

**ACADEMIC MOTIVATION AND SUCCESS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL
STUDY OF 8TH GRADE AFRICAN AMERICAN BOYS IN TWO SUBURBAN
MARYLAND MIDDLE SCHOOLS**

EDLD Dissertation

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ABSTRACT

A review of the existing literature illuminated a gap in the current research on academic motivation and success for 8th grade African American male students in the state of Maryland. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the perceptions of factors contributing to the academic motivation and success of eight 8th grade African American male students' in two suburban Maryland middle schools. From the research, eight major themes emerged from the study; goal setting, highly academic performance, increased peer accountability, parental support and accountability, classroom environment, more principal-led focus groups, specific career aspirations, and negative school images. Based on the themes the researcher collected, the results suggested that peer accountability, parental involvement, and committed educators have a direct correlation with the academic motivation and success of the selected participants. The research may be of interest to K–12 administrators, teachers, and parents seeking instructional and cognitive strategies to address how 8th grade African American male students process their perceptions and emotions attached to their learning.

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1	1
Introduction to the Study	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Introduction	1
Background of the Problem	6
Need for the Study	7
Problem Statement	8
Significance of the Study	8
Purpose of the Study	9
Research Questions	9
Conceptual Framework	10
Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy	10
Theory of motivation	11
Data Analysis	12
Assumptions	13
Limitations	13
Delimitations	14
Definition of Terms	14
Summary	15
Chapter 2	17
Literature Review	17
Introduction	17
Motivation and Success	17

Historical Overview of African American Education in Maryland.....	19
Pre-Civil War African American education in Maryland	19
Post-Civil War African American education in Maryland.....	21
Impact of African American Schools in Suburban Maryland.....	22
Rockville Colored High School.....	22
Lincoln High School.....	24
Legal Cases Impacting African American Education	24
Plessy v. Ferguson	24
Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County	26
Bolling v. Sharpe	27
Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka	28
Brown v. Board of Education’s Impact on Montgomery County Schools	29
Academic Disidentification and African American Boys.....	29
Perspectives of the African American Male	30
Positive Portrayals of the African American Male	31
Negative Portrayals of the African American Male	32
No Child Left Behind Act of 2001	33
Theoretical Literature	34
Bandura’s social learning Theory	34
Maslow’s theory of Motivation	35
Theory of Motivation.....	37
<u>Academic Achievement and Self-Esteem.....</u>	42
Differential Treatment of African American Students	43

African American–White Achievement Gap.....	44
Factors Contributing to African American Male Academic Success	44
Impact of parental involvement on African American male academic success	45
Impact of administrators on African American male academic success.....	46
Impact of school structure on African American male academic success.....	47
Programs to Improve African American male academic success	47
Relevant Studies in Motivation.....	50
Summary.....	53
Chapter 3	55
Methodology	55
Introduction.....	55
Research Design	55
Participant Selection.....	57
Reliability/Validity	57
Setting.....	58
Instrumentation.....	59
Data Collection	59
Ethical Considerations.....	60
Epoche and Bracketing.....	61
Field Test.....	62
Informed Consent	63
Risks/Benefits	63
Security	63

Summary	64
Chapter 4	66
Findings	66
Introduction	66
Participants in the Study	67
Description of the Setting	67
East Wood Middle School	68
Sinclair Middle School	68
Demographic Profiles	69
Respondent 1 (Captain America)	69
Respondent 2 (My Brother’s Keeper)	70
Respondent 3 (The Artist)	70
Respondent 4 (The Technology Guru)	70
Respondent 5 (The Inquisitive One)	71
Respondent 6 (The Well Rounded One)	72
Respondent 7 (Coming To America)	72
Respondent 8 (The Driven One)	73
Data Analysis and Interpretation	73
Themes	75
Theme 1: Goal Setting	75
Theme 2: Highly Proficient Academic Performance	77
Theme 3: Increased Peer Accountability	79
Theme 4: Parental Support and Accountability	81

Theme 5: Classroom Environment.....	84
Theme 6: More Principal-Led Focus Groups	86
Theme 7: Specific Career Aspirations	88
Theme 8: Negative School Images	90
Summary.....	91
Chapter 5	93
Discussion and Conclusions	93
Introduction.....	93
Summary of the Study	94
Literature Reviewed	94
Significance of the Study	96
Findings by Research Question	96
Research Question 1	96
Research Question 2	97
Research Question 3	101
Recommendations for Future Research	103
Recommendations for Practice.....	104
Implications	105
Conclusion	107
References	109
Appendices.....	173
Appendix A	174
Institutional Review Board Approval Letter	174

Appendix B 175

MCPS Approval Request to Conduct Research 175

Appendix C 176

Semistructured Interview Guide 177

Appendix D 179

Informed Consent Form..... 179

Appendix E 183

Permission Letter from Researcher 183

Appendix F 184

Research Questions..... 184

List of Tables

Table 1.	<i>Research Matrix</i>	62
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Chapter 1

Introduction to the Study

Introduction

In the United States, African American men are in a state of crisis and present a complex picture for those observing and analyzing them (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 2013; Noguera, 2009). Faced with severe life challenges from birth, African American boys endure high infant mortality rates, live in challenging neighborhoods, and are labeled at-risk, dysfunctional, and uneducable (Close, Suther, Foster, El-Amin, & Battle, 2013). The United States has an extremely conflicted relationship with African American men (Howard, 2013; Lott & Marcus, 2013). For other races, they evoke fear or conjure images of violence against one another.

For 8th grade African American boys, school carries multiple connotations. School is an exciting place of growth and reckless abandon where they develop lifelong friendships and create lasting memories (McLaughlin & Jones, 2009; Stuckart, & Glanz, 2010). Additionally, school conveys a connotation of high expectations from administrators, teachers, and parents to meet rigorous student achievement standards (Bottoms & Anthony, 2005; Lynn, Bacon, Totten, Bridges, & Jennings, 2010). School represents an escape from unwanted pressures and responsibilities of nurturing younger siblings and symbolizes an environment in which future dreams can be actualized through self-discipline and hard work (Levin & Kilbourne, 2008; Magnet, 2013). Conversely, school also triggers self-doubt and antisocial behavior, and evokes significant fear for African American boys that their inadequacies will be exposed (Dancy, 2012; Glover, 2012). The by-products of these issues are poor coping skills,

internalized frustrations, and students who are misunderstood by their peers and teachers (Curran, 2014; Martin, 2009).

School represents a series of external tests and developmental milestones to acclimate African American boys to established school rules and social norms (Espinoza & Juvonen, 2011; Joaquim, 2011). It represents a microcosm of the greater society and development of their self-concept and adjustments to personal successes and failures (Harter, 2012; Hopkins & Putnam, 2013).

Schools perpetuate an environment that often is not friendly for 8th grade African American boys (Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Murphy, Acosta, & Kennedy-Lewis, 2013). The expectations of failure and nonperformance that exist in society permeate the walls of many schools (Gay, 2010; Granger, 2008; Lack, 2009). Often, 8th grade African American boys have minimal societal expectations for greatness (Delpit, 2012; Graham & Anderson, 2008; White & Cones, 2013). As they attempt to seek peer approval, maladaptive behaviors surface (Patrick, Mantzicopoulos, & Sears, 2012; Weissberg, 2011). In comparison to their White counterparts, 8th grade African American boys' actions are viewed more critically and the punishments they receive are stricter (Foote, 2009; Grant, 2014; Jewkes, 2014; Michie, 2012). Statistics suggest they receive harsher office discipline referrals, suspensions, and expulsions from school than do White students (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Skiba et al., 2011).

Some are more comfortable seeing African American men excel in myopic arenas such as music, basketball, and football (Duderstadt, 2009; Martin, 2014; Phillips, 2008). Society has portrayed African American males as being hostile, angry, and disengaged with the academic process (McLaughlin & Jones, 2009; Nicolas et al., 2008; Noguera,

2009). 8th grade African American boys face societal issues that impact their school performance (Howard, 2008; Strayhorn, 2010; Tyre, 2009). National unemployment, education levels, incarceration rates, and mental health challenges suggest that African American men need help (Greenberg & Rosenheck, 2008; Western & Wildeman, 2009; Xanthos, Treadwell, & Holden, 2010).

The unwritten caste system in schools separates academically gifted students from struggling students (Guenther, 2009; Mickelson, 2015; Stinson, 2011). These distinctions are further reinforced through peer acceptance, rejection, and teacher feedback (Garandean, Wilson, & Rodkin, 2010; Lozier, 2013; Mikami, Lerner, & Lun, 2010). For naturally gifted students, school is a place where they receive positive reinforcement and are motivated by praise (Burney, 2008; Canter, 2009; Fisher, 2009). Through their parents' high expectations, emphasizing critical thinking through extracurricular activities, and placing a high priority on education, these students seek leadership roles (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2011; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2011; Queen, 2013).

For struggling students, attention-seeking behaviors generate peer acceptance through maladaptive behavior; boundary testing represents their need for acceptance, and their overall disinterest in school masks greater issues (Lebowitz & Omer, 2013; Naidu, 2008; Shecter, 2013). Some parents of 8th grade African American male students project their challenges and fears onto their sons, who in turn internalize the beliefs that they, too, will be unsuccessful in school (Amah, 2009; Emanuel, 2008; Franklin, 2004). These fearful boys mask their academic insecurities with hardened exteriors to deflect peer ridicule and exposed academic weaknesses (Chapman, 2009; Colby, 1988). School does

not represent success; it creates internal anxiety based on the dedication, perseverance, resilience, and strength required to succeed in school (Crowther, Ferguson, & Hann, 2009; Jensen, 2009; Reeves, 2008). Environment and culture play a significant role in how 8th grade African American boys perceive school, how these perceptions impact their performance and behavior in school, and how they internalize these beliefs (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008; Elias & Haynes, 2008). School is a place where they learn how they function in and relate to society through established rules (K. P. Allen, 2010; Dewey, 2013; Page, 2008; Shor, 2012). Schools convey unintentional implicit and explicit messages to 8th grade African American boys, influencing their self-image and the racial stereotypes projected on them (Holtzman & Sharpe, 2014; Larsen, 2008; Steppes, 2011). Rather than school being a place to grow and learn, peer groups strongly influence their members to conform to their norms (Hollins, 2008; Ogbu, 2013; Strayhorn, 2010). This acceptance creates challenges and raises their need for immediate peer acceptance (Ducharme & Shecter, 2011; Leary, Schreindorfer, & Haupt, 1995; McTigue, Washburn, & Liew, 2009).

Educational research has positioned 8th grade African American boys as being slower, undeveloped, and possessing inferior abilities in comparison to their White counterparts in mathematics on school district and state-mandated assessments (Bush & Bush, 2010; Cook, 2008). African American children's lack of achievement in mathematics is staggering (Boaler & Staples, 2008; Lewis, James, Hancock, & Hill-Jackson, 2008). The 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress data (as cited in Tyler, 2013) suggested that only 7% of African American children were proficient in mathematics. The average math score for African American students was higher in 2013

than in 2005; however, it was the lowest percentile score for all subgroups assessed (Dee & Jacob, 2011; Reardon & Robinson, 2008). For schools to augment student achievement and engagement, schools must partner with parents by providing educational, emotional, and crisis intervention supports during the school day (Cripps & Zyromski, 2009; Jensen, 2009). For 8th grade African American boys, their internal rage, fragile egos, and significant need for nurturance and support from their teachers affect their academic performance (La Guardia, 2009; Powell & Powell, 2010). Teachers serve as a vital link between the boys' academic potential and academic success (Spilt, Hughes, Wu, & Kwok, 2012; Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009). Teachers who are familiar with African American culture understand the students' manner of dress and usage of slang (Altrichter, Feldman, Posch, & Somekh, 2013; Anderson, 2013; Butler, Robinson, & Walton, 2014). Teacher engagement and empathy have a significant impact on the learning of 8th grade African American boys (Matias & Zembylas, 2014; Payton et al., 2008). Many 8th grade African American boys receive poor instruction and experience uncaring teachers who lack not only efficacy toward them but also lack racial awareness (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Walker, 2012). African American children attending suburban schools also lag behind their White counterparts (Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Whitmire, 2010).

Scholars have debated whether teacher effectiveness impacts student achievement. According to Jennings and Greenberg (2009), teachers establish high expectations and classroom culture, and they impact the physical and psychological presence of their students. Each classroom experience varies; some students are inattentive, others float through on their innate ability rather than dedicated effort, and

some have difficulties grasping difficult concepts (Burke & Sass, 2013; Snowman & McCown, 2011).

The outcomes of this study may interest scholar-practitioners because they may (a) provide further insight into 8th grade African American male achievement in middle school, (b) indicate the factors that impact their academic performance, and (c) identify the sources of academic motivation and success for African American boys.

Background of the Problem

Several studies have addressed academic motivation and the limited success of African American boys in the United States, but few have addressed successful African American middle school boys (Berry, 2008; Gordon, Iwamoto, Ward, Potts, & Boyd, 2009; Noguera, 2009; Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes, & Milburn, 2009; Wood & Turner, 2010; Woodland, 2008). According to Rolland (2011), future research on African American middle school boys' perceptions of education relating to their academic motivations and successes is needed. For children, comprehending and learning mathematics is an essential and fundamental skill in modern society for future academic and vocational success (Robinson, 2011; Wells & Claxton, 2008). While critical transitional periods occur during elementary school years, students who have difficulty mastering mathematical concepts face increased educational challenges as they matriculate through their middle and high school years (Conley, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Scott, 2009).

Bandura's social learning theory has had significant implications on the existing research regarding student motivation (Hsieh & Schallert, 2008; Ushioda, 2011; van Dinther, Dochy, & Segers, 2011). His research presented a perspective consistent with

the proposed research because students were motivated by peer influence, their beliefs of their own academic abilities, extrinsic rewards, and direct feedback from teachers (Alderman, 2013; Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

While several researchers have studied middle and high school African American boys and the factors contributing to their lack of academic motivation and success, a paucity of research exists regarding factors which contribute to their academic motivation and success (Abel, 2013; Ford, 2010; Zedan, 2012). Identifying these factors may provide a much-needed template for school districts, administrators, and teachers in developing professional development opportunities (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Easton, & Luppescu, 2010; Leithwood et al., 2009).

Need for the Study

Educating, motivating, and encouraging 8th grade African American boys within a suburban educational setting is a national concern (Allen, 2015; Davis & Jordan, 1994; Harry & Klingner, 2014; Stinson, 2013). These boys enter school with a myriad of issues: poor economic conditions, lack of father figures, and family members who may not have experienced success in school (Conchas, 2012; Gurian, 2010). Though multiple initiatives, programs, and interventions have attempted to alleviate this problem, the achievement gap continues to widen (Desimone & Long, 2010; Hill, Moser, Shannon, & Louis, 2013).

8th grade African American and Latino boys are more likely than other subgroups to be suspended from school; these groups also have lower graduation rates than other subgroups (Adelman & Taylor, 2014; Dobbie & Fryer, 2009; Howard, 2013; Noguera & Wells, 2011). African American boys are frequently excluded from the gifted and

talented classes, and they are more likely to be placed in special education classes based on their behavior rather than their academics (Ford & Moore, 2013; Harry & Klingner, 2014; Morgan, Frisco, Farkas, & Hibel, 2008).

Problem Statement

The problem is the lack of empirical research concerning the motivation and success strategies of 8th grade African American male middle school students in suburban Maryland schools. Developing a positive self-image, understanding their racial identity, and enhancing their critical thinking skills are important for 8th grade African American boys' academic motivation and success (Berry, Thunder, & McClain, 2011; Rozansky-Lloyd, 2005; Walton, 2010).

This study may fill a gap in the literature by exploring factors that influence 8th grade African American male middle school student achievement in suburban Maryland schools through the lens of motivation and success. The outcomes of this study may provide greater insight relating to motivation and success from the perspective of students who are achieving against the odds in the study school district.

Significance of the Study

This study may open dialogue concerning instructional and cognitive strategies which enable educators to support and understand the academic motivations and successes for 8th grade African American boys in suburban Maryland middle schools. This research may help explain how these boys process the perceptions and emotions attached to their learning and examine how administrators, teachers, and parents may best engage them.

The study may add to the existing body of knowledge by illuminating the factors that motivate 8th grade African American male middle school students and the strategies they employ to achieve success. Understanding the motivation and success strategies of African American male students is relevant to school districts, administrators, and teachers in providing daily instruction, because it provides insights into their internal struggles and thought processes and provides intervention strategies to address their needs (Uwah, McMahon, & Furlow, 2008; Waters, 2010).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to provide insight as it related to 8th grade African American male academic motivation and success at the middle school level within two suburban Maryland schools. The study also explored the impact of peers, parents, and teachers on the students' experiences. Studies have shown that the best opportunity to make lasting changes for students comes during the middle school years (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Reeves, 2009).

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What factors do 8th grade African American male middle school students perceive as contributing to their academic motivation and academic success?
2. What roles do peers, parents, and teachers play in 8th grade African American male students' academic motivation and academic success?
3. What role does school environment play in 8th grade African American male students' academic motivation and academic success?

Conceptual Framework

This study was based on two related education research theories, Bandura's theory of self-efficacy and Maslow's theory of motivation.

Bandura's theory of self-efficacy.

This study was in part based on Bandura's theory of self-efficacy. Students' motivation is influenced by their cognitive choices (Bandura, 1977a, 1997; Mega, Ronconi, & De Beni, 2014). In educational settings, students are motivated based on self-efficacy, their personal achievement goals, and their perceptions that the task relates to their future goals (Bandura, 1993; Liem, Lau, & Nie, 2008; Zimmerman, 2008). According to Ferla, Valcke, and Cai (2009), Bandura characterized self-efficacy as being both a product of one's interactions in the world (active engagement) and the impact on the nature and quality of those interactions. Students' self-efficacy beliefs play an integral role in their academic motivation, learning, and performance (Komarraju, Karau, & Schmeck, 2009; van Dinther et al., 2011). Students who feel confident in their academic abilities tend to engage in challenging activities that develop their cognitive and analytical skills (Gregory & Chapman, 2012; Schunk & Pajares, 2009). Students who believe they can succeed academically are intrinsically motivated, set higher goals, and demonstrate more resilience when encountering difficulties (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011; Levine, 2012; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Student performance in critical academic areas such as reading, writing, mathematics, and science is based on student self-efficacy beliefs (Dweck & Master, 2008; Schunk & Pajares, 2009; Usher & Pajares, 2009). Students' self-efficacy beliefs can be influenced by their emotional and physiological reactions, such as arousal, anxiety, stresses, and fatigue, to challenging

instructional tasks (Bresó, Schaufeli, & Salanova, 2011; Pekrun & Stephens, 2010). Students often interpret their physiological arousal as an indicator of personal competence (Usher, 2009; Usher & Pajares, 2009).

Theory of motivation.

The theory of motivation examines influences propelling student behaviors based on academic motivation and success toward specific student achievement measures. A student's personality and internal drive influences the external actions needed to accomplish a specific goal (Bandura, 1977b; Brophy, 2013).

According to the seminal work of psychologist Maslow (1943), the theory of motivation describes an individual's ascending needs extending from basic, lower order physiological needs to higher order needs. These needs propel individual behaviors according to the level the individual has achieved (Carsrud, Brännback, Elfving, & Brandt, 2009). Characteristically, each hierarchical level must be met prior to the individual proceeding to the next level (Littrell, 2011; Siltan, Flannelly, Flannelly, & Galek, 2011). Maslow (1943) described the hierarchy of needs that motivate individuals in the following terms:

- Physiological needs—categorized as basic human needs, such as sleep, food, water, sex;
- Safety needs—categorized as the need for shelter and security;
- Social needs—categorized as the need for belonging, love, and affection;
- Esteem needs—categorized as the need for achievement, high esteem for oneself, and the acceptance of others; and
- Self-actualization needs—categorized as the need to reach on. (p. 370-372)

Maslow's theory suggests these individual needs carry pertinent significance in order of importance, and until those needs are met, all others are absent (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982; Thielke et al., 2012). For instance, if an individual is famished and needs food, his or her basic impulse will be to gain food to fulfill his or her need for food. Once this need is satisfied, the individual progresses through the hierarchy of needs to address other higher order needs (Greguras & Diefendorff, 2009; Maslow, Stephens, Heil, & Bennis, 1998). As each level is experienced, the individual strives to achieve higher order needs, driving his or her internal and external motivations (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009; Deci & Ryan, 1991). Modern educators have scrutinized the works of Bandura and Maslow and have added their own contexts to these different theories.

Data Analysis

In this phenomenological, qualitative study, the researcher analyzed collected data from semi-structured interviews. Participants had an opportunity to discuss all factors impacting their academic motivation and success in an unrestricted and nonbiased manner in a private office in a middle school setting.

Prior to conducting the semi-structured interviews, the researcher drafted an interview protocol to ask questions and ensure each participant signed an informed consent form. During the actual semi-structured interviews, the researcher audiotaped each session, recorded participant responses, and noted observations. The researcher analyzed and coded the data from 16 interview questions into emerging themes impacting participants' academic motivation and success in their school setting.

Once the data analysis was completed, the researcher used the process of triangulation to validate the findings and code the interviews for emergent themes. The elements of the triangulation process included interviews, observations, and surveys.

Assumptions

The assumptions of this study were that the participants would provide complete and honest responses in the semi-structured interviews and would not discuss their responses with other participants. The researcher assumed the sample size of the participants from their respective National Junior Honor Societies represented the perceptions of academic motivation and success for 8th grade African American male students and that participant would have a basic understanding of the concepts of motivation and success strategies.

Limitations

Several limitations surfaced in this research study including the bias of the researcher. Initially, the researcher selected five suburban Maryland middle schools with 8th grade African American male students from their respective National Junior Honor Societies to participate in the study. From this sample, only two middle schools chose to participate, which was a limitation in this study. The researcher attempted multiple instances to communicate with the respective principals via e-mail and telephone. One principal chose not to participate and the remaining two indicated that their administrative duties maximized their time.

Of the two middle schools that participated, the researcher sought 10 participants as members of the sample size, but the data reported is from eight participants. The remaining two participants chose not to be a part of the study. The inability to gain

complete participant involvement served as a limitation in this study, which does not reflect the overall student population but rather the selected population.

Once the initial semi-structured interviews unfolded, the researcher visited the respective middle schools on several occasions. Due to time constraints, the researcher interviewed students immediately after their academic day concluded. A possible limitation to the research was that the researcher may have formed impressions based on interactions with school personnel; this may have interfered with the researcher's ability to be impartial. During the semi-structured interview process, participant responses may have been impacted by their comfort level with the researcher, the overall interview process, and their recall or choice of selective memory regarding previous academic experiences. These experiences may have limited or challenged the quality and depth of the participant responses.

Delimitations

Several delimitations existed in the research study which narrowed the focus of the study. These included the selection of 8th grade African American male students, the location of the two suburban Maryland middle schools, the timing of the participant interviews after the conclusion of the academic day, and the study's focus on academic motivation and success.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are applicable to this research study.

Achievement gap. The inequitable disparity between races in academic achievement on national standardized assessments.

African American. Citizens of a diverse ethnic group in the United States with a link to African ancestry (Stewart, 2007).

Self-efficacy. The innate belief in one's ability to achieve specific and measurable goals, complete tasks with high levels of proficiency, and comprehend rigorous multiple concepts connected to real-world experiences (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003).

Student achievement. Student learning through purposeful and intentional methods to obtain specific measurable cognitive skills in multiple subject areas (Waters, 2010).

Student perceptions. The cognitive and intuitive process of how students understand something (Pokorny & Pickford, 2010).

Teacher effectiveness. The measured growth of student progress during one academic school year. Teacher effectiveness examines instructional strategies, established relationships with students, and use of data to drive instruction (Corcoran, 2010).

Summary

Within the United States, 8th grade African American male students present unique challenges and opportunities for educators who are working to inspire and influence their lives. With the growing achievement gap of African American male students when compared to other subgroups, research is needed to determine specific factors that favorably influence their academic achievement and student engagement.

The studies of Rolland (2011) and Truesdale et al. (2007) examined factors impacting the academic motivation and success of African American high school male

students in rural Georgia and southwestern Arizona; however, no research has been conducted within the state of Maryland examining the factors impacting academic motivation and success of 8th grade, African American male students within two suburban Maryland middle schools. This phenomenological research study sought to answer specific research questions focused on the impact of participant peer influence, school environments, and their academic motivation and success.

The results of the study may contribute to the field of education by (a) providing a better understanding of factors impacting 8th grade African American male students' academic motivation and success; (b) providing teachers, administrators, and K-12 educators with insights into instructional strategies to engage student mastery and achievement; and (c) providing future researchers with more significant literature to continue researching this important topic.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter presents a review of seminal and current literature significant to this qualitative study on academic achievement and success for African American middle school boys in two suburban Maryland schools. The purpose of this study was to assemble, analyze, and report 8th grade African American male students' perceptions of factors that contributed to their academic success. This chapter explores historical events affecting 8th grade African American education in Maryland, the importance of academic achievement for 8th grade African American boys, and factors contributing to their academic success. Further, the chapter provides discussion regarding the differential treatment of African American boys, their perceptions of the instruction they received, and improvements needed for their overall academic experience. Finally, the conceptual framework for the study was based on Bandura's theory of self-efficacy and Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which are reviewed and presented in this chapter. This study may contribute to the scholarly body of knowledge by building on previous studies regarding academic motivation and success with 8th grade African American male students.

Motivation and Success

Rolland (2011) conducted a study of the motivation and success factors of African American male students in rural Georgia. She proposed that certain factors (supportive parents, caring teachers, positive school environment, peer support, and community initiatives) impact African American male students' perceptions of their academic success. In her recommendations for future research, Rolland suggested further studies

could provide greater depth in exploring African American boys' academic motivation and success through a different geographic and demographic group. Therefore, this study may build on Rolland's work by examining academic motivation and success of African American male middle school students in two suburban Maryland middle schools.

Coleman (2014) completed a similar study examining factors motivating African American and Latino boys to engage in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) at the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy (IMSA), a residential academy for gifted/talented students. Through focus group interviews of several gifted and talented Black boys, their parents, IMSA alumni, and IMSA faculty/staff, Coleman identified and triangulated trends linking motivation to multiple factors. Coleman discovered that African American male STEM students' innate abilities, external reinforcement through their concerned parents, significant African American community resources, and their fervor for STEM education attributed to their academic motivation and success. Through her research, Coleman enhanced the scientific community's literature on motivational factors impacting African American male STEM students and provided authentic insights on this challenging dilemma.

This study was designed to collect descriptive data that provide a greater depth to the existing literature regarding perceptions of 8th grade African American boys' academic motivation and success. Other studies have focused on high school students; however, this study may provide greater understanding of the educational process for African American boys at a different development stage.

The syntax of the findings may provide insights into 8th grade African American boys' reflections regarding their own personal motivation and success, provide

administrators and educators with direct accounts of their experiences and the meaning they attach to them, and provide an academic forum to discuss this issue.

Historical Overview of African American Education in Maryland

Pre-Civil War African American education in Maryland.

Before the Civil War, educational opportunities for African Americans in the United States were extremely challenging (Flegal, Carroll, Ogden, & Curtin, 2010; Morris & Monroe, 2009). During this time, the nation was heavily involved in addressing stress between the North and South regarding national issues and the continued mistreatment of African Americans physically, socially, and educationally (Tate, 2008).

The first evidence of furnished education in the state of Maryland was the reading of an “Act for the Foundation and Erecting of a School or College within the province for the Education of Youth and Learning and Virtue in 1671” (Hill, 2003, p. 4). In the late 1690s, the lieutenant governor assessed Maryland’s insufficient educational services and suggested the educational system in the state was inadequate; offering to fund a new school for children (Morris & Monroe, 2009). From his suggestion, the Maryland General Assembly focused its educational efforts and created the Free Schools Act which established public schools (Hill, Pierce, & Guthrie, 2009; Vaughn, 2015). This process created private schoolhouses on extensive plantations with clergy members serving as teachers.

According to Hill (2003), after the Declaration of Independence had been passed, 65% of Maryland counties had freestanding schools and provided education to a finite number of students. Through the Act of 1798, Maryland directed state funding to several counties for high school education.

In the 1820s, the Maryland Assembly passed legislation to authorize the creation of schools throughout the different counties in the state (Fischel, 2010; Usman, 2010). In the infancy stage of public education in Maryland, a small governing board regulated the schools. Its formation spurred the initial framework of education in Maryland. African Americans desired an enriched education but were figuratively held captive by their slave masters. According to Hill (2003), the 1860 Census indicated that Maryland was classified as 24th out of the 33 existing states in total educational expenses and 23rd in public education expenses. Minuscule percentages of free African Americans attended schools; they were deprived of their education because Maryland anti-abolitionists wanted them to remain docile. The abolitionists feared an increasing number of African American slaves would congregate, subdue their masters, and seek better educational, physical, and spiritual lifestyles (Richardson, 2009; Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992).

In 1860, 12% of African Americans were free and had accumulated land in Maryland (Du Bois, 2013; Walker, 2009). In efforts to build stronger generations of African Americans and provide restitution for injustices, Congress established the Freedmen's Bureau to assist freed slaves in creating schools, establishing hospitals, and distributing food (Barak, Leighton, & Cotton, 2014; Emberton, 2013). Hill (2003) noted these efforts helped African Americans acquire land to construct schools and disburse teacher salaries. However, once the General Assembly witnessed the improving academic and social status of Maryland African Americans, legislators obstructed state and local funding for schools and provided inadequate instructional materials (Altbach, Gumport, & Berdahl, 2011; Grant, Murray, & Grant, 2009). In many cases, African Americans were not permitted to educate one another, churches that provided informal education

were destroyed, and White residents did not feel compelled to help (Hamilton & Ture, 2011; Kozol, 2012; Noguera, 2009). This injustice heightened African Americans' urgency for change and their desire for freedom.

Post-Civil War African American education in Maryland.

Once Abraham Lincoln authored the Emancipation Proclamation, African American families lived in isolated communities and attended inferior schools (Blackmon, 2009; Litwack, 2010). In 1865, the Maryland General Assembly provided an exploratory look at public education for African Americans, which was subject to the rules of the State Board of Education (Peters, 2008). As time passed, the General Assembly revisited the issue of schools for African American children but sanctioned that the schools remain segregated (Ryan, 2010). In 1866, free African Americans acquired land in Montgomery County and began creating small schoolhouses (Thorp, 2013). According to the State of Maryland Legislative Record of 1872, only one school could be established for African Americans, and its total enrollees could not exceed 15 (Warren, 1913). Later in 1872, the Maryland General Assembly provided African American schools minimal funding during summer months and required the land be deeded to Montgomery County; thus, African American students attended school fewer months than their White counterparts. Many students were needed on their farms to plow fields, pick cotton, and grow consumables to be sold at local markets. Throughout the late 1870s, several small, one-room, African American schools began to emerge. As funding from the Maryland General Assembly subsided in the 1880s, many of these schools closed or were burned down.

With the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling, states were racially segregated under the federal mandate that separate but equal conditions exist (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). From the Plessy decision, the United States upheld the authority of the Jim Crow laws and ignored racial discrimination. The challenges for African Americans in Montgomery County were limited state funding for schools and the Maryland Democratic Party negating opportunities for them to vote (Clarke & Brown, 1978). In 1900, concerned Germantown citizens appealed to the Montgomery County School Board to create African American schools in their communities. After intense deliberations, the board agreed to provide schools with the condition that the county levy remain exorbitantly expensive. As time passed in the early 1900s, more small schools throughout the county opened quickly but closed because of minimal attendance, inadequate instructional materials and supplies, teacher shortages, and dilapidated buildings (Clarke & Brown, 1978).

Impact of African American Schools in Suburban Maryland

Rockville Colored High School

Racial separation still existed in many parts of the United States during the early 1900s (Glaeser & Vigdor, 2012; Guterl, 2009). Education, public transportation, sporting events, and entertainment were all separate, especially in the South. In the North, racial separation began to fade as Whites and African Americans openly intermingled in nightclubs and other public establishments. Though there were desegregated experiences in many areas, public education in Maryland was still segregated.

An affluent and well-respected segment in Montgomery County did not support openly equal educational opportunities for African Americans in the early 1900s

(Shelton-Boodram, 2009). Scarce instructional materials and unqualified teachers made it difficult for African American students to increase their knowledge (Brown, 2013; Crowley, 2014). Often, resilient ministers taught African American residents covertly at night, because they were fearful of being assaulted by rural White farm owners (Fuller & Robert, 2010).

Edward Taylor was an educator in the 1920s who rose to become a supervisor of Montgomery County Colored Schools. With the support of several African American trustees, Taylor voiced vehement concern to the school board concerning the lack of a high school for African American students. The school board had to be persuaded that African American students desired to attend their school. Through persistence and constant pressure, the Montgomery County School Board relented and approved the creation of the Rockville Colored High School. The African American community assisted in generating funding to build a school. This culminating event represented more than 60 years of persistence in demanding equitable educational opportunities.

Designed to provide secondary African American students with improved academic facilities, the Rockville Colored High School carried the important distinction of being the only high school in Montgomery County for African Americans in 1927 (Hill, 2003). Though an emotional and psychological victory for African Americans, they had to use castoff books, materials, and desks from White schools (Greer, Mukhopadhyay, Powell, & Nelson-Barber, 2009). Each year, the Rockville Colored High School continued graduating successful students, and it prospered until 1935 when the student population outgrew the facility.

Lincoln High School

Originally opened in 1935, Lincoln High School in Rockville, Maryland provided a more enriched and diversified curricula with greater opportunities for African Americans to further their education, and it generated an increased sense of pride in the African American community (Hill, 2003). Initially, the school served students in Grades 8–11 with students receiving instruction in three varied curricula: academic, general, and vocational (Hill, 2003). The academic-track students took college preparatory classes, including foreign languages; general education students took similar classes as the academic-track student except for foreign languages; and the vocational-track students received instruction in home economics and farming (Hill, 2003).

As the years passed, successful students matriculated through Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), many returning to instruct the remaining students at the school and instilling a sense of school pride. Through these incremental victories in addressing educational equity in Montgomery County, African Americans vocalized their concerns to the school board and began seeking legal actions when necessary (Hill, 2003).

Legal Cases Impacting African American Education

Historic legal cases have influenced African American education, and each case served as a conduit for change in how African Americans received equitable educational opportunities (Button, 2014; Davis & Palmer, 2010; Pierre, 2012).

Plessy v. Ferguson.

The Plessy v. Ferguson court case in 1896 initiated significant legislation in *separate but equal* standings in the United States (Ashmore, 2010; Harris, 2004;

Hutchison, 2011; Willyard & Vasicko, 2010). The ruling mandated that distinct public facilities be of equal quality for African Americans (Dixson, 2011; Harper et al., 2009; Peters, 2008)

In 1890, Louisiana ruled separate railway facilities would be provided for African American and White passengers (Hague, 2010; Hale, 2010). Additionally, the ruling noted travelers would be reprimanded if commingling occurred. Legally, the plaintiff in the case, Mr. Plessy, was seven-eighths White and one-eighth African American (Carbado & Moran, 2007). In June 1892, Plessy, an African American passenger whose physical appearance implied he was White, bought a train ticket in Louisiana and sat in the Whites-only section of the railroad car (Johnson, 2010; Kelley, 2010). Louisiana law required Plessy sit in the colored patrons section. Plessy was arrested and tried in a Louisiana court and convicted of violating the 1890 law (Kelley, 2010). Plessy petitioned the court, contending segregation pilloried African Americans and branded them as substandard individuals, and that their constitutional Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments rights were violated (Park, 2012). Both amendments prohibit states from denying any person equal protection of the laws.

The Louisiana court ruled that “separate but equal” extended to political and civil rights and that Plessy’s Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments had not been violated (Dorsey, 2008; Nelson, 2009). The Court rejected Plessy’s arguments that African Americans were treated as substandard, and reiterated both races had equitable access to separate but equal facilities under the law (Guzman, 2008; Young, 2009). As the court ruling dissented Plessy’s arguments, Justice Marshall Harlan ruled the Constitution is color blind and no race is superior or inferior to the other (Brewer & Heitzeg, 2008;

Schmidt, 2008). This ruling precipitated the “separate but equal” philosophy throughout the United States until the future *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* case in 1954 (Clotfelter, 2011; Kluger, 2011; Williams, 2013).

Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County.

Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County addressed particular African American student concerns endured at R. R. Moten High School, an all-African American high school in Farmville, Virginia (Baker, 2011). The students lacked rigorous textbooks and comfortable desks, suffered extreme hardships, and sought equitable services provided to White students (Bonner, Freelain, Henderson, Love, & Williams, 2011; Hairston & Strickland, 2011). The challenge was that the White schools had more modern facilities, whereas the African American schools lacked indoor restroom facilities and had classrooms that were heated with wood stoves (Bonastia, 2012; Zimmerman, 2014).

In attempts to refute inequities from a student’s lens, Miss Barbara Johns staged a student protest during an assembly in April 1951 to alert school officials to the dire conditions of students. Nearly 500 students left R. R. Moten High School that afternoon and protested at the school board members’ homes.

The court case gained traction as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People disputed with the Virginia courts that African American students warranted equal services (Inazu, 2010; Miller, 2008). Multiple Virginia appellate courts provided an ultimate decision that African American students should receive equal services based on previous rulings from the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case (Thompson, 2013; Turner, 2008). As the case continued to propel intensified tension in Virginia, the case

continued to be argued through multiple courts before reaching the Supreme Court as a combined court case in the eventual *Brown v. Board of Education* case (Ogletree, 2009; Pitre, 2010). After the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision to integrate all schools in 1959, Prince Edward County's Board of Supervisors decided not to fund schools and instead closed all schools rather than integrate them (Bonastia, 2015; Williams, 2011).

Bolling v. Sharpe.

Another court case that impacted African American education was *Bolling v. Sharpe*. This case was crucial because it dealt with segregation in the District of Columbia Public Schools (Fassett, Pollock, Prettyman, Sander, & Barrett, 2012). In late 1949, African American parents from the Anacostia region of Washington, DC assembled to petition for their children to attend John Phillip Sousa Junior High School. The District of Columbia School Board repudiated their request, and in September 1950, several African American students were denied admittance to the school, which had been opened for White students only (Ashmore, 2010; Kluger, 2011).

James Nasbrit, an esteemed Howard University law professor, represented the African American families in district court and argued that the school's denial of the student's admittance and segregation of the African American students were unconstitutional. Chief Justice Earl Warren noted that though the Fourteenth Amendment was not applicable in Washington, DC, according to *Brown v. Board of Education*, school segregation was unconstitutional under the Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (Hockett, 2013; Schmidt, 2008; Willyard & Vasicko, 2010).

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka.

Throughout the United States, African Americans asserted their will in their local communities to establish rigorous and meaningful schools for their children (Postman, 2011). *Brown v. Board of Education* helped set a precedence for African American children and children of all races and nationalities (Frankenberg, 2011; Skocpol, 2013).

Brown v. Board of Education was a combination of five distinct court proceedings in separate jurisdictions across the United States (Alexander & Alexander, 2011; Kluger, 2011). The primary linking premise of each case was the constitutionality of state-mandated segregation in public schools; that separate school systems for African Americans and Whites was inequitable and violated the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution (Powell, 2011). After tenacious debates among the Supreme Court judges, inspiring closing remarks by Thurgood Marshall, and America holding its collective breath, on May 17, 1954, Chief Justice Earl Warren read the unanimous decision of the court:

We come then to the question presented: Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other “tangible” factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities? We believe that it does. . . . We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of “separate but equal” has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. (p. 483)

The *Brown v. Board of Education* case left the United States in a quandary; turbulence ensued in Southern states, and images of young African American children attending segregated schools dominated nightly television newscasts (Allen, 2009; Bolton, 2011; Karpinski, 2008). The *Brown v. Board of Education* case overturned the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision that separate but equal educational experiences were acceptable in the United States (Harper et al., 2009; Morris, 2008). As the United States shifted its ideologies regarding segregated schools, local jurisdictions felt the immediate burden of rectifying a societal issue (Cox, 2000; Viteritti, 2012). Each district had to address the educational and emotional deprivation of African American students attending inferior schools and help them assimilate into their new schools (McKenzie et al., 2008; Singleton, 2014; Theoharis, 2007).

Brown v. Board of Education's impact on Montgomery County Schools.

Though the Supreme Court's desegregation legislation provided clear mandates, Montgomery County met the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision with reluctance, anger, bitterness, and opposition (Cobb, 2011; Sugarman & Kemerer, 2011). Superintendent of Schools Forbes H. Norris's stance, "Integration will be a slow process" (as cited in Hill, 2003, p. 93), further incensed African American citizens of Montgomery County. MCPS did not immediately follow the new national precedence. It did not completely integrate its schools until 1960–1961 (Hill, 2003).

Academic Disidentification and African American Boys

During the 1960s and 1970s, African American communities continued to fight for equality in education, housing, and social issues. As economic conditions for African Americans improved, families migrated into predominantly White communities (Pattillo,

2013; Wilson, 2009). Many African American families were excited for their children to have access to better education (Ferguson, 2008; Hamilton & Ture, 2011; Kozol, 2012). However, they faced many challenges: a different instructional style from White teachers, a misunderstanding of cultural behaviors, and a lack of academic identification for students (Keengwe, 2010; Whaley & Noel, 2011; White & Lowenthal, 2011). As a result, African American students faced low expectations from teachers, inferior student achievement, and the energy of urban life to distract them from developing their higher order thinking skills (Clark, Johnson, & Chazan, 2009; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). African American male students felt vulnerable because of negative stereotypes and beliefs of African American boys reported by the media (Conchas, Lin, Oseguera, & Drake, 2014; Wood, Kurtz-Costes, Rowley, & Okeke-Adeyanju, 2010). Academic identification can be based on forming one's academic goals, obtaining successful results, and developing a healthy self-esteem (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Koestner, 2008). For students with high student achievement, successful academic performance is satisfying and ineffective academic performance is disheartening (Rubenfeld & Chua, 2014; Zmuda, 2010). For struggling students, academic disidentification is the lack of a relationship between self-esteem and academic success (Kerpelman, Eryigit, & Stephens, 2008; Nussbaum & Steele, 2007). Struggling students interpret their academic abilities as inferior to those of their peers (Bishop, 2012).

Perspectives of the African American Male

The African American male conjures multiple images of positive and negative traits. Understanding the complexities and contradictions of the African American male is

intriguing (Kerpelman et al., 2008; Reynolds, Sneva, & Beehler, 2010; Tatum, 2003). From one perspective, African American men have been described as caring, warm individuals, resilient caregivers, intelligent motivators, and powerful leaders (Ellison, 2013; Hughes & Terrell, 2011). Conversely, African American men have been viewed as irresponsible in their homes, violent toward their spouses and children, and dysfunctional in society (Kershaw, Pulkingham, & Fuller, 2008; Norton, 2011; Oware, 2011). From a societal perspective, African American men are complex because they possess many positive and negative characteristics (Gauntlett, 2008; Jackson, 2012). This section describes the literature discussing these societal perspectives from opposing spectrums.

Positive portrayals of the African American male.

African American men can be described as self-motivated, family-oriented, servant leaders who provide love, financial resources, and stability for their spouses and children (Barnett & Rivers, 2009; Eliot, 2012; Folbre, 2010). These men assume leadership roles in churches, corporate America, fraternal organizations, and school boards with integrity, a tenacious work ethic, and a sense of purpose (Goldberg, 2008; Luders, 2010; Martin, 2013). The United States witnessed the positive African American male presence during the 1995 Million Man March that revealed the importance of their collective voices being heard, a demonstrated sense of unity, and the responsibility of building stronger generational relationships (Conyers, 2015; Philipp & Thanheiser, 2010). The Black Man Can depicted accounts through an online forum of positive African American male representations (Dreilinger, 2014; Harper, 2009). These accounts included a Chicago college student, an African American man leading colon cancer vaccine research, a 14-year-old African American boy admitted to the Massachusetts

Institute of Technology who sought to become a professor at the university in mathematics and physics, and accounts of African American boys transitioning from foster homes to graduate from the Bronx School of Law and Finance (Dreilinger, 2014). All of these accounts were poignant, as African American men may not normally achieve significant academic advances in both medical and educational fields. These accounts demonstrated African American males from varied societal aspects who provided significant contributions to their families and communities.

Negative portrayals of the African American male.

Although the literature has portrayed African American men in favorable and respectful societal roles, a significant portion of the literature also portrays African American men as dumb, deprived, dangerous, deviant, and disturbed (Crain, 2008; Smith, 1979).

Alarming statistics suggest although African American males represent only 6% of the U.S. population, 29% of African American boys born in 2010 will be incarcerated in their lifetime (Lee & Ransom, 2011; Pettit, 2012). Of the current prison population, 44% are African American men (Howard, 2008; Wakefield & Uggen, 2010). Mostly feared, mostly misunderstood, and most likely to be uneducated, African American men's plight has been illuminated through increased unemployment rates, a deficit-based educational experience, and rising alcohol and substance abuse rates.

African American men present a complex picture to assess; their resilience to overcome generational racism is laudable, but society's view of them as nonthreatening individuals remains clouded (Rhodes & Rhodes, 2009; Robinson, 2014).

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

As African American boys have matriculated through the educational school districts, policymakers have examined their academic successes and challenges on standardized assessments. (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Robert, Davis, James, & Adriel, 2010). Though intended to provide America with transparent direction to rectify educational injustices and inequities, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) further impacted African American boys' existence in schools (Ani, 2013; Brown & Donnor, 2011; Walker, 2012). NCLB legislation represented a paradigm shift in educational focus from equal educational access to achievement for all subgroups (Dixon, Tucker, & Clark, 2010; Kantor & Lowe, 2006; Mertens, 2014). The act created increased accountability measures for academic growth; its reform constructs created tougher accountability for schools and teachers, and further amplified the academic, emotional, and social status of low-achieving African American boys (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Dahir & Stone, 2009). Moreover, NCLB stressed equal opportunities for all students, standards-based reform, and annual improved performance measures. With this intentional improvement system, NCLB appeared to direct its efforts toward minorities, English language learners, and disabled students (Harry & Klingner, 2014; Hill & Miller, 2013; Kopriva, 2011). Many interested educators were concerned with the direction of America's educational system and the lack of closure in the achievement gap for African American boys (Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Ravitch, 2011; Stinson, 2013). In addition, they questioned the frequency of formative and summative assessments at the district level to demonstrate proficiency, and they believed students were ill prepared to apply critical thinking skills in the real-world contexts required by community colleges and 4-

year colleges (K. Burke, 2010; Childress, Doyle, & Thomas, 2009; Hess & Robbins, 2011). Some educators perceived these actions as attempts to transfer lower performing students out of general education settings into alternative or special education schools.

Theoretical Literature

Bandura's social learning theory.

Social learning theory evolved from graduate students exploring the connections between learning theory and psychoanalysis. Bandura (1977b) hypothesized students learn through observing another person's behavior, emotional state, and resilience to the external environment. For students, learning takes place through their immediate environment, attitudes, and perceptions based on multiple variables. Students' self-images and beliefs impact their efforts and exertions in problem solving (Bright, 2012; Tavis & Aronson, 2008). Each student possesses varying levels of self-efficacy based on how their self-efficacy is developed and the socioeconomic factors that impact their lives (Caprara et al., 2008; Pastorelli et al., 2001). Several studies were conducted with middle school students to explore how they self-evaluated their proficiency to solve complex mathematical problems. The students who indicated high self-efficacy were extremely successful in comparison to those who indicated low self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy is defined as a person's self-assurance to accomplish given assignments. Bandura (1984) suggested efficacy focuses on one's self-perceptions to complete tasks confidently. Bandura (1995) proposed as learners overcome academic difficulties, it increases their self-confidence to complete more difficult tasks. Social persuasion, another impact of self-efficacy, influences learners through verbal praise from peers, teachers, family members, and involved community members (Bandura,

1993). Bandura (1977b) suggested that the more learners hear positive reinforcements regarding their abilities, the more they believed in themselves. Learners who engaged in negative self-talk, had decreased ability to complete tasks (Järvelä, Järvenoja, & Veermans, 2008; Robertson, 2011; Usher & Pajares, 2009). For African American boys, some experience academic success through their intrinsic motivation (Turner, Chandler, & Heffer, 2009; Valiente, Lemery-Chalfant, Swanson, & Reiser, 2008). Conversely, others may not experience academic success because of limited academic ability, misconstrued self-perceptions, and repeated disappointments (Bhutto, 2011; Hughes, 2011).

Bandura suggested that self-efficacy impacts the learning process through unique processes (Bell & Kozlowski, 2008; Mayer, Aquino, Greenbaum, & Kuenzi, 2012; Walumbwa et al., 2011). The cognitive process examines the decoding process for learners and how information is synthesized to create future goals (Friedlander et al., 2011; Gurlitt & Renkl, 2010; Hamada & Koda, 2008). This process can include goal setting to accomplish specific goals or tasks. The motivational process explores how learners' self-confidence, self-concept, and self-esteem influence their actions (Alderman, 2013; Usher & Pajares, 2008). Those who feel confident in their abilities will appear self-motivated and willing to persevere through difficult tasks (Lovitts, 2008).

Maslow's theory of motivation.

Maslow described emotional, physical, and psychological needs coupled with critical milestones in his theory of motivation. Maslow's (1943) premise was that people are motivated to achieve particular needs, and once these requirements are achieved, people continually move through the hierarchy seeking to fulfill deeper and more

intrinsic needs (Pink, 2011). Many African American boys witness or participate in violence in route to school, and others live in environments where they assume adult responsibilities, causing lack of sleep and consequential lack of focus in the classroom (Charlton & David, 2013; Siegel, 2011). Transitioning higher in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, children want to be perceived as intelligent by their peers (LaFontana & Cillessen, 2002; Rozansky-Lloyd, 2005; Walton, 2010). Their knowledge, or lack thereof, can be regarded as a litmus test for acceptance (Ogloff, 1999). Knowledge is viewed as a stronger attribute to possess than no intelligence (Wenger, 2014; Zahn & Lacey, 2007). The stigma of being perceived as inferior among one's peers may evoke multiple responses (Cohen & Garcia, 2005; Johnson, Richeson, & Finkel, 2011). According to Maslow (1943), African American boys' safety needs of security, stability, and freedom of fear also come into play in a classroom setting. For African American boys, answering classroom questions or providing an in-depth justification of a response to their teacher can create anxiety (Johnson et al., 2011; Lynn et al., 2010; Stephens, Markus, & Fryberg, 2012). Based on their content mastery, their confidence may increase or decrease based on external peer feedback (Hattie & Gan, 2011; Narciss, 2008). For students who provided detailed responses, their self-esteem increased (Guindon, 2009). Their fear of being exposed as less knowledgeable than their peers decreased. Conversely, for a student whose response is incorrect, his security is at risk due to fear of being unmasked as less intelligent (Abel, 2013; Harper et al., 2011). When students fail, it appears as though they do not have the same ability as others (Alderman, 2013; Biggs, 2011). For African American boys, perceived peer rejection causes self-doubt that illuminates self-fulfilling prophecies of failure and paralyzes their actions in class (Cavilla, 2015; Landis

& Reschly, 2013; Peters, 2012). They become passive-aggressive, verbally attacking other students and seeking negative peer reinforcement through acting out in order to divert attention away from their abilities (Michelson, Sugai, Wood, & Kazdin, 2013; Rimm, 2008). They rationalize that the assignment was disengaging, the task was too difficult, and they did not have the ability (Gino & Ariely, 2012; Khalifa, 2011).

For all students, love and belongingness are critical elements in their eventual self-actualization. In middle school, popularity brings increased peer recognition, heightened emotions, and shifts in parental relationships (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). This developmental stage produces increased academic and social competition that can create anxiety for minority students and may contribute to decreased academic performance.

Theory of motivation.

No universal scholarly consensus for the definition of motivation exists, although the field has been studied extensively. Motivation is an internal belief that becomes action based on internal beliefs that one will be successful at a given task (McClure et al., 2011; Weiner, 2010). External cues of positive reinforcement can assist one to achieve one's goal more quickly (Fan & Williams, 2010). Motivation pushes students to aspire for academic success and give an appropriate level of effort to achieve it (Conley, 2008; Marshall, 2014). Accelerated academic motivation is contingent on one's perception of academic ability and prior levels of success or failure, and can be considered a learned behavior (Garn, Matthews, & Jolly, 2010; Wigfield, Eccles, Schiefele, Roeser, & Davis-Kean, 2007). Motivational beliefs can be influenced by self-efficacy and shifts based on school or classroom variables (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Pajares, Johnson, & Usher, 2007).

For African American boys, parents can affect achievement motivation (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Student behaviors can be linked to academic motivation through specific actions, including paying attention to the teacher, engaging in academic activities, and persisting in problem solving (Reeve & Halusic, 2009; Skinner, Furrer, Marchand, & Kindermann, 2008).

Seminal theorists have approached the concept of motivation from multiple perspectives. The cognitive factors system explores student motivation from a goal-oriented perspective (Sins, van Joolingen, Savelsbergh, & van Hout-Wolters, 2008). Salient information provided by teachers or external stimuli manifest goal-setting measures by students (Anderson, 2008). Their focus can be attributed to the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards they may receive for accomplishing a given task. In this process, students self-evaluate their progress and focus.

The ability-evaluative system addresses motivation from the sense of students being competitive with one another (Chan & Lam, 2010). Ego becomes a factor in that they are comparing their cognitive, analytic, and academic abilities to determine if they are perceived as intelligent and can succeed (Cartwright & Pappas, 2008; Wout, Shih, Jackson, & Sellers, 2009). They may ask themselves questions such as, “Am I smart enough? Do I understand this? Can I do this?”

The task mastery system views student motivation as an individualistic process (T. Smith, 2007). Students are intrinsically motivated, and they are competing against themselves to improve their performance each day (Schraw, Wadkins, & Olafson, 2007; Williams & Williams, 2011). This system focuses on the intensity of students’ efforts.

The questions they may ask themselves include, “Am I trying hard enough? How can I do this when it is very difficult?”

The moral responsibility system views motivation as a cooperative process among students (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Students are analyzing and comparing their motivational levels within their individual groups to other group efforts (Hwang & Chang, 2011; Webb, 1989). Motivation is derived from their efforts and overall cooperation in a group setting. This group may ask themselves, “Are we trying hard enough? How can we do this?”

In classroom settings, children assume multiple postures and behaviors (Mashburn et al., 2008). Some children may not immediately process applicable information and use it in real-world contexts, but through diligence are able to achieve proficiency (Loewenberg, 2003; Westwood, 2007). All children desire peer approval and to be viewed as being intelligent by their peers (Coplan, Girardi, Findlay, & Frohlick, 2007; Gleason, Jensen-Campbell, & Ickes, 2009).

African American Male Educational Experiences

Educating 8th grade African American boys in 21st-century schools is the most pertinent, daunting, and challenging social issue facing educators today (McCray, Beachum, & Yawn, 2012). African American children have different educational experiences than White children (Jencks & Phillips, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2009). The educational disparities are based on White students seeking additional educational supports such as after-school tutoring, summer school, and early childhood educational opportunities (Calderón, Slavin, & Sánchez, 2011; Ladd, 2012).

8th grade African American students wear socially conscious masks to protect and disguise any inadequacies they may possess (Fanon, 2008). For some, their schooling experience mirrors what they see outside of school (Eshach, 2007). Many of their schools are equipped with metal detectors and the students are greeted by security guards to maintain a safe and orderly environment (Thurau & Wald, 2009). African American males learn society will not provide them with multiple chances to recover from life-altering decisions (Gottesdiener, 2013).

Some perceive the school as a haven from the crime and infestation of negative influences (Waymer, 2009). The problem is that the issues from their immediate environments spill over into the schools, causing even more distractions (Duncan & Magnuson, 2011; Repetti, Wang, & Saxbe, 2009).

8th grade African American boys need consistent and effective support from concerned parents, teachers, and administrators (Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Perry, Liu, & Pabian, 2010). The support can reflect positive reinforcement of successful behaviors, acknowledgment of improved academic growth, established mentoring relationships, and reinforcement of coping strategies (Ward, Thomas, & Disch, 2012; Young & Caldarella, 2011). Conversely, when 8th grade African American boys sense their school environment is unsupportive, they may withdraw and demonstrate minimal academic motivation and success (Gordon et al., 2009; Whaley & Noel, 2011). 8th grade African American students' perceptions of school climate and social environment are related to their educational experiences. In their eyes, skin color is no longer an excuse for poor performance and academic deficiencies (Delpit, 2012; Fanon, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2009). The media's portrayal of African American male students as lower performing,

aggressive, and disengaged permeates their psyches and reinforces the mindset of academic inferiority (Jones-Parks, 2011). In African American culture, immediate gratification of material possessions outweighs the lengthy process of obtaining academic success (Smith, 2007). From the perspective of 8th grade African American male students, immediate self-gratification outweighs arduous, lengthy, academic preparation (Bandura, 1977a). In their minds, school is in stark contrast to their norms; therefore, some 8th grade African American boys' insecurities surface and defiant behaviors emerge, thus masking their academic deficiencies. They become internally conflicted toward school structures and expectations (Kincheloe & Hayes, 2007). In not drawing attention to themselves, some may purposely choose not to excel, in order to gain peer approval and group acceptance (Bosacki, 2012).

Children from dire socioeconomic environments desire to leave their immediate environments because of lack of control over their quality of life. As they navigate through a poverty-stricken existence, they encounter emotional trauma. For some, their environments are stressful and lack emotional support. As a result, 8th grade African American boys may become impulsive and experience feelings of alienation, withdrawal, and depression (Brown, 2011). They desire a sense of belonging. These young African American boys want stability, an adult, a teacher, a father figure, or a caring guardian who is consistent and reliable (Alderson, 2008; Samuels, 2008).

Some 8th grade African American boys have reported facing multiple environmental distractions before coming to school, working through difficult family issues with parents, observing unhealthy relationships, and working through their feelings of abandonment and anger issues that impact their concentration (Wilson, 2011). Once in

school, their chaotic classroom environments further affect their concentration and comprehending of difficult concepts (Danielson, 2007). They are interested in learning but grow fearful and become overwhelmed by the massive responsibilities of being effective students (Bullough & Gitlin, 2013; Gootman, 2008). Therefore, it becomes easier for them to rationalize their poor performance and accept defeat.

Conversely, for high-achieving 8th grade African American boys, school represents a place where they can excel (Ford & Moore, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2009). They realize learning is their responsibility, and they must seek additional resources to reinforce their learning and support their future success (Tomlinson, 2014).

8th grade African American boys also face the challenge of receiving quality instruction in the classroom (Howard, 2008; Thomas & Stevenson, 2009). In a study by Gay (2010), 8th grade African American middle school boys reported that the presence of a committed teacher who took a genuine interest in them as individuals and held them accountable was essential to their academic success. These trustworthy individuals must synthesize their instruction where the students' kinesthetic learning styles are activated and learning becomes real to their immediate environments (Winne & Nesbit, 2010).

Academic Achievement and Self-Esteem

It is important to understand the psychological factors that impact student success and achievement (Durlak et al., 2011). Academic success is a large predictor of student self-esteem. Academically motivated students excel in school because of their organizational skills, self-discipline, persistence, and intrigue with the learning process (Kyllonen, Lipnevich, Burrus, & Roberts, 2014). The discovery and learning process excites them. Self-esteem can serve as an important catalyst or deterrent in students'

academic achievement. Their sense of connectedness and how they view themselves impacts their motivation in school. Self-efficacious students are confident in their abilities, are not easily discouraged, and view challenges or setbacks as opportunities to rise to the occasion.

Differential Treatment of African American Students

The differential treatment 8th grade African American boys experience at school can hinder their academic motivation and success (Davis, 2003). For them, the expectation of inequitable treatment from school administrators' handling of disciplinary issues impacts their academic performance (O'Connor, Hill, & Robinson, 2009). Researchers have revealed that an excessively disproportionate number of discipline referrals, suspensions, and expulsions are being given to 8th grade African American middle school boys for loitering, insubordination, and physical violence based on teacher and administrator subjectivity (Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2009). 8th grade African American male students perceived racial discrepancies as a reason for having been removed from the classroom. 8th grade African American boys have identified a lack of interest on the part of the teachers, differences in communication style, and lack of respect from teachers as underlying causes of referrals (Clark, Lee, Goodman, & Yacco, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2009). In addition, 8th grade African American students believed strongly that teachers purposely chastised them to the point of being disrespectful and hostile, thereby leading to office referrals (Jai, 2011; E. W. Morris, 2006).

However, educators often perpetuate the difficult challenges 8th grade African American students face in their educational development. According to Losen and Gillespie (2012), 8th grade African American students are three times more likely to

receive out-of-school suspensions than White students. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (as cited in A. Gregory et al., 2010), although 8th grade African American students represented 17% of the general student population in 2010, they accounted for 32% of suspensions and 30% of expulsions in U.S. schools.

African American–White Achievement Gap

8th grade African American children experienced increased disengagement and decreased motivation in school (Alderman, 2013; Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007). Some say 8th grade African American students digressed because of cultural differences between them and White students (Healy, 2011; Smagorinsky, 2007). From the African American student’s perspective, the academic content did not have relevance for them, reflecting a deficit mindset of achievement in their performance (Cummins, 2009; Gay, 2010; Milner, 2012).

The African American and White achievement gap poses an issue for educational policymakers and suggests both races of children are the sum product of their experiences (Paige & Witty, 2009; Plucker, Burroughs, & Song, 2010). Gregory et al. (2010) suggested there are academic, emotional, and social gaps between African American and White children. They posited America has moved past its blatant racist tendencies and that attainment of education is now on equal footing in spite of race and color.

Factors Contributing to African American Male Academic Success

Studies have shown that diverse factors impact the academic motivation and success of 8th grade African American middle school boys (Gutman & Midgley, 2000). These factors include parental involvement, the relationships school administrators create by establishing small learning communities, the presence of effective mentoring

programs, and culturally specific literacy programs to improve their reading skills (Ladson-Billings, 2009). As 8th grade African American boys navigate through their educational experiences, several factors impact their academic success, helping to advance their student achievement: psychological, social, and family influences. (Noguera, 2003). The psychological factors include development of the 8th grade African American boys' self-efficacy, increasing their problem-solving skills, and developing their self-confidence.

Impact of parental involvement on African American male academic success.

According to Jeynes (2005), parental involvement serves as a prominent factor in the academic motivation and success of 8th grade African American boys. Jeynes analyzed the results of 41 research studies, determining the relationship of parental involvement to urban male academic achievement. Jeynes reported that school-initiated programs significantly increased parental involvement and positively impacted 8th grade African American male academic success and motivation. Students with increased levels of parental involvement demonstrated strong character, perseverance to obtain their personal goals, resilience to prepare for school and standardized assessments, and matriculated through Advanced Placement classes (Conchas, 2006). School personnel recognize and treat 8th grade African American males with greater respect and fairness when they know high parental involvement exists. Highly involved parents introduce themselves to the principal to inquire about which programs and teachers can best serve their children, attend parent-teacher conferences to inquire about interim assessment progress, and connect with their children's guidance counselor to monitor their behavior (Jensen, 2009). The development of healthy parent-teacher linkages demonstrates a

genuine concern for their sons' academic success and creates an accountability system for the teachers and students (Casper, 2001). Through this process communication opens to address any deficiencies or concerns as the school year progresses, refine test-taking strategies, and ensure both parties have the children's best interests at heart (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Impact of administrators on African American male academic success.

MCPS has 148,000 students. Although 21.4% of the overall student population is African American, less than 10% of the administrators and staff are African American (Childress et al., 2009). It is a national challenge for African American administrators and teachers to impact African American boys in schools (Sleeter, 2011). African American administrators provide another layer of academic, behavioral, and social accountability, and they provide these boys an authentic role model with whom they can interact every day (Gano-Overway & Guivernau, 2014).

School administrators have an arduous task of supporting and configuring the scholarly development of students and socializing their development for responsible roles within society (Hammer, Berger, Beardsley, & Easton, 2003; Noguera, 2008). They must also develop a school culture of high expectations, data analysis to drive student achievement, and healthy student-teacher interactions (Gay, 2010).

To enhance 8th grade African American boys' experiences, effective administrators have visions for their schools to accentuate strong character, identify at-risk students, create specific academic and achievement action plans to address the boys' needs, and communicate messages of accountability in a nurturing environment (Berry, 2008; Howard, 2008; Noguera, 2009). Within these settings, administrators can create

small cohorts of 8th grade African American male students receiving academic and emotional supports after school and during weekend programming events.

Impact of school structure on African American male academic success.

Classroom size impacts the performance of 8th grade African American male students (Davis & Jordan, 1994; Strayhorn, 2010). In classrooms with a large number of students, some students do not receive the personalized, guided instruction that helps them better comprehend content materials (Duke & Pearson, 2008; Hill & Miller, 2013). From these experiences, several suburban Maryland school districts realized that pinpointing achievement issues solely would not increase student achievement in Maryland. Data trends have supported the argument that class size may be an issue for 8th grade African American boys. According to Rodney and Mupier (1999), 40% of ninth-grade African American boys in large classes were in jeopardy of being retained. As a result of these findings, individual districts have applied for grant monies to create small learning communities within schools to reduce classroom sizes, create an intimate classroom setting, and develop a sense of connectedness, especially among 8th grade African American boys. The goal of this initiative was to increase the graduation rates of these students (Clegg, 2007).

Programs to Improve African American Male Academic Success

8th grade African American middle school boys can present challenges for teachers; as a cluster, they can be noisy, difficult to manage, disorganized, and at times disorderly (Skogan, 1992; Steinberg, Allensworth, & Johnson, 2011). In Maryland, 8th grade African American male students underachieve at significant rates (Howard, 2008). According to the U.S. Department of Education, in 2013 African American students'

assessment averages were 35 points lower than for White students. The 35 point performance gaps have not improved substantially from 1990 notwithstanding sweeping educational reforms and NCLB implementation. For 8th grade African American boys, this achievement disparity raises significant concerns regarding how educators address this issue. According to Holzman (2010), in 38 of the 50 states and the District of Columbia, African American boys have the lowest graduation rates in comparison to other races. Specifically for MCPS, only 74% of African American boys graduate compared to 91% of their White counterparts. In Prince George's County Public Schools, only 55% of African American boys graduate from high school to comparison to 71% of White students.

With the staggering disparities in graduation rates and little movement toward closing the achievement gap, culturally responsive teaching has become more prevalent in the past decade, in an attempt to engage African American males (Gay, 2010). Researchers have explored the significance and relevance of blending culture and instruction in order to heighten student engagement of 8th grade African American boys, and they have examined the diverse cultural and academic processes that holistically develop them (Ladson-Billings, 2009). African American boys need consistent and committed role models to help them develop socially responsible behaviors and strengthen their communication skills with peers and adults (Caldwell, Rafferty, Reischl, De Loney, & Brooks, 2010; Ng, Wolf-Wendel, & Lombardi, 2012). Mentoring increases the academic performance of 8th grade African American middle school boys and creates common bonds to increase their academic motivation and success (Payton et al., 2008; Woodland, 2008). Mentoring provides 8th grade African American boys with older male

figures who provide accountability, guidance, and structure (Graham & Anderson, 2008; Noguera, 1996). These processes helped African American male students mature and develop into responsible citizens (Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004; White & Cones, 2013).

Programs sponsored through 100 Black Men and Concerned Black Men empower 8th grade African American boys with life skills courses designed to assist their educational and emotional development. This process endows them with coping strategies to address challenges they face, encourages them to develop entrepreneurial interests, and increases their emphasis on academic achievement (Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007).

An additional external academic and socioemotional resource for 8th grade African American boys is the Black Star Project (Aratani, Wight, & Cooper, 2011), whose overarching purpose addresses parents' active presence in their children's lives and reinforces the importance of effective academic, social, and emotional preparation between preschool and third grade (Meyers, 2009). Through weekly instructional classes, the Black Star Project implements healthy mentoring relationships to augment 8th grade African American boys' self-esteem and provides direct accountability systems (Coleman, 2014). This process provides an additional layer of support to ensure children's future success in their academic settings and eventual workplace roles.

In 2009, President Obama held a Fatherhood Town Hall meeting in the White House to address his administration's concerns and commitment toward the crisis regarding fatherhood and mentoring responsibilities impacting the United States. Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. partnered with the Obama administration to challenge African

American men to become a consistent presence in their children's lives and to celebrate men who support and care for their families (Walton, 2009).

Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., another renowned African American fraternity, implemented its Guide Right Program. This mentoring opportunity provides African American boys with educational and occupational opportunities that are focused on character development in local high schools and on college campuses (Hughey & Parks, 2011). As a subsidiary component of the Guide Right Program, the Kappa Leadership Development League assists African American high school students with college readiness courses and provides monthly training to develop healthy parental relationships (Gasman, 2011).

Relevant Studies in Motivation

A recurring theme in the literature on 8th grade African American boys that directly impacts their academic motivation and success is the concept of motivation. Stinson (2004) conducted qualitative action research on academic achievement over a 6-month time frame, built on the concepts of achievement. Stinson identified the lack of research on explaining African American male students' achievement in school and sought to increase the understanding of the motivations of four African American boys who demonstrated achievement and persistence in school mathematics. The study examined African American male students' experiences that demonstrated appreciation for the rigors of schools, their academic growth, and love of mathematics.

Stinson (2004) provided two research questions:

1. How did participants define success? What sociocultural factors did they attribute to their school and academic success? What discourses about African

American boys shaped participants' perception of themselves as mathematics learners and as African American students?

2. How did they accommodate, resist, or reconfigure those discourses? How did participants define agency and how does it function in their lives? What relationship did participants perceive between their achievement in school mathematics and agency? (p. 11)

Stinson utilized Weissglass's model to describe the significant factors impacting student learning. This model examined how a student's beliefs, attitudes, values, and emotions about race, class, gender, language, role of schools, teaching, learning, and society overall impacted his performance in the classroom. The study captured how sociocultural discourses impacted 8th grade African American boys' being while assimilating, resisting, and recalculating their strategies to achieve their personal success. Stinson defined *agency* as the ability to accommodate, resist, or recalculate sociocultural factors to achieve success.

Stinson (2004) chose an eclectic theoretical framework, including poststructural theory, critical race theory, and critical (postmodern) theory. He suggested that poststructural theory provides a framework for examining and defining one's circumstances. His findings revealed the students defined success globally by helping others achieve success or in micro terms as enjoying one's life by loving family and friends. The boys' mutual responses implied education had significant influences on their lives, and four common factors contributed to their success: having immediate family and community members with higher education, precise expectations of achievement through

encouragement of family and community members, committed educators who verbalized high expectations, and high-achieving peers who had similar goals and interests.

Stinson (2004) noted a limitation of the study was the physical research site. The study's high school did not fit the typical depiction of an urban Black high school. In his recommendations, Stinson suggested future studies could duplicate the theoretical framework and methodology with academically and mathematically successful African American and Latino female students.

Truesdale, Baber, and Cooper (2007) conducted an instrumental case study to examine factors influencing motivation of nine seventh-grade African American male students attending schools in the Southeast. The purpose of the study was to explore middle-grade African American boys' educational experiences and feelings of alienation.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do participants perceive their motivation to achieve in school?
2. How do participants perceive their educational experiences?
3. What are the relationships between peer influences, perceptions of educational experiences and feelings of alienation? (Truesdale et al., 2007, p. 9)

Surveys were conducted with nine seventh-grade African American male students and their parents and caregivers, and observations were made in their schools and community settings (Truesdale et al., 2007).

Truesdale et al. (2007) noted that five significant themes emerged: achievement and identity, significance of the (dis)connected family, friendship, pedagogical influences, and self-regulation. The (dis)connected family theme was influenced by a student's family structure and parents'/caregivers' expectations. Friendship referred to

participants bonding with peers through talk, play, and dress, as well as the code of respect and camaraderie. Pedagogical influences included interactions with teachers and response to the curriculum. The students' listening, on-task behavior, and following of rules defined learner behavior.

Truesdale et al. (2007) suggested future qualitative research with larger and more diverse school populations to support the opinion that perceptions of African American male students' school experiences considerably impact their motivation to strive for excellence in school. In addition, the researchers suggested further research to explore the selected participants through their high school experiences to determine whether their immediate school environments impact their motivation to achieve positively or negatively. Lastly, Truesdale et al. suggested further research was needed to explore the influence of the disconnected family on African American boys' motivation.

Both aforementioned researchers used qualitative research studies to examine socioeconomic factors impacting 8th grade African American male academic success and motivation. They implemented multiple philosophical frameworks to conduct their studies.

Summary

African American males have persevered through challenging academic and social challenges during the 19th and 20th centuries within the United States and, specifically, within the state of Maryland. These defining moments led to the historic court rulings of Plessy v. Ferguson and Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka that heightened educational and social focus on the academic motivation and success of African American male students within academic settings. As No Child Left Behind

Legislation (NCLB) unfolded, academic disparities facing African American male students grew, becoming a national concern. Researchers including Rolland (2011) and Truesdale et. al (2007) examined academic motivation and success at their respective middle and high schools. In their findings, the researchers noted peer involvement, strong parental support, and committed educators significantly impacted African American male students.

In this research study, the literature review revealed Bandura's (1995) social learning theory and Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation in concert with Rolland (2011) and Truesdale et. al (2007) research studies supported findings that student engagement and achievement are influenced by strong peer accountability, emotional investments from their classroom teachers, and consistent parent accountability.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

This study aimed to identify the academic motivation and success factors of African American male students in suburban Maryland schools. This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What factors do 8th grade African American male middle school students in suburban Maryland schools perceive as contributing to their academic motivation and academic success?
2. What roles do peers, parents, and teachers play in 8th grade African American male students' academic motivation and academic success?
3. What role does school environment play in 8th grade African American male students' academic motivation and academic success?

Research Design

A phenomenological research study describes the participants' lives and their experiences (Creswell, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2010). This approach gives the researcher an understanding of the participants' consciousness, intuition, and intentionality (Charmaz & McMullen, 2011). During this process, the researcher, as an outside observer, seeks to comprehend the participants' experiences. This researcher chose a phenomenological research design to understand the lived experiences of the phenomenon being studied (Wiggan, 2008).

Interpretive researchers have suggested that individuals form their meanings and build knowledge based on their perspectives (Creswell, 2012). This researcher used that

approach to seek to understand the subjective meanings of the phenomenon studied (Creswell, 2012).

The critical science paradigm is a blend of critical theory and postmodernism (Brookfield, 2007). In this framework, the researcher examines the historical aspects of important events and seeks to gain understanding of their impact (Creswell, 2012). For researchers using this approach, the research methodology is dependent on the research question and the researcher's approach to the question (Maxwell, 2012). The qualitative research design for this study is based on the researcher's underlying philosophical assumptions that the experiences of the participants are subjective (Creswell, 2012). Therefore, this is an interpretive (qualitative) study utilizing a phenomenological research design to investigate the academic motivation and success of 8th grade African American male students in suburban Maryland schools (Cooper, 2014).

Qualitative research has three distinct purposes: to explore, explain, or describe (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). Researchers attempt to make distinct assumptions when beginning a new study (Creswell, 2012). This process can be categorized by three assumptions: ontological, epistemological, and axiological (Creswell, 2012). Ontological assumptions represent the reality of society; participants' realities are based on personal experiences (Creswell, 2012; DeForge & Shaw, 2012). Hence, open-ended questions generate robust participant responses that allow the researcher to better understand the participants' circumstances and worldviews (Klenke, 2008; Usher, 2009).

The epistemological assumption is that the researcher gathers data through multiple interview forms to acquire the participants' life experiences (Creswell, 2012). The researcher collects data in person, in focus groups, or through direct interviews. As

the researcher reports his or her findings, the investigation reveals the participants' perspectives on the research topic (Creswell, 2012).

The axiological assumptions reflect the researcher's role and the participants' values in the study (Creswell, 2012). The researcher's values and beliefs are vital because they reflect his or her perspective of the participants' life experiences (Branson, 2007).

Participant Selection

This phenomenological study focused on 8th grade African American male middle school students in suburban two Maryland schools. The researcher utilized the semi-structured interviews of 10 8th grade African American suburban boys based on recommendations from guidance counselors and their academic grade point averages of 3.0 or higher in an effort to understand their academic motivation and success. The researcher also gained approval through a suburban Maryland school district's Office of Shared Accountability to conduct the research study (Appendix A). The researcher also gained approval through the University of Maryland Eastern Shore's Institutional Review Board to conduct research on the university level (Appendix B). For qualitative studies, phenomenological research can enable the researcher to gather relevant participant information on the participants' living experiences and provide insights for future research.

Reliability/Validity

An effective research instrument incorporates validity, reliability, and practicality (Little, Goe, & Bell, 2009). When researchers seek to verify a study's objectives, they use validity (Creswell, 2012). Validity can be measured through internal and external procedures (Gibbert, Ruigrok, & Wicki, 2008; Harper, 2012). According to Abowitz and

Toole (2009), internal validity examines inferences found by the researcher, their credibility, and their impact on causal relationships. Validity exists when correlations can be established between the measured items of the study and the results from the observations (DeVellis, 2011). The implications of validity in qualitative research in comparison to quantitative research are diverse (Creswell, 2013). In qualitative studies, the researcher's findings and participants' responses influence the validity of the results (Hesse-Biber, 2010). Conversely, quantitative research measures the universal nature of the research (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007). Independent researchers seek consistent data results free of random errors to correlate data relationships and draw conclusions.

Setting

Data collection was conducted through interviewing participants via a semi-structured interview guide. The in-person interviews were conducted privately for one hour in a quiet, designated location at the identified school. The participants were escorted to the interview location by the guidance counselor to safeguard them from being identified as participants in the study. The interview results were digitally recorded and stored in a locked office in the researcher's home.

The interview method was an effective method for participants to provide their historical accounts. Conversely, this process removed participants from their customary environments which may have swayed participant responses and introduced researcher bias into the responses.

Instrumentation

Effective qualitative studies use structured, unstructured, and semi-structured interviews to collect data (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). Structured interviews pose open-ended questions in a specific order to capture participant responses (Covell, Sidani, & Ritchie, 2012). Unstructured interviews have random questions that produce varied responses (Covell et al., 2012). Semi-structured interviews commence with overarching questions that allow the participants to expand their thoughts (Willig, 2013). For the purpose of this study, the researcher proposed a structured interview. The instrument used in the research project was a slightly modified, valid, and reliable instrument. The instrument was used in a published study, and specified modifications made the instrument appropriate for the targeted participants and the specific variables to be studied. The designer granted permission for its use (Appendix E) The instrument consisted of 16 questions related to the motivation and success factors of African American students at the high school level (Appendix C). The instrument was modified to address the researcher's target group of 8th grade African American middle school boys.

Data Collection

A phenomenological study's focus captures the quintessential experiences of the study's participants. Effective interviewers ask well-structured, open-ended questions that gather critical participant information (Roulston, 2010). Through established mutual trust, the researcher listens empathically to participants, enabling them to speak freely and share their perceptions without researcher judgment and bias (Hargie, 2010). For the

purpose of this study, the interview questions explored the participants' perceptions of the factors they believed contributed to their academic motivation and success.

The interviews were one hour in length, digitally recorded, transcribed verbatim, and checked by participants to ensure accuracy of the data. To ensure participant anonymity, each participant was coded with a number for identification purposes instead of using the participant's name.

To ensure validity of the collected responses, the data was cycled through the triangulation process. Triangulation employs multiple approaches to the investigation of a research question to test its validity. The triangulation process included interviews, observations, and surveys to decrease potential limitations of the study.

The collected data was also assessed through member checks. This process encompassed sharing the collected data with the participants to ensure the researcher had collected and analyzed the data appropriately. As opportunities presented themselves throughout the interview process, the researcher conducted member checks informally and formally to assess the validity of the respondent's thoughts. Moreover, respondents supplemented their thoughts, clarified expressions or words misunderstood by the researcher, and allowed mutual understandings between both parties.

Ethical Considerations

In a research study, the researcher must anticipate any ethical issues that may occur during the study (Creswell, 2012). The researcher has the responsibility of ensuring that respondents are protected from adverse actions as a result of their participation in the study and must provide security for the data collected (Bond, 2004).

Researchers need to implement the following steps to minimize the risk of harm to respondents during the study:

1. Counsel respondents that their participation is voluntary and that they have the right to terminate their involvement at any time (Tybout & Zaltman, 1974).
2. Provide information about the purpose of the study so that respondents can comprehend the nature of the research and its impact on them (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 1993).
3. Review the procedures of the study so that participants can understand the process (Creswell, 2012).
4. Assure respondents that they have the right to ask questions at any time (Tourangeau & Smith, 1996).
5. Offer a copy of the research study results (Kotrlik & Higgins, 2001).
6. Describe the benefits of the study to respondents (Jobe & Mingay, 1991).
7. Collect signatures of respondents agreeing to the provisions as described (Brickell & Shmatikov, 2006).

The researcher ensured the privacy of participants by utilizing the coding process to identify each respondent.

Epoche and Bracketing

In the initial stage of the terminal data interpretation, the researcher reviewed each interview transcript and examined it for overall themes generated by the interview questions (Yin, 2014). In establishing topics of significance, flagged items represented an initial listing for clustering similar topics (Bednall, 2006). In this stage, a minimal degree of coding was implemented and a later decision to flag significant items was made

(Stevens, Myers, & Constantine, 1974). In the third stage of establishing thematic linkages, common themes of significance were reassessed and grouped into major categories. During this process, no decisions were made about individual characteristics and consequences of attaching personal bias to the data (Bednall, 2006; Fowler, 2013). In the fourth stage, the researcher identified items for meaning. Within the identified items, the topics were categorized for topics of significance within each major category to determine its relevance for intense scrutiny (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Table 1
Research Matrix

Research question	Interview questions
RQ1. What factors do African American male middle school students perceive as contributing to their academic motivation and academic success?	1, 2
RQ2. What roles do peers, parents, and teachers play in African American male students' academic motivation and academic success?	3, 7, 9, 11
RQ3. What role does school environment play in African American male students' academic motivation and academic success?	5, 12

Field Test

This researcher conducted a field test with the proposed instrument to evaluate necessary changes to the interview guide and to clarify language of the questions from the participants' vantage point. Annesa Cheek, Ed.D., vice president for School and Community Partnerships, and Ty Stone, Ph.D., past faculty at Central State University (a historically black university) and current vice president for business operations, participated in the field test. Through their mutual examinations of the proposed

instrument, they found that it would enable the researcher to gather participant data regarding African American middle school boys' academic success and motivation in middle schools.

Informed Consent

All respondents were provided an informed consent form. The researcher collected signed informed consent forms from respondents' parents before data collection occurred. The researcher provided general information regarding the process of the study, giving the respondents an overview of what to expect. Respondents were advised they had the option of withdrawing from the study at any time during the process with no adverse impact.

Risks/Benefits

Not all research studies are unequivocally risk-free, but this researcher did not expect any inordinate risk to the respondents. The researcher minimized potential concerns by upholding high standards of confidentiality and privacy for the respondents.

If any respondent became uncomfortable with the study, he could stop the interview at any time and any information collected to that point would not be used. In addition, should a participant experience any psychological issues during this process, he would be immediately referred to the school guidance counselor for support.

Security

All data collected was kept on the researcher's computer and a USB drive. Both devices were password-protected. The USB drive and any corresponding notes were kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office accessible only by the researcher. Data

will be kept for 7 years and then destroyed by shredding the paper documents and smashing the USB drive.

Summary

Chapter 3 described the phenomenological research method the researcher used to capture the lived experiences of the participants. The study's overarching goal was to determine specific factors that impact 8th grade African American males in two suburban Maryland middle schools and whether parents, peers, educators, and school environments affect their academic motivation and success.

An initial survey provided a similar group of participants with interview questions designed to capture the essence of the phenomenon studied. From this process, the researcher elicited positive responses from the test group responses. The researcher triangulated participant data using epoche and bracketing processes to elicit emergent themes and subtexts. This research study was conducted in two suburban Maryland schools, and the participants were respective National Junior Honor participants. The semi structured interviews were conducted after school hours for one month, at which time the researcher reached saturation with the participant interviews. The researcher assumed participant remarks were transparent and complete based on the given interview questions.

As the researcher analyzed and interpreted participant data, the results of the study were generated. As the transcription process unfolded, many consistent themes and some outliers emerged as participants shared factors that impacted their academic motivation and success in two suburban Maryland middle schools.

The researcher recognized that limitations might have impacted the research study.

The qualitative research method was used to collect participant data to determine specific factors that impact eighth grade, African American males' academic motivation and success in two suburban Maryland middle schools.

Chapter 4

Findings

Introduction

This phenomenological study was designed to explore which factors 8th grade African American males perceived as contributors to their academic success in two suburban Maryland middle schools. A series of individual semi-structured interview sessions were used to collect the participants' lived experiences and the impact of those experiences on their lives. Prior to this, a pilot study was conducted with five African American male students to test and revise the interview questions for clarity and appropriateness. All five respondents judged the interview questions to be suitable for future use on participants.

Two theories came together to provide a conceptual framework for this study including Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation and Bandura's (1995) social learning theory. It was through the lens of this conceptual framework, combined with a historical perspective of 19th-century African American education in Maryland through the present state of knowledge that the researcher identified eight themes.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What do 8th grade African American male students in suburban Maryland middle schools perceive as factors contributing to their academic success?
2. What roles to peers, parents and educators play in the ability to achieve academic success for 8th grade African American male students in suburban Maryland middle schools?

3. What role does school environment play in 8th grade African American male students' ability to achieve academic success?

Participants in the Study

The participants in this study were eight 8th grade African American students from two suburban Maryland middle school locations. Of the eight African American males, five (62.5%) were raised in two-parent households. Two participants (25%) lived with their fathers, and the remaining participant (12.5%) lived with his mother and sister.

All participants were members of the National Junior Honor Society who voluntarily participated in the study. Once the initial participants were identified at their individual schools, a written recruitment letter along with parental and student informed consent forms were provided, explaining the nature of the study and the expectations of participation. The criteria for the study was also documented on the informed consent form that all study participants signed. These documents were provided to the administrative assistants at their respective schools who were instrumental in securing the participants for the study. Potential participants who agreed to participate were asked to return the signed consent form to the researcher in a stamped, addressed envelope that was included with the delivered documents. Initially, 10 members agreed to take part in this study but only eight participants returned their forms permitting them to participate in the study.

Description of the Setting

The study took place in two suburban middle schools in a large suburban public school system in the state of Maryland.

East Wood Middle School.

East Wood Middle School was chosen as a study site because of the number of 8th grade African American male students in the National Junior Honor Society. Of the eight participants, six respondents—My Brother’s Keeper, The Artist, The Inquisitive One, The Well Rounded One, Coming to America, and the Driven One—were enrolled at the school.

Located in the northeastern portion of the suburban Maryland school district, 915 students attended East Wood Middle School at the time of the study. Approximately 35% of the student population were African American, 45% were Hispanic, almost 8% were White, less than 5% were Pacific Islander, and the remaining 7% were other. Of the overall student population, 292 students were in the 8th grade class that represented nearly one third of the student body. The school had 68 classroom teachers, 75% of whom had five or more years of professional service. Regarding student academic performance, 37.1% of the 8th grade African American students were proficient in mathematics, and 69.1% were proficient in reading. Overall, the school environment was inviting, staff members were welcoming, and its goal was to produce college and career ready students.

Sinclair Middle School.

Sinclair Middle School, also located in the northeastern portion of the suburban school district, was also chosen because of their number of 8th grade African American males in their National Junior Honor Society chapter. Two participants, Captain America, and the Technology Guru were enrolled at the school. Approximately 21% of the student population of students at the time of the study were African American, 33% were

Hispanic, 25% were White, 14% were Asian, less than 5% were Pacific Islander, and the remaining 2% were other. Of the overall student population, 210 students were in the 8th grade class that represented nearly 35% of the student body. The school had 44 classroom teachers, 88% of whom had five or more years of professional service. Regarding student academic performance, 45% of the 8th grade African American students were proficient in mathematics, and 83% were proficient in reading.

Demographic Profiles

Respondent 1 (Captain America).

Captain America, age 14, is a biracial, African American male who is the youngest of three children. He is a polite, courteous young man who appears wise beyond his years. Originally from Northern California, he and his siblings were raised in a two-parent household with White/European values. Captain America was extremely focused and passionate about a future aviation career.

I moved to suburban Maryland when I was two. I would go flying with my step-grandfather. He was a pilot, and my dad was a pilot. When I was little, I would go into museums. My favorite museum would be the Air and Space Museum. I would love going to DC, but my brother and sister would hate me, but I loved being around planes. The feeling of flying a plane is like nothing I have ever felt before. I feel I can do this for the rest of my life.

While a cadet in the Civil Air Patrol, Captain America emphasized he developed his leadership and time management skills.

Leadership teaches you about time management and how to deal with personal problems. It teaches you to see how you can improve yourself and see how you

can improve others. Leadership is not about the title; Leadership is inspiring others and how they remember you. The earlier you develop your leadership, the better it's going to be in the future.

Respondent 2 (My Brother's Keeper).

My Brother's Keeper, age 14, was a quiet, conscientious, 8th grade student who self-reported as the oldest of four children.

I have three younger brothers, and I have the responsibility of taking care of them along with my grandmother. I play the guitar, violin, keyboard, and the drums occasionally, and I play bass guitar also. I am always supportive. I am going to a private school soon. I want to get paid for something so I can have some money in my pocket before I get out of this school if I can find something so I can have a little bit of money in my pocket.

Respondent 3 (The Artist).

The Artist, age 13, was a gentle, mild-mannered, 8th grade African American male who wore glasses and viewed himself as a future graphic artist and publisher. In revealing his home life, he noted he came from a two-parent household and enjoyed tennis and soccer. "I love spending my free time drawing and developing my work through animated stories of Anime, which incorporate adventure story lines shown in fantasy and suspense, in which my audiences will learn more about me."

Respondent 4 (The Technology Guru).

The Technology Guru, age 14, was an extremely lanky, mild-mannered, only child who wears glasses. He lived with his parents in their suburban Maryland

neighborhood, and he had a few close friends. He struggled with his academic transition from elementary to middle school.

I am an average kid, and I am not too out there. I am an only child that enjoys sports, video games especially Madden 2015, Black Ops, and Grand Theft Auto. Initially, I was terrified of the middle school experience at East Wood Middle School because I lack organizational skills.

Respondent 5 (The Inquisitive One).

The Inquisitive One, age 13, was a bright 8th grade African American male with a slight stutter. He was being raised by his father and did not reveal much about his mother.

I would describe myself as a person who is different than how he comes across. Earlier today, my friend told me when he first met me, he thought. I was one of those kids that would beat up everyone for fun but actually when he got to know me, he knew I was different. I can be sarcastic and mean to others, but I can also be a kind and caring person. A lot of people have gotten used to me. I am stuck in a middle ground where people expect too much out of me . . . or too little of me at the same time. I am hounded by my classmates to be their partner on class assignments and projects. I feel like I am being overestimated . . . at other times I feel underestimated. People who don't know me assumed things about my race, physical appearance, and, maybe, my speech impediment.

As he continued, his body slightly shifted as he provided additional insightful comments:

Though I come across as knowledgeable, if it weren't for my sister I wouldn't have the drive to go to college; and my powerful upbringing, then I wouldn't be prepared. I am interested in finding out more about computers. I am interested in

learning more about scripting because I can make more advanced games; it seems like an excellent profession.

Respondent 6 (The Well Rounded One).

The Well Rounded One, age 13, was an articulate, thoughtful, 8th grade African American male who lived with his father. He stated he came to the United States when he was 6 years old from Ghana because his father wanted a better life for him.

The most important thing to me is my family and then education. Nowadays, you have to work a lot harder to get a get an excellent job in America when you are older. I am going to work as hard as possible. My grade point is no lower than a 3.51. My parents divorced when I was around 7, and my grades went down until the fourth grade. Then, there was a teacher who was like a mother figure to me. She treated me like a son and gave me everything I needed.

Respondent 7 (Coming To America).

Coming to America, age 14, was of medium build, mature, well traveled, and a slightly guarded, 8th grade African American male who lived with his mother and older sister.

I am an African. My mom is Somalian, and my dad is from Yemen. I have five brothers and five sisters. My dad died when I was 4, and my mom came to the United States in 2004. The immigrant place brought us to the United States. I lived in Denver for four years, Maine for four years, and then here in Maryland. My mom does not do any work but she attends classes, and my big sister helps us out because she is the one with the job.

Respondent 8 (The Driven One).

The Driven One, age 14, was an articulate, thoughtful, 8th grade African American male who wore glasses that lived with his parents. He confidently shared, I lived in Germany for six years before my dad got a call and moved back to the United States. I have two sisters and one brother. My mom works at the Department of Education, and my dad worked at General Dynamics and but he is now retired.

As a collective body, the respondents were eager to share their backgrounds with the researcher, providing insights into their perceptions and the factors impacting their academic motivation and success.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

According to Creswell (2003), phenomenological research “described the participant’s lived experience in their natural setting and its impact on their behavior” (p. 15). This study’s phenomenological approach was to collect participant data and document extensive descriptions of the participants’ responses. According to Krippendorff (2012), the qualitative researcher reports what may be considered inconsequential minutiae, but those facts are of importance to how the researcher experienced the study. The interviews in this study took place in a private, nonthreatening location within the respective middle schools. The researcher gathered the participant responses from a semi-structured interview guide consisting of 16 questions. Each interview was conducted in person and was digitally recorded. Each interview took approximately one hour to complete. Individual identification numbers were used to note

each participant. The researcher transcribed the participant interviews verbatim and then reviewed and compared them to the recorded interviews to ensure accuracy.

The researcher was guided by the procedural components of Giorgi and Giorgi (2003), progressively synthesizing the original qualitative data to analyze its significance. The methodology entailed gathering the raw data to understand the overarching meaning of the collected data, ascertaining the meaning of the experience with respect to the phenomenon studied, and converting data into themes with similar meanings (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003).

Once the transcription process concluded, the researcher reviewed each transcribed interview to gain an overarching perspective of the discussions. During the initial examination, no conclusions were drawn, and no data synthesis resulted from the process. On the second review of the interviews, the researcher began noting the significance and relevance of the data (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). The researcher started to identify themes that emerged from the analysis of the data.

During this process, the researcher also classified related topics together and started the initial organization of subjects. Once this process was completed, these items were examined again for mutual themes throughout the data and were further synthesized into distinct units to extract implicit factors into explicit ones (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). Therefore, the researcher organized the participants' accounts into themes that highlighted the psychological meanings of their lived experiences (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). For example, the researcher noted underlying themes in the data, such as the need for strong parental and teacher support implicitly and explicitly referenced in the interviews. The categories were entered into an Excel spreadsheet and disaggregated to

characterize relationships between the data and determine the frequency of each response. In the concluding phase of data analysis, a final review of the coded data was undertaken to confirm that the researcher captured the participant responses precisely.

Through this process, eight themes emerged: goal setting, highly proficient academic performance, increased peer accountability, parental support and accountability, classroom environment, more principal-led focus groups, specific career aspirations, and negative school images.

Themes

Theme 1: Goal Setting.

For 8th grade African American male students, the importance of having clearly defined academic objectives and an articulated strategy was paramount to their academic motivation and success. The theme of goal setting was an essential component in answering the initial research question of perceived factors that were contributing to their academic success. The respondents understood that their self-esteem directly impacted their motivation to learn. As the researcher pressed participants, as a collective body, their responses were in alignment with social learning theory and its belief that student learning and perceptions are based on their ability to accomplish a task and overcome academic difficulties (Bandura, 1995). Lovitts (2008) supported this component by validating Bandura's (1995) earlier research that goal setting processes begin through the synthesis of information, and confident subjects can persevere through difficult tasks. Markus and Wurf (1987) further supported this premise by suggesting that highly motivated students set obtainable goals, seek high achievement over immediate gratification, and want performance based feedback. From Markus and Wurf's (1987)

lens, highly motivated students continuously assess their performance and strategize methods for academic improvement. From this, they suggested, African American male students seek the reassurance of their performance from their peer group.

According to Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation, it is possible the participants strove for academic excellence based on their need for acceptance from their immediate peer groups that would transcend them through the higher levels of Maslow's hierarchy as they strove toward self-actualization.

As a collective body, six out of eight respondents (75%) explained the significance of goal setting on their academic motivation and success.

R1. Academic success is doing well in school and having long and short-term goals. A short-term goal is wanting to get an A on this next test or get into this program. It's me taking the steps to get and constantly saying I can do it even when it's hard. This will benefit me in the future. It not only helps with your grades but with any activity that you are doing. It is paying attention in class, constantly staying after school, and talking with the teacher when I don't understand something.

R2. Academic success is when you reach your full potential and apply it to what you have learned or what you are learning in life. If you have all B's in class and want to get all A's, academic success is when you put your nose to the grind to get those straight A's.

R3. Academic success is working hard in class and being focused. It is being able to understand the directions and apply the directions to the work that I do. I try to make my work the best I can make it.

R4. Academic success is if you put your mind to it, with hard work your knowledge will grow. By studying, asking lots of questions in class and using my friends, my teachers help me sharpen my skills so I can do well in school.

R7. Academic success is reaching your goal. It's reaching your limit; going to that place that you want. You get that success by achieving your goal.

R8. You are always on the ball. When you see your goal that you want, you have to stay focused. You have to make sure you are always after that prize and eventually you will get it. That's what I think academic success is.

The respondents had definitive goals and a specific process for achieving their goals. The findings in this study were supported by the work of Truesdale et al. (2007) regarding social learning theory and the importance of goal setting in impacting African American males' motivation to strive for excellence in school.

Theme 2: Highly Proficient Academic Performance.

Successful student achievement is a paramount concern for schools and their students. For the respondents, highly proficient academic performance was a theme that emerged from their collective interviews. The relationship of the theme and social learning theory suggests motivated participants need to perform well in school. Bandura (1984) noted that motivated students are extremely driven, assess their current academic performance, and self-regulate themselves using goal setting to attain their concrete and measurable goals.

One respondent noted that although he was highly proficient, he could perform more proficiently when focused. Six out of eight (75%) respondents explained the

significance of their highly skilled academic performance on their academic motivation and success.

R2. Right now, in English I have a B. In all of my other classes I have A's. I have all advanced classes. I am trying to keep this up for the rest of my life. If I can skip a grade that will get me to where I want to be. I want to have all advanced classes so I can learn as much as I can. I want to be a great person and earn respect from all of my teachers.

R3. I haven't gotten any lower than a 3.61, and whenever I get a B, I try to bring it up to an A before the end of the quarter. Usually, the work is easy for me. I mean it is straightforward. It would be nice if the teachers pushed me. I want to get 4.0s for the rest of my years in school. I want to be able to draw a lot. I want to make people interested in what I do. I want people to know my work, from my sketches to my video games.

R4. I want to keep my grades up as I enter high school and work hard. Talking with my friends, high school is an enormous step up. I will need to spend the majority of my day studying.

R5. My performance is proficient. I am described as an overachiever kid; as one who does not try in class but gets A's and B's. Classes are starting to become harder. My goal is to get straight A's in eighth grade. I could start turning in my classwork. I am smart and know my work. I just forget to turn it in. I find myself not doing homework and waiting until the last minute to get it done. I feel I am doing very well right now, and I am at the top of my classes. I believe I can do way better with responsibility. I could try studying for tests more. I do my

homework or my project. I don't usually go over my notes or anything. I probably should have reviewed my notes; I would probably know the material way better. Imagine how good I would be if I took the time to study more and put down the video games.

R6. In high school, it is a lot tougher . . . it is tough right now in middle school, but it is going to be a lot harder in high school. My goal in high school is to be even more successful than I am right now in middle school. I will have to cut out all of the nonsense, start studying even more, and work harder. I think I do well academically. I think I am one of the best. I am always working hard to learn, study, and do my best at home, school, anywhere. I am always trying to learn something new every day. I just understand everything, and I am one of the best in all of my classes.

Theme 3: Increased Peer Accountability.

Peer influence was an important element in influencing academic motivation (Hattie & Anderman, 2013) When developed with consistent group norms, peer accountability creates a synergistic effect among its group members causing members to rise to or exceed the established standards which can propel them to high academic levels (Chin & Osborne, 2010). As group members engage in daily interactions, the group's collective power can provide positive reinforcement, impelling greater efforts to achieve high academic standards and receiving more positive feedback (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2013). This structured environment can strongly influence African American male students to remain highly motivated and excel academically.

Bandura (1984) noted that self-efficacy impacts the level of individual self-efficacy and its by-product, academic achievement. The respondents were aware that the expectation of future reinforcements or negative group norms had a significant impact on their behavior. Seven out of eight respondents (87.5%) noted peer accountability was a theme of significance.

R1. We can joke around sometimes, but overall, it improves the experience. You are studying but also having fun at the same time. If you don't understand something, your friend can help you out. If your friend doesn't know something, you can help them out. Studying with and supporting your friends makes you a team player. You are talking with your buddies, and you are getting your work done fast. You are understanding it at the same time and having fun! Ultimately, you inspire one another.

R2. Friends can be very supportive, and they have to be able to know what you do. It is also important that your friend makes sure that you are doing the right thing. They can offer help and be more willing to help and be prepared to hear what you have to say and feel what you have to say. Friends can be focused on the work you both are working on. They can ask how things are going.

R3. Friends can serve as tutors because you are talking about the same subject, and you will ask each other questions that will help you better understand what the teacher is talking about.

R4. My peers remind me to be consistent and focus on one task a time. They are mostly honor roll students. We all know each other's families. We all hang out

together after school. They all care about their academics. They are the type of friends that will go and ask their teachers for help.

R5. I would try and support the friends that I have. I wouldn't let social, emotional, physical, problems affect our friendship. My few close friends help reinforce things I may have missed in class. From here, I do my homework, listen in class; or if I feel a test or quiz is hard then I will go over my notes.

R6. My best friend always stands up for me. He reminds me to study and check my grades. It helps me . . . without him I would not be successful. If you choose the wrong friends, they will steer you to the wrong. It is good to want a friend that is smart that can help you academically.

R8. You just got to give support to push them so they can go farther and farther so they can be the best person they can ultimately be.

Theme 4: Parental Support and Accountability.

Parental support and accountability are paramount issues facing African American parents with their sons (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Active and consistent academic parental involvements are important elements when motivating, supporting, and encouraging African American males' academic motivation and success (Prince & Nurius, 2014). Parents who create an emotionally supportive bond, through the development of healthy relationships with teachers and administrative staff, establish high expectations for postsecondary education, firm and supportive parenting skills, and the reinforcement of positive achievement could create opportunities for future success (Ross-Aseme, 2012). By maintaining a consistent presence in their lives, the participants

internalized the values of their parents; that academics mattered, and it motivated them to perform well in school (Ryan & Deci, 2012).

As African American male students matriculate through the different levels of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, their parents' role in their character development and their increased self-esteem plays a critical measure in fulfilling their academic motivation and achieving academic success. Based on the participants' remarks, there was a relationship between this identified theme and Maslow's theory of motivation.

Eight out of eight respondents (100%) noted that parent support and accountability was a theme of significance.

R1. I feel that my mom helps me with my Spanish. She is a fluent speaker. She was an English teacher. I can go to her for help. She helps me with corrections on my essays. My dad always checked my math homework. He would comment this problem is wrong; double check this answer, make sure you show your work here. I would have to do it all over again. I don't know if it was the best learning style for me.

R2. My dad motivates me heavily. My dad checks my Edline to see how I am doing in school. He is very supportive of everything we do. He works as a security guard at Georgetown Prep in Bethesda and is always trying his best to make sure we have a better future than he had. He is always very supportive of what we were doing just as long as it is morally right and goes according to our religion. He helped me get into this school by talking to people there. He is struggling right now to keep the family together. Recently, I got into a private school. I got a scholarship to go there. We have financial aid, but he quit his job,

and my mom had to work two jobs to make ends meet. After I found out that I got in, I would go to Ms. Denny and Ms. Hare's house for extra tutoring for their entrance test.

R3. My parents' role in education is enormous. My parents push me to get good grades. My parents reward me for the good work that I do. They make it easy for me. They give me advice and always tell me things that will put me at ease. They motivate and make me feel relaxed. Sometimes when I ask my parents for things . . . a new video game or book . . . if I can prove myself with my grades . . . they will buy me these things.

R4. I used to shove things in my binder and I would lose things. Between the summer of fifth/sixth grade, I became more organized. As an only child, my dad makes sure I am on top of things. My mom checks my work for me. My dad is a teacher; helped me become very organized; my mom is also highly involved in education as well. Now, when I get home, I organize and scan my notes if we are going over a unit in class. I ask my teachers in class or over lunch for help.

R5. I believe my parent's role in my education is pretty high. They don't follow up with me, but I would think about my parents, and they would tell me what to do. I don't see my dad on a daily basis, but I remember what he wants me to do in school. That's an unyielding role in my success. He knows how absentminded I can be; so what he wants me to do is check over my work well and study.

R6. My father has a huge role in my education. He is always telling me the future is coming for me very soon, and I need to work very hard. When he sees that I am not doing well at something, he comes to school and meets with the teachers and

asks them what I am having trouble with. My dad is always there even when I am doing well; he always wants me to do better.

R7. My mom brought me here to have a better life and a future. She always tells me to work hard. When I am not on gear or distracted, she gets my backpack, and she makes it fun for me using games.

R8. My mom and dad encourage me to do my work and to work hard at it. They taught me that it is all about the effort that you put into it. That is all that matters. That's what people look for; the time and effort you put into it. I know that my parents will be there to support me financially and emotionally when I am moving on to the next level.

Theme 5: Classroom Environment.

The teacher is an integral component in developing a safe learning environment, encouraging mutual trust and respect, and initiating healthy student discourse that may influence high levels of student engagement and academic achievement (Brophy, 2013). According to Gay (2010), teachers must self-reflect on their instructional practices, examine their belief systems around student learning, and develop healthy strategies for engaging meaningful student relationships.

One of the essential components of Bandura's (1997) social learning theory is attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. The findings of this study suggested through observations of verbal and nonverbal behaviors, that African American male learners tended to work harder, engage more with their teachers, and seek their teacher's approval when in a structured learning environment. According to Alderman (2013), effective teachers of 8th grade African American male students are committed to their

students' learning and have faith in their pupils' ability to master rigorous concepts. Their students' achievement is based on their diligent study and not solely on innate ability; and as teachers, they must have a firm grasp of their pedagogy. According to Ladson-Billings (2009), these effective teachers establish healthy relationships with their students where intimate personal details of the students' lives are shared in a private setting beyond formal classroom instruction.

The theme of class environment was a key provision in helping to answer the research question concerning the roles peers, parents, and educators play in 8th grade African American male students' ability to achieve academic success.

Six out of eight respondents (75%) noted their classroom environment was a theme of significance.

R1. For me, making myself known to my teachers has made a difference. I have been able to build trust with them that has made my experience much better. My teachers have times where they work with students one on one. They can come in for help in English or math if they need help. We have after school help. They have these resources for struggling students that need help. I had used these from time to time when I did not understand a topic.

R3. Our teachers talk with us and encourage us to do well in school. Teachers will help us with extra help during test times and provide additional help when we need it

R4. My math teacher has been an excellent resource for me. I can come in for extra help during lunchtime on my free mods to get additional help in things that I do not understand. It has made the difference for me.

R5. If teachers see a struggling student, they need to help them during or after class because of our past experiences, there are times there are some students who don't get it, but they don't want to do anything about it.

R6. Teachers can talk with students and e-mail the student's parents. It's not about their grades; it's about their understanding. They understand it better and don't feel left out or stupid.

R8. I think the teachers need to be much more patient. She gets off track a lot when the students are talking too much. Because of this, my science teacher gets furious and will send the students out of the room. They need to keep on encouraging them to do their work.

Theme 6: More Principal-Led Focus Groups.

Student concerns and expressions are important in an academic setting. It provides a forum for hidden concerns to be expressed, action plans to be generated from the responses, and ways to measure eventual growth from these concerns.

The theme of more principal-led focus groups was a key provision in helping to answer the research question regarding the roles peers, parents, and educators play in the ability to achieve academic success for 8th grade African American male students in two suburban Maryland middle schools. Some of the respondents felt that though their principal was visible, more accessibility was needed to develop a connectedness to their school environments. For this one, there were some disconnects with Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation in that some of the students felt that there were incidents during which their physical needs were not entirely met.

Six out of eight respondents (75%) noted that more principal-led focus groups were a theme of significance.

R2. My principal is always around to talk to. I see she is trying to bring all of the groups together to talk out our issues that we see in the school and our classes. I just wish we had more time to have these conversations.

R3. Though my principal makes us feel like we are part of the school, we need to express ourselves in the ways we have learned in our original countries. We want to feel like we are all together and united. This is something I would like for him to do now.

R4. Though our principal speaks with us in private and encourages us, we should have a gathering of African American families and talk about the importance of academics and emphasize the importance of it in our lives. They should ask the young men what they want to be when they grow up. The benefit of the meeting is that the African American male success rate would skyrocket. These meetings could take place one quarter. My peers may not come at first but once they hear that there are guest speakers they would come. Though my principal is visible, it does not make a huge difference for me.

R6. The principal can have an assembly for the African American males students and show them everything that they need to be working on and what they need to stop doing to prevent them from being successful. I went to an annual meeting at Montgomery College for African American boys where there were only African American boys and celebrities where we discussed our education, and they told us that our education is critical. Since then, I have been focused.

R7. They just got to sit down with them and go through it. I think they would understand better where the African American males are going in school. The principal can't just expect the students to get good grades. They have to talk with someone to get some support. They will need all types of support such as encouragement; just like friends.

R8. I don't know exactly how to answer it but the way I see it, I think she gets them into a huge meeting and talks with the students over with the enormous potential that they have inside of them. She could ask the students what they can do, and the principal and staff can do, to make their education a lot better. To be honest with you, I think this meeting will be a little chaotic because some of them may have a better place to go instead of being at the meeting. I would hope at this meeting they would engage and listen to what the principal has to say and ask questions at the end on what they could do as students.

Theme 7: Specific Career Aspirations.

For African American male students, clearly defined career goals provide them a definitive plan for achieving their future goals. This issue was paramount in helping to answer the research question concerning the role the school environment plays in 8th grade African American male students' ability to achieve academic success. The relationship between this theme and the conceptual framework was evident when considering the theories surrounding social learning theory and Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation. The students were engaged with other highly motivated African American males that provided opportunities for them to replicate these highly engaged academic behaviors.

Eight out of eight respondents (100%) noted that having specific career aspirations was a theme of significance.

R1. My dream is become a pilot. One of my goals is to get into an academy. The best way to become a pilot is that you need hours. One of the best ways is to go into the military. I would like to get into the Air Force or Naval Academy. I need to get my grades up and try and see if I can get recommendations from my congressmen.

R2. I want to get straight A's and become an engineer. I will need to create a master schedule of my homework.

R3. I want to become a sketch artist or graphic designer.

R4. I want to get accepted into the University of Maryland's technology program.

R5. I am interested in learning more about video games and coding. These two things hold my interest.

R6. I really like helping people. I am interested in either becoming a lawyer or a surgeon.

R7. I want to have my paintings hanging in an art gallery one day. I will need to own my own business to make it happen.

R8. When I was young, I would go to my cousin's house in South Carolina. He has an Xbox, and I would want to play with it. It sparked my interest in things that helps your brain in school. I want to make a video game that all of the world will use. I want it to be something that is helpful to people and something that they remember.

Theme 8: Negative School Images.

Student perceptions of their academic environment enhance or diminish their self-worth, influence their desire to learn, and impact their performance in school (Brophy, 2013). For 8th grade African American male middle school students, experiencing and internalizing negative school images can affect their academic motivation (Sakiz, Pape, & Hoy, 2012). These constant reminders can perpetuate negative thoughts, create self-doubt, and, eventually cause a paradigm shift in behavior and academic focus (Peters, Eisenlohr-Moul, Upton, & Baer, 2013). As the researcher interviewed the respondents, the theme of negative school images was identified as significant. For the participants, this theme was in direct conflict with Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation. Their repeated viewing of negative school images and comments overheard in their respective school environments affected the respondents' security. From prior statements, the respondents' academic performance thrived when surrounded by other highly motivated peers because they felt safe, and they received positive reinforcement from them. From a social learning theory perspective, they learned through observation and desired to mimic positive academic behaviors. The negative school images were in direct conflict, and they voiced their concerns.

Four out of eight respondents (50%) noted negative school images as a theme of significance.

R5. The school is criticized because it is an older school. Some students think that the school is ratchet. People have a low expectation of that image and our performance.

R6. Our school is a harsh environment where the students are more interested in their popularity and looks rather than studying.

R7. It's not the best environment. I don't blame the school. They don't have the best environment for academics for African American students. African American kids use what is around them. If they see that the school is bad, then they will act badly. They are more like followers. It's not the school's fault. I think it's the board's fault because they do not provide enough money for the African American students to do better. It's the board. They do not offer enough money because I see old textbooks from when my brother was back in middle school, and I don't think they get new supplies; so I think that can affect something.

R8. What I see inside my school is graffiti on the wall and the blacktop as well. There is litter and trash everywhere. I don't blame the school. It's the students that are doing this. What this is causing is a negative vibe, and it gets to some of the African American students where they have to act up because this is what they think this school is about.

Summary

This chapter provided a detailed description of the participant selection process, a summary of their respective school environments, a detailed summary of each participant's lived experiences, and the researcher's phenomenological findings of this study. Through this process, several themes emerged that included: goal setting, highly proficient academic performance, increased peer accountability, parental support and accountability, classroom environment, more principal led focus groups, and negative

school images. These themes directly tied back to the research questions of the study and, through direct quotes, supported the conceptual framework of the study.

The findings revealed that peer accountability, strong parental support, and committed educators significantly impact the academic motivation and success of 8th grade African American males in two suburban Maryland middle schools.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the problem and the methodology, and discuss the results in relation to the research questions. This chapter also discusses the conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future research on factors 8th grade African American males perceived as contributors to their academic motivation and success in two suburban Maryland middle schools. The study was conceived from the premise that there are distinct factors that impact academic motivation and success for African American male students.

Through this phenomenological research and data gleaned through the semi-structured interviews, this study may provide current and deliberate empirical evidence for educators and relevant district and state level administrators in K–12 and postsecondary education to guide instructional practices for African American middle school male students.

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. What do 8th grade African American male students in suburban Maryland middle schools perceive as factors contributing to their academic success?
2. What roles to peers, parents and educators play in the ability to achieve academic success for 8th grade African American male students in suburban Maryland middle schools?
3. What role does school environment play in 8th grade African American male students' ability to achieve academic success?

The researcher sought to contribute to the existing research on academic motivation and success, but based on a perspective directly impacting suburban Maryland middle schools.

Summary of the Study

This phenomenological study was conducted using a qualitative research design to detail the research findings that emerged from the exploration of factors that eight 8th grade African American male students perceived as contributing to their academic motivation and success in two Maryland suburban middle schools. Through the assistance of administrative assistants and respective principals, the participants in the study were eight 8th grade African American male students who were members of their respective National Junior Honor Societies. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews with the participants. Each interview was comprised of 16 interview questions and follow-up probing questions based on the participant responses. Each semi-structured interview was audio recorded and transcribed. The researcher coded factors that the participants believed contributed to their academic success into common themes and patterns.

Literature Reviewed

This phenomenological study grew from research conducted by Rolland (2011) that examined high school males' perceptions of factors contributing to their academic success in rural Georgia. In addition, this study also built upon the study conducted by Truesdale et al. (2007) that examined factors impacting academic motivation among seventh-grade African American male students attending middle schools in the Southeastern portion of the United States. In Rolland's study, supportive parents, caring

teachers, positive school environment, and peer support were identified as significant aspects of the participants' academic motivation and success. Truesdale et al.'s (2007) recommended the premise that peer relationships impact academic motivation and success, and that participant success is predicated on the self-efficacy of the learners.

The researcher also reviewed seminal works in motivation, such as Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation and Bandura's (1995) social learning theory. Overall, the results of the findings supported the principles presented in the study. Bandura's (1943) social learning theory was a critical theoretical framework, because students replicated effective study skills and processes from their peers and parents. The findings supported Maslow's theory of motivation in many instances; the students had to progress through their various levels of needs to achieve academic success and sustain their motivation.

Based on the establishment of the individual themes in Chapter 4 and the grouping noted in this chapter, the researcher was able to validate the tenets of Bandura's (1995) social learning theory and Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation. Bandura suggested that the observer replicates behaviors perceived as desirable (O'Fallon & Butterfield, 2012). From here, the observer will imitate the model's behavior (Rosenthal & Zimmerman, 2014). The more the observer perceives the model being rewarded for positive behavior, the more the observer will strive to achieve similar results. Maslow's theory of motivation suggests that humans transition through multiple hierarchical steps seeking to satisfy their physiological needs, secure their safety needs, meet their social needs, work through their self-esteem needs, and move toward self-actualization (Brophy, 2013).

Significance of the Study

The existing research focused on academic motivation from a high school perspective in the state of Georgia and at the middle school level in Arizona. However, little research has been conducted in the state of Maryland at the middle school level to discern the specific factors impacting students' academic achievement. The questions posed by the semi-structured interview questions were designed to draw responses that would address the stated research questions. The data captured from this study can continue the conversation regarding the importance of exploring academic motivation and success for middle school African American male students, provide subsequent steps for future research, and encourage more research around this important topic.

Findings by Research Question

Research Question 1.

Research Question 1 asked, "What do 8th grade African American male students in suburban Maryland middle schools perceive as factors contributing to their academic success?" For African American boys, clearly defined career goals provide them with a definitive plan for achieving their future goals (Zhang & Barnett, 2014).

The students were engaged with other highly motivated African American males that provided opportunities for them to replicate these highly engaged academic behaviors. The results of this study indicated that the themes of goal setting and highly proficient academic performance were significant factors in impacting 8th grade African American male students' academic motivation, and success. The findings were consistent Bandura's (1995) social learning theory and Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation.

As a collective body, the respondents confidently set goals with measurable outcomes that provided a succinct academic plan for their future successes. Through daily observations of their peer group's diligent academic work ethic and study skills, it reinforced the importance of remaining focused, reaching their full potential, and remaining tenacious when setbacks occurred.

From a theory of motivation perspective, the students ascended through Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation and felt a sense of belonging with their highly motivated academic peers, which propelled them to seek even more academic successes. As a collective body, the respondents were extremely driven and enjoyed the feeling of academic success. They saw their highly proficient academic performance as a reward for their tenacity and goal setting. It reaffirmed their self-esteem and grew their collective peer groups which became more intimate and responsive to the rigors of their daily academic responsibilities, causing them to look beyond middle school toward their future endeavors.

Overall, these findings supported Rolland's (2011) research study that also noted the participants were self-motivated, focused on future achievement, and wanted the skill sets for academic success. As found in this study, her participants had concise educational plans, viewed academic success as an essential step in their future achievement, and inner motivation was paramount in achieving one's goals.

Research Question 2.

Research Question 2 asked, "What roles to peers, parents and educators play in the ability to achieve academic success for 8th grade African American male students in suburban Maryland middle schools?" The developmental stage of adolescence produces

multiple physical, emotional, and psychological experiences for children (Shaffer & Kipp, 2013). During this developmental cycle, adolescents struggle with self-discovery of their individual identities (McCubbin & Figley, 2014). Through the increasing importance of peer relationships, adolescents seek daily interactions with their intimate peer groups, and together they collectively work through various experiences to transition successfully into adulthood (Cotterell, 2013; Elder & Conger, 2014). Although peers could cause one to make a right or wrong decisions in life, participants in this study perceived their peers motivated them to stay focused and out of trouble. Also, peers believed in and had confidence in one another. For 8th grade African American males, peer groups can influence academic, emotional, physical, and psychological behaviors (Fitzgerald, Fitzgerald, & Aherne, 2012). From a positive perspective, peer influence reinforced the importance of the participants' goals, helping them assess future goals and emulate the positive characteristics of their friends (Espelage, Green, & Polanin, 2012). On the contrary, negative peer influence could have distracted the participants from their academic goals, producing unhealthy lifestyle choices to satisfy friends, and resulting in unwise decisions (Tones, Robinson, & Tilford, 2013).

The results of this study indicated that the themes of increased peer accountability, parental support and accountability, and classroom environment were critical issues in contributing to the 8th grade African American males' academic motivation, and success.

The findings supported Rolland's (2011) research in that all of the participants expressed that peer accountability made a significant impact on their academic success, because they perceived themselves as members of an elite group of young African

American males focused on their future goals. Several participants attended the same middle school, were in similar classes, and knew the expectations of their teachers. Through cohesive emotional bonds, the group's dynamics kept participants focused, inspired to strive for excellence, and secured within the confines of the group when faced with academic or familial challenges. In some instances, the participants' advice had a more significant impact than that of their immediate families, because they could relate to one another and could reinforce values they learned from their parents. From a theoretical perspective, this process supports Bandura's (1995) social learning theory and Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation.

From a social learning theory lens, the participants observed the tenacious academic behaviors and study skills of their peers, saw how their teachers praised them, and wanted to experience the same feelings of academic success. From Maslow's (1943) lens, the participants were in the development stage where they felt the need to belong to a group and receive positive reinforcement from them. Through years of established friendships and experiences of attending the same schools, the members built trusting relationships, could seek peer support without fear of ridicule, and overall, they could rely on their established group dynamics to hold them accountable. Also, this group could help one another when they met academic adversity, encountered difficult situations in their personal lives, or were not at their best emotionally or physically. In their eyes, they wanted to be seen as equally intelligent as the rest of their peers. For them, this safety net reinforced the notion that school could be fun away from the stressors and high expectations of their teachers.

The research findings indicated that the participant's attributed their academic motivation and success to their parents' consistent encouragement, motivation, involvement, and support in their education. The participants expressed that they performed at higher academic levels because they wanted to please their parents, knew the importance of education from their parents, and held high expectations for themselves. They expressed that they felt supported by their parents and did not feel pressure to excel; instead, they appreciated their parents' consistent feedback and encouragement. Rolland's (2011) and Truesdale et al.'s (2007) research studies affirmed that 8th grade African American male students excel more academically when parents are highly involved and communicate with school administrators and teachers. As in Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation, the parents provided for their physiological needs and, therefore, created an environment where the participants could solely focus on their academic goals. Through their high involvement, the parents built effective relationships with the participants' administrators and teachers which reinforced the students' healthy self-esteem.

As the parents assisted in the participants' academic motivation and success, educators also made a significant impact on their lives. Research shows that African American male students excel when they perceive they are cared for, emotionally supported, and held accountable by committed teachers and administrators (Howard, 2013). All of the participants expressed that their school's educational structures created avenues for them to receive extra academic assistance in a smaller academic setting one-on-one with their teachers. Through receiving additional assistance, participants grew more trusting of their classroom teachers, built genuinely healthy teacher/student

relationships, and knew their teachers were vested in their overall success. They felt their teachers' warm sincerity and knew they too would provide high expectations of their character, academic performance, and resilience when met with adversity.

Research Question 3.

Research Question 3 asked, "What role does school environment play in 8th grade African American male students' ability to achieve academic success?" School environment can enhance intrinsically motivated students, impact student attitudes and perceptions of their learning environment, and enrich the inquiry-based learning of 21st-century students (Liu, Horton, Olmanson, & Toprac, 2011). Within these settings, it is vital that the school culture promotes nurturance and emotional support. The findings in this study concluded that participants desired a safe and secure school environment.

This study noted that for the involved participants, the school environment impacted their academic motivation and success. Three out of eight participants (37.5%) remarked that the negative stereotypes the school environment presented began to provoke self-doubt in the students' abilities to excel academically. From Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation, several members' expressed their physiological and emotional needs were not met because of the consistent viewing of litter and graffiti en route to school; many heard racial overtones and stereotyping in classrooms, and they were perceived as lazy by other groups. The participants depended on their internal strength, fortitude, and consistent praise from their peers, parents, and teachers to overcome these adverse circumstances.

This psychological categorization occurs with all identifiable groups as a suppressive deterrent of present and future growth, projects feelings of insecurity, and

masks hidden emotional issues. For 8th grade African American males seeking to establish a strong educational foundation, the potential impact of stereotyping can be life altering.

Many participants strongly noted that they asserted themselves in their classrooms to overcome negative perceptions from other races which inferred they were academically inferior. This reference reverts back to the literature review of this study about the negative portrayal of African American males in the eyes of other races.

Though not overtly expressed, the researcher observed that in a majority of their responses, disparaging remarks subtly impacted their self-esteem. At times, they noted it was difficult to concentrate and remain focused. Through supportive parents, teachers, and committed peers, participants overcame adversity and chose not to internalize these negative messages.

Research has shown that bullying becomes more prevalent at the middle level, especially among male students (Sweeten, Piquero, & Steinberg, 2013). National statistics show that one in four students reports bullying, one in five admits to engagement in bullying activities themselves, and there has been a significant increase of youth violence within school confines and on school property (Swearer & Espelage, 2012). Highly gifted and talented 8th grade African American male students may be ridiculed by other students and unaccepted for their academic successes in school (Gallagher, Smith, & Merrotsy, 2013). Bullying has the potential to impact highly successful African American male students causing their grades and commitment to their education to languor (Renard & Rogers, 1999). In this study, three participants (37.5%)

became reticent on occasion and needed the emotional support from their peer support group(s) and parents to remain successful in school.

From a social learning theory perspective, students did not want to replicate the negative behaviors they observed from their less fortunate peers, because their value systems were cemented through their parents' constant presence and enforced accountability practices. For the respondents, attaining their future goals and pleasing their parents were more important than succumbing to peer pressure.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. The study recommends that future research to support the findings of this investigation examine factors influencing achievement motivation in Hispanics, Latinos, Native Americans and other minority group male and female students. The purpose will be to determine if the same or different factors impact their achievement motivation.
2. Refocus the study on current students attending East Wood and Sinclair Middle Schools. The inclusion of current students who are not members of the National Junior Honor Society could provide a fresh perspective into their motivation and expectations.
3. Conduct a case study of successful and unsuccessful middle school students as they transition to high school to determine the factors that can help them become more successful in school.
4. Additional research should be done to assess the impact of the principal's leadership style on 8th grade African American male students' academic motivation and success.

5. Additional research should be done to assess the impact of female African American principal leadership on 8th grade African American male students' academic motivation and success.
6. Additional research should be done to assess the impact of academic motivation and success on the high school seniors transitioning into their freshman year at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to determine their academic motivation and success.

Recommendations for Practice

1. Examine underlying bullying and stereotyping concerns at East Wood and Sinclair Middle Schools. School administrators, guidance counselors, and teachers can enhance character development programming through strategic planning, reviews of behavioral data, and the implementation of culturally responsive classrooms at respective schools.
2. Provide professional development opportunities for middle school staff on examining their self-efficacy beliefs around academic motivation and success for 8th grade African American male students.
3. Enhance parental involvement through incentives and professional development workshops in motivating and engaging middle school students.
4. Principals and administrators should examine their leadership styles through the use of student surveys to glean student perceptions. Qualitative and quantitative student data feedback can shift leadership practices with student engagement that may enhance student achievement.

5. Enhance professional instructional professional developments with teachers to build effective student/teacher relationships and continue instructional training on best practices for engaging and teaching 8th grade African American male students.

Implications

As a subgroup, 8th grade African American male students face multiple challenges in their pursuit of academic excellence. Often they academically perform lower than other subgroups on standardized assessments, receive higher rates of disciplinary actions, and experience more familial concerns in their homes. They are also navigating through the challenges of their transition to high school, the pressure to remain highly motivated and successful when faced with rigorous Common Core Standards, and enhance their peer relationships.

During the recruitment process of potential participants, the researcher attempted to secure students who were 8th grade African American males within the chosen school districts. In order to be approved from the Office of Shared Accountability, the prerequisites of the selected participants shifted to students who were members of their respective National Junior Honor Societies at their respective schools. For future studies, it may be beneficial to access varied levels of student performance to diversify the participant responses.

A lack of empirical research existed on academic motivation and the success of 8th grade African American male students in suburban Maryland middle schools. This study can contribute to existing literature and provide K–12 educators and administrators

with insights into best practices into how best to educate 8th grade African American male students.

Several implications arose from this research study that directly impact academic success and motivation for 8th grade African American male students.

1. Nationwide, middle schools experience significant incidents of bullying, threats of physical harm, and psychological intimidation among African American male middle school students which can have devastating impacts on their student engagement and academic performance (Copeland, Shanahan, Costello, & Angold, 2009). These violent occurrences threaten their physical safety and influence their progression through their hierarchical needs of Maslow's theory of motivation.
2. When probing the participants for their final comments, the researcher identified bullying and stereotyping as themes, since a majority of the respondents identified this as significant. This was important because it was in direct conflict with the conceptual frameworks of Bandura's social learning theory and Maslow's theory of motivation. The findings of this study suggested that bullying and stereotypes unearthed covert student racial issues among the pupils, affected their academic performance, and impacted their self-esteem. This theme provided unique insights into the participants' perspectives and allowed the researcher to experience their daily lives.
3. More empirical research needs to be done on the effects of bullying and stereotyping on our highly motivated African American middle school males and its impacts on their self-concept and motivation. Bullying is an issue that

has affects schools both in suburban and urban settings. Second, the powers of peer accountability and influence strongly affect African American male students' success or failure in school. As noted in the findings that support social learning theory's components, when highly motivated students are surrounded with other highly successful students, these synergistic behaviors replicate and students are more prone to want to achieve at high levels.

4. Parental support and accountability need even more advocacy and increased importance in the lives of the African American male students. There is a need to look at how to engage parents who are not as motivated or comfortable as the parents in this study in order to find ways to help them become more involved with their children's education.

Conclusion

Academic motivation and success research is vital to improving the academic success and motivation of 8th grade African American male students. Research shows that African American male students face unique challenges. Overall, the results led the researcher to conclude that the participants' self-efficacy and desire to achieve their career aspirations motivated them in their academic settings. They recognized that their present academic success could propel them toward their future goals.

Based on the research findings, 8th grade African American males perceived peer accountability, parental support, and committed and caring educators as the three major themes that contributed to their academic motivation and success.

Participants noted their peers positively impacted and supported their academic performance, reinforced their positive attitude toward school, and aided them in

remaining motivated through peer accountability. They associated academic success and motivation with achieving their specific career goals.

Though self-motivated, the participants acknowledged and appreciated their parents' investment in their education, recognized the values parents placed on their education, replicated similar values, and strongly believed parental support and accountability reinforced their focus toward their future goals.

The participants noted strong relationships with their teachers, and they were encouraged by their teachers to succeed. Healthy student–teacher relationships engaged participants in meeting their educational goals. They were encouraged by praise from their teachers and by the additional academic supports they received from teachers.

The findings led the researcher to determine that all 8th grade male students can succeed through highly engaged parents, caring educators, and peer accountability.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND EASTERN SHORE

Institutional Review Board

Hazel Hall, Suite 1062

VOICE: (410) 651-6262

Princess Anne, Maryland 21853-1299

FAX: (410) 651-6736

Date: October 21, 2014

To: Dr. Derry Stufft, Educational Leadership Program

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "CF", located to the right of the "To:" line.

From: Clayton Faubion, Ph.D., Chair, UMES IRB

RE: UMES #2015-002 – “A Phenomenological Study of African American Boys in
Suburban Maryland Middle Schools”

I am writing to confirm that UMES Protocol #2015-002 mentioned above has been reviewed and approved by the UMES Institutional Review Board. Your protocol was deemed EXPEDITED and did not require full IRB committee review. Please be advised that any and all information recorded in your study must be kept confidential.

This application has UMES IRB approval until October 20, 2015. As the principal investigator for UMES, you are expected to maintain consistent communication with the UMES IRB (i.e., annual update, changes to protocol). Finally, no changes to the study protocol can be made without prior approval by the UMES IRB.

If there are any questions regarding this study, please contact me at 410-651-6379 or cwfaubion@umes.edu. Thank you.

Appendix B

MCPS Approval Request to Conduct Research

Office of Shared Accountability
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Rockville, Maryland

February 11, 2015

MEMORANDUM

To: Dr. Maria V. Navarro, Chief Academic Officer

From: Geoffrey T. Sanderson, Associate Superintendent *GTS*

Subject: Approval of Request to Conduct Research

In compliance with Regulation AFA-RA, *Research and Other Data Collection Activities in Montgomery County Public Schools* (MCPS), the attached request to conduct research has been reviewed and approved by the Office of Shared Accountability (OSA). The request is recommended for approval by the Office of the Chief Academic Officer. Mr. Kyle Randolph Bacon, teacher and doctoral candidate, requests permission to conduct a research study titled, *Academic Motivation and Success: A Phenomenological Study of African American Males in Suburban Maryland Middle Schools*. The study and its data collection activities are part of the requirements for completing a doctoral degree in the Department of Education, University of Maryland Eastern Shore.

The purpose of the study is to identify the academic motivation and factors for academic success of African American male middle school students in Maryland public schools. Specifically, results from the study will identify the perceptions of African American male students' regarding factors that contribute to their academic success, such as the roles of their peers, parents, and teachers, and the school environment.

Student Recruitment and Participation

Middle school students who participate in the National Junior Honor Societies in Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; Montgomery Village; Neelsville; Roberto Clemente; and Shady Grove middle schools will be invited to participate. Mr. Bacon will provide all students in the Junior Honor Societies in each of the respective middle schools with a packet of information that describes the study, its data collection activities, the protocols to maintain confidentiality of collected information, and a parent consent form. Students who are interested in participating in the study are asked to bring the packet home to their parents. Only students who return a signed parent consent form may participate in the study. Participation is voluntary.

Data Collection Activity

The data collection activity is an individual student interview with Mr. Bacon which will be scheduled sometime between February and March 2015. Interviews are expected to last approximately 60 minutes and will occur after school at a time and location that has been approved by the principal of each middle school and is convenient for the student and his family.

The University of Maryland Eastern Shore Institutional Review Board has approved the research protocol beginning October 21, 2014, with an expiration date of October 20, 2015. All data will be reported in summary format. The names of participants, schools, and the school district will not be used in the summary of results. The study is supported by Dr. Inger H. Swimpson, Director, Department of Certification and Continuing Education, Office of Human Resources and Development.

If you have questions regarding this request, please contact Mrs. Cynthia L. Loeb, logistics support specialist, Applied Research Unit, OSA, at 301-279-3848 or via e-mail at Cynthia_Loeb@mcpsmd.org. Other external research studies approved through the MCPS review process may be found by visiting the MCPS website at <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/sharedaccountability/calendar/>.

GTS:cil

Attachment

Copy to:

Dr. Statham
Dr. Marks
Dr. Williams
Dr. Addison
Mr. Bacon
Mrs. Loeb
Principals of selected middle schools
Dr. Swimpson
Mr. Koutsos

Approved: _____


Maria V. Navarro, Chief Academic Officer

Appendix C

Semi-structured Interview Guide

Script:

Hello, my name is Kyle Bacon. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study on academic motivation and success of 8th grade African American boys in suburban Maryland schools. As a reminder, your child's privacy will be protected and documented anonymously. Your child's name will not appear in any published reports and their responses will remain confidential. Your child's responses will be coded with a corresponding number that will be their only identification in the study. This interview will be digitally recorded and transcribed. An identification number assigned by the researcher will only identify your child on digital recordings. All recordings will be kept on the researcher's computer and password protected. Any notes or USB files will be kept in a locked drawer and destroyed after 7 years. If, at any time, you would like to withdraw from this study, you may do so with no consequence, and the data collected will not be used in the study. If there are no questions, I will begin recording the interview.

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. How would you define academic success?
3. How will academic success affect your future?
4. Describe your academic performance in school.
5. What goals have you set for yourself?
6. Discuss study strategies that may contribute to your academic success.
7. Explain your parent's role in your education.

8. What can your principal do to help African American male students realize their academic ability?
9. What can your teachers do to help African American male students realize their academic ability?
10. What effect does the school environment have on African American male students' ability to achieve academic success?
11. What can the community do to help African American male students achieve academic success?
12. What can friends do to help African American male students achieve academic success?
13. What other factors may contribute to academic success for African American male students?
14. What may hinder African American male students from achieving academic success?
15. What solutions do you have for African American male students to become successful in their academics?
16. Explain how well prepared you are for life after school.

Appendix D

Informed Consent Form

Academic Motivation & Success: A Phenomenological Study of African
American Boys in Suburban Maryland Middle Schools

Statement of Age of Subject:

Your child is invited to participate in a study that examines the academic motivations and successes of 8th grade African American, middle school boys in suburban Maryland schools. Specifically, the study will provide an opportunity for African American male students to describe what makes them successful. The results of the study can be shared with local school districts to respond to the needs of all students, and specifically, African American boys.

Your consent will confirm your child's willingness to participate in research conducted by Dr. Derry Stufft; Principal Investigator and Mr. Kyle Randolph Bacon; Student Investigator at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, Department of Education.

Purpose:

The purpose of this research is to determine the academic motivation and success of African American middle school boys in suburban Maryland middle schools. This research will lend insight into how teachers and administrators can aid African American male students in developing skills, strategies, and attitudes essential to building academic success.

Procedures:

Subjects will complete a semi-structured interview administered in person. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes to complete. Interviews will be recorded using an audio recorder for the purpose of transcribing the information accurately. The researcher will keep the audio taped information in a locked and secure vault. The tapes will be transcribed. Data will be maintained no less than 7 years from completion of research. The researcher will be responsible for scheduling all interviews that will take place in a neutral location within the school agreed upon by principal and counselor. All student participants have the right to refuse to answer any questions during the interview and may terminate the interview at anytime, or have any information deleted from analysis.

Confidentiality:

All information collected in this study is confidential. Subjects are not required to disclose their name, date of birth, work location, or private information. The results of the study will be published; however, your name and/or any other identification will not be revealed. To maintain privacy, a number will identify all collected data (notes, transcripts, etc.). All data collected will be secured and destroyed 7 years after the document has been published.

Risks:

No study is completely risk free; however, I do not expect that your child's participation in this study will harm him or her. You should be aware that there is a small possibility that unauthorized parties may view their interview responses if the researcher's computer is hacked. However, all precautions have been taken to make sure

the information is secured. If your child becomes uncomfortable with the study, the interview may stop at any time. If your child decides to stop the interview, any information collected to that point would not be used.

Benefits:

All research creates knowledge, which may benefit participants and others. The participants will benefit by taking part in a study that will possibly increase the knowledge base of what African American boys perceive as factors contributing to their academic success; and understand the role peers, parents, educators, and school environment play in their ability to achieve academic success.

Society will benefit by gaining firsthand knowledge, data and understanding from African American male students on how best to support them in achieving academic success and hope of finding answers to challenges and possible solutions for improving their academic success. Findings may have an impact on local and national school districts regarding how administrators and school personnel work with African American male students.

The data collected from this survey may assist the investigators to determine how academic motivation and success of African American boys in suburban Maryland middle schools impact their student achievement. I understand that I will not receive any compensation for participating in this research study.

Freedom to Withdraw From and Ask Questions:

I understand that I am free to ask questions and to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

Conclusion:

The researcher is available by telephone or e-mail at the information provided at the beginning of this form. You are making a decision whether or not you will participate in this study. If you sign the consent form, you are agreeing to participate based on your reading and understanding of this form. You may ask the researcher questions about the study at any time. If you have any questions regarding the study please ask Kyle Randolph Bacon (Student Investigator) 240-393-9851 or Dr. Derry Stufft (Principal Investigator) 410-651-6216. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the Chair of the University of Maryland Eastern Shore Institutional Review Board, Dr. Clayton Faubion by calling 410-651-6379.

Dr. Derry Stufft, Principal Investigator
Mr. Kyle Randolph Bacon, Student Investigator
University of Maryland Eastern Shore
Department of Education
2027 Hazel Hall
Princess Anne, M 21853
410-651-6216

Signature of Participant_____

Date_____

Appendix E

Permission Letter from Researcher

From: **Trudy Rolland** >

Hide

To: **Kyle Bacon** >

Dissertation

June 21, 2014 at 10:41 AM

Inbox

Thank you for your inquiry. I give my permission to use/modify my dissertation model. Sorry for the delay in responding as I am on vacation. Best of luck with your study.

Gertrude (Trudy) Rolland

grolland@comcast.net

Appendix F

Research Questions

1. What factors do 8th grade African American male middle school students perceive as contributing to their academic motivation and success?
2. What roles do peers, parents, and teachers play in 8th grade African American male students' academic motivation and success?
3. What role does school environment play in 8th grade African American male students' academic motivation and academic success?