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What are the Educational Aspirations of African American Males Raised in Mother-Only Households?

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WHAT ARE THE EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES

RAISED IN MOTHER-ONLY HOUSEHOLDS?

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

by

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Dream Deferred

What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up
Like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore–
and then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over–
like a syrupy sweet?
Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load
Or does it explode?

Langston Hughes

Acknowledgements

Three score and five years ago, when I started this venture, or at least it seems that long, I was uncertain that I would ever reach this phase of completion. As the old saying goes, "It takes a community to raise a child," it also "took a community of support to get Pat Chavis through this journey.

From the onset, the faculty and staff at Virginia Commonwealth University have been most supportive and encouraging. I would like especially to thank Dr. Colleen Thoma, Dr. John Marshak, and Dr. William Bosher for their patience and guidance and willingness to serve on my dissertation committee. Their support was priceless.

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Without a doubt, I must thank my son, Jesse III. He calmed my fears and wiped away many tears along the way. His faith in me and his constant reminder that I was not a quitter kept me on the "straight and narrow" roadway to completion. To him I say I love you and I'm so proud to be your mother. Jesse was my inspiration for this study. He is an African American male and has lived in a mother-only household since age 13. This admission will become much clearer as you read this study.

To my best friend, Linda Minor, thanks for hanging in there with me. I know it was hard sometimes and I often feared the strain it would have on our relationship. True friendship stands the test of time.

To Dr. Linda Underwood Schweigert, the superintendent of the school system where I have been employed for the past 40 years, I will give you part of this degree. You have been there for me in so many ways. I cannot thank you enough.

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Abstract

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By Patsy Chavis, Ph.D.

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Major Director: Dr. Charol Shakeshaft, Professor
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Over the past few decades, there has been a great deal of attention given to the struggles of the African American male raised in mother-only households and their lack of academic success. In order to understand why this trend continues, one has only to look at the previous literature.

The family structure has always stood on the forefront as being the cause of these Black males not living out their goals and dreams. Whether students are raised in a two-parent, mother-only, or father-only household, we cannot ignore the low achievement performance by some of these male students.

There are many attributes that must go into the equation as to why these at-risk Black males are not closing the achievement gap when compared to their counterparts. Variables

connecting both the home and school environment must be considered. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship of Black males being raised in a mother-only household and their career aspirations. The absence of the father in the home stands at the forefront as the cause of family dysfunction, which subsequently leads to the destruction of many hopes and dreams of the Black male. Is a mother-only household a preconceived environment for failure for the Black male?

Four Africa American males from a rural public school in Virginia, along with their mothers, participated in this study. Participants and locations were assigned pseudonyms from the beginning of the study. No reference was made in oral or written reports that could link participants to the study. Through the use of interviews and data collection, the cultural environment at school and home was examined. As a result, emerging themes have given perspective to a dream deferred by some and a motivational tool to succeed to others.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The struggles of African American males have drawn increasing attention in the media and in professional literature. The educational achievement of African American high school males lags behind that of European-American males on a number of measures, from reading, writing, math, and science proficiency to school retention rates, with males performing less well than females. Harvey and Rauch (1997) listed additional stressors that African American males face, including racism, involvement with the justice system, and other substandard social and economic outcomes. Moreover, some authors argued that to be an African American male in the United States meant being a member of an "endangered species" (Gibbs, 1988; Irvine & York, 1993). Thus, being an African American male almost assures certain disadvantages.

Considerable concern has been raised over the poor academic performance of African American students, especially males. A barrage of negative experiences, which potentially contribute to school failure, has been found to plague these children. Many African American youth face numerous barriers to academic achievement and success due to disproportionate rates of poverty, unemployment, and underemployment. Specifically, minority children who live with a single parent and in chronic poverty are least likely to experience academic success. Since a disproportionately high number of African American youth who live in poverty have increased chances of negative outcomes, the search for factors that foster (positive trajectories) for low-income urban African American youth is particularly important.

In addition, numerous studies indicate that the highest percentage of these at risk African American male youth is found in inner-city schools, where the worst social and economic conditions exist (Hodgkinson, 1991; Peng, Wang, & Walberg, 1992). Indicators such as the high crime rates, unemployment, and concentrated poverty describe the critical status of Black males who are currently living in our nation's urban neighborhoods. Less than adequate conditions of underachievement, student and teacher alienation, and high dropout rates are also prevalent in urban school districts. Consequently, those black males attending inner-city schools represent the most imperiled group of growing numbers of students at risk of failure (Boyd, 1991).

Furthermore, the transition to high school presents definite challenges for many minorities. Low-income minority children, particularly African Americans, are susceptible to declines in academic motivation and performance during the transition to the ninth grade, which may not be recovered in the subsequent years of high school (Eccles, 1994). Researchers also found that as an African American male got older, they liked school less, their grades dropped, and they were more likely to experience behavior problems (Simmons, Black, & Zhou, 1991).

Although environmental disadvantages and stress can lead to behavioral, academic, and psychological difficulties among children (Luthar & Zigler, 1991), many children are able to overcome adverse influences and become well-adapted individuals (Garbarino, Dubrow, Koestelny, & Pardo, 1992; Luthar & Zigler, 1991; Safyer, 1994). Urban African American adolescents are at particular risk of negative developmental outcomes. However, not all African American adolescents fall victim to the negative influences in their environment. Instead, many youth rise above expectations, and their lives take positive trajectories. The important question, then, is: Why do some African American males excel in spite of their adverse circumstances, while others do not? Rutter (1979) pointed out that this "is an important issue to

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investigate. . . . Many children do not succumb to the effects of deprivation, and it is important that we determine why this is so and what is it that protects them from the hazards they face" (p. 70).

Despite these incredible hardships and the presence of several at-risk factors, some African American male high school students go on to achieve, while others succumb to risk factors. Although, a significant number of youth fit the profile of at-risk students, for some reason they do not succumb to negative environmental factors. Little is known about these African American adolescents who possess correlates of failure, yet in spite of their circumstances, they excel.

The most current numbers on young Black males' educational outcomes are dire. Though the disparity between racial groups regarding graduation has narrowed since the 1970s, notable gaps still remain (Helig & Darling-Hammond, 2008). Data from the Current Population Survey (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007) present a snapshot of high school graduation rates by race. Nationally, the percentage of males in the 18 to 24-year cohort with a high school diploma or greater is 77%. When disaggregated by race, however, the disparities become readily apparent. While Asian American and White males in the 18 to 24-year cohort report educational attainment of a high school diploma or greater at 85% and 81%, respectively, African American males report a rate of 73%. The national dropout rate in 2005 was at 11% among males in the 16 to 24-year cohort of all races. However, only 7% of White males in this group were dropouts. Men of color fared far worse: 12% of young African American males were dropouts, as were 26% of young Hispanic males in the same age cohort.

As educational opportunities grow, the number of underrepresented students participating in postsecondary education is increasing. This increase has been painful and slow, and has not

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been enough to bring African American males to their full academic potential. Various studies have documented the gaps in achievement when comparing African American male students to non-Hispanic White and Asian students (Jacobson, Olsen, King Rice, Sweetland, & Ralph, 2001; Robelen, 2002). Recent statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau on the American Community Survey (2005) reported that only 7% of African American male high school graduates complete the New Basics Curriculum, a college preparatory curriculum that includes 3 years of mathematics, science, and social science, 2 years of foreign language, and 4 years of English.

Poor academics preparation in high school is the explanation proposed by Cross (1991). Cross states that White students are more likely to attend high school with a strong college preparatory focus, enroll in rigorous or honors courses, and spend money on supplementary SAT exam preparation courses. These advantages work to raise the performance of some students. Many African American male students may not be offered these advantages, may not be aware of the benefits, or such programs are not affordable. According to Delpit (1993), this is due to the fact that racism has become institutionalized in American schools through hierarchical conceptions of intellectual ability. These hierarchical conceptions of intellectual ability have led to a focus on individual and cultural characteristics of students rather than the ways that the social system structures academic success for some and academic failure for others. The result has been a variety of school policies and practices that foil the full development for the intellectual potential of African American students.

The struggle to close the gap in educational achievement between African American and White students could be enhanced by current reforms or it could be seriously undermined (Johnson & Kritsonis, 2006). American schools must accept the challenge of closing the achievement gap between minority and White students.

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Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to look at African American high school senior males in mother-only households and examine their experiences as they pursue their academic goals: The questions are:

1. What are their goals and dreams? How are these goals and dreams perceived to have changed, if at all, from the academic plan the boys developed in ninth grade?

2. What barriers have the boys faced as they worked to achieve their academic goals and dreams? How have they responded to these barriers?

3. What influences have supported the boys in the pursuit of these goals?

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In August 1983, publisher John Johnson introduced *Ebony* magazine's special issue on "The Crisis of the Black Male" as

> an editorial response to underground rumblings we detected in hundreds of letters from our readers [who] said, almost without exception, that something strange and ominous is happening to black males in this country and that someone should sound the alarm before it is too late (p. 10).

By the end of the 1980s, the Black male crisis had become widely regarded as a self-evident feature of American life. A large number of symposia, conferences, journal and magazine articles, special reports, and scholarly and popular books have tracked the life chances of Black males in general, and of young Black urban males in particular. Virtually all of these accounts include statistics reflecting the plight of Black men in America: their high rates of criminality, incarceration, alcohol and drug abuse, unwed parenting, and premature death; their low rates of legal employment, high school completion, college attendance; and lack of active participation in the lives of their children. The context of the literature review is generating around this Black male crisis.

The literature reviewed for this study has been somewhat inconsistent in its findings. Research investigating positive institutions, such as families, and the optimal well being of

adolescents has been scant (Antaramian, Huebner, & Valois, 2008). As a whole, the studies do not clearly indicate which specific parenting or contextual variables are most important for African American youths' academic success in general, and for outstanding academic success among Black males in particular. Even though there are inconsistencies in the review of literature, the data indicates that African American males are having difficulty in public schools. Further research suggests that a large number of these males are from mother-only households (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1992). What implications do these studies hold for the educational future of the African American male? A further understanding of the relationships among family structure, quality of parenting, and the self-esteem of the African American male is greatly needed.

E. Franklin Frazier (1939), a noted African American sociologist, who wrote about the African American family during the 1930s, claimed that the majority of African American households were female centered. He noted that out-of-wedlock births represented family disorganization, and that such patterns were transmitted normatively from one generation of African Americans to the next. Has so little emphasis on research in this area allowed this image to still gain widespread acceptance? Daniel Patrick Moynihan (1965) linked pathology with African American mother-headed families. Moynihan's major thesis was that African American families were matriarchal in structure and that women dominated boys in these families who subsequently grew up without adequate role models for healthy adult masculinity. At the core of Moynihan's research theses about African American mother-headed households were race, class, and gender assumptions about the primacy of the matriarchal middle-class nuclear family in which women and men are compartmentalized into different domains with distinctive roles. Moynihan's words caused an uproar, nowhere more than the African American community,

which immediately concluded he was referring to the break-up of Black families and illegitimate children among Black inner-city youth. He was considered a racist, even a fascist by his harshest critics. Moynihan stated that, if only by implication: (a) two parent families, headed by men, were inherently better than one parent families; (b) that single African American women were somehow deficient in parenting skills, particularly when it comes to raising their male children; and (c) that African American mother-headed households were destructive in that they held deviant cultural values, aspirations, and psychological characteristics that they transmitted to their children and which kept them in a state of perpetual pathology (p. 9).

There is also a growing body of research labeled community/environment/geography that links developmental outcomes for Black males to neighborhood and community factors. Crowder, Tolnay, and Alderman (2001), for example, demonstrated that Black males from low opportunity areas in Northern cities who migrated south increased their economic and job opportunities and had better social networks in their new communities of residence. Also, the review of current studies revealed that Black males who reside in mother-only households have poor social and academic outcomes (Hofferth & Curtin, 2006). A growing body of research known as constellation studies recognizes that single-mother-headed households may include extended family members and nonresident fathers (Zimmerman, Rameriz-Valles, & Maton, 1999).

Noguera's (2003) analytic review of the literature revealed that much of the research and scholarship on Black males was rooted in a cultural or deficit model. In other words, the lens used to explain Black male disparities in educational outcomes, or their overrepresentation in the juvenile justice system, was largely rooted in a framework that construed Black males as the source of their own problems, giving little consideration to contextual or structural factors.

Because of the overuse of the deficit-framework, less research is available that explains how structural factors impact outcomes in the area of education, employment, and mental/public health for males. Because of this framework, there is a lack of information about how some Black males manage to avoid the pitfalls and hardships that beset other Black males despite structural constraints

Across these and other dimensions, the life chances of Black American males have improved little overall in the last quarter century. In some cases, they have deteriorated further in spite of the fact that attention to the crisis has encompassed actions as well as words. For example, between 1989 and 1999 alone, the U.S. Congress held at least ten hearings that expressly featured Black men. Over the same period, Ohio, California, Indiana, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, New York, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Wisconsin established commissions or task forces to examine the challenges facing Black males. In the late 1980s, the private sector also took up the cry.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, African American individuals and groups have been at the forefront of the effort to sound the alarm regarding Black male welfare. In 1988, the Center for the African-American Male at Albany State University, formerly the Center for the Study of the Black Male, became the first institute devoted to the production and dissemination of research on Black males (Majors, 1994). A similar center, the Morehouse Research Institute, was founded in 1990. The Institute, funded by major grants from the Ford and Rockefeller foundations brings attention to the lack of knowledge concerning issues that affect African American men. To this end, the Institute publishes *Challenge: A Journal of Research on African American Men*. The year 1990 also saw birth of the first national umbrella organization for Black males, the National Council of African American Men, which publishes the *Journal of African American Male*

Studies. Other prominent Black-led groups that advocated for or provided services mainly or exclusively for Black males included The National Trust for the Development of African American Men, African-American Male Achievers Network, Boys-into-Men, the African American Male Institutes, Men Against Destruction: Defending Against Drugs and Social Disorder (MAD DADS), and Concerned Black Men.

During this same time the share of young Black men without jobs was climbing relentlessly experiencing only a slight pause during the economic peak of the late 1990s (Elderman, Holzer, & Offner, 2006). In 2000, 65% of Black male high school dropouts in their late 20s were

jobless–that is unable to find work, not seeking it, or incarcerated. By 2004, the share had grown to 72%, compared with 34% of White and 19% of Hispanic dropouts. Even when high school graduates were included, half of Black men in their 20s were jobless in 2004, up from 46% in 2000.

Incarceration rates climbed in the 1990s and reached historic highs in the past few years. In 1995, 16% of Black men in their 20s who did not attend college were in jail or prison; by 2004, 21% were incarcerated. By their mid-30s, six in ten Black males who had dropped out of school had spent time in prison (Elderman et al., 2006).

All of this begs the crucial question: Why have these efforts had so little apparent success at improving the conditions of Black American males as a whole? Certainly, part of the answer is structural, having to do with macroeconomic developments and policy decisions that have exacerbated the decades-long trend toward rising income and wealth inequalities in this country. And, of course, to say that the African American male crisis has generated significant attention is not to say that it has generated attention sufficient to the magnitude and complexity of the

challenge, or that those efforts have been well directed. So although mentoring programs and other direct service efforts doubtless have a part to play in ushering Black boys into healthy and productive adulthood, they aim to prepare Black males to function more effectively within pre-existing opportunity structures; they do not aim at the transformation of those structures. It is this transformative lens through which we look as we consider our literature review.

Surveying the literature written from 1994-2007, the period after Gordon, Gordon, and Gordon-Nembhard's (2004) initial meta-analysis of social science, this researcher's review of literature, is expected to identify gaps in the literature, identify areas of investigation that show promise for increasing understanding of Black males, and highlight research that explores the dynamics accounting for success in their lives. Research on African American males has largely focused on their deficits, including their academic, social, and behavioral problems. For example, in studies performed by McAdoo (1994) and Taylor, Hinton, and Winston (1995) there has been disproportionate focus on factors related to school dropout and underachievement rather than those related to academic levels of achievement.

Family Structure

Mother-only structure

The majority of current research still maintains that single-mother-headed households produce lower positive outcomes for Black males, especially in comparison to single-father-headed households. This raises a serious issue since the number of African American males raised in single-mother-headed households has steadily increased since the last review. There is a growing body of new research, however, suggesting that Black males residing in single-mother-headed-households do not have lower developmental outcomes than other family structures (Battle, 1999; Battle & Scott, 2000; Zullig, Valois, Huebner, & Drane, 2005).

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Two studies, Battle (1999) and Battle and Scott (2006), found that African American males in mother-only households scored better on standardized math and reading tests than those in father-only households. Battle's research also found that when socioeconomic status was added to the analysis, the outcome remained the same, implying that economic status is less significant than family configuration. Battle (1999) suggests that children in all types of family configurations have the potential to do well socially and academically; however, their effective functioning depends on the type of resources and strengths that their families provide to counterbalance problems. Battle and Scott (2006) posit that African American mothers are apt to seek out resources such as supplementary academic activities and assistance from teachers or community members, as well as utilize their support networks for their sons' development.

Gutman and McLoyd (2000) also examined the effects of poverty on Black elementary and middle school students. Their study was both critical and uncommon because they compared families of high-achieving and low-achieving African American elementary and middle school students living in poverty and identified differences between both groups of parents on how they managed their children's education within their homes, schools, and communities. The authors discovered that the parents of the high-achieving students were more proactive in their children's education while parents of low-achieving students were more reactive. In other words, the authors indicated that parents of high-achieving students initiated contact with schools to monitor their child's progress, while it was uncommon for parents of under-achieving students to visit or have contact with the schools unless it was initiated by the school. In most circumstances, the communication initiated by the school was caused by the students' academic underachievement or behavior infraction. The parents of high-achievers reported augmenting their children's educational experience by enrolling them in programs

promoting academic achievement, peer relations, and social skills. Within the home environment, parents of both high achievers and low achievers reported that they assisted their students with schoolwork, but parents of high achievers indicated that they also organized scheduled time to work on homework, created additional math problems, and assigned extra assignments in the areas of reading and writing.

Much of the research on family functioning addresses the impact of parental support and style on improving Black male educational outcomes (Argyle & Henderson, 1985; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Shearin, 2002). Research has shown that authoritative parenting—providing children with warmth and love while also maintaining authority (Mandara, 2006; Tolan, Gorman-Smith, & Henry, 1996)—best supports the rearing of African American male children. Parents who used an African American version of authoritative parenting—teaching their male children about cultural heritage and encouraging resiliency despite racial impediments—who were actively involved in monitoring their children's academic progress, and who were active in diminishing their children's counterproductive use of time, were better able to cultivate an environment in which African American males were more likely to succeed in school.

Father Perspective

Past research on African American males and fatherhood has represented African American men as incompetent, unreliable, untrustworthy, sexually predatory, and erratically present in the lives of their children (Gadsden & Smith, 1994; Hurd & Rogers, 1998; Smith, Krohn, Chu, & Best, 2005). Due to this negative representation, African American fathers have been largely invisible in past research examining the development of children and the functioning of African American families (Coley, 2001). When examined in the literature, the

contributions of African American fathers were framed almost exclusively in terms of their children's educational outcome (Gadsden & Smith, 1994; Hurd & Rogers, 1998; Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 1999). This frame is limited. For example, in a 1999 study, Roy (2006) interviewed 40 African American fathers in a community-based parenting program in Chicago and found that fathers understood themselves not merely as providers in their children's lives, but as vital caregivers.

Consistent with previous findings, the majority of male and female adolescents looked up to their mother as their female role model and their father as their male role model. Fewer than 10% of the participants identified primary role models who were not in their immediate or extended family. Only 25 youth reported a famous person as a male role model, and only 9 reported a famous person as a female role model. Approximately, 9% of the respondents reported that they had no female role models, 9% of the males reported that they had no male role models, and 23% of the females reported that they had no male role models. A smaller percentage of adolescents reported that they had no male or female role models: 3% of the males and 6% of the females. Male and female adolescents did not differ in their selection of male role models.

Current research shows that fathers are not only caregivers but that many fathers actively engage in protecting the safety and well being of their children and spend productive time with their children. In a 2005 longitudinal study by Smith et al. (2005), the authors determined that young African American fathers spent an equal amount of time with their eldest child (eldest children were examined because of the young age of the fathers) as fathers from other racial and economic backgrounds. This study also found that fathers who received public assistance were more likely to live with the eldest children than those fathers not receiving public assistance.

Because the support received was in the areas of housing, food, and healthcare assistance, rather than in cash benefits, the study determined that the public policy in place was providing support as intended. This is especially significant information in that it points to the familial benefits that attach to "upgrad[ing] fathers' employment potential and earning power" (Smith et al., 2005, p. 997).

Several studies have found that status of employment is a key impediment to Black fathers' involvement with their children (Anderson, Kohler, & Letiecq, 2002; Dallas & Cen, 1998). Studies have shown that a father's employment status can be linked to the amount of contact with children, participation in educational activities, and quality of parent-child interaction. The lack of viable employment for fathers can also cause depression in Black men. In a 1996 study, Fagan examined the way in which 33 low-income African American fathers interacted with their preschool age children during play. He observed the father's responsiveness to his child during play interactions was significantly related to his employment status and self-esteem. Depression brought on by resource challenges (i.e., inability to pay child support, limited access to reliable transportation, and lack of permanent housing) may inhibit fathers' ability to respond to the needs of their children (Anderson et al., 2002). On a positive note, high quality mother-father relationships were significant predictors of father involvement with their child and may serve as a buffer to other life stressors for fathers (Downer & Mendez, 2005; Fagan, 1996).

Other Family Structures

Because there is still a significant number of African American males who do not have contact with their biological fathers or have absent fathers, researchers have begun to look at "other fathers" or "social fathers" and the impact these "nonbiological fathers" have on African

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American males (Coley, 2001; Hunter et al., 2006; Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 1999). Social fathers and other fathers can be defined as brothers, brothers-in-law, grandfathers, uncles, male mentors, or any male relative or family associate who acts as a role model by sharing their values and displaying father-like or appropriate behaviors to a child (Bryant & Zimmerman, 2003; Hunter et al., 2006; Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 1999). Fifty-one percent of children in the Jayakody and Kali (2002) study had other fathers or social fathers. They found that the presence of a social father who was a male relative was associated with a higher level of the child's readiness for school.

In a 2005 study, Downer and Mendez examined African American fathers and social fathers to determine their levels of involvement with their preschool children attending Head Start. Father involvement was defined using three distinct activities that support and contribute to children's learning: general childcare activities, home-based educational activities, and school-based educational activities. The results of their study found that African American fathers participated in a wide variety of childcare activities with their children. The most common weekly activities included playing with toys or games indoors, talking about what happened at Head Start, taking children along while doing errands, and involving the child in household chores.

Another group of fathers that has received very little attention are the African American fathers who are full-time parents. Coles (2002) suggests that single African American fathers who are full-time fathers exist in higher frequencies than single White fathers. In Coles' study, 10 African American fathers were interviewed regarding the reasons why they wanted to become parents. Coles found that the men's motivations "centered on fulfilling a sense of duty or

responsibility, reworking the effects of having had weak or absent fathers themselves, wanting to provide a role model for their children, and fulfilling an already established parent-child bond" (p. 412). Eggebeen, Snyder, and Manning's study reported that 15.5% of single-parent families are headed by single fathers (Eggebeen et al., 1996, as cited in Coles, 2002) and African American single fathers make up roughly 6% of those custodial parents (National Urban League, 1998, as cited in Hamer & Marchioro, 2002).

Suicide has become an important public health issue for African Americans in recent years, specifically among youth (Joe, Marcus, & Kaplan, 2006). In 2004, suicide was found to be the third leading cause of death among 15 to 24-year old African Americans (Kochanek, Murphy, Anderson, & Scott, 2004). According to the study conducted by Joe et al. (2006), suicide rates peaked for African American males at age 20 to 24 and 25 to 29. The highest rate in this age period cohort analysis was seen in the 25 to 29 age group of males, with 41.05 per 100,000 African American males committing suicide. Even though the suicide rate for African Americans (6.2 per 100,000) is lower than the rates for Whites (12.4 per 100,000), suicide appears to be a greater risk for young African American men than young White men, as Black men represented 84% of suicide victims in the African American community (Joe & Kaplan, 2001). Between 1980 and 1995, the suicide rate among African American youth, ages 10 to 19 years more than doubled compared to Whites (American Association of Suicidology, 1996, as cited in Willis, Coombs, Cockerham, & Frison, 2002). The rates of suicide among Black men begin to increase dramatically in early childhood, reach their peak in adolescence, begin to decline steadily and plateau in mid-life, and begin to increase in late life moderately (Gibbs, 1997; Moscicki, 1994). Some studies, such as Kubrin, Wadsworth, and DiPietro (2006) have

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argued that the increase in Black male suicide is linked to deindustrialization and extreme poverty in communities in which African American males reside.

Protective factors against suicide for African American youth have also been identified throughout the literature. Foremost among these were strong kinship ties and social support (Gibbs, 1988). Black males residing in the South have also been linked to lower suicide rates (Wingate et al., 2005). For example, Wingate et al. (2005) suggested that the context of the South likely buffers against suicide because there is low racial integration or the separation of different racial groups and cohesion among individuals within each racial group. Gibbs (1997) also stated that if social agencies were not present to provide essential services to African American in the South, the "extended family, kin networks, and the African American church fulfilled those needs" (p. 618). Joe and Kaplan (2001) suggested that strengthening social supports, religious beliefs and curtailing income disparities may reduce the risk of suicide among African Americans. Moreover, research has found that lower occupational and income inequalities between Whites and African Americans reduced the risk of suicide among African American men (Burr, Hartman, & Matteson, 1999).

Family Structure and Substance Abuse

Another critical factor contributing to Black males' harsher treatment in comparison to their White counterpart is the courts' perception of Black families. Because juvenile courts view single-female-headed households as less stable, Black males are given harsher sentences (Bishop & Frazier, 1996; DeJong & Jackson, 1998). The perception of two-parent families as more stable, however, also positively affects Whites: White juvenile offenders from two-parent households are given less jail time than Black males from two-parent families are not. While Black male youth receive more severe punitive discipline generally, research has demonstrated

specific discrimination in the area of drug infractions. In a 1998 study, Delong and Jackson examined differential sentencing patterns among Black, Latino, and White juveniles. Surveying 18.1% females, 60.6% Whites, 32.3% Blacks, and 6.1% Latino, and 1.0% individuals identifying as other, the authors found that Black and Latino youth were referred for sentencing at slightly younger ages than White juveniles, more likely to be referred for drug charges, and more likely to live in single-mother-headed households. Black youth charged with drug crimes were more likely to be incarcerated than Black youth charged with other crimes. White youth were no more likely to be incarcerated for drug crimes than other offenses.

School Experiences and African American Male Behavior

Achievement

School performance of African American males in particular has been an area of concern in both educational and public arenas (Education Trust, 2002; Holzman, 2006). Recent studies and national media have highlighted evidence that shows great disparity in school outcomes between African American males and other student populations. National statistics continue to show significant differences in high school graduation rates, college attendance, and completion rates between African American males and White students, none of which favor African American males (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Moreover, African American males are still more likely to be in the lowest academic track, to be disciplined more often, and to be negatively stereotyped by teachers than White students (Holzman, 2006). Perhaps the most telling statistic is that the graduation rate for African American male students was just 45% in 2004, compared to 70% for White males (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

In addition to disparities in achievement levels between African American male students and White male students, disaggregated data reveals African American males also are achieving

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at much lower levels than African American females (Holzman, 2006). This with-in racial group gender gap is the widest gap of any student demographic group. The gender gap is evident in a number of achievement variables including the college graduation rate. Of all African American males enrolled in college, only 34.2% graduated as compared to 44.7% of African American females (Education Trust, 2007). In fact, the college graduation rate of African American males is the lowest of any group.

Social scientists have discussed the significant academic and social challenges confronting African American male youth in their quest for education (Green & Wright, 1991; Johnson & Watson, 1990; Narine, 1992; Reed 1988; Wright, 1992, as cited in Lee, 1992). The nature of these discussions points to a serious stifling of African American male achievement, aspiration, and pride in the educational system. These discussions are bolstered by data on the educational attainment of African American male youth from a variety of sources that present a profile of widespread failure (House of Representatives, 1990; Committee to Study the Status of the Black male in the New Orleans Public Schools, 1988; Jones, 1986; National Black Child Development Institute, 1990, as cited in Lee, 1992).

Such data and reports are compounded by the fact that African American males are frequently the victims of negative attitudes and lowered expectations from teachers, counselors, and administrators. Educators may expect to encounter academic and social problems from African American males, which often leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy (Washington & Lee, 1982).

It is a generally accepted fact, though widely lamented, that in most American inner cities Black males, at every level from kindergarten through 12th grade, are turning off education in epidemic numbers. In school districts across the country, Black males, in the main, are either

failing or are disproportionately labeled as behavior problems, slow learners and truants (Hagan & Foster, 2001). To say that Black males are performing poorly in school is a gross understatement of the current crisis. Recent studies of school districts in Milwaukee, New Orleans, and Dade County, Florida, among others, highlight the critical nature of the predicament. In all cities, Black males were shown to have dramatically higher suspension, expulsion, retention and dropout rates, and dramatically lower grade-point averages.

Aspirations

In a study performed by Gandara (2001), she attempted to examine how adolescents from different ethnic groups form their expectations about schooling and their post secondary aspirations during their 4 years of high school. Her focus was on how peers and families help to shape these attitudes and aspirations. The study looked at students from both urban and rural contexts, and used ethnographic, survey, and interviews/focus group data to provide a textured picture of the development of post secondary aspirations of African Americans, Southeast Asians, Latino, and European American youth over time. The findings and implications suggested that African American males in particular, have high aspirations for school achievement and do not actively resist the idea of being a good student. The data also suggested that African American males, are disingenuous in their responses to these kinds of attitude surveys and that theory should not be built on these data. Ethnographic and interview data are far better sources of information on African American students than the survey data.

Resilience and Self-Determination

According to Spencer (2006), in developing an optimal example of resilience for African American children and adolescents, the dilemma is faced of articulating a healthy, optimally, functioning African American child or adolescent. To consider the present day African

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American child's or adolescent's assimilation into oppressive social institutions and circumstances is not sufficient and only perpetuates the status quo that is plagued with disparities untenable for the positive health and well-being of the African American community or the United States as a whole.

Sandler (2001) proposed an ecological approach to resilience that is also a more process-oriented model. According to Sandler, understanding youth resilience requires that investigators consider the quality of risk exposure over time. Risks are threats to an individual's basic human goals (e.g., physical safety, social relations, positive self-evaluation) and ability to achieve competence in his or her desired social roles in various contexts (i.e., developmental tasks). Resilience cannot occur in the absence of real or perceived risk or adversity (Zimmerman et al., 1999). Genero (1998) viewed resilience as a relational issue rather than as an individual characteristic. Walsh (1998) suggested that being resilient includes more than merely surviving and being a victim for life; it also encompasses the ability to heal and to be empowered to live life fully.

Teacher Student Interaction

Some studies provide evidence of the role that teachers play in the success of Black males. For instance, Grant (1985) found that teachers, on an average, hold lower expectations for Black males. And, teachers' low expectations often lead to student disengagement, which, in turn, lowers the teacher's expectations, furthering a vicious, cycle downwards. His findings are corroborated by others (Ferguson, 2005). Still others provide little to no support for this conclusion. Baron, Topp, and Cooper (1985) uncovered a study in which teachers had higher expectations of Black students compared to Whites, although this difference did not meet the threshold of statistical significance (Strayhorn 2008). Indeed, more information is needed to

understand the potentially complex interplay between teachers' perceptions and student achievement.

Mental Health Concerns

Family dynamics are central to the mental health literature on Black males. The literature review by Gordon et al. (1994) revealed that prior to 1994 studies on the mental health of African American males focused on how males behaved and responded to the societal conditions of inequality, discrimination, and poverty. Some of the main issues found in past reviews of male psychosocial issues include: pathology of the Black family (single-mother-headed households); relationships between Black males and females; coping strategies for addressing the stresses of racial stereotypes; institutional racism; and poverty. A key critique of the past reviews was that the mental health literature did not consider the influence of environmental stressors on the mental health of Black males.

African American adolescents are at a greater risk for experiencing behavioral and emotional problems such as depression than any other ethnic groups because they reside in high-risk urban segregated communities (Goodman & Gotleb, 1999; Kubrin et al., 2006; Taylor, 1996), which may be highly stressful (Cunningham, 1999; Myers, 1989). Researchers defined these high-risk environments as communities that are segregated from mainstream society by high poverty, a lack of jobs (Kubrin et al., 2006), and high rates of exposure to violent crimes and homicides (Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000).

Kistner, David-Ferdon, and White (2003) found that African American boys showed more signs of depression when compared to African American girls, White girls, and White boys, with all children in grades 3 through 5. In a longitudinal follow-up study, Kistner,

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David-Ferdon, Lopez, and Dunker (2007) examined ethic and sex differences in depressive symptoms along with possible mediators such as academic achievement and peer acceptance of those differences among African American children. Black boys still had a much higher frequency of symptoms of depression than Black girls. African American boys reported more depressive symptoms as the school year went on while African American girls and White boys and girls reported either less severe depressive symptoms or about the same level of severity over the school year. Lower academic achievement scores were associated with increases in depressive symptoms for African American boys and White boys and girls. However, in a study by Bynum and Kotchick (2006), African American adolescents who reported a more positive relationship with their mothers and greater autonomy were more likely to report more positive self-esteem, less symptoms of depression, and fewer behaviors that were delinquent.

Other studies on African American male depression revealed that high exposure to violence was significantly associated with symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression in African American males that could not alleviated by social support (Gorman-Smith, Henry, & Tolan, 2004). Studies have linked depression rates in Black males to substance and sexual abuse (Friedman, Terras, & Glassman, 2000). African American males may be at a higher risk for substance abuse and drug-related problems than their White counterparts due to being bombarded by what Pierce called "micro aggressions." Micro aggressions "are defined as insults (verbal/nonverbal, visual, or both) directed toward people of color, frequently automatically or unconsciously" (Pierce, 1970, as cited in Washington & Teague, 2005, p. 93-105). In addition, African American boys who physically matured early were placed at risk for higher levels of depressive symptomology (Ge et al., 2003).

Coping Mechanisms of African American Males

According to Bonner (1997), because some African American males live in high-risk environments or "cultural cocoons," they are given little opportunity to develop appropriate coping and adaptive mechanisms. Sparks' (1996) study on coping processes of African American adolescent males living in violent communities found that the 27 African American males, aged 13 to 19, used five types of coping strategies. These processes included and are defined as "confrontative coping," using aggressive efforts to alter the situation; "distancing," using cognitive efforts to detach oneself and to minimize the significance of the encounter; "self-controlling," attempting to regulate their own feelings and actions while in the midst of a violent encounter; "escape-avoidance coping," employing wishful thinking and/or behavioral efforts to escape or avoid the emotional reaction associated with the situation; and "planful problem solving," making a plan of action and sticking to it." Cunningham (1999) suggests that providing "psychological armor" would allow African American males to effectively cope within their high-risk environments. The author describes "psychological armor as the competency and self-worth needed to confront hostile situations and individuals" (p. 27).

The research suggests that there are a high number of barriers to African American males' utilization of and participation in mental health services (Jackson-Gilfort, Liddle, Tejeda, & Dakof, 2001). Researchers suggest that adolescent African American males' reluctance to discuss their feelings results in a possible under-reporting of depressive symptoms. The fear that participation in mental health services will lead to a negative stigma in their community, (McKay, Nudelman, McCadam, & Gonzalez, 1996; Richardson, 2001), and feelings of shame or embarrassment (Lindsey et al., 2006). Because of these negative consequences, African American adults are more likely to receive mental health services from general medicine or

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medical doctors than from mental health clinics (Cooper-Patrick et al., 1999). For example, Lindsey et al. (2006) found that many of the African American male adolescents in their study chose to deal with their problems on their own instead of attending formal mental health counseling because they believed that voicing their feelings would be seen as a sign of weakness. Finally, studies have shown that Black males, who had lower negative experiences with their mental health professional, had fewer negative attitudes towards seeking professional help than their Black male counterparts who had experienced a higher number of negative experiences with mental health professionals (Scott & Davis, 2006).

Summary

Many of the studies reviewed were still rooted in the deficit approach and offered few recommendations or interventions to improve the well being of Black males. Why are not African American males faring better in a nation reputed to be the most wealthy and progressive of major world nations? Studies that account for favorable outcomes for Black males are sorely needed. Given the increasing proportion of nontraditional families, the standard measures of family structure are definitely inadequate when one tries to analyze behavior in the context of today's society. As an educator in a leadership position, I find it imperative that we not only develop, but implement those programs that will support and encourage this at-risk group of young males to follow those positive dreams that may seem unattainable at present. Research initiatives that advance both cultural and structural solutions for the Black male could prove to be the answer to the crisis situation that is on the rise in this country.

CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this section, research design will be explained. This section describes the qualitative design and why it was chosen rather than the quantitative approach. The second section incorporates a description of the population and sample. This section contains the selected site, demographics and identification of the sample population, procedures for data collection, and the springboard for the study. Methods for data collection will be in the third section. The last section will include establishing and maintaining confidentiality and the rights of the participants.

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to explore the home and school experiences of African American males in single-mother-households to determine the perceived impact of those experiences on schooling outcomes. For the purpose of this study, the phrase "at-risk students" was descriptive of those students who, on the basis of several risk factors, which were absentee father, and mother-headed households. Yet, in spite of these adverse conditions, students do experience success in their academics. This research also explored the reasons why some of these at-risk students succeed in spite of social and educational disadvantages.

This research employed qualitative methods to examine the role of the family structure in the lives of African American males raised in a mother-only home. This study was designed

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to identify and highlight factors related to the success/failure of African American male youths with particular focus on school and home experiences. The methodology allowed in-depth exploration of family and contextual factors potentially related to achievement, and also allowed the voices of those studied to be heard.

Qualitative research, broadly defined, means "any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17). Where quantitative researchers seek casual determination, prediction, and generalization of findings, qualitative researchers seek illumination, understanding, and generalization to similar situations.

Qualitative inquiry accepts the complex and dynamic quality of the social world. Strauss and Corbin (1990) claim that qualitative methods can be used to better understand any phenomenon about which little is yet known. Qualitative methods can also be used to gain new perspectives on things about which much is already known or to gain more in-depth information that may be difficult to convey quantitatively.

Identification of Participants

Purposeful sampling is the dominant strategy in qualitative research. Purposeful sampling seeks information-rich cases, which can be studied in-depth (Patton, 1990). For this reason, purposeful sampling was employed in this study.

Patton (1990) identifies and describes 16 types of purposeful sampling. These include: extreme or deviant case sampling; typical case sampling; maximum variation sampling; snowball or chain sampling; confirming or disconfirming case sampling; politically important case sampling; convenience sampling; and others (Patton, 1990, p. 169-183). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the most useful strategy for the naturalistic approach is maximum variation

sampling. This strategy aims at capturing and describing the central themes or principal outcomes that cut across a great deal of participant or program variation. For small samples a great deal of heterogeneity can be a problem because individual cases are so different from each other. The maximum variation sampling strategy turns that apparent weakness into a strength by applying the following logic: Any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared aspects or impacts of a program (Patton, 1990, p. 172).

After receiving permission from the Jefferson county schools superintendent to conduct the study, an initial contact was made with the principal of the high school. The high school provided demographic data and other information that contained a representative list of African American male students raised by a mother who is head of household. I requested access to the school counselor who provided additional information. These school personnel provided preliminary or directory information and the names of African American male students whom he/she believed would fall into the category that was to be studied, but who demonstrated a broad spectrum of academic achievement.

The sample to be studied was composed of only African American males and focused entirely on within-group differences. In this approach, African-American youth are not compared to groups, (i.e., Whites) that may not be similar on several dimensions (e.g., life experience, culture). Research that examines within-group differences rather than comparisons to White mainstream culture, may allow for a richer, more accurate, and culturally sensitive understanding of adolescent development (Jackson, Tucker, & Bowman, 1982).

Four African American males, who entered Jefferson High School as freshmen during the 2007-2008 school year, and their parent (mother) were the focus of this research. Jefferson High

School is the only high school located in rural Jefferson County. Jefferson County, with a population of approximately 19,000, is situated 30 miles west of Virginia's capital of Richmond. Another criteria for participant selection was that the mothers had custody of their sons for at least 5 years. Mothers participating in the research should have a high school education or some college experience. In terms of occupation, all mother participants fell into the categories of technical workers, semiskilled or services workers. Finally, the males participating in the study must have lived in the Jefferson County area during their high school career.

Once a list of names was generated, and with the permission of the student and parent, the students' permanent record was reviewed and a profile identifying any at-risk characteristics was compiled. To be included in the study, participants must have met the following criteria: (a) African American ethnicity, (b) male, (c) senior in high school, (d) coming from a family in which the mother is the head of the household, and (e) living in a rural environment.

Selected students and parents were contacted first by telephone/e-mail. Additional contacts were through one-on-one interaction. After explaining the purpose of the study, parents were asked to sign an agreement allowing sons to participate in the study (Appendix A). Initial interviews were held with respondents to establish baseline data, including biographical and demographic information. All baseline data were coded and profiles made for each respondent using constant comparison.

Other criteria used to finalize the selection of male students included their GPA and standing in the senior class. Two students were chosen from the top 15% of the senior class; the other two students were selected from the lower 50% of the class.

<center>**Procedure/Data Collection**</center>

Once the participants were selected, they were informed about the confidentiality of the process. All information shared with the researcher would be confidential. Consent forms were obtained, and structured interviews were conducted (see Appendixes B and C).

Data Collection Techniques

Qualitative interviews are used as a primary strategy for data collection in conjunction with observations, field notes, document analysis, or other techniques (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Qualitative interviewing using open-ended questions allows for individual variations. These semistructured interviews consist of open-ended questions, which are designed to explore general topics in order to gain information in the participants' own words, as well as to develop insights on how subjects interpret some pieces of the world. Interview guides provide the parameters, the tools, and the general guide of how to proceed. The qualitative research design remained flexible.

The prevailing form of data collection for this study was interviewing. Data also were obtained from case files with permission from students and parents. Separate interview guides were prepared for students and parents.

Field notes, which are descriptive in nature, were made during all interviews. These notes included facts, quotes, and key words. No interpretations were included in the notes themselves. A personal log was used for the researcher's reactions to the interviews. Logs also included reactions to what was seen and heard.

Appropriate documents were collected and used to supplement and verify data collected during interviews. Documents were obtained from school records or requested from participants. This data included documents such as school records, letters, awards, certificates, photographs,

and news articles. Beside basic demographic data, which were collected from school files as well as respondents, the interview guide contained questions grouped according to categories.

Files formed the basis for the coding of data. These files included: (a) files for keeping track of people, places, documents, etc.; (b) analytic files for emergent coding themes; and (c) fieldwork files to keep a record of the process involved in doing the research itself.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began from the beginning of the data collection process. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) recommended that in the qualitative research: "We should never collect data without substantial analysis going on simultaneously" (p. 2). Data analysis included reading and memoing, describing, clarifying, interpreting and writing the report. I reread the notes to get an overall view. This approach was used to search for themes and patterns in the data. Classifying involved breaking down main ideas, classifying them, and later rebuilding into themes and patterns. Open coding was used (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This approach involved a paragraph-by-paragraph and line-by-line analysis, which generated categories and subcategories. Direct quotes were used to capture feelings, attitudes and beliefs of participants. Interpreting involved pulling together the important aspects of participants' stories. Writing the report involved writing those items that were found insightful and appropriate.

Each participant's interview was transcribed. The researcher read each transcript to assure understanding of the four participants. Codes gave the researcher an abstract view with a scope of the data that included disparate phenomenon (Glaser, 1978). Statements were assigned themes and organized into clusters of themes, which included categorizing according to similar meaning (Krueger, 1994). Clustering provided the basis for the synthesized statement of each participant's experience. Each participant reviewed the synthesis to assure that his or her

experience was accurately described. Thematic clusters or descriptions of the participants' experiences were based on the categories. Memos, written elaboration of ideas about the data and the coded categories (Charmaz, 1983) were classified and included to reveal any relationship between categories. Theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) occurred as data were analyzed and categories developed when additional data are needed to encompass categories.

Building and Establishing Trustworthiness

Various measures were undertaken to establish trustworthiness of this study. The following strategies were employed: triangulation by observation, peer debriefing, and member checking. A second analyst reviewed the data, this was done by a school counselor. According to Padgett (1998), the member checking and reflexivity are the most significant in increasing trustworthiness. These measures will increase the trustworthiness of the data needed to reach a judgment.

Credibility depends less on the sample size rather on the richness of the data gathered and the analysis of the researcher (Patton, 1990). In order to build credibility, the following techniques were used. Prolonged engagement occurred. First, I spent sufficient time with each participant in order to understand his/her culture and so that my presence did not introduce any distortions. Prolonged engagement involves "the investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes; learning the culture; testing for misinformation introduced by distortions either of the self or of the respondents, and building trust" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301). Data, categories, themes, interpretations and conclusions were tested with respondents. Respondents were given the opportunity to react to them. This occurred formally and informally.

Maintaining Confidentiality

Maintaining confidentiality is important at every phase of a qualitative study.

Face-to-face interviews are explicitly based on building a relationship between the researcher and the participants. In this study, participants and locations were assigned pseudonyms from the beginning of the study. No reference was made in oral or written reports that could link participants to the study. In addition, audio and videotapes were coded using pseudonyms. All tapes and notes were kept in a locked space. Tapes will be erased 6 months after completion of the study.

CHAPTER 4: GOALS AND DREAMS FOUR YEARS LATER

In the school division that is the site of this study, the process and procedures for providing students with information necessary for a successful and beneficial high school curriculum start no later than the eighth grade. For students with strong academic achievement, the planning phase may actually start at the end of their seventh grade year in middle school. These students are eligible to take foreign language and math courses for which they can receive high school credit during their eighth grade year. Students are prompted to put preliminary meaning to their educational aspirations at this time. Counselors and lead teachers start the academic planning process with one-on-one counseling. Students' previous career testing and profiles are retrieved to gain insight for purposeful conversation during this initial meeting. All participants in this study took part in this initiative during the same developmental time in the educational process. It is this focal point, the end of eighth grade that serves as a baseline for this study.

Goals and Dreams of John Adams

From all indications, John knew early on that college would be his goal. As a child he dreamed of becoming a teacher because he loved school and liked those he saw in the teaching profession. John admired his Sunday school teacher and, whenever he had a chance, to "play school" with his friends. John was the teacher.

I have always wanted to go to college. Teaching is something I have wanted all along. When I first did my 4-year plan, I wanted to get an advanced studies diploma. I also wanted to try my hand at dual enrollment classes at J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College so that I could have some college credits. I knew the math would be hard. That was the only thing that scared me. I gave it all I had and I made it. I will be entering college with at least six college credits. I think I stuck to the plan.

John exhibited so much self-confidence when he spoke that he sounded like a man with a master plan and had the self-assurance to go along with this plan. According to both John and his mother, his mother encouraged John's every move. John has great concern about his desire to go to college and whether or not they can afford the cost, particularly because his mother is on disability and is currently unable to work.

I know she wants me to go to college but I don't want her to stress out over this and get sick again. Maybe I should look at a community college or even a trade school. I just don't know what will be best for the both of us.

John explains that he meets with his counselor on a regular basis and has applied for those scholarships for which he is eligible. "I completed my FAFSA form and hope I will qualify for some money. My counselor seems to think that I will. I sure hope so." Whenever John speaks with his mother about paying for college, she leaves him thinking that she will make it happen and that this should not be his worry. John wants her to make it happen: "I don't want my chance to get into a college to die. I've made it this far. I have faith. I feel things will be okay." John makes it very clear that his dreams for a post secondary education are still as clear to him as they were the day he decided his path for his high school courses. When he first drafted his plan

for high school, he had no worries about affording college; he just knew that this was what he wanted to do.

> As each new year of high school started, I continued to think about just what it was I was asking everyone to do. Including myself. This is crazy! Do you know how much this whole education is going to cost somebody?

As he talked about the costs, John became increasingly anxious. As a result, I felt it necessary to have him explain again what his counselor had told him about the FAFSA form and the scholarships that he might receive. I returned to these possibilities in my questioning so that he could explore further ways that his dream might be accomplished.

I began my interview with John's mother by asking her to recall John's introduction to his high school curriculum and his transition into high school. Ms. Adams' memory of certain events was vague until we took a look at his 4-year plan and her signature at the bottom of the page. Our discussion centered on how much more demanding and stressful the curriculum is now than it was years ago when she was in high school.

> All we had to worry about back then was English, math, science, social studies and physical education. Our biggest discussion was on whether we would have Mr. Robinson for physical education, because he made you run a mile everyday and there were no excuses.

Ms. Adams is clear that the pressures on John are different than they were on her and is proud that John is ranked in the top 10% of the senior class, the highest ranking African American male in the class. John's mother observed that John's goal to finish high school and be accepted by a good college is coming to fruition. Ms. Adams shared that there have been some rough times along the way that she thought would have swayed his dreams, but that he is

still focused on his goals. "There have been times when I could not do for John all the things I wanted to. My sickness has taken its toll on us in more ways than one."

In addition to the effects of her illness on John's academic goals, Ms. Adams talked about the absence of John's father in his life. She did not see this as either a hindrance or an asset, just a fact.

> Don't get me wrong; I feel every child should have both parents. They deserve it. Life does not always turn out the way you want it to. I pray a lot and I have a good boy. What more can a mother ask for?

Ms. Adams described John's experiences with mentoring and tutoring young children from church. I asked her if these were children without fathers. "Oh no, not necessarily. They are any kids who are in need. Some will even ask him for help. I don't think there has ever been a time that he has said no to anyone standing in need."

As evidence of his connection to the church, Ms. Adams told the story of John's trip to Barbados and video of the trip that he made for his church family. From this story of giving and sharing, it is evident that religion and the church community is a large part of both John and Ms. Adams' lives. Their faith appears to be very strong. Both John and his mother returned multiple times to their faith that God would see them through.

Goals and Dreams of Arthur Pinner

According to behavioral documentation in his school file, Arthur is quick tempered, prefers to be alone, and finds fault with everything a teacher does or says. He is not argumentative, but has the tendency to block out information that he does not want to hear. Arthur's ninth grade aspirations were different than those he now has as a senior. At the end of his high school career, the goals he set for himself 4 years earlier have not materialized. "I had

hoped to play basketball in high school and then get a scholarship to play ball in college. My counselor told me to aim for the advanced studies diploma and so I did."

Arthur reports that, as time passed, he became disillusioned because his academic performance was not sufficient for college admission, despite his athletic abilities. "It looks like I will never make it to college now." As early as his freshman year, Arthur began having difficulty with his academic standing. His grades were not high and the pressure was great. Arthur knew in order to remain eligible to play ball, he had to pass at least five subjects. "Things started to go downhill early in my freshman year. The algebra was difficult and so was foreign language. I tried to get help but the teachers didn't have time to give me extra help." When I asked why he feels he did not get the help he needed, Arthur replied, "I hate to say this but some of the teachers make a difference in how they treat kids. You can tell when they don't like you." Arthur clearly felt that his academic weaknesses and setbacks were the fault of teachers who did not help him learn.

Arthur's mother, Rose, agrees with her son. "I don't like this school and the teachers make a difference in Black and White kids." His mother explained that Arthur feels that teachers do not want to help him. She describes him as a very quiet student who tries not to draw attention to himself. "He is not the type of student who will nag a teacher about an issue. He will not go back to a teacher a second and third time with the same request." My interviews with some of Arthur's teachers led to comments that he can be easily overlooked.

When Arthur began his sophomore year, his 4-year plan was changed. "When it was time for me to choose classes for my 10th grade year, I went back to a standard diploma." Arthur's mother responded by taking her son out of high school to begin home schooling. This decision proved not to be good for Arthur.

"My life started to change. I thought this was good for me, I had no idea this would kill my dreams of playing basketball. I came back to the high school my senior year." At the time of this interview in his senior year, Arthur's hopes were fading, not only for his basketball career, but also for graduating with his class. He had yet to pass an SOL needed for graduation.

By the time of my interview with Ms. Pinner, her attitudes about the school were strongly negative. As we discussed Arthur's planning documents from the ninth grade, I tried to understand where she stood in the planning process. I was interested in what she had hoped for her son 4 years earlier when she helped him plan his high school schedule. "I wanted him to have the best high school education possible, he deserved the best." This sentence was shared in the context of Ms. Pinner's belief that the high school had failed her son. She was angry about how he had been treated.

In an effort to move the conversation back to a more pleasant time in her life, I asked her about some newspaper articles about her Arthur and what they meant to both of them. These articles dated back to the start of his basketball career in Little League and during middle school. Ms. Pinner stressed that, "His dreams were awesome then and I was right there with him."

Focusing on Arthur's successful years did little to stifle the disappointment that Ms. Pinner was feeling at this point. I asked her what schools could do to help the "Arthur's" of the world. I probed for her explanations of what happened with Arthur's academic work and his athletic goals. This conversation was difficult and hostile, building upon a history of interaction between mother and son.

Rose Pinner stressed that she had provided a safety net for her son since birth. She was clear that from the beginning she did her best to shield him from what she thought was an unyieldingly cruel world for males of color. However, her efforts to shield her son by blaming

others (society, schools, and teachers) did not help Arthur confront his part in what happened to him. Because failure was framed as the fault of others, Arthur had few opportunities to problem solve how he could change. As a result, Arthur had less developing strategies to change things, since he was taught that things happened to him and that he had no control over those things.

> I never did let Arthur know that he wasn't invited to a birthday party or to other events because the other mothers didn't want him to associate with their kids because he didn't have a father. How do you explain something like that? I would just come up with excuses as to why he couldn't go. This was the easiest way out for me.

In elementary school providing this safety net did not result in unanticipated negative outcomes for Rose and her son. There were no contradictions to the story that Rose told. However, by the time Arthur arrived in middle school, things were different. Students talked and a mother could not keep her son from hearing what they said. Other students told Arthur that he was not invited to gatherings. According to Arthur, these rejections changed his perceptions of who he was and influenced those with whom he associated. Describing the reasons why he was excluded, Arthur says, "I'm just not good enough." His self-esteem was altered during middle school, and he started to narrow his selection of friends in an effort to avoid disappointment. Arthur comments, "I've got to trust the guys before I invite them to the house or spend time at a game or a party or something like that." His mother says,

> His circle of friends is much smaller than it used to be. Arthur is more selective in choosing friends. At one point my house used to be full of his male friends, but now there are only a select few that he trusts.

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Ms. Pinner does not see her role of helping Arthur understand what is happening and figuring out what to do.

Goals and Dreams of Brandon Shelton

Brandon explained that his formative years in elementary school were not as productive as he thought they should have been. He recalled experiencing some adjustment difficulties. For instance, at the end of both his fourth and fifth grade years, letters would go home informing his mother of Brandon's lack of sufficient progress that could result in grade retention. "I don't remember exactly why my Mom would get these letters because the grades on my report cards were not 'F's. I know they were not all A's and B's, but they were good enough to pass!"

I shared with Brandon his ninth grade educational plan in an effort to help him think about what he wanted for himself at the beginning of high school. He responded that at that time he wanted to do what the counselor thought best for him. Brandon remembered that in ninth grade, he was asked by the counselor, what he wanted to be in 10 years. Brandon said he was not sure how to respond because he had never really thought about what he wanted for a future after high school.

> When I was going to be in ninth grade, all I could think about was playing football, and I was told by the counselor doing my schedule that I would have to make good grades and pass five classes in order to be eligible to play.

Brandon said he gave very little thought to how he was going to pass the five classes, but he wanted to be perceived as someone who knew what he wanted. Brandon said it did not occur to him that his grades would interfere with what he wanted, especially if he took an easier route.

"My grades weren't that good and she [the counselor] said to try for the regular diploma, so I did." In reflection, Brandon said he did not feel that the counselor knew him well enough to

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make a decision that would affect the rest of his life. When asked if he complied with the counselor's recommendation, Brandon said:

> Because I didn't want to be different and I wanted to impress the counselor, so I went along with what she said so the counselor wouldn't think I was dumb or stupid. She just looked at me and thought I wasn't smart enough to handle the tough classes, so she gave me the easy way out. I've had a tough time and now I want to go to college to play ball and I don't know if I can get in with my average.

Brandon followed the plan, which the counselor had proposed. As a result, he had not taken the kinds of courses he needed to get into college. Brandon's overall academic average was 2.5. He had the potential to do much better. On the other hand, Brandon was an outstanding athlete. Articles in the paper about his outstanding ability were impressive. He loved receiving kudos. By the time he was at the end of his senior year, Brandon was aware that there was some question as to whether or not he would be able to attend the college of his choice. At this point, he understood the implications of a decision made 4 years earlier.

> My friends on the football team are talking about going to Virginia Tech. I don't know if they would even consider me. I just want to be able to show my stuff on the field, it really doesn't matter where. I've worked hard to get to this point. I'm getting ready to graduate. That's a big thing in my family.

While Brandon now knows the connection between success in high school and academic preparation for college, he also knows that the path he chose in ninth grade takes him to a different place than the place he now wants to be in at the end of his senior year.

Brandon had no academic guidance and support from his mother. Ms. Shelton has a cognitive disability. Her ability to articulate appropriate responses is limited and her

comprehension of situations, as well as the interview questions, is limited. Ms. Shelton relies on her brother for advice and guidance with her son. When asked about her son's selection of classes in the eighth grade, she seemed bewildered. When I provided her with the document that she had signed giving her approval for the selection, she said, "I really don't remember signing anything like that. I think this is my brother's signature. He must have signed my name." I then explained to her that this schedule comes home every year for her approval. She responded with, "I know I don't pay attention to things that I should, but when you don't know something, you just don't know." When asked about her involvement in her son's school life, she was not able to respond and asked for an example of what involvement might look like. Ms. Shelton shared that she always found excuses for not meeting with the teachers or even going to Brandon's games.

My brother was always there and he enjoyed doing those kinds of things. I know school has not been easy for my child. Now he wants to go to college and my brother is trying to help him get into Norfolk State. I hope that he will. His grades should have been better than what they are. Brandon could have done better. He played around too much. We tried to tell him all along.

Goals and Dreams of Greg Ozman

I don't really remember why I chose the standard diploma my freshman year in school. I wanted the easy way out because I have never really liked school. I like being with my friends and having a good time but I hate to study. Look at my grades. My mother didn't push me all the time and then it got to the point where she just wanted me to pass my classes even if it was with D's.

Greg is also a football player and does well with the sport. On several occasions he talks about his ability to play the sport. "I'm good at this game. I play defense and can stop a truck if it comes my way." When asked about his future in football, he smiles a little and explains, "Coach says I could go to a Division II school if I continue to play like this. I don't know if he tells me this to keep me out there or if it's really true." During football season, Greg's grades are above average, however they have a tendency to fall after the season is over. When asked about this change in grades, his only explanation was, "You have got to pass five classes and Coach comes around to talk to the teachers about how we are doing during the season."

Greg goes on to explain that he expects to graduate on time and to "get a job and start to work." When Greg tried to remember his life as an eighth grader, he spoke about some of the teachers he remembered and how each day would start. People who made an impression on his life were those he strived to emulate. He had very fond memories of his bus driver, who he remembered would take the time to see how he was doing and would engage him in conversation. "He would give us treats at Halloween and Christmas and would not yell at us like this new bus driver. You know, I have gotten written up for sitting on the bus with one foot in the aisle?"

Greg recalled that he did not really understand his own academic capacities or why he was placed in special education classes. He connects his class placements with playing around and not studying.

Back then I knew, or at least I thought I knew, that I could handle my classes. My mother use to tell me that I needed to focus more on my class work and stop playing around. I didn't know that I would have to go into special classes. I have trouble learning certain things.

Greg became disconnected when he talked about being placed in special classes in high school. When he was in 10th grade, and at the request of his teachers, a child study committee found him eligible for special services. These services included learning disable classes. This would place him in classes with fewer students and allow him to have more one-on-one with the teacher.

Greg believed that this placement had put a label on him that would be there for the rest of his high school career. Greg reported that after being identified as eligible for special services, his 4-year plan changed, because he was not able to take some of the classes he had originally signed up for. He also reported that, to the extent possible, he refused extra help and support.

> Although I have some special classes, I am still in a regular class with the regular teacher and a special education teacher who is supposed to provide me with help when I need it. I don't ask for help because when other students see them come to your desk, they look at you like you are stupid. That sucks!

Greg believes that he has followed the plan that was originally set for him, but he is not altogether happy with the outcome. There were courses that he was not exposed to that he wanted to take in his original plan, but he could not take them because of his placement in special education. "I have done what I had said I would do. It wasn't easy, but I am graduating." Greg will be graduating with a standard diploma and now talks about trying to get into a community college.

His desire to attend community college did not quite ring true within the context of the other information he provided in his interview. He might have mentioned this because he thought it would be something I wanted to hear, because others were making plans for

post-secondary education, or because he was considering enrolling in a community college. Greg wants to blend in wherever possible, as not to be ostracized by insensitive kids.

Greg's mother took responsibility for her part in Greg's schooling, including her agreement to the pursuit of a standard diploma:

I know I didn't do everything I could have done to make Greg do better. When he went into the ninth grade, I had great hopes for him, but it's been all I can do to keep him in school. If I remember correctly, when I signed his 4-year plan, I felt this was the least he could do and if he did well enough, we could change it after the first year. I know now that he has a disability and he does not feel good about how he has been labeled. I feel so much of the blame for this.

As a parent, Susan explained that she now believes she should have had more involvement in her son's school life. She recalled very few planned visits to the school. When she would receive calls from the school, Ms. Ozman said, "I would try to resolve situations over the phone rather than meeting with the teacher in person." According to Ms Ozman,

One teacher described Greg as having a very explosive temper that was often displayed in school. This had generated a few referrals for him and had put him on a list that he did not wish to be on. Teachers all look at him the same way. They always think he is going to be trouble. They just won't get to know him. There are good things even in the worst of us. I know that he may never go to college even though he now wants to go. The counselors keep pushing him to go to job corp. I don't know what will be best for him, I just don't know.

Susan is obviously not happy with the way things have turned out for Greg but feels it is too late to expect a change. She also describes a passive role as a parent. As the interview

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proceeded, we talked about finding a mentor or a "big brother" for her son, someone that could earn Greg's trust and allow him to talk about his inner thoughts without feeling restricted. Ms. Ozman's response was not optimistic, nor did it display a willingness to take some steps in this direction.

> If you mean someone from school, you only have two or three Black male teachers in the entire school, and Greg will not talk to any of the White teachers. He does not trust them. But isn't this a little too late? Why didn't the school or even the counselors look into this a long time ago? You know I have no answers for what it is you want me to say. I can only speak from what I know.

Both Greg and his mother expressed a somewhat deeply rooted mistrust for the White population. This appears to be more of a where to place the blame, than any specific incidents that may have occurred during his high school tenure.

Summary

As each pair of participants articulated their hopes and dreams 4 years later, there are mixed feelings and different perspectives. Only one pair of participants' goals and dreams are in alignment with what they had proposed 4 years earlier. They both are still committed to higher education. They are sensitive to the needs of others and their trust in God and hard work has brought dreams into fruition. On the other hand, the other pairs of participants are not realizing their dreams. In one case, mother and son are in contrast. The outcome was not what either expected and the journey to this unpleasant conclusion was founded on bad decisions that were not well thought through. The blame for the outcome, in some cases, was self-ownership; however, school, teachers, coaches and administration were not left out of the equation. They are blamed for deferring the aspirations and dreams of these participants. Although all but one

of the three remaining male participants will graduate on time, their future educational plans will not be what they had anticipated 4 years ago.

CHAPTER 5. BARRIERS TO GOALS AND DREAMS

John Adams

When the word barrier was introduced to John, he gave me this: "When I think of barriers, I think of things that keep you from getting what you want." John then asked me how I would define the word, and I responded that I thought he was right on target. In the conversation that transpired, John explained that he looked at barriers as motivational tools that made him work harder. These were challenges that caused him to look at himself and find a way to "jump higher and harder." Whenever John faced obstacles in school, whether academically or socially, he responded with an initiative that would lead to the boosting of his self-esteem.

> Whenever I faced roadblocks, the situation only gave me more energy to do better and
> come out on top. When an assignment was too difficult and I couldn't get it, I would get
> on the phone with one of my friends to talk it out, and when I found out that they didn't
> know any more than I did, the next day, after class, I would stay back and try to talk to
> the teacher.

John describes this process as both solving a problem and boosting his self-esteem.

John also talked about those times when teachers did not have time to help him and would put him off. When I asked John how this made him feel, he replied, "I just kept worrying them until they did help me." According to John and his mother, John was able to achieve and

prosper. According to teacher comments and documentation, John is a student that a teacher would find hard to ignore. Teachers go on to say, "His straight forwardness is not that of someone who would become a nuisance to a teacher, but whose character is one of self-pride and the ability to portray his love of learning to all that crosses his path."

John's circle of friends is sparse. He considers himself a loner. "Some of the students would call me a nerd because of the way I would always ask questions, but that didn't really bother me." His teachers commented that John acknowledges that he took criticism from his classmates well. "The criticism only makes me push harder."

Students in this age category often conform to the norm when faced with rejection from peers. This was not the case as John told his story. According to one of his teachers, he was very focused and wanted to learn. According to both John and his mother, this determination came from the values instilled in him at a very young age. His teachers commented on his work ethic and his endurance to see things through to the end. John gave a similar explanation of perseverance.

John spoke very little of adjustment problems growing up. When asked about his father, he responded:

> You can't miss what you never had the chance to have. I know that I do have a father and
> I have some stepbrothers and we do see each other, but I have my mother and my
> grandparents and life is good. The absence of a father in my home is not a barrier for me.

Despite a childhood without a father, John did well, something both he and his mother agree upon. Family, friends, and church are woven throughout both of their interviews as supports that helped John succeed. The church helped with school expenses at times and gave monetary rewards at the end of the school year for honor roll.

The kinds of challenges that a Black male might face are not described as challenges or barriers by John. He does not see that not having a father present was a barrier, nor does he find that being a smart, achieving Black male was troublesome to him in high school. Instead, he remarks on his determination, perseverance, and support from his family and church.

John's mother, though more concerned about the absence of a father and wealth, also minimizes them and does not see them as a barrier to John's academic goals. She is aware of how the world treats Black males and much of this awareness has driven her involvement in John's development.

Ms. Adams defines barriers as those things that are purposefully in place to hold back people of color, which she acknowledges comes from her personal experience:

> I have talked to John a lot about how Black boys are viewed in this world today. They are expecting you to do poorly and you've got to prove them wrong and there is a right and wrong way to do this. You don't want to bring bad attention to yourself.

Ms. Adams spent a great deal of our interview talking about the adversities she had experienced and how they reinforced her involvement as a parent. "I have spent most of my life working longer and harder than the White man, but when it came time for a promotion or pay increase, they would always get it over me. It is so frustrating." Ms. Adams explains that she tells John he has to be twice as good and twice as fast as the White man, to even get a chance at a position. Although she has tried to protect him from the racism that exists, Ms. Adams has also provided ways to succeed despite racism. Nevertheless, she understands he is going to face it alone once he graduates from high school and goes into the work world. She hopes she has prepared him for that world. She explains:

I did prepare him for the obstacles of high school. I could not always afford to get John everything he wanted to have for school, but I can say I was able to give him the things he needed. He would come home sometimes and say, 'Mom, I need this kind of calculator or graphing paper to do this assignment,' and I would either have to try to borrow it or go to my parents for help because I just didn't have the money to go right out and buy one. But we always found a way. I never wanted him to go without what he really needed.

Ms. Adams relates the stories of two teachers who took a personal interest in John and helped him tremendously with things that he needed, including being sensitive to his economic status. She remarked:

John would come home sometimes with supplies and books that teachers had given him for completion of a project. I have nothing bad to say about the teachers at Jefferson County High School. Some of them have really helped John and have been there when he needed them.

Ms. Adams contends that the obstacles that have presented themselves in both of their lives have only made them stronger and a little wiser.

I had a child out of wedlock. The odds were against me. Most people wanted to see me fail. They wanted to see me beg for help. This made me bound and determined to make the best life I could for John.

Both John and his mother speak from the perspective of understanding the odds and beating them. Both see hard work, family, and the church as solutions to adversity. Both take difficult situations and make them into learning experiences. Ms. Adams tells a story that illustrates her approach:

My family is forever telling me that I need to take time for myself and go on a vacation or a shopping trip just to relax. The one time I did listen, I had saved money to go with the church group to go on a shopping trip. The week before the trip, John informed me that he had to have a suit for a play he was in at school. The play was coming up in 2 weeks. He wanted to back out because he knew there was no money to purchase a suit. I took those opportunities to talk to him about commitment and not living up to his word. Your reputation will suffer if you back out. I gave up the trip for him, and I let him know. I never regretted it, not for one moment. I am not saying that everything goes easy for us. There have been times that I have cried myself to sleep at night.

Ms. Adams shared that she takes responsibility for John's situation as far as not having both parents in the home. However, she also believes that John has not been denied that relationship because he does have nonbiological father figures who have stepped in to help fill that role.

Arthur Pinner

Instead of the word barrier, I used the term roadblock with Arthur. He understands roadblocks as those things that are "standing in the way of your hopes and dreams." Arthur describes most of his high school experiences as barriers or roadblocks.

I am not happy with the way things have turned out for me. No one at Jefferson County High School wants to help me. I am not a talker and it's hard for me to talk to a teacher and when I do, they put me off and won't even listen to what I have to say. I thought my basketball coach would listen to me and help me to stay on the team even though I was on home school, but all he would ever say is that there was nothing that he could do because these were school rules and his hands were tied. He didn't even try and I'm a good player. He just kicked me to the curb. I kept hoping that Mom would fix it so I

could still play with my friends. It didn't work. I guess you could say my barrier was going to a public school. The principal and the teachers just seem like they didn't want to help me, and some even acted like they didn't want me there.

Arthur is very bitter at this phase of his educational career. The one thing that motivated him, or could have motivated him – sports –has been taken away. As a result, he feels there is no purpose for continuing his education.

Both Arthur and his mother describe high school academics as a necessary "evil" required to be able to do something important – play sports. Neither value academics and Arthur, particularly, went to high school so that he could participate in athletics, exhibit his athletic prowess, and go on to play college ball. School no longer holds the same value as it did when his high school curriculum was built around sports participation. College is now not attainable for him because of his inability to graduate. He explains that when the school failed him by not allowing him to continue with what he considered important, being at school no longer served his purpose.

Each interview question that was presented to Arthur was answered with the same discontent and anger as the previous one. "I hate this school. Everyone here wants me to fail and do badly. What did I ever do to these teachers? Nothing! They just don't want me here!" These are phrases that I heard over and over throughout the interview process. Arthur believes that everyone but him and his family is to blame for his lack of success.

Arthur's mother, Rose Pinner, shares her son's assessment. When questioned about her views on those barriers that may have stood in the way of her son's education, Rose replied, "There are many things here at this school that have definitely kept my son a prisoner." Just the mention of her son and his high school career causes Rose emotional stress and she no will no

longer continue to discuss it. I tried a number of strategies and questions to explore Rose's involvement and responsibility in Arthur's education. In most instances, she began to cry, usually ending with, "It is hard for me to answer this question."

However, while meeting with her one afternoon at Jefferson Prep in a nearly deserted building, after the students and teachers had left, Rose was more relaxed and calmer than on our previous visits. Obviously, the environment at the site of our previous meeting was too open and she did not feel secure. The fear was there that she would be seen, as was later revealed by Ms. Pinner. She retraced her son's upbringing during happier times prior to high school. Although she believes there were many adjustments that her son has had to make during those years, she also noted an abundance of happy and rewarding times when he would come home excited about school. According to his mother, prior to high school "Arthur made friends and he would spend a lot of time with them, engaging in boy things. They all loved to play street ball and play station".

According to his mother, Arthur was able to adjust to fatherless life, a mother who had to miss work because of reoccurring headaches, and grandparents whose religious beliefs made life miserable for him sometimes. "They were not ashamed of Arthur or the fact that I had him out of wedlock, they just didn't want to talk to him about his father or the lack of one."

Ms. Pinner explained that Arthur was always successful in his endeavors when he felt good about himself and could exhibit his talent with his friends around. She felt this got him the recognition he needed. "He feels good when he is in competition with his friends and comes out on top." I then asked Ms. Pinner, "What if he does not win?" She paused for a while and then responded, "As long as he is with his friends and everything is fair, he is fine if he loses." Ms.

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Pinner avoided the real question about how Arthur and she dealt with barriers, opting instead to give a general response:

> I'm sorry but I will have to say this, everyday we stumble over something. Is that not what life is all about? I don't really like using that word. It gives people the impression that you are always getting into trouble. I don't want my son remembered that way.

With some prodding, Rose Pinner categorized barriers as either things or people. "Things you can move. People become obstacles because they can and if they are that bound and determined to get in your way, they have no intention of moving." I asked Ms. Pinner what she concluded about barriers especially when goals are involved. She explained that she does see people as barriers because they put their hands on those things that are placed in your path. I responded to her statement by checking for meaning and asking if she meant "people create all barriers that people face." She agreed that was what she meant. Ms. Pinner thought about people being barriers and then responded. "I love my son more than life itself. If I have stopped him from reaching for the stars, then I am truly sorry. That was never my intention."

Brandon Shelton

> When I think about what stood in my way of me doing better in school, I will have to say me. My uncle used to say I was my own worst enemy. I didn't know what in the world he was getting at, but now I kind of understand.

Brandon admits that he gets into trouble with very little effort.

According to Brandon's teachers, he had a history, dating back to elementary school, as the class clown. Teachers from elementary school described him as being the center of attention with his storytelling of events that were sometimes "too wild to believe," according to Brandon. According to written documentation, the more students would gather around his desk, the more

outrageous the stories would become. When I asked Brandon about those events and how they made him feel, he smirked with a chuckle and said, "I did like the attention." Brandon says he now knows that the teachers did not like the noise and laughter that would accompany his story telling episodes.

> I guess teachers look at you and see who you are so when something happens, they will always point the finger at you. Sometimes I'm guilty and sometimes I'm not. I just wanted to have a good time. I didn't worry about my grades. I wanted to just hang with my friends and they were not doing good in school either.

Brandon still feels that he was supposed to enjoy school even if his academics suffered because of it. What he sees as barriers now were not barriers when they occurred during his formative years. He truly thought that fun times were supposed to be had for all students in school. Brandon's hardships in high school were magnified because of what he felt about the color of his skin. "It never fails. When I'm around other students and somebody does something wrong, if I'm the only Black in the group, then it's me." Brandon expressed at this time that he sees his biggest barrier as the color of his skin. "I'm Black and that means I'm a trouble maker to most teachers and principals."

Brandon's mother, Anya Shelton, is more reflective on her son's school career and her part in it.

> I love my son dearly. I tried to make up for him not having a father. I feel sometimes it is my fault he did not do as well as he should have. I was doing the best I could. If I had it to do again, a lot would change. I would talk more with the teachers, go to the school counselor more, and be there for him at meetings. I would just fight more for my son's education. My son would have a big brother or a mentor to help him get through tough

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times. I would be there for him more when he needs me. It's funny sometimes how hindsight is 20/20. It's too late now. The damage to his goals and some of his dreams has already been done.

Ms. Shelton does not deny the lifelong roadblocks that have been present, but she puts them in a context of normality. "We fall down but we get up and try again. Isn't this what everyone does?" She feels that adversity is a natural part of living and everyone encounters the same barriers as she has encountered in one form or another. Ms Shelton is from a humble beginning and has lived a life with constant mental and physical challenges. Her IQ is extremely low and physical ailments exist because of her weight. To her, the things that have happened are just the way life is. Anya has only her own experience and assumes that adversity is a natural part of one's existence. While that is true, her baseline of average is more stressful and challenging than for many of her son's classmates and their families.

> Each day I expect there to be some type of crisis, whether big or small. I'm
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> used to this. Maybe it's not a good way to live your life but you can get used to
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> disappointment and you live with it.

Anya has taught her son to expect barriers, but she has not taught him how to overcome them. A good example comes from a story that Ms. Shelton told. Her son had tried out for a flag football game and was not chosen by the two male teachers that he had previous problems with. He became angry and wanted to tell them off. "We talked about how he should act, as if it just didn't bother him at all. I told him not to give them the satisfaction of even knowing he was hurting." Ms Shelton remembers taking Brandon to the prison to visit his father, who was dying from colon cancer. Brandon had requested a meeting with him. Ms. Shelton acknowledges that she was not in favor of the visitation, but felt that her son needed to meet his father. The visit did

not turn out as well and ended with a confrontation between mother and father. Brandon witnessed this confrontation. If there were any hopes for a relationship between father and son, it did not occur. The visit to the prison was the last opportunity for such a relationship to develop. In hindsight, Ms. Shelton realizes that she did not handle the interactions with Brandon's father in a way that supported Brandon's desire for connection. Because of this, she reports that her relationship with her son was damaged. Ms. Shelton realized that she should have prepared Brandon more to meet his dying father. "I could have prepared him for the worst and the best that could have happened. I failed my son."

Greg Ozman

Let me think about barriers. I would say that the classes were hard, and I did not get the help I needed. I didn't push myself and neither did anyone else. I think I would have done better in a shop program where you work with your hands.

You know I really don't know the answer to this question.

Greg realizes that he has not worked hard at academics.

I have never had anyone to really push me. When I see that people care about me and how I do in school, it makes me want to do better cause, I like to impress people sometimes, especially my Momma.

According to behavioral records and teacher written comments in his file, Greg has had his share of referrals and suspensions from school. Teachers say that they have had their share of his anger outbursts in class. Some teachers report that they consider it a good day when Greg is absent from school. Teachers with whom I talked believe they get very little cooperation when they call Greg's mother for assistance. This belief is based upon the lack of change in Greg's behavior, simply because it does not make a difference in his behavior. Of those teachers with

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whom I spoke, most classified his mother as the enabler. Some of his former teachers regard her as an enabler because she always blames someone else when Greg gets in trouble. One of his teachers, Susan, notes that Greg's mother is consistent in believing that nothing Greg does is his fault.

According to Greg, one of the barriers that impedes his academic progress in school is his anger. "I will always have this temper. I don't think there is anyone that can help me with this. I think now I'm too old to change."

Susan Ozman believes that the biggest barrier to Greg has been the absence of positive role models to provide what she was unable to give.

Greg has faced many barriers, but I think the biggest one was not having a positive role model to steer him in the right direction. I never pushed him to make A's and B's, I just wanted him to pass and get out of school.

Ms. Ozman avoids confrontations with Greg because she would rather not deal with his attitude. When she talks to Greg about his grades and behavior, he answers back with, "What's it to you?" Ms. Ozman also reports that when she speaks to Greg about his grades, he becomes agitated. Like his mother, Greg does not like confrontations or being put on the spot. Susan describes Greg's defensive reactions. There appears to be fear in confronting him. She says,

He goes on the defense and starts to blame everyone but himself. Rather than start an argument I usually just end the conversation by saying, 'We'll talk about this later.' However, we don't. I don't like arguing with him. He has a bad temper. He has listened too much to his friends who just don't have his best interest at heart.

Susan Ozman acknowledges that the way that Greg talks to her is the way his friends talk to their parents. She has heard them when they call their parents from her house to get permission or just

to tell them that they are not coming home right away or they want to go someplace else. This type of conversation between parents and son seemed to be acceptable to the parent.

Summary

Barriers were a natural and always present part of the educational life of all four participants. Their perception and responses to these barriers were different. Three out of the four participants felt that these roadblocks were deliberately placed in their way because they were Black and teachers associated them with characteristic behavior that was sometimes misplaced. They blame the teachers and administration for not understanding their needs and their imperfections. They see the color of their skin as the ultimate barrier. One pair of participants stands alone in their perception of barriers and how they chose to overcome them. Their perspective is to overcome the odds and beating them. Their solution to adversity is hard work, family and the church.

CHAPTER 6. SUCCESS OF SUPPORT SYSTEMS

John Adams

When I asked John about his support systems, he listed several.

If you mean who has supported me, then I must say my biggest supporter has been my mother. She has walked every step with me. My extended family, which includes my grandparents and my aunts and uncles, were there for me. I will also say my belief in God. And let's not forget about those teachers that I mentioned earlier who took the time to talk to me and to find out who I really am. There were so many who helped me along the way. I guess that is why I have been so lucky.

I did not expect John's answer to be any different than what he delivered. His responses had been consistently positive and upbeat throughout the interviews. His outlook on people and life portrays the optimism that exists from within.

John connected his experiences with the teachers who supported him to his hopes for his future. John hopes that in 10 years, he will be a teacher with emphasis on technology and help others like himself. John's grandparents live right next door to John and his mother. John explained that when his mother was in and out of the hospital, he stayed with his grandparents and his mother's sister. John's mother has experienced ill health for sometime due to a work-related disability. She is out of work and on disability at the present time. She has had several hospital stays. Each time she is admitted, John says he suffers emotionally. He admits that his mother's illness may be a continual thing but it is something he will never get use to. He

feels that she suffers both physically and emotionally each time she has to be admitted. While his mother was hospitalized and he stayed with his grandparents, he missed his mother:

> They provided me with love and acceptance, but even more they supported me. I missed my mother so much. They tell me that during those times, I would go in my room and cry. They never would let me be alone. They would take me to the hospital to see my mom.

John explains that even when he talks about those times, the sadness comes back.

> I know that my mom can get through this again because she still isn't well. My grandparents and my mother's sister are still here for me. I see them every day. Grandpa still stuffs money in my pocket when he sees me. I'm blessed. I want to have a Master's in Education and teach in high school or maybe even the college level. I want to make my mother proud. I want to be able to buy her the house that she wants and let her know she will never have to work again. I will take care of her. That's the least I can do. She has given so much.

John's mother concurs with John that there were multiple positive support systems for John.

> All I can say about the influences in John's life is that they came from everywhere, his family and the school. I could give them all a name but the list would never end. They all had a hand in making John who he is.

At this point in the interview and since we were approaching the final question, the interview ended with a consensus that it took the support and commitment of the entire family to help mold John into the person he is now.

Arthur Pinner

The only person I can think of who has supported me has been my mother.

At times, she was the only one who tried to make life good for me. When she

would see me sad and disappointed, she would always try to make things

better. No one else did.

At this point in the interview, Arthur is adamant and clear that his mother, and only his mother,

is his support system. In most of his examples and stories, he puts his mother out in front and

alone. "She has never let me down. Even though things don't look good right now for

graduation, I can't blame her. She did what she thought was best for me, and she will fix this.

She always does." Despite his stance that he had no other support system than his mother, later

in the interview, Arthur gives credit to his grandparents and aunts.

They were supportive not only to me but to my Mom. They have helped her with money

matters as well as other needs we had at home. They love the both of us and will do

anything for us but my Mom hates to ask them for anything.

Rose elaborates on the help that she and Arthur had from her family, noting that they

offered financial support and a loving home in which they were always welcomed.

Arthur does not know everything they have done for us along the way, and he doesn't

have the same appreciation for the sacrifices they had to make for us. They made sure we

had food in the house and kept our electricity from being cut off many a time. You

know, they didn't have to do any of this, but they did.

Arthur and his mother agree that there was no support from the school. Rose was wishful when

she said, "There was no one at school who tried to help him. I just wish I could have been able to

make everything right for him. It hurts me that he is hurting".

Brandon Shelton

Brandon's dreams focused on his athletic participation and he identifies those people who helped him continue to play sports.

My uncle and one of the coaches on the football team were my best supporters. There were times when my uncle could not pick me up from practice, or times when I had no way to get home. One of the coaches would always step in to help me out. If he saw me waiting for a ride he would tell me to call home and tell my uncle he would give me a ride. He was the only coach that took that kind of time with me. I won't ever forget that. My mom was also a big supporter, but she doesn't know enough about football to understand what my wishes and dreams were all about.

Brandon's mother, Anya, also named Brandon's uncle as a big supporter. "My son's biggest supporter has been my brother. They talk a lot and seem to know what each other wants." In addition to his supportive relationship with Brandon, the uncle provided financial support for both Anya and Brandon. He provided a place for them to live and made other financial support available. Brandon acknowledges this important relationship:

He loves me like I'm his son. He has taught me just about everything I know about football, and he's good. He played football in high school himself. There are trophies at home that he got during high school. I hope I can be as good as he was.

Brandon's uncle has been the primary caretaker after Brandon's mother and cares for Brandon when his mother is not at home. Brandon remembers his talks with his uncle "about being a man and owning up to your mistakes. He has always been there for me, and believes in me, I love him for all he's done for me."

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Greg Ozman

When asked who his support system has been, Greg drew a blank.

> If I have to choose someone, I don't think I can. I don't know who really cared enough
>
> about me to help. Of course my mother was there but she really just wanted me to make
>
> it out of school. My friends were always there but sometimes they would just help me to
>
> stay in trouble. I just don't know. I can't think of anyone else.

I probed further and asked if there was anyone anywhere that made him feel good about himself

or gave Greg the desire to want to make good grades and graduate. Greg thought for awhile and

then said:

> No! I know you think that I should have wanted good grades to please my
>
> mom. Don't get me wrong, I always want to make my mom happy, but
>
> sometimes I get so mad with her because she fusses at me all the time about
>
> every little thing and then I start just not caring!

Greg's mother explains that she has tried to be supportive of her son.

> I have been here for my son, but I don't know how positive my influence was. I know
>
> you may think that I'm a terrible mother for not always being there for Greg, but I love
>
> my son and I've done all I know how to do.

Upon entering high school, both Greg's and his mother's ultimate goal was to see him march

down the aisle in 4 years. According to Greg's mother, "Graduation for me means he will have a

diploma and get a decent job." Four years in high school for Greg meant playing 4 years of ball

and perhaps a scholarship to play college ball. "He is going to graduate and that was his goal

and mine too." It was difficult to get Susan to talk about how she supported her son. She chose

her words carefully and never did consider her own initiative as a positive influence in her son's

life. Greg's mother did not understand how her constant nagging and pushing her son to do his best may have been just the push he needed to stay in school and now to be eligible for graduation. She feels that she put a strain on the relationship.

Ms. Ozman blames herself for her son's lack of a successful high school experience. She sees her efforts as restraints to his reaching all of his dreams. "Although Greg will graduate on time, this was done through Greg's own initiative."

Summary

This interview question yielded valuable information from both mothers and sons. The response from the connected family members was similar when compared with personal experiences. Two out of four of the pairs felt that outside of the family, teachers and administration provided support to the student that was worthy of praise and commendation. Comments were made as to the genuineness of the mentoring, particularly the coaches. A couple of the mothers and the students questioned the personal gain for the coaches, who wanted the student to remain eligible for athletics. Regardless of the reasons, the mothers were mostly appreciative of the efforts and consideration.

Two out of the four mother-son pairs interviewed felt that the school failed them when it came to encouraging and supporting the student. They felt that more could have been done by the school system in terms of guidance and support.

When reflection upon their own involvement in their son's success, all four mothers expressed at some point during the interview that they could have been more present in the social and emotional development of their child and that the connection with their educational development would have led to more positive results.

CHAPTER 7. DISCUSSION, EMERGING THEMES, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study was to investigate the home and school experience of African American males in order to discover the impact these experiences had on school outcome. To achieve this goal, four African American males and their single mothers were chosen for this study. The results of that process have been developed and explained in the previous chapters. The previous chapters represent a triangulation of observations, collected data, and interviews. It is worth noting that of the three methods used, the interviews provided the most useful insights. For me, this methodology offered a unique understanding into the phenomenon of the culture shared by these mothers and their sons. Society and the media have painted their own vision of the mother-only household, and it is not favorable. It is important to understand that this study captures only a small part of a very vast culture and population of single mothers and their academic support and interactions with their sons.

The four males in this study were products of a rural high school in southern Virginia and the demographics of this school would certainly contrast those of an urban society as depicted in many of the previous studies of Black males. The participants for this study had been predisposed to similar educational backgrounds and, for the most part, had journeyed from elementary through high school. They had all shared similar experiences in the school environment. These young men had been exposed to many of the same teachers and administrators. They had participated in similar extra curricular activities and all shared the same overall introduction and expected timeline to fulfill their dreams and aspirations. What

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makes each participant unique is the journey through his or her secondary education and the success or lack of success in obtaining desired goals. Another avenue of interest that was revealed during the study was the reasons why some males in this at-risk category reach their goals and dreams in spite of the adversity. Why are these males so persistent in pursuing their dreams?

Emerging Themes

How each subject articulated their responses to the research questions were carefully coded and categorized. Follow-up questions were continued throughout the timeline of the interviews. Answers remained consistent for the majority of the interview; however, on some occasions when I tried to reach deeper through probing, the participant chose to remain silent or repeated previous responses. The three emerging themes from the interviews are as follows:

- Three out of the four sets of participants displayed the same attitude when relating to the culture of the school.

- Three out of the four of the participants' were motivated to stay in school because of athletics and sports rather than educational gains and having a high school diploma.

- Teachers' educational expectations for at-risk African American males are low.

Deeply rooted attitudes toward the school system and its lack of ability or willingness to deal with at-risk children was the assumption of three out of the four groups of participants. Arthur, whose dreams were to play high school basketball and then go to college, felt the system let him down. Arthur strongly believed that students were treated differently based upon student race and background. "I hate to say this but some of the teachers make a difference in how they treat kids. You can tell when they don't like you." Arthur clearly felt that his academic setbacks

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were the fault of teachers who did not help him learn. Ms. Pinner, Arthur's mother, shares in his beliefs. "I wanted him to have the best high school education possible, he deserved the best." In her interviews she returned to her belief that the system and the teachers had not given Arthur the best of what they had. Ms. Pinner alleged that the high school had failed her son and she was angry about how he had been treated.

Another set of participants, Brandon and his mother, Anya Shelton, also thought that the school was responsible for Brandon's inability to achieve his educational goals. Brandon explained, "My grades weren't that good and she [the counselor] said to try for the regular diploma, so I did." In reflection Brandon said, "I did not feel that the counselor knew me well enough to make a decision that would affect the rest of my life." However, when asked, he complied with the counselor's recommendation. Brandon was an aspiring football player, but academically did just enough to be eligible to play. In addition to believing that the school failed her son, Ms. Shelton also admitted that she gave Brandon no academic guidance and support. Because Anya Shelton understood herself to be mentally challenged, she relied on her brother for advice and guidance with her son. Brandon is an example of a student who had very little support and direction from home and school.

Greg Ozman is also an aspiring athlete who blames teachers and administration at the high school for destroying some of his dreams and goals. After his 4-year plans had been put into action, a teacher referred him for a child study; they found him eligible for special services. Greg is disappointed but states:

Although I have some special classes, I am still in a regular class with the regular teacher and a special education teacher who is suppose to provide me with help when I need it. I

don't ask for help because when other students see them come to your desk, they look at you like you are stupid. That sucks!

Greg's mother puts most of the blame on herself for some of Greg's behavior and attitude toward school. Even with this self-blame, she does not leave the teachers out of the equation. She explains:

One teacher describes Greg as having a very explosive temper that was often displayed in school. This has caused a few referrals for him and put him on a list that he does not wish to be on. Teachers all look at him the same way. They always think he is going to be trouble.

When we talked about a mentor or a big brother for her son, Ms Ozman's response was:

If you mean someone from school, you only have two or three Black male teachers in the entire school, and Greg will not talk to any of the White teachers. He does not trust them. But isn't this a little too late? Why didn't the school or even the counselors look into this earlier?

As I continued to read and re-read the interview transcripts, the second theme emerged. Three out of the four male participants stayed in school to play sports. A diploma and graduation were side benefits, not primary motivators. Receiving a quality education and a high school diploma were not at the top of the list. Their focus in high school centered on the opportunity to play competitive sports. They lived to play football or basketball. School was the means to the end.

From the very beginning, Arthur Pinner makes it clear that high school afforded him the opportunity to play basketball which would allow him to display a talent that he knew he was good at and could lead the way to a college scholarship. Academics were there as a school

requirement and he would have to make it work if he wanted to reach his goal. Arthur was a talented player. Was he the best on the team? Let us just say he was competitive and the coaches did use him. He made the sports section of the local newspaper a few times and he had talents that could be developed. According to his coaches, he showed promise. Most of the opened-ended interview questions with Arthur ended with comments on basketball, which at one time was his only motivation to stay in school. Arthur's original plan was for an advanced studies diploma. However, by the beginning of his sophomore year, he had switched to a standard diploma. He could not handle the rigor of the courses. With his vision still on basketball and college, Arthur's mother pulled him out of public school and started to homeschool him. Arthur responded, "My life started to change. I thought this was good for me, I had no idea this would kill my dreams of playing basketball".

After Arthur's mother realized what she had done to her son's dreams she tried to re-enroll him in high school the following semester. He was allowed to come back; however, he was not allowed to play basketball. He had not passed the subjects he needed to be eligible. During his senior year, Arthur was placed back into homeschool; he finished that program and graduated from homeschool.

The second pair of participants, Brandon and Anya Shelton, differed in their perception of what they thought the outcome should be at the end of Brandon's tenure in high school. Brandon was into football. He received his most respect from coaches during football season. He was a good athlete and the coaches wanted and needed him. It was during the season that he got the most support from them. They encouraged good behavior and usually they received it. During off season, Brandon was involved in behavior that caused him to receive referrals. Although at the end of the year, he would perform well enough academically to pass for the year,

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it wasn't without struggle. Brandon knows he took the easy way out his freshman year in selecting the path that he chose. He realizes his concentration was on being able to play football and not being over burdened with academics. Now he wants to go to college. He explains:

> Everybody is talking about going to Virginia Tech. I don't know if they would ever consider me. I just want to be able to show my stuff on the field, it really doesn't matter where. I've worked hard to get to this point. I'm ready to graduate. That's a big thing for my family.

Brandon's mother admits that her son did not have support and guidance from her. She left all the decisions up to his uncle and the school. She realizes that Brandon may not get into college. She realizes that he is feeling helpless as to what he should do. She does not feel that there is anything that she can do at this point. She admits that she has not always been there for her son. She also holds her son responsible for what he has turned out to be. She explains: "I know school has not been easy for my child. Now he wants to go to college and my brother is trying to help him get into Norfolk State. Brandon could have done better. He played around too much." Ms. Shelton realizes that Norfolk State University is not the school of choice for her son, however, it may be one that he can get into.

The final set of participants; Greg and Susan Ozman are quite informative and willing to share information and are both straightforward people. They both are quite informative and willing to share information. Greg's initial statement concerning his goals did not speak of sports but as time went on and he engaged in the sport and that sport bought him some recognition, his aspirations for his high school career changed with less emphasis on academics and more about what the football field meant to him.

The final emerging theme that became evident during the categorizing of responses from participants and teachers was the concept that teachers' expectations are low when it comes to the performance of African American males.

In addition to the comments coming from the participants when they interacted with teachers, teachers and coaches made the following comments about one of the participants: "Brandon had a history of being a class clown. His stories were too wild to believe. He was always the center of attention. The more students that gathered around his desk, the more outrageous the stories would become." One teacher admitted that it was a quiet day when Brandon was not in school and learning took place at a much higher level because she had everyone's attention. Brandon's response to this comment was, "It never fails. When I'm around other students and someone does something wrong, if I'm the only Black, it's always me."

Another participant, Arthur, comments; "What did I ever do to these teachers? Nothing. They just don't want me here!" One teacher's comment about Arthur was, "He is the type of student you could easily overlook." Was this comment made because Arthur was not a troublemaker and did not seek the attention?

Greg Ozman's teachers explained that they had their share of his anger outburst in class. They also consider it a good day when Greg is not in class. They consider his mother as an enabler because she always blames others when Greg gets in trouble. They consider a call to her useless in terms of helping them to deter this behavior.

The teachers' reactions to three out of the four participants was not favorable in terms of participants' overall potential for academic success and the exhibited behavior that may be deterring their success.

The Outlier

When the emerging themes became obvious and dialogue revealed that in each category three out of the four sets of participants were in agreement, questions concerning the fourth set of participants began to form. One of the essential questions in this study has not been addressed. I have documented what happened to the young men who did not meet their goals; however, one of my male students that I studied did meet his goals. The question is why some African American males with the same demographics and the same at-risk characteristics manage to succeed, while others do not in their endeavor to reach their dreams. John Adams is considered to be an outlier in this case study. What can this study tell us about his ability to succeed? As I look back at his responses to pertinent questions, it is all about attitude and his predisposition. From the very beginning John exhibited confidence in himself and his ability to succeed. When asked about his goals when his 4-year plan was originated back in the eighth grade, he responded:

> I have always wanted to go to college. Teaching is something I have wanted all along.
> When I first did my 4-year plan I wanted to get the advanced studies diploma. I also
> wanted to take dual enrollment classes at J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College so
> that I could have some college credits. I knew the math would be hard. This was the
> only thing that scared me. I gave it all I had and I've made it.

When John speaks of the obstacles he had to overcome along the way, his response is filled with a sense of determination: "Whenever I faced roadblocks, the situation only gave me energy to do better and come out on top." John describes overcoming obstacles as both solving a problem and boosting his self-esteem. Teachers had the following description of John: "His straightforwardness is not that of someone who would become a nuisance to a teacher, but whose

character is one of self pride and the ability to portray his love of learning to all that crosses his path." Both John and his mother understand the odds and beating them. Both see hard work, family, and the church as solutions to adversity. John also contributes some of his success to his support system. His mother is number 1 on his list and his extended family is not far behind. John states the following:

> If you mean who has supported me, then I must say my biggest supporter has been my mother. She has walked every step with me. My extended family, which includes my grandparents, my aunts and uncles, were there for me. I will also say my belief in God. And let's not forget about those teachers that I mentioned earlier who took the time to talk to me and to find out who I really am. There were so many who helped me along the way. I guess that is why I have been so lucky.

John also connected his experiences with school staff and administration to his hopes and dreams for the future. John's mother concurs with John, she states:

> All I can say about the influences in John's life is that they came from everywhere, his family and the school. I could give them all a name, but the list would never end. They all had a hand in making John who he is.

Recommendations and Consideration for Further Study

Although this school system has received success in terms of being fully accredited for a number of years, there are areas in Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) that need to be addressed. Disproportionality, in terms of Blacks and the achievement gap is an area of concern. It is imperative that a structure becomes available to address these concerns that exist for African American students, especially the African American male. As a result of this study, the following recommendations should be considered.

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1. At risk-male students should be identified before creating their secondary 4-year plan, if not earlier.

2. Provide in-service for teachers to help them understand and develop a classroom of cultural diversity that is supportive of students no matter how they come to the class.

3. Develop a collaborative partnership with community churches, local YMCA, scholarship benefactors and the American Legion to help put into fruition a mentoring program for these at-risk youth.

4. School board should make a conscientious effort to hire more Black male teachers and set them up as mentors, role models, and leaders. Reduce teaching load to spend time with students.

Connecting Past Research With Current Study

The old adage "ain't nothing new under the sun," speaks directly to the connection of previous research literature and the findings in this study. Many of the past studies up to 2007, left gaps which future studies would hopefully fill. It was expected by previous researchers that future studies would increase understanding of Black males and explain the dynamics accounting for the success in their lives. Previous research has focused on their deficits. in terms of school dropout and underachievement. Factors relating to academic levels of achievement should now be at the forefront of research. This research is still at a deficit.

In terms of emerging themes from this study, a new phenomenon has emerged. This new data was not covered in the literature that was previously available for the literature review. The participants in this study articulated that sports and athletics was the motivational tool that kept them in school. This variable alone meant more to them than an education. The flip side of the

coin on this admission is that in order to play organized sports, athletes must maintain their grades and not be suspended from school in order to remain eligible to play sports.

The previous review of literature was in agreement with another emerging theme in this study. Teacher expectations of African American males continue to be low. There were many studies whose analysis still hold true, to this factor, today. African American male students are still more likely to be in a lower academic track, discipline more often than their counterparts and negatively stereotyped by teachers than White students.

The one question that was asked some years back and is still relevant at the time of this study is why African American males not faring better in a nation known to be the wealthiest and the most progressive of major countries?

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RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM FOR PARENTS

TITLE: WHAT ARE THE EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES RAISED IN MOTHER-ONLY HOUSEHOLDS?

VCU IRB NO.: HM12589

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
The purpose of this study is to look at African American high school senior males in mother-only households and examine their experiences as they pursue their academic goals.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AND YOUR INVOLVEMENT
This study is designed to investigate the educational aspirations and achievement of African American males raised in mother-only households. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are the mother of an African American male. If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in 30 to 60 minute interview. The interview will focus on the effects of home and school experiences as they relate to your child's experiences in school outcomes.

In addition, with your permission the researchers will interview your child and review some of their school records related to their educational plans. All interviews will be conducted at a time and location that is convenient to study participants.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS
The research does not involve greater than minimal risk. However it is possible that some of the interview questions may cause you some discomfort. You can skip answering any question(s) that you choose.

BENEFITS TO YOU AND OTHERS
You may not get any direct benefit from this study, but the information learned from participants in the study may help educators to better understand the educational aspirations of African American males.

COSTS
There are no costs for participating in this study other than the time you will spend participating in the interview. At any time, subjects can withdraw from the research. Participants can omit

answering any question that causes discomfort. The use of pseudonyms and passwords will ensure privacy of subjects. Collected data will be stored in a locked vault when not in use.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION
No compensation will be administered.

ALTERNATIVES
The alternative is to not participate in the study.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Maintaining participant confidentiality is an important aspect of this study. Participants and locations will be assigned pseudonyms from the beginning of the study. No reference to specific individuals or locations will be made in oral or written reports. In addition audiotapes will be coded using pseudonyms. All written and taped transcripts will be stored in a locked vault. Electronic transcripts of the interviews will be stored on password protected computer. All tapes and transcripts will be erased six months after completion of the study.

We will not tell anyone the answers you give us; however, information from the study and the consent form signed by you may be looked at or copied for research or legal purposes by Virginia Commonwealth University.

What we find from this study may be presented at meetings or published in papers, but your name will not ever be used in these presentations or papers.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL
Participation for parents and their child is strictly voluntary. Participants can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Even though some students will be eighteen years of age, the School System requires that parental permission be obtained.

QUESTIONS
In the future, you may have questions about your participation in this study. If you have any questions, complaints, or concerns about the research, contact:
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If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact:

> Office for Research
> Virginia Commonwealth University
> 800 East Leigh Street, Suite 113
> P.O. Box 980568
> Richmond, VA 23298
> Telephone: 804-827-2157

You may also contact this number for general questions, concerns or complaints about the research. Please call this number if you cannot reach the research team or wish to talk to someone else. Additional information about participation in research studies can be found at http://www.research.vcu.edu/irb/volunteers.htm.

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION
I have been given the chance to read this consent form. I understand the information about this study. Questions that I wanted to ask about the study have been answered. My signature says that I am willing to participate in this study and allow my child to participate. I will receive a copy of the consent form once I have agreed to participate.

_____

Participant name printed   Participant signature   Date

_____

Name of Person Conducting Informed Consent
Discussion / Witness
(Printed)

_____ _____

Signature of Person Conducting Informed Consent   Date
Discussion / Witness

_____ _____

Investigator Signature (if different from above)   Date

CONSENT FOR RECORDING
I understand the information about this study and the interview sessions will be recorded with my permission. Questions that I wanted to ask about the recording and transcriptions of the interview sessions have been answered. I have checked the box below that indicates my permission or declination of the recording of the interview session.

☐ YES, I give my permission to have the interview session recorded.

☐ NO, I do not give my permission to have the interview session recorded.

RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM FOR STUDENTS 18 Years of Age or Older

TITLE: WHAT ARE THE EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES RAISED IN MOTHER-ONLY HOUSEHOLDS?

VCU IRB NO.: HM12589

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
The purpose of this study is to look at African American high school senior males in mother-only households and examine their experiences as they pursue their academic goals.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AND YOUR INVOLVEMENT
This study is designed to investigate the educational aspirations and achievement of African American males raised in mother-only households. If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in 30 to 60 minute interview. The interview will focus on the effects of home and school experiences as they relate to your experiences in school outcomes.

In addition, with your permission the researcher will review some of your school records related to your educational plans. All interviews will be conducted at a time and location that is convenient to you.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS
The research does not involve greater than minimal risk. However it is possible that some of the interview questions may cause you some discomfort. You can skip answering any question(s) that you choose.

BENEFITS TO YOU AND OTHERS
You may not get any direct benefit from this study, but the information learned from participants in the study may help educators to better understand the educational aspirations of African American males.

COSTS
There are no costs for participating in this study other than the time you will spend participating in the interview.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION
No compensation will be administered.

ALTERNATIVES
The alternative is to not participate in the study.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Maintaining participant confidentiality is an important aspect of this study. Participants and locations will be assigned pseudonyms from the beginning of the study. No reference to specific individuals or locations will be made in oral or written reports. In addition audiotapes will be coded using pseudonyms. All written and taped transcripts will be stored in a locked vault. Electronic transcripts of the interviews will be stored on password protected computer. All tapes and transcripts will be erased six months after completion of the study.

We will not tell anyone the answers you give us; however, information from the study and the consent form signed by you may be looked at or copied for research or legal purposes by Virginia Commonwealth University.

What we find from this study may be presented at meetings or published in papers, but your name will not ever be used in these presentations or papers.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL
Participation is strictly voluntary. You can withdraw from participation in this study at anytime without penalty.

QUESTIONS
In the future, you may have questions about your participation in this study. If you have any questions, complaints, or concerns about the research, contact:
Patsy S. Chavis
2904 Barwood Road
Glen Allen, Virginia 23060

pchavis@vcu.edu

Dr. Charol Shakeshaft
Virginia Commonwealth University – School of Education
Educational Leadership Department
Oliver Hall – Education
1015 W. Main Street, Room 2126
P. O. Box 842020
Richmond, VA 23284-2020

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CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION
I have been given the chance to read this consent form. I understand the information about this study. Questions that I wanted to ask about the study have been answered. My signature says that I am willing to participate in this study. I will receive a copy of the consent form once I have agreed to participate.

_____
Participant name printed   Participant signature   Date

_____
Name of Person Conducting Informed Consent
Discussion / Witness
(Printed)

_____ _____
Signature of Person Conducting Informed Consent   Date
Discussion / Witness

_____ _____
Investigator Signature (if different from above)   Date

CONSENT FOR RECORDING
I understand the information about this study and the interview sessions will be recorded with my permission. Questions that I wanted to ask about the recording and transcriptions of the interview sessions have been answered. I have checked the box below that indicates my permission or declination of the recording of the interview session.

☐ YES, I give my permission to have the interview session recorded.

☐ NO, I do not give my permission to have the interview session recorded.

APPENDIX C

RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMATION AND YOUTH ASSENT FORM

TITLE: What are the Educational Aspirations of African American Males Raised in mother-Only Households?

VCU IRB NO.: HM12589

This form may have some words that you do not know. Please ask someone to explain any words that you do not know. You may take home a copy of this form to think about and talk to your parents about before you decide if you want to be in this study.

What is this study about?
The purpose of this study is to look at African American high school senior males in mother-only households and examine their experiences as they pursue their academic goals.

What will happen to me if I choose to be in this study?
If you decide to be in this research study, you will meet with the primary investigator at a site to be determined. At which time an interview will be conducted that includes open-ended questions concerning your educational and home experiences. The following are examples of open-ended questions that are representative of those that will be asked: (1.) How do you perceive your school life from elementary to present? (2.) What has been some of your most positive experiences in school? (3.) Describe those experiences that did not turn out as you expected.

The interviews will be tape recorded so that we are sure to get everyone's ideas. Names will not be recorded on the tape. If you decide to be in this research study, you will be asked to sign this form. Do not sign the form until you have all your questions answered, and understand what will happen to you.

What might happen if I am in this study?
The research does not involve greater than minimal risk. However it is possible that some of the interview questions may cause you some discomfort. You may skip answering any question(s) that you choose.

Will you tell anyone what I say?
We will not share your answers with your teachers, parents, or friends. Participants and locations will be assigned pseudonyms from the beginning of the study. No reference to specific

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individuals or locations will be made in oral or written reports. In addition, audiotapes will be coded using pseudonyms. All tapes and notes will be kept in a locked vault. Tapes will be erased six months after completion of the study.

Do I have to be in this study?
Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. If you choose to be in this study, you may stop at any time without penalty.

Questions
If you have questions about being in this study, you can have your parent contact:
Patsy S. Chavis
2904 Barwood Road
Glen Allen, Virginia 23060
███████████████

pchavis@vcu.edu

Dr. Charol Shakeshaft
Virginia Commonwealth University – School of Education
Educational Leadership Department
Oliver Hall – Education
1015 W. Main Street, Room 2126
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Do not sign this form if you have any questions. Be sure someone answers your questions.

Assent:
I have read this form. I understand the information about this study. I am willing to be in this study.

_____   _____
Youth name printed   Youth signature   Date

_____
Name of Person Conducting Informed Assent
Discussion / Witness, printed

_____   _____
Signature of Person Conducting Informed Assent   Date
Discussion / Witness

Principal Investigator Signature (if different from above)   Date

PERMISSION FOR RECORDING
I understand the information about this study and the interview sessions will be recorded with my permission. Questions that I wanted to ask about the recording and transcriptions of the interview sessions have been answered. I have checked the box below that indicates my permission or declination of the recording of the interview session.

☐ YES, I give my permission to have the interview session recorded.

☐ NO, I do not give my permission to have the interview session recorded.

VITA

Patsy Chavis was born January 11,1950 in Bassett, Virginia and graduated from George Washington Carver High School in Fieldale, Virginia in 1967. She received a Bachelor of Science degree in Health and Physical Education from Virginia State College, now Virginia State University, located in Petersburg, Virginia, in 1972. She subsequently moved to Richmond where she went to work in the field of Health and Physical Education in Goochland County Public School System for over 38 years. She earned her Master of Education in Counselor Education from Virginia Commonwealth University in 1984.