	X		Yes	Didn't Ask	
John(below 3.0)	X		Yes	Yes	
Lester	X		Yes	Yes	Yes
Phillipe	X		Yes	No	
GROUP SUMMARY	11	2	Yes- 11 No- 2	Yes- 8 No- 3	Yes- 5

APPENDIX L

Summary of Self-Identified Influences

Self-Identified Influences	**Relationships**	**Social Surroundings**	**Media & Media Images**	**Racism**
Adam(2.3)	X		X	
Billy(At least 3.0)	X		X	
David(3.469)	X	X		
Fred(4.0)	X		X	
James(3.0)	X		X	
Paul(2.7)	X			X
Theo(2.9)	X		X	X
Will(At least 3.0)	X			
Edward	X		X	
Gary	X		X	
John(below 3.0)	X			
Lester	X			
Phillipe	X			
GROUP SUMMARY	13	1	7	2

APPENDIX M

Summary Display of Relationships Which Influence Participants

Relationship Breakdown	**Parents**	**Other Family Members**	**Teachers**	**Friends**	**Others**
Adam(2.3)		X			
Billy(At least 3.0)	X	X			
David(3.469)	X	X			
Fred(4.0)	X	X	X		Mentors&Friend's Parents
James(3.0)	X	X			
Paul(2.7)	X	X	X		
Theo(2.9)	X	X			Friend's Brother
Will(At least 3.0)	X	X		X	
Edward	X	X			Godparents; Godbrother; Grandmothers' Friends
Gary	X				
John(below 3.0)	X	X			
Lester	X			X	
Phillipe	X				
GROUP SUMMARY	12	10	2	2	3

APPENDIX N

Summary of Media and Media Images which Influence Participants

Media & Media Image Breakdown	**TV Show/Movie**	**Athlete**	**Entertainer**	**Entrepreneurs**
Adam(2.3)			X	
Billy(At least 3.0)	X			
David(3.469)				
Fred(4.0)				X
James(3.0)				
Paul(2.7)				
Theo(2.9)	X			
Will(At least 3.0)				
Edward				X
Gary		X		
John(below 3.0)				
Lester				
Phillipe				
GROUP SUMMARY	2	1	1	2