ABSTRACT

THOMAS, TONYA CHAVIS. The Underachievement of High School African American Males: What are Their Perceptions of the Factors Contributing to Their Underperformance? (Under the direction of Dr. Paul Bitting).

The purpose of this study was to examine the different perceptions that shape African American male high school students' understanding of their academic experiences that lead to their success or lack of success in school. In addition, the study identified factors that explain the underachievement of African American male students who are academically capable, have sufficient financial resources, and adequate support from home.

The qualitative, multiple case study design was used to study the phenomenon, African American male underachievement. The researcher interviewed six African American male students in grades 11 and 12 from a high school in the rural South. The interviews were recorded onto a digital recording device and transcribed at a later time. Other sources of data collection were observation notes and documents pertaining to student academic performance. The transcripts, observation notes, and documents were analyzed using open coding to identify emergent themes.

Data analysis revealed three major findings contributing to the underachievement of academically capable African American males at the high school level. The major findings were as follows: poor study habits, difficulty transitioning from middle school to high school, and a culture of complacency. The findings suggest that in order to motivate African American males who have the intellectual ability, home support, and sufficient financial

resources yet underachieve, schools must implement a positive school culture that supports

the academic success of all students and train teachers to implement strategies to support and

educate the African American male student.

The Underachievement of High School African American Males: What are Their Perceptions of the Factors Contributing to Their Underperformance?

by
Tonya Chavis Thomas

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APPROVED BY:

_____   _____
Dr. Paul F. Bitting   Dr. Kevin P. Brady
Committee Chair   Committee Member

_____   _____
Dr. Kenneth H. Brinson, Jnr.   Dr. Lance D. Fusarelli
Committee Member   Committee Member

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my loving husband, Petie, and my two wonderful sons, PJ and Tyler, for all of their love, support, understanding, and patience as I spent many hours neglecting them to work on this study.

BIOGRAPHY

Tonya Chavis Thomas was born on July 3, 1969 in Oxford, NC. She attended Granville County Schools and is a graduate of J. F. Webb High School. She received both her Bachelor of Arts degree in English education and Master of School Administration degrees from the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. Tonya has served as a middle school Language Arts teacher, a high school English teacher, an assistant principal, and is currently an elementary school principal.

Tonya resides in Oxford, NC with her husband and two teenage sons, all of whom are the loves of her life.

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Finally, I would like to thank my great aunt, Mary C. Chavis, for your willingness to listen to me complain for hours on end about having to write this dissertation. Most of all I would like to thank you for constantly encouraging me to see this process to the end.

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CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

One of the most controversial educational decisions made in the history of the United States was the 1954 *Brown* decision to desegregate public schools. Although school desegregation had been mandated, implementing that decision proved far more difficult than most proponents imagined, particularly in the Southern states (Urban & Wagoner, 2009). One of the main reasons for this difficulty is that the federal courts had no agency available to enforce their mandates. However, the implementation of the fiscal penalties imposed by the 1964 Civil Rights Act on school systems that refused to desegregate significantly increased the pressure for meaningful desegregation in southern schools. White teachers expressed their frustration by claiming a need to teach to the standards prior to desegregation, and blaming the African American students for not being able to meet academic standards. They also complained of the pressure to inflate grades for African American students so that they would not fail their courses (Hanink, 2004). While White teachers expressed apathy to their African American students, students were apathetic to their teachers. Many students believed that their teachers had no genuine interest in their education, and only passed them to get them out of their classroom.

Beginning with *Brown*, attorneys have offered a wealth of evidence proving the educational deficiencies and deficits African American students have suffered because of the many national, state, and local policies regarding segregated schools. Sociologists have argued profusely that the long history of oppression has placed many African American children behind their White peers academically (Singham, 1998).

No different from any other American student, African American children's performance ranges from exemplary to weak. However, parents, policy makers, and educators became keenly aware of the achievement gap as it was identified in 1966 in the *Coleman Report,* which reported that African American student achievement, on average, was lower than that of Whites and Asians (Mickelson & Greene, 2006). Although there is the achievement gap between African American students and other ethnic groups, the within-race gender gap among African Americans has garnered much attention. While the racial gap is closing slightly, persistent lower performance is particularly evident among African American males (Boyd-Franklin & Franklin, 2000; Majors & Billson, 1992). Despite several decades of school reforms, on average African American students' school performance continues to lag behind White students' performance, and African American males are the most affected by this gap. Even middle class African American males perform lower than expected given their family's socioeconomic level (Ogbu, 2003; Paige & Witty, 2010; Tatum, 2005).

The educational and social status of African American males in the United States is disheartening. National reports constantly remind us of the unfortunate reality that African American males face implausible barriers as they strive to achieve in school and social settings. The deplorable and alarming statistics of low achievement and underachievement presented in the report *Facts Contributing to the Cradle to Prison Pipeline* (Children's Defense Fund, 2007) are not new. Lee (1991) found the same data at least two decades ago:

1. The overall mean achievement scores for African American male students are lower than those of other groups in the basic subject areas.

2. African American males are much more likely to be placed in classes for the educable mentally retarded and for students with learning disabilities than in gifted and talented classes.

3. African American males are far more likely to be placed in general education and vocational high school curricular tracks than in an academic track.

4. African American males are suspended more often from school and for longer periods of time than other groups of students.

5. African American males complete high school at lower rates than their female counterparts.

African American males face social injustices that effectively undermine their potential, self-perception, and opportunity to achieve in academic settings (Whiting, 2009). African American males are over-represented in special education, under-represented in gifted education, over-represented among dropouts, and over-represented among students who are unmotivated and choose to disengage academically (Kafele, 2010; Schott Foundation, 2010; Smiley, 2011). The disproportionate failure of African American males in the educational system has a direct correlation for their over-representation in the criminal justice system and high unemployment rate (Kafele, 2010; Smiley, 2011). African American males make up approximately 8.6 percent of K – 12 public school enrollment in the United States; however, they represent roughly 60 percent of all incarcerated youth (Smith, 2005).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine the different perceptions that shape African American male high school students' understanding of their experiences that lead to their success or lack of success in school. In addition, through the voices of the participants, the study identifies factors that explain the underachievement of African American male students who are academically capable, have sufficient resources, and home support. Unveiling their experiences with school and their perceptions of success, helps educators and communities see the need to change our approach to working with our young African American male students.

Research Question

The purpose of my study is to explore the perceptions of underachieving high school African American males who have the family support, socioeconomic status, and the academic ability to be successful. By examining their perceptions of school success, peer pressure, experiences with school, and societal influences, I identify some common factors that contribute to low achievement of capable African American males.

The following research question is examined in the study:

What are the perceptions of underachieving high school African American male students of the factors contributing to their underperformance?

Definition of Key Terms

To better understand the study and to clear up any ambiguity there are some key terms that need to be defined. The key term which is the foundational piece of the entire study is underachievement. For the purposes of this study the term underachievement (underperformance) is manifested by the following:

- Poor grades, lack of effort, dropping out of school, and exerting low levels of effort on most school-related activities (Ford, 1991, 1992; Ford & Harris, 1996)

- The stratification of performance results among subgroups; lower standardized test scores, lower grades, lower graduation rates for a set of students who have ample resources, are prepared better than adequately in terms of knowledge and skills, and possess an exceptionally high capacity for academic achievement (Steele, 1999)

- A discrepancy between the student's school performance and some index of his actual ability, which has been demonstrated at a previous time during his academic career (Davis & Rimm, 1997)

Another key term that needs to be defined is self-perception. For this specific study the term self-perception is used and is based on the following definition:

- An individual's belief in one's level of competence or adequacy in academic and nonacademic domains based on one's past experiences.

Significance of the Study

According to research by Lee (1991) the future of African American males in the United States is dismal at best, particularly if we cannot get the young men who are capable of being successful to achieve in school. African American males are among the most "at-risk" for suspensions, poor grades, and dropping out segment of any school population (Ferguson, 2001; Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2005). According to Steele (1992) African American students begin school with test scores that are fairly close to those of Whites their age. Studies indicate that the longer they stay in school, the more they fall behind. By sixth grade African American students in many districts are two or more grade levels behind. This pattern holds true regardless of socioeconomic status. Middle class African American students also lag behind nearly as much as in the lower class (Steele, 1992). By middle school the pieces of the underachievement puzzle start to align foreshadowing the gloomy outcomes associated with the repercussions of the underachievement of African American males in high school (Michelson & Greene, 2006). Students who underachieve are not as competitive in the job market or college admissions and scholarships. Students who experience poor school outcomes are unlikely to obtain a quality education, a necessary condition for maximizing life's opportunities (Ferguson, 2001).

This study seeks to understand the perception of underperforming African American male high school students who should be achieving at much higher rates. School administrators often maintain the status quo and run schools as they have been run for

decades not realizing that they are a major part of the problem. If we intend to change the educational status of the African American male and to close the achievement gap between them and all other ethnic groups as well as African American females, we cannot continue to operate our schools as we have. This study is so important because it helps educators to better understand how the African American male student feels toward school and how he views his role as a student. It helps us to understand why they do not feel the need to be successful in school. Another aspect that this study explores is the relationships that African American male students have with their teachers and if they feel that they are being challenged to do better. There may be institutional barriers within our schools that educators are unaware of that hold these young men back. The perception of these young men may be that high achievement is not acceptable in the existing school culture or they may fear failure if they put forth the effort. By understanding the fears and perceptions of the high school African American male, administrators and school districts can create a culture where it is acceptable for African American males to make good grades and excel in school, and educators expect greatness not just from African American males but from all students.

Theoretical Framework

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), a conceptual framework is constructed from the theories and experiences the researcher brings to and draws from in conceptualizing the research. These theories include but are not limited to grand theories as well as biases, preconceptions, and values. Similarly, Maxwell (2004) posits that the conceptual framework contains the goals, experience, knowledge, assumptions, and theory one brings to the study

and incorporates into the design. He argues that what the researcher thinks is going on with the phenomena is brought to the development of the study and influences the purpose of the study, the literature used, and preliminary research the researcher draws upon in conceptualizing the study.

Before delving into the framework through which this study is conceptualized, I would like to take a look at the challenges of African American college students since their experience is similar to that of the African American male high school student. According to the statistics, the nationwide college graduation rate for African American students stands at an appallingly low 43 percent (Braxton et. al., 2004; Guiffrida, 2005). This figure is 20 percentage points below the 63 percentage rate for White students. On this front, the only positive news is that over the past three years the African American student graduation rate has improved by four percentage points. Among those who finish college, the grade point average is two-thirds of a grade point below that of Whites. Steele (1999) ponders if this problem stems from something about African American students themselves, such as poor motivation, a distracting peer culture, lack of family values, or the unsettling suggestion of *The Bell Curve* – genes. Virtually all aspects of underperformance – lower standardized test scores, lower college graduation rates, lower college grades – persist among students from the African American middle class. This situation forces us to the uncomfortable realization that beyond class, something is depressing the academic performance of these students.

The conceptual model that is used in this study was Steele's (1997) stereotype threat model – the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of

doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype. Claude Steele's stereotype threat hypothesis posits that when there are negative stereotypes about the intellectual capacity of certain stigmatized groups, members of the group suffer aversive consequences (Osborne & Walker, 2006). Group members who are most strongly identified with the stigmatized domain in question (e.g., intellectual or academic ability) are most likely to suffer the effects of stereotype threat (Osborne & Walker, 2006). This model argues that socio-cultural factors negatively influence minority students' ability to remain interested in academics. According to this theory, negative stereotypes associated with the ethnicity cause students of color to underachieve academically because of the fear of predicted failure. Although all students experience some form of anxiety in school, students of color experience additional anxiety which causes them to withdraw rather than to achieve academically.

According to Steele (1997), stereotype threat impacts stigmatized students who are identified with academics in varying ways. First, stereotype threat may impact their academic performance. Academic performance may be inhibited due to heightened levels of anxiety during testing situations. Due to the pressure of this stereotype of intellectual inferiority, this increased anxiety could become a chronic condition, which over time be seen as an aversive stimulus. This would prompt these students to seek escape from the undesirable stimulus which may manifest itself as disidentification and withdrawal (Osborne & Walker, 2006). Disidentification will reduce the experienced anxiety levels because academics is no longer a domain central to the self-concept (Steele, 1997). On the other

hand, withdrawal would eliminate the anxiety by removing the student from the situation in which the anxiety was occurring (Osborne & Walker, 2006).

The stress of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype can be an overwhelming experience (Schmader & Johns, 2003). The biggest challenge of targets of negative stereotype is to accurately determine if the stereotype actually exists because if they believe the stereotype really exists then its consequences become real (Wout et. al., 2009). If targets believe that this threat does exist, they must psychologically prepare to cope with it. While preparing for this threat serves as a protective mechanism, it also drains cognitive resources, thereby impairing performance on intellectual tasks (Schmader & Johns, 2003). On the other hand, if targets believe the threat is not there, they can pour their cognitive energies into their academics and maximize their performance on intellectual tasks (Wout et. al., 2009). However, there is a downside to formulating this conclusion. Targets will be unprepared to handle the negative psychological consequences of being stereotyped if and when the threat actually materializes (Wout et. al., 2009).

The stereotype threat premise parallels the Thomas theorem formulated by W. I. Thomas which states, "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Thomas, 1923). In other words, we act and form beliefs on what we believe to be true with very little regard to alternative possibilities of truth. The stereotype theory proposes that when a negative stereotype is relevant to a social setting, the targets of the stereotype must contend with the threat of being judged through the lens of the stereotype (Wout et. al.,

2009). Contending with this threat is cognitively exhausting and can impair targets'

academic performance (Inzlicht, McKay, & Aronson, 2006).

Targets contend with this threat in differing ways, ranging from being resilient to

their social settings to becoming concerned or anxious that they will be negatively

stereotyped (Steele et. al., 2002). The individuals from the stigmatized group who handle the

negative stereotype threat by being resilient are able to overcome underperformance.

Whether they are being resilient to the stereotype because they do not believe what it

purports about their group or they simply choose to ignore it, this attitude of indifference

protects them from suffering aversive consequences such as restricted capacity to perform.

These students perform just as well if not better than all other subgroups (Steel et. al., 2002).

Steele's (1997) stereotype threat model is an appropriate conceptual framework for

this study because it takes into consideration the external societal factors that contribute to

the African American male's disassociation with school. It helps one make sense of such a

complex phenomenon, capable African American males performing substantially lower than

their White peers in school. Although this theory minimizes such factors as poor motivation,

distracting peer pressure, lack of family values, and the unsettling suggestion of genes, it

does not reject the personal factors that African American males bring to the table that also

heavily influences their decision to not work to their full potential. This stereotype threat

model is a nice marriage of the two, the external and internal factors.
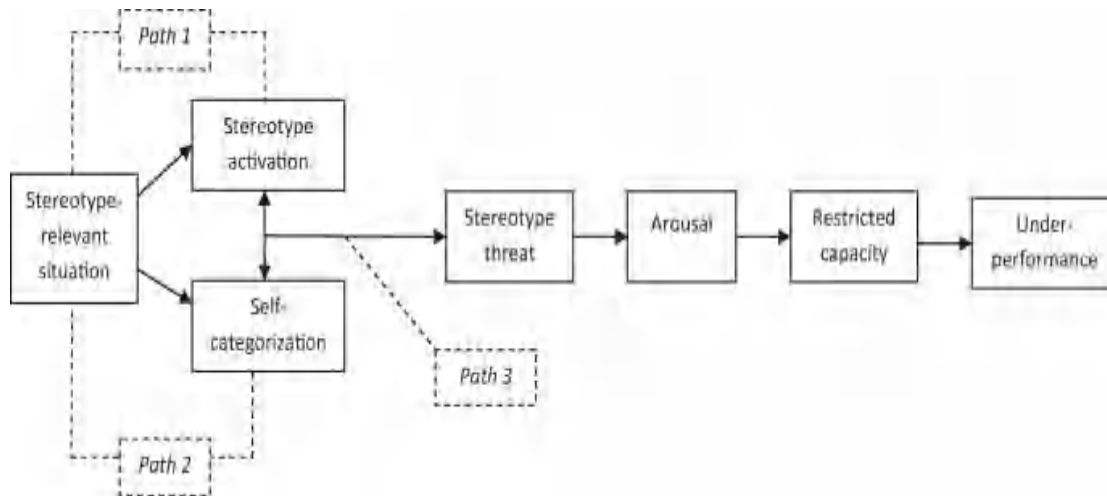
Figure 1

Stereotype Threat Model

Researcher Subjectivity Statement

I was born in Oxford, North Carolina and attended the Granville County Public schools. My parents were young, 18 and 19, and were not married. They were married when I was one year old, and we lived with my father's mother. My mother soon gave birth to my brother, and we moved into the first built public housing apartments in Granville County. The marriage was volatile. There were lots of cursing, physical fighting, screaming, and tears. By the time I was seven my parents separated. We moved into a huge, dilapidated five bedroom house with my mother's sister and her two children, my grandmother, and two other family members. Pretty soon the number grew to 14 as babies were born to unwed mothers and other family members moved in. Of the 14 people in the home, only four were adults, three of which worked. There were no adult males in the house. Conditions were horrible. We slept three and four to a bed. There was never any privacy. The house was excruciatingly cold during the winter and fall months and unbearably hot during the summer months. There was a large field next to the house. Consequently, we had problems with field rats getting into the house occasionally. My grandmother generally cooked the meals which consisted of beans, potatoes, rice, bread, and any part of the pig that we could get - tails, feet, ears, chitterlings, and stomach.

Although we were poor and lived in shabby conditions, we were trained to respect all adults and to do well in school. After school each day, we ate a snack, changed out of our "school" clothes, and completed our homework before we were allowed to go outside and play. My mother and all of her sisters graduated from high school, and we were expected to

do the same thing. I did extremely well in school, generally earning all A's and an occasional B. By the time I reached 8th grade, school changed. I was no longer in the classes with the children from my neighborhood. Usually, I was one of two or three African American students in the class. I continued to thrive academically; however, I was terribly lonely. While they were not mean to me, I never truly felt accepted by the White students. I always felt like the outsider. I had nothing in common with my White classmates. Therefore, during free time I really had nothing to bring to the conversations. They talked about the parties they attended during the weekends, the sleepovers, the movies they saw, the type of cars they drove, and who was dating whom. I was embarrassed to share my simple life with them because I felt they would look down upon my experiences.

Despite the alienation and loneliness, I continued to excel in school. On meager wages my mother bought me a clarinet, and I played in the band for six years, becoming first seat by my senior year. I cheered for five years and ran track for three years. I received trophies in both sports, and was named female athlete of the year. My senior year I was crowned Miss Homecoming.

During my senior year in high school I decided I wanted to apply to the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. I asked my calculus teacher, who was a graduate of UNC-CH, for a recommendation. She told me she could not give me a recommendation to UNC-CH because I was not Carolina material. She said Carolina was hard, and I would not make it at that school. She thought I should go to a smaller university. I found two other teachers to give me recommendations. After graduating from high school I attended the University of

North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the loneliness and alienation were magnified. Other than the experience with my calculus teacher, I had experienced very little in the way of racial discrimination. However, I can recall being the only African American student in classes at UNC-CH and sitting through class discussions where genetic inferiority of my race was openly considered or debates about affirmative action occurred. Surely these experiences shape your self-worth, how you view yourself, and impact your academic life.

I returned to my hometown and taught middle school for two years and high school for six years before taking a sabbatical. I went back to UNC-Chapel Hill and received a master's degree in school administration. I returned to Oxford and served as the assistant principal at the middle school for five years. After leaving the middle school, I was named principal of C. G. Credle Elementary School and remained there for six years. I am currently the principal of Mt. Energy Elementary School.

I am biased in many ways. I believe that a child can overcome obstacles if she has a vision and works hard to achieve the goal. I know that I am the exception to the rule. I was very fortunate to get into UNC-CH, not once but twice, and do well despite what my teacher told me and the existing stereotypes. However, there are minority children who lack resilience and do not cope well with the stereotypes or overcome the barriers that are placed before them. There are practices, beliefs, and hidden agendas that exist in our public schools today that hinder the achievement of our minority students. As educators we are a part of the problem if we allow this type of behavior to continue to happen. We do a major disservice to our minority students when we operate our schools the way they have always been operated.

As an African American female, who experienced poverty, negative stereotyping, and alienation, yet overcame those barriers, I sometimes get angry at students who give up or use their situations as excuses for failing. I am particularly frustrated with the African American males who are just as capable if not more capable than their White peers but do just enough to get by. What frustrates me even more than that is teachers who allow them to settle for average achievement and tell them that they are doing well. They do not push these boys into Advanced Placement or Honors classes. They allow them to miss assignments, especially homework. Some teachers allow these young men to sleep in class and miss instruction. The only consequence is a zero, which may mean they fail the course. This is not a true indication of their ability. When I worked as an administrator at the middle and high school levels I encouraged the minority students, especially African American males, to register for college prep courses. I talked with parents and advised them to request that their students be placed in those classes regardless of teacher recommendation.

In my current position as an elementary principal, I strategically place my at-risk students with teachers who are going to engage them and hold them to high standards. Although all children should be exposed to a rigorous and relevant curriculum, I know some teachers are stronger and more patient than others. I also talk openly to my teachers about the needs of our minority students and provide professional development for them to help them develop skills to deal with minority students and students of poverty. My teachers plan together and align their lessons with the county pacing guides to ensure that all students are exposed to the same curriculum. Most importantly, I am visible in the building and in the classes monitoring what goes on. In addition, I establish relationships with my students by

learning their names and making them feel special by greeting them personally each day. I talk to my students about taking responsibility for their own learning. I talk candidly with them about making excuses and using their situations as a reason for not being successful. Every chance I get I talk to my parents and encourage them to be involved in their child's education.

I not only deal with this issue each day on my job as an educator. I deal with this phenomenon on a more personal level. I have two African American boys in high school, both of whom are very capable and well prepared academically. Early in their academic careers in 3rd through 8th grade it was commonplace for them to make the A/B honor roll and to score a 3 or 4 on the North Carolina End of Grade Reading and Math tests, which demonstrated proficiency. They currently bring home B's, C's, and an occasional A on their report cards. They are no longer on the honor roll. I am in constant contact with their teachers. Often, I am told that they are doing well in the class, but when I get the report card I see a low C. That bothers me because that teacher believes it is acceptable for African American males to make a 77 in her class when they are capable of earning an A. These boys are not being pushed or encouraged by their teachers. They are allowed to do just enough to get by. If it were not for my husband and me staying on them and constantly pushing, threatening, and coaxing, they would not do as well as they have done. No, I am not putting the blame on the schools and teachers alone; however, we as educators must do something very different if we are to save our African American boys. I know that despite all I do I cannot save every child, but if my story and commitment to them can save one child, that is one less child we lose.

Limitations of the Study

Due to the narrowed scope of my research there are limitations to the study. One of the limitations is the selection of participants. Rather than attempting to study the underachievement of all African American males in schools across the country, the scope is narrowed to solely high school African American males in grades 11 and 12 in only one high school in a relatively small school district. The local education agency in which I conduct my study consists of approximately 9,400 students enrolled in 19 schools, eight of which are elementary, three middle, five high school, one early college, and two alternative schools. This eliminates all other males in elementary and middle school, as well as all other high schools not only across the nation, but in this school district. This phenomenon is only studied in one of the three high schools in the district utilizing four African American male students.

Limitations of this study are based on the structure and nature of the study. The study itself is qualitative, relying primarily on narrative research techniques in which the findings are based on the interviewee's responses. The students who are interviewed in this study represent a small sampling of African American males in the school district. The accuracy of the data collected is dependent upon the veracity of the interviewee and the interviewee's ability to communicate. High school males are sometimes unable to articulate their thoughts or unwilling to let you know how they are feeling for fear of appearing soft or vulnerable. They may also feel uncomfortable speaking with me, as I am a current administrator in the school district in which they attend school and a parent of boys their age.

Another limitation is researcher bias. The struggles of the African American males in educational settings as well as in society are glaringly apparent to me as an educator, administrator, and as a mother of two African American boys. According to Maxwell (2004) no interviewer is completely free of bias. Acknowledging this and revealing this in my subjectivity statement can minimize researcher bias; however, it does not completely remove it. The bias that I know I bring is the willingness of teachers to allow capable young African American males to sit in classes and not put forth any effort. These students are allowed to waste away, to not answer questions, to sleep in class, to not turn in assignments, and ultimately to drop out of school.

In addition, the study is limited geographically as well. The study takes place in a small rural town in North Carolina, which is a southern state. This eliminates all other regions of the country. One is left wondering if this is a phenomenon equally prevalent in larger more urban or suburban areas.

This study focuses on the underachievement of African American males in high school. Consequently, the criteria selection of the participants who fulfilled the definition and conditions of underachieving also limited the scope of the study. According to Steele (1999) underachievement is lower standardized test scores, lower grades, lower graduation rates for a set of students who have ample resources, are prepared better than adequately in terms of knowledge and skills, and possess an exceptionally high capacity for academic achievement. The participants display a discrepancy between their school performance and some index of their actual ability, which has been demonstrated at a previous time during their academic

careers (Davis & Rimm, 1997). Therefore, the participants for the study were African American male students in grades 11 and 12 who have demonstrated proficiency (the ability to perform at grade level) in Reading and/or Math prior to beginning their high school careers. Previous scores on the North Carolina End of Grade Reading and Math tests were used to determine proficiency. The participants' grade point averages must have dropped since entering high school. The current grades reflect C's, D's, and F's in the core academic subjects (English, Math, Science, and Social Studies/History).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I described a research project that addressed the phenomenon, the underachievement of African American males in high school. The research project employs the case study approach to explore African American males' perception about their academic ability and performance. It also highlights their perceptions of how others in the school and the community view academic performance. The chapter outlined the historical context and background of this phenomenon, clarified the problem under examination, and provided research questions to guide the study.   In addition, the chapter provided a lens through which the issue was examined. I have framed my study through the lens of the stereotype threat theory. The next chapter will look at the existing research literature surrounding this issue.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will provide information about the status of African American male students in the United States public school system and will provide an explanation of why the underachievement of African American high school males is a critical problem in our schools. It will also outline the existing literature that supports my proposed research topic, the underachievement of African American males. While the focus of this study is the underperformance of African American males at the high school level, there are sub-categories that must also be explored to better explain this issue. Some of those categories are African American males' perceptions of their academic capabilities, school climate and culture, and institutional barriers. The key question that will help guide the proposed research project is as follows: What are the perceptions of underachieving high school African American male students of the factors contributing to their underperformance?

Statement of the Problem

A recent study paints a bleak picture of young, African American men in high school. Nationally, it is reported that in 30 states African American males are at the bottom academically. According to the Schott Foundation for Public Education (2010), more than half of African American males do not graduate. The graduation rate for White males is 78 percent. Only 47 percent of African American males who entered high school in 2003 graduated in 2008, which means that our country is losing 50 percent of its product (Schott Foundation, 2010). In some places, it is even worse - shockingly worse. New York state's graduation rate statewide for African American males is one in four, which equates to only

25 percent. In corporate America any corporation that loses 50 percent of its product would

go bankrupt. The study shows that African American males have the highest dropout rates,

poorest achievement, and lowest test scores compared to White and Asian students. Low

graduation rates are connected to high unemployment and incarceration rates among African

American men. African American males make up only five percent of college enrollment

nationally but 40 percent of the United States prison population. African American males

make up six percent of the country's overall population (Smiley, 2011).   This is not a crisis

that affects just African American males. This crisis affects all Americans. If nothing is done

to reverse this trend, our country, economically, will pay in more ways than one. Dropouts

cost taxpayers more than $8 billion annually in public assistance programs like food stamps

and Welfare. It costs on average $25,000 to incarcerate an inmate for a year compared to

$14,000 for a year at a community college (Henrichson & Delaney, 2012).

     There is an area, however, pertaining to the academic performance of the African

American male that continues to baffle and frustrate researchers and educators alike, and that

is the underachievement of high school African American males. Several definitions of

underachievement have appeared in the literature. A common theme among these definitions

exists as it pertains to the characteristics and behaviors of the students who are

underachieving. Underachieving students demonstrate exceptionally high capacity for

academic achievement but do not perform satisfactorily for their levels in daily academic

performance (Whitmore, 1980). These are students who have high capacity for achievement,

but consistently exert low levels of effort on most school-related tasks (Ford, 1991, 1992).

Underachievement is characterized by such attributes as disorganization, lack of

concentration, perfectionism, low self-esteem, unwillingness to conform, anxiety, vulnerability to peer pressure, and an external locus of control (Coleman et. al., 1966; Whitmore, 1980). Underachievement, which is manifested by poor grades, lack of effort, dropping out of school, or otherwise not reaching one's academic potential, is a serious problem among African American students, particularly the African American male (Ford, 1996). Specifically, African American males have higher dropout rates, earn lower grades, attain less education, and participate in less rigorous classes and programs than do White students and African American females (Gay, 1989; Shapiro, Loeb, & Bowermaster, 1993). Poor educational outcomes such as dropping out of school have also been reported among African American students with above-average intelligence (Felice, 1981; Rumberger, 1983, 1987). These studies indicate that many students do not drop out because of inadequate ability, but for other reasons.

While educational achievement testing and grades exist to measure how well a student has mastered or learned skills and concepts taught at school, academic performance is not only the aftermath of exposure to curriculum (Pershey, 2010). Achievement is also a reflection of multiple contexts that engender student performance and that at times may mitigate academic performance. These contexts include insufficiencies in school resources, inadequacy of school programming, family and community socioeconomic circumstances and learner characteristics (Pershey, 2010). However, even when these inadequacies and insufficiencies are removed, African American males still perform much lower than their White peers.

In Prince George's County, Maryland, the wealthiest African American majority county in the nation, White males outperform African American males from families of equal or greater socioeconomic status. The median income for a household in the county in 2008 was $81,908. The 2008 mean income for a family in the county was $94,360. African Americans account for 63% of the county's population, and Whites account for 24% (Maryland State Data Center, 2010).

In addition to the high socioeconomic status of most of the families in the school district, the quality of the teachers who provide instruction for these young men is well above average. Approximately 30% of the teachers hold a Standard Professional degree, and 63% hold an Advanced Professional degree (Maryland State Report Card, 2011). Only 9% of teachers are not Highly Qualified according to No Child Left Behind legislation. In addition, the per pupil expenditure in Prince George's County is $13, 612, which is above the national average of approximately $10,000 per student.

According to the 2011 Maryland State Report Card, African-American males in Prince George's County lag behind White males in promotion rates in grades 9 through 12. In the 9th grade there is only a 67% passing rate for African American males compared to an 80% passing rate for White males. The gap tends to narrow as they approach their senior year with a 90% passing rate for African American males and a greater than 95% passing rate for White males. The narrowing of the gap may be attributed to the attrition rates as both groups progress through high school (Maryland State Report Card, 2011).

As indicated on the 2011 Maryland State Report Card, African American males in Prince George's County do not perform as well as their White counterparts on the Maryland

State Assessments (MSA). In the 10th grade the proficiency rates for African American males on the MSA are as follows: Algebra (62%), Biology (60%), English (67%), and Government (71%). The proficiency rates for White males on the same MSA are as follows: Algebra (89%), Biology (89%), English (87%), and Government (92%). The 11th and 12th grade comparisons mirror the 10th grade comparisons. In the 11th grade White males outperform African American males in Algebra by 30%, Biology by 20%, English by 12%, and Government by 12%. This vicious cycle continues into the senior year with a 20% gap in Algebra, a 20% gap in Biology, a 14% gap in English, and a 14% gap in Government.

The performance of African American males in Prince George's County perplexes educators and researchers alike who study this phenomenon. Everything that these young men need to be successful and competitive in school is there, but they still do not measure up to the academic performance of White males.

Given the reality of these issues among students regardless of whether they are in one of the more challenging schools or attending an affluent school, attention needs to be directed towards whether affected students subjectively perceive themselves as academically capable, confident, and satisfied with school (Paris, Roth, & Turner, 2000). To substantiate the premise that school, community, and learner characteristics affect academic performance, it is important to investigate the perceptions of students who are in circumstances that may place them at risk for unsatisfactory achievement (Pershey, 2010). Self-perceptions of lack of competence might coincide with unfavorable results (Paris, Roth, & Turner, 2000).

There is a long-standing view among educators that the beliefs and feelings students have about themselves are key in determining academic success (Beane, 1994). Although

the terms self-perception, self-concept, and self-esteem are often used interchangeably, they

represent different but related constructs. Self-concept refers to a student's perceptions of

competence or adequacy in academic and non-academic (e.g., social, behavioral, and

athletic) domains and is best represented by a profile of self-perceptions across domains

(Valentine, DuBois, & Cooper, 2004). Self-esteem is a student's overall evaluation of

himself or herself, including feelings of happiness and satisfaction. Students typically

display a decline in self-concept during the transition from elementary school to middle

school. This decrease represents an adaptive reaction to overly positive self-perceptions that

are associated with childhood (Manning, 2007).

Individuals develop a set of perceptions of competence based on an accumulation of

success and failure experiences (Campbell, Assanand, & Di Paula, 2003). Those who

experience more successes than failures tend to develop positive perceptions of their ability,

while those who experience many failures tend to develop more negative perceptions of

ability. They may also have difficulty maintaining achievement motivation (Weiner, 1980).

After examining the dismal statistics one can see that there is obviously a major

problem with the social and educational status of the African American male in our country.

Even more disturbing is the underachievement of the African American male who has the

potential to do so much more. In this study I will seek to identify some factors that contribute

to the underachievement of high school African American males who have not had to

experience the multiple contexts such as insufficiencies in school resources, inadequacy of

school programming, family and community socioeconomic circumstances, and learner

characteristics, which often mitigate academic success. Instead, these students have demonstrated academic success prior to entering high school and have necessary supports in place. Based on the research, these young men should have positive perceptions of their academic ability due to their experiences with school success. Focusing on African American males who possess the qualities and resources to be successful, yet underachieve, will shed some light on their experiences with school and why they are not working to their full potential. Earlier studies conducted by Paris, Roth, and Turner (2000) examined the perceptions of students in grades 2 – 11 of themselves based on their performance on achievement tests. Research conducted by Pershey (2010) measured self-perceptions of school competencies among 4th and 6th grade African American students who attended an academically challenged school district. Students' self-perceptions were correlated with their performance on state-mandated achievement tests. Better self-perceptions of ability and confidence correlated with better test scores.

This study is unique in that it specifically focused on 11th and 12th grade African American males' perceptions of their academic ability and sought to determine if there is a correlation between their self-perceptions and their academic performance in high school. Despite the current alarming statistics as well as historical disadvantages such as unequal, segregated schools and the horrific desegregation experience, as well as socioeconomic disadvantages of African Americans as a group, there is a disturbing trend in our schools today of African American males who have proven they can be successful but do just enough to get by or worse, they drop out. Clearly, something is missing from the idea of self perception and its link to academic achievement in African American males.

While this study focused on the disturbing phenomenon, the underachievement of African American high school males, there are studies that highlight a more positive image of successful African American males. Hrabowski, Maton, & Greif (1998) conducted research to find young African American men who have been resilient and have overcome major obstacles and beat the odds. In *Beating the Odds* (1998) Hrabowski, Maton, and Greif recount remarkable stories of African American males and show us what African American families have done to raise academically successful sons, sons who are among the top two percent of African American males in terms of SAT scores and grades. The result of extensive and innovative research, *Beating the Odds* (1998) goes beyond mere analysis--and beyond the relentlessly negative media images--to show us precisely how young African American men can succeed despite the roadblocks of racism, the temptations of crime and drugs, and a popular culture that values being "cool" over being educated. By interviewing parents and children from a range of economic and educational backgrounds and from both single and two-parent homes, Hrabowski, Maton, and Greif (1998) are able to identify those constants that contribute to academic achievement and offer step-by-step guidance on six essential strategies for effective parenting: child-focused love; strong limit-setting and discipline; continually high expectations; open, consistent, and strong communication; positive racial identity and positive male identity; and full use of community resources. The proof of the effectiveness of such strategies is in the sons themselves, who speak eloquently about their struggles and successes in both the classroom and the often hostile world that surrounds it.

Contextual Theories

There are several theories that seek to explain why African American males underperform in school, which I used to frame my study. I started by placing the issue of the study in the context of being academically successful in school is viewed by African American students as "acting White." Next, I discussed the topic of male alienation from school. I further situated the study in the context of African American children's immigrant and non-immigrant status and school achievement. Other contexts that frame the proposed study were opposition to the majority culture, coping strategies, and negative stereotypes or beliefs about the ability of minority students. I then sought to explain the self-concept theory and perceptual tradition as a means of understanding how African American males' perception of their academic abilities impacts their performance in school.

Acting White

Fordham's (1988, 1996) raceless persona theory contends that African American students who achieve in school and experience academic success are often conflicted, feeling the need to reject their racial and cultural identity in the process. Fordham claimed that despite the emphasis on diversity and multiculturalism, educators often continue to disapprove of strong ethnic identity among African American adolescents. These contradictory messages produce conflict and ambivalence in this group of young people toward possessing strong racial and ethnic identities and toward performing well in school.

Fordham's (1988) theory was conceptualized by borrowing from the anthropological concept, fictive kinship. Fictive kinship is defined as a kinship-like connection among persons in a society, not related by blood or marriage. This kinship within the African

American community is a learned cultural symbol that denotes an African American collective identity. Fordham (1988) posits that resisting academic success is often considered a part of the African American collective identity because it rejects what is perceived to be the White identity. Fordham argues that African American children who assimilate and adopt White school norms have a better chance of experiencing academic success. They distance themselves from the African American collective identity, developing a raceless persona. African American students experience peer pressures from other African American students to discourage them from adopting such White attitudes and behaviors.

According to Fordham (1985), African American students experience ambivalence and affective dissonance around the issue of academic excellence in the school context. Fordham (1985) employs the use of the phrase "acting White" to describe the contradictory nature of schooling for African American children, and their concurrent embracement and rejection of those behaviors defined as "acting white". Among those behaviors African American students identify as "acting White" are: 1) speaking standard English; 2) listening to White music and White radio stations; 3) going to the opera or ballet; 4) spending a lot of time in the library studying; 5) working hard to get good grades in school; 6) getting good grades in school, i.e. being known as a "brainiac"; 7) doing volunteer work; 8) having cocktails or a cocktail party; 9) going to the symphony, orchestra, or concerts; 10) going hiking or mountain climbing; 11) having a party with no music; 12) listening to classical music; 13) being on time; 14) reading and writing poetry; and 15) putting on "airs" (Fordham, 1985). Although the list above is certainly not exhaustive; nonetheless, it is

indicative of which behaviors in the school context are likely to be negatively received and therefore avoided by large numbers of students. African American students who attain academic excellence are frequently perceived by their peers as "being kind of White" and therefore not truly African American (Fordham, 1985). Unfortunately, tensions build between those students who choose to behave in ways that their peers define as "acting white" and those who tend to limit their behaviors in the school context to those accepted by the group.

Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) burden of acting White theory is a coupling and extension of Fordham's fictive kinship and Ogbu's acting White (Stinson, 2011). This theory attempts to explain how African American students who are high-achievers or perform satisfactorily, although well below their potential (i.e., underachievers), in schools manage the burden of acting White. Fordham and Ogbu also claim that few African American students learn coping skills that aid in resolving the tensions in the hegemonic White identity of schools and the fictive kinship of the African American collective identity (Stinson, 2011). Fordham and Ogbu (1986) found that successful African American students who had learned coping strategies had camouflaged their success by being involved in sports, which is regarded as a black activity. Others masked their success by becoming the class clown; whereas some acquired the protection from the school bullies in exchange for assistance in schoolwork and homework.

Cultural Ecological Theory

Ogbu's cultural ecological theory asserts that the American caste system, which is racially stratified, contributes to the academic underachievement of specific racial minorities in U.S. schools (Stinson, 2011). Ogbu asserts that the crucial issue in understanding cultural diversity and learning is the relationship between the minority cultures and the American mainstream culture. Ogbu (1992) classified racial minorities into types: (a) autonomous minorities, people who are minorities in a numerical sense; (b) immigrant or voluntary minorities, people who move or immigrate to the United States; (c) castelike or involuntary minorities, people who were brought to the United States against their will or had been conquered or colonized.

One critical component of Ogbu's (1992) theory is the notion of "cultural inversion," which is the rejection of certain forms of behaviors, events, and meanings by involuntary minorities because they are perceived to be characterized as White. Another key component is "acting White", which is when involuntary minorities must choose between adopting appropriate attitudes and behaviors consistent with school rules and practices that are perceived by minority students as typical of White students and adopting attitudes and behaviors that minority students consider appropriate for their racial or ethnic group but that are not necessarily conducive to school success (Stinson, 2011).

The Cultural-Ecological Theory of School Performance was developed by Ogbu (1990, 1991) to address societal and school factors, as well as issues surrounding academic performance among minority students. This theory considers the broad societal and school factors as well as the dynamics within the minority communities. Ecology is the setting,

environment, or world of people (minorities), and cultural, broadly, refers to the way people

(in this case the minorities)

see their world and behave in it. There are two major parts to this theory. One part is about

the way that minorities are treated or mistreated in education in terms of educational policies,

pedagogy, and returns for their investment or school credentials. Ogbu refers to this as the

system.

   The second part of the theory is about the way minorities perceive and respond to

schooling as a result of their treatment. Minority responses are also affected by how and why

a group became a minority. This second set of factors is designated as community forces,

which includes the barriers faced by minorities (Ogbu, 1991). These barriers are

instrumental discrimination (e.g., in employment and wages), relational discrimination (such

as social and residential segregation), and symbolic discrimination (e.g., denigration of the

minority culture and language). Ogbu (1991) calls these discriminations collective problems

faced by minorities. To explain the minorities' perceptions of and responses to education, the

theory explores the impact of the white treatment of the minorities. This impact is expressed

in their responses, or their "collective solutions," to the collective problems (Ogbu, 1991).

Minorities usually respond to or develop collective solutions to the instrumental

discrimination. They may develop a folk theory of how they can make it or resort to

"collective struggle" and become mistrustful of white Americans and their institutions.

Minorities may develop an oppositional cultural and language frame of reference or

selectively adopt "white ways" to deal with symbolic discrimination (Ogbu 2004).

The theory argues that while discrimination and structural barriers in school are directly related to low academic performance among minority students, they are not the primary cause of low performance. Some minority students do well in school. Therefore, the difference in minority student performance can be attributed to differences in community forces that are determined by differences in incorporation into society, either voluntary or involuntary. Ogbu and Simons (1998) purport that minorities' perceptions and understandings of their social realities and of their schooling directly influence minority students' performance in school. These perceptions and beliefs are shaped by the cultural model adopted by that particular minority group. The type of cultural model selected by the group depends on whether they were initially incorporated into their host society voluntarily or involuntarily (Gilbert, 2009; Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

Immigrant minorities, referred to as voluntary minorities, are individuals who moved into their host society in search of economic and religious freedom and a better way of life (Ogbu, 1991; Ogbu & Simons, 1994, 1998). Successful minority groups have a different understanding of their place in society compared to the views of less successful minority groups. Voluntary minorities do not feel that they were forced by White Americans to come to the United States. Thus they do not resent the views of White Americans. Instead, voluntary minorities retain their attitudes and behaviors regarding education of their ancestors. For the optimistic voluntary immigrant, America is a land of opportunity compared with the harsh economic realities of their homeland (Foley, 2004). Voluntary minorities view the economic, political and social barriers as problems they can overcome in time with hard work and education (Ogbu, 1991; Ogbu & Simons, 1994, 1998). They

develop a positive dual frame of reference, which allows them to have an optimistic view of their future opportunities, as compared to their former situations back home (Foley, 2004). By developing a dual frame of reference, voluntary minorities are able to express gratitude for whatever opportunities afforded them in their host society. Although it is not desirable, voluntary minorities recognize that if things do not work they can always go back home (Gibson, 2005). Ogbu and Simons (1994, 1998) argue that voluntary minorities develop this notion of getting ahead, where they believe education is the key to making this a reality. As a result, voluntary minority parents have high academic expectations for their children. Given their dual frame of reference they do not develop a pessimistic oppositional youth culture that equates school achievement with cultural assimilation and loss (Foley, 2004). Consequently, voluntary immigrants adapt to society and its schools better. Even if they experience racism and inequality, they persevere and value upward mobility.

On the contrary, non-immigrant minorities, referred to as involuntary minorities, have been forced into their present society through slavery, conquest, or colonization (Ogbu, 1990; Ogbu & Simons, 1994, 1998). In comparison to voluntary minorities, voluntary minorities perceive economic, political, and social barriers against them as permanent problems and have no "back home" with which to compare (Ogbu & Simons, 1994). Further, Ogbu and Simons (1994,1998) argue that involuntary minorities do not view their cultural differences from the dominant group as obstacles that they can overcome. Instead, they view them as institutionalized markers of group identity to be maintained (Gibson, 2005). Involuntary minorities develop their sense of identity after being incorporated into the present host society (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). As a result, they develop a negative dual frame of reference

with respect to upward mobility. This negative dual frame of reference leads to the creation of a secondary cultural system in which they develop and try to maintain language, cultural, and belief systems that are different from and in opposition to the dominant culture (Ogbu & Simons, 1994, 1998). Involuntary minorities such as non-immigrant African Americans react differently to social situations than voluntary minorities. Involuntary minorities are more likely to reject existing norms and values related to education and possess ambivalent and contradictory attitudes toward schools. Consequently, involuntary minorities view schools and their curricula as an imposition of the dominant culture on them, which is a root cause of their academic failure.

As a way of coping with their placement in the host society African Americans develop what has become known as collective identity. Collective identity refers to people's sense of who they are (Ogbu, 2004). People express their collective identity with cultural symbols which reflect their attitudes, beliefs, feelings, behaviors, and language or dialect. Collective identity usually develops because of people's collective experiences or series of collective experiences.

In addition to the creation of a collective identity as a coping mechanism, involuntary minorities, according to Ogbu (1991) and Ogbu & Simons (1994,1998), develop an oppositional identity as well. They often express the desire of succeeding through hard work and education, but they do not believe that this strategy works for them. Involuntary minorities believe that getting ahead not only requires education, but a collective struggle against the obstacles placed before them (Gilbert, 2009). Therefore, they develop ambivalent and contradictory attitudes toward schooling.

Cool Pose Theory

The masculine gender role has traditionally been associated with positive, socially acceptable behaviors, and characteristics such as strength, independence, and assertiveness (Czopp et. al., 1998). Children are socialized at a very young age to behave according to gender specific roles and are rewarded by parents, teachers, and peers for doing so. At the same time they are punished for behaving in gender-inappropriate ways. At a very young age children learn that boys are supposed to be tough, strong, and boisterous, while girls are supposed to be quiet, neat, and pretty (Czopp et. al., 1998).

In a study conducted by Alder, Less, and Adler, (1992) they found that boys achieved popularity among their peers by exhibiting the stereotypical masculine behaviors such as athletic ability, being tough, and standing up to their teachers. They suggested that such characteristics are prerequisites to popularity, and that these behaviors were emulated by their classmates in attempts to gain social acceptance. Alder and her colleagues (1992) also observed that male students who exhibited traditionally feminine characteristics were considered to have relatively low status and were frequently referred to as "sissy" or "homo." Many of the traditionally feminine characteristics were congruent with what teachers regarded as appropriate behavior for "good" sudents (i.e., sitting quietly, following directions, and paying attention when the teacher is speaking).

Consistent pairing of positive academic behavior with femininity, and the social pressure to conform to the traditional masculine gender role, may influence the males to present themselves as relatively less academically conscientious than their feminine peers

(Czopp et. al., 1998). The social pressure for conformity to traditional gender roles is stronger for males than for females, and this self-presentation continues throughout males' educational careers (Alder et. al.,1992).

Alder et. al. (1992) found that some students' perceptions of masculinity and popularity of other students were influenced by their degree of academic achievement. Students who did "too well" in school were negatively perceived as "brains" and "nerds" (Alder et. al. 1992). Negative peer evaluation is such a powerful social influence that some boys who had relatively high scholastic aptitude were unwilling or simply refused to work up to their actual potential for fear of exhibiting feminine behavior and its resulting social rejection. Boys who were academically talented made frequent attempts to conceal their abilities in order to avoid the negative stigma of performing above the recognized level of masculine social acceptance (Alder et. al., 1992).

This masculine posturing can have a negative impact on male academic achievement. In order to remain in this "culture of coolness" and avoid the negative social stigma, many young boys perform well below their actual academic ability and refuse to put forth more effort despite documented academic aptitude (Alder et. al., 1992). A part of this underachievement involves a strategic self-presentation style in which males down play interest or involvement in their academic outcomes. This self-presentation style is understood by the encoder (target) and the decoder (perceivers) of this hypermasculine posturing as a masculine phenomenon and is continually enforced in a continuous feedback loop of social rewards and reinforcements (Czopp, et. al., 1998). This presentation style

denotes a social declaration of masculinity and the individuals are regarded by peers as more

popular, more attractive as potential dating partner, and more socially confident (Czopp et.

al., 1998).

This self-presentation strategy is congruent with what masculine theorists have

described as the "cool pose" factor of the male self. Majors and Billson (1992) describe cool

pose as the means by which young African American males present their self-identity

through intensified or hypermasculine traits. Being cool is characterized as being

emotionless, extremely self-confident, always calm under pressure, and in control of oneself.

Cool pose often includes nonverbal behaviors or cues such as a particular gait or style of

walking (Czopp et. al., 1998). Majors and Billson (1992) argue that the hypermasculine style

of presentation allows the African American male to maintain a sense of control, strength,

and pride in a racially discriminatory society (Czopp et. al., 1998).

Majors and Billson (1992) theorized that factors existed within society that prevented

Africa- American males from envisioning themselves as scholars, thereby causing them to

devalue academic achievement. According to the theory, African-American males often

adopt a "cool pose" persona – nonchalant, tough, hostile, emotionless, and uncaring – to cope

with the external pressures and oppression. These coping strategies often lead to behavior

referrals and punishment. The African-American male's growth and potential are stunted as

a result of his refusal to get involved in activities that could broaden his social and political

consciousness (Whiting, 2009). Despite the social advantages of this strategic style of self-

presentation, cool pose may have negative side effects on students' academic careers because

the behaviors surrounding this hypermasculine presentation style may inhibit them from engaging in productive behaviors which are likely to result in academic achievement (Czopp et. al., 1998). The students who demonstrate many of the masculine characteristics associated with coolness may be stunting themselves academically by displaying indifference to the consequences of their academic performance.

The Negative Stereotypes

Stereotype threat refers to being at risk of confirming, as self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one's group (Steele & Aronson, 1995). This term was first used by Steele and Aronson (1995) who showed in several experiments that African-American college freshmen and sophomores performed more poorly on standardized tests than White students when their race was emphasized. When race was not emphasized, however, African-American students performed better and equivalently with White students. The results showed that performance in academic contexts can be harmed by the awareness that one's behavior might be viewed through the lens of racial stereotypes.

The stereotype threat focuses on a social-psychological predicament that can arise from widely-known negative stereotypes about a specific group. The existence of such a stereotype means that anything anyone from that group does that conforms to it makes the stereotype more plausible as a self-characterization in the eyes of others, and in one's own eyes (Steele & Aronson, 1995). When the allegations of the stereotype are negative, this predicament may be self-threatening enough to have disruptive effects of its own.

Whenever African American students perform an explicitly intellectual task, they face the threat of confirming or being judged negatively about their group's intellectual ability and competence (Steele & Aronson, 1995). This self-threat may interfere with the intellectual functioning of these students during standardized tests. This threat does not impact groups that are not judged in this manner. Over time this threat has a greater effect on African American students. It pressures these students to protectively dis-identify with achievement in school and related intellectual domains (Steele & Aronson, 1995). This protects the student from the self-evaluative threat caused by the stereotypes; however, it may lead to lack of interest, decreased motivation, and ultimately a decline in academic achievement (Steele, 1992).

Literature on stereotype threat has broadened in several important respects. It is now known that consequences of stereotype threat extend beyond underachievement in academic areas. For example, it can lead to a reduced sense of belonging to the stereotyped domain (Good, Dweck, & Rattan, 2008). In addition, consistent exposure to stereotype threat can reduce the degree that individuals value the domain in question (Osborne, 1995; Steele, 1997). In education, it can also lead students to choose not to pursue a certain field of study and, consequently, limit the range of professions that they can pursue. Furthermore, stereotype threat has been shown to affect stereotyped individuals' performance in a number of domains beyond academics, such as certain ethnicity's participation in a particular sport (Stone et. al., 1999).

The expansion of research in this area has given us a better understanding of who is most vulnerable to stereotype threat. Research has shown that stereotype threat can harm the

academic performance of any individual for whom the situation invokes a stereotype-based expectation of poor performance. For example, stereotype threat has been shown to harm the academic performance of Hispanics students from low socioeconomic backgrounds females in math and even white males when faced with the specter of Asian superiority in math (Steele & Aoronson, 1998). Also, within a stereotyped group, some members may be more vulnerable to its negative consequences than others. Factors such as the strength of one's group identification or domain identification have been shown to be related to ones' subsequent vulnerability to stereotype threat (Osborne & Walker, 2006). Members of the group who most strongly identify with the stigmatized domain such as academic ability suffer most from the effects of stereotype threat. Students highly invested in schooling will experience negative effects of a stigma of intellectual inferiority (Osborne & Walker, 2006). Thus children of color who are heavily invested in schooling are most likely to withdraw from school.

Steele (1990) argues that African-American students' exposure to society's negative images of their ability is often internalized as an "inferiority anxiety." This anxiety may cause them to blame others for their underachievement, to avoid maximizing available opportunities, and to develop a victim's mentality. Consequently, these adaptations lead to academic failure (Steele & Aronson, 1995). If one is constantly exposed to this negative stereotype, he internalizes it and begins to believe that the stereotype is true or real. The stereotype threat theory is congruent to the Thomas theorem formulated by W. I. Thomas which states, "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Thomas, 1928). The interpretation of the situation causes the action. Thomas (1923) developed a

concept of the "definition of the situation": Preliminary to any self-determined act of behavior, there is always a stage of examination and deliberation which we may call the "definition of the situation." The individual's definition of the situation is always subject to "a rivalry between the spontaneous definition of the situation made by members of an organized society and the definition which his society has provided for him." In other words, people do not always respond to a situation objectively. Instead, they respond based on the subjective meaning that the situation has for them. Once they attach a certain meaning to the situation, the following beliefs will be influenced by that meaning. If society constantly says that African-American students cannot and will not be successful in college, African-American students begin to believe that this is true and they act on it.

This type of behavior is a self-fulfilling prophecy. A self-fulfilling prophecy is, in the beginning, a false definition of the situation evoking a new behavior, which makes the originally false conception come true (Merton, 1968). Public definitions of a situation (prophecy or prediction) become an integral part of the situation and thus affect subsequent development. This is basically what happens to African-American students experiencing the stereotype threat. The attached meaning of the false prophecy of their intelligence influences subsequent beliefs and actions, hence academic underachievement.

Perceptual Tradition and Self-concept Theory

There are factors believed to account for significant growth and decline in academic performance that are external to any academic area, factors that are more in the realm of the psychological rather than the cognitive. One factor that has received a significant amount of study is self-perception and self-concept and its relationship to academic performance. This

putative relationship is at the core of the self-esteem movement and has been central to the promotion of child-centered instruction. The core of this approach is the supposition that positive self-concept or positive self-perceptions of competence are causal of many positive outcomes, including good academic performance (Valentine et. al., 2004).

Human behavior is a product of how people see themselves and the situations in which they are involved. Our perceptions of ourselves and the world are so real to us that we seldom pause to doubt them (Combs, Avila, & Purkey, 1978). The perceptual tradition consists of all those systems of thought in which humans are viewed as they normally see themselves. Perception refers not only to the senses but also to meanings, which is the personal significance of an event for the person experiencing it (Purkey & Schmidt, 1987). These meanings extend far beyond sensory receptors to include personal experiences such as feelings, desires, aspirations, and the ways people view themselves, others, and the world.

Each person is a conscious agent who experiences, interprets, constructs, decides, and acts. Behavior is a product of the ways people see themselves and the situations in which they find themselves rather than a complex bundle of stimuli and responses or the product of unconscious urges (Purkey & Schmidt, 1987). The perceptual tradition places importance on each person's perceived world – looking at the world as it is experienced by the perceiving person.

The perceptual tradition purports that all behavior is dependent upon an individual's personal frame of reference and is a function of the perceptions that exist for the person at the moment of behaving (Purkey & Schmidt, 1987). There are 14 premises of the perceptual tradition reflected in the following basic assumptions:

1. There may be a preexistent reality, but an individual can only know that part which comprises his or her perceptual world, the world of awareness.

2. Perceptions at any given moment exist at countless levels of awareness, from the vaguest to the sharpest.

3. Because people are limited in what they can perceive, they are highly selective in what they choose to perceive.

4. All experiences are phenomenal in character: The fact that two individuals share the same physical environment does not mean that they will have the same experiences.

5. What individuals choose to perceive is determined by past experiences as mediated by present purposes, perceptions, and expectations.

6. Individuals tend to perceive only that which is relevant to their purposes and make their choices accordingly.

7. Choices are determined by perceptions, not facts. How a person behaves is a function of his or her perceptual field at the moment of acting.

8. No perception can ever be fully shared or totally communicated because it is embedded in the life of the individual.

9. "Phenomenal absolutism" means that people tend to assume that other observers perceive as they do. If others perceive differently, it is often thought to be because others are mistaken or because they lie.

10. The perceptual field, including the perceived self, is internally organized and personally meaningful. When this organization and meaning are threatened, emotional problems are likely to result.

11. Communication depends on the process of acquiring greater mutual understanding of one another's phenomenal fields.

12. People not only perceive the world of the present but they also reflect on past experiences and imagine future ones to guide their behavior.

13. Beliefs can and do create their own social reality. People respond with feelings not to "reality" but to their perceptions of reality.

14. Reality can exist for an individual only when he or she is conscious of it and has some relationship with it.

Based on the 14 assumptions, it is clear that all behavior is a function of the individual's perceptual field. This explains why a person's behavior may make little sense when observed externally by others, but the same behavior makes great sense when understood from the vantage point of the experiencing person (Purkey & Schmidt, 1987).

Self-concept may be defined as a complex, organized, and dynamic system of learned beliefs, attitudes, and opinions that each person holds to be true about his or her personal existence (Purkey, 1988). The self-concept is the frame of reference from which observations are made and is different for each person.

Academic self-concepts are mental representations of one's abilities in academic domains and school subjects (Valentine et. al., 2004). Self-concept refers to a student's perceptions of competence. High academic self-concepts are associated with positive psychological and behavioral outcomes such as feelings of competence and self-confidence, academic effort, and success (Marsh & Craven, 1997). Due to the significance of academic self-concepts in the educational context, much research has been devoted to the development

of corresponding theories. There are two components to the theories. The first component deals with the question of how academic self-concepts are related to the structure of academic self-concepts, which is a corresponding measure. The second component addresses the empirical network between academic self-concepts and other construct such as student achievement (Brunner et. al., 2004).

Analysis of the empirical network requires a solid explanation and understanding of an appropriate structural model of academic self-concepts. There are three models that attempt to explain the structure of academic self-concepts. The first model known as the Shavelson model, was presented in 1976 by Shavelson, Hubner, and Stanton. This model posits academic self-concepts to be (a) specific to school subjects and (b) hierarchically organized, with (c) general academic self-concept at the apex of academic self-concept hierarchy (Brunner et. al., 2010).

Prior to the 1980s there was no distinction made between self-esteem (i.e., a global evaluation of the self) and domain-specific self-concepts (i.e., evaluations of specific abilities or qualities in different domains) (Brunner et. al., 2010). To compensate for this deficiency, Shavelson, Hubner, and Stanton (1976) developed a multifaceted and hierarchically structured model of self-concept. The Shavelson model purports that general self (self-esteem) is the most general level of self-concept. At the next level, there is a distinction between general academic self-concept and three nonacademic self-concept domains (social self-concept, emotional self-concept, and physical self-concept) (Brunner et. al., 2010). General academic self-concept is further divided into the following subject specific subdomains: mathematics, physics, biology, history, French, and German. The Shavelson

model posits that general academic self-concept operates at the apex of the hierarchy of academic self-concepts, thereby influencing all subject-specific self-concepts.

Empirical support for the hierarchical nature of self-concept in the academic domain was limited. As a result the Marsh/Shavelson model was created (Brunner et. al., 2010). This model distinguishes a general mathematics self-concept from a general verbal self-concept. The general mathematics and general verbal self-concepts influence academic self-concepts in related school subjects (e.g., physics self-concept is influenced by general mathematics self-concept; French self-concept is influenced by general verbal self-concept) (Brunner et. al., 2010). Academic self-concept is subordinate to general mathematics and general verbal self-concept. In other words, domain-general academic self-concept is less important in the Marsh/Shavelson model than in the original Shavelson model.

The third model of the structure of academic self-concept is the nested Marsh/Shavelson model (NMS model). The NMS model predicts that general academic self-concept directly influences domain-general and subject-specific measures of academic self-concepts. Consequently, general academic self-concept directly accounts for a substantial amount of variance in all measures of academic self-concepts (Brunner et. al., 2010). Just as in the Shavelson model, the general academic self-concept is the most general construct of the NMS model. This is congruent with the idea that general academic self-concept operates at the apex of the hierarchy of academic self-concepts. Further the NMS model incorporates the multifaceted and subject-specific nature of academic self-concepts. The model includes subject-specific academic concepts that operate independently of general academic self-concept and influence corresponding measures over and above general academic self-concept

(Brunner et. al., 2010). The NMS model takes into consideration that self-concepts may be hierarchically organized within academic domains, which parallels the Marsh/Shavelson model (Brunner et. al., 2010).

Literature Gap

There have been studies conducted on the resiliency of African American males who have been successful despite obstacles they had to overcome. Likewise, there is quite a bit of research on the underachievement of African American males and attempts to provide a rationale for this phenomenon. One such research that attempts to understand the dilemma of African American male students is Fordham's (1988, 1996) raceless persona theory. This theory contends that African American students who do well academically in school are ridiculed for "acting White". Therefore, many African American students resist academic success, which is a symbol of embracing the African American collective identity because it rejects that which is perceived as the White identity.

Another study that seeks to explain the underperformance of African American students in general is Ogbu's (1990) cultural ecological theory which asserts that cultural diversity and learning are greatly impacted by the relationship between the minority culture and the American mainstream culture. Ogbu contends that while societal and school factors impact academic performance, the dynamics within the minority communities have a much greater impact on academic performance. Some minority students do well in school despite societal factors and structural barriers. Therefore, the difference in minority student performance is directly related to how the minority group views their social realities, either optimistically or negatively.

Majors and Billson (1992) conducted research on this topic as well, and describe "cool pose" as a hypermasculine style of presentation that allows the African American males to be in control. Majors and Billson theorize that there are factors within society that prevent African American males from viewing themselves as intellects, causing them to reject academic success. Consequently, they adopt a "cool pose" persona in which they are emotionless, tough, and hostile as a coping mechanism to the external pressures and to prevent their peers from knowing how they really feel.

Next, there is the stereotype threat which focuses on a social-psychological predicament that is the result of a well known stereotype about a particular group (Steele & Aronson, 1995). If the allegations of the stereotype are negative, it may have unfavorable effects on the group. For example, African American students' exposure to society's negative beliefs of their academic ability interferes with the intellectual functioning of these students. Over time, constant exposure to the negative stereotype causes these students to believe the stereotype is real. Eventually, the students dis-identify with academic achievement as a means of protecting themselves from the self-evaluative threat.

After examining the many theories that attempt to explain the phenomenon, there seems to be a gap in the literature about why African American males underachieve despite the fact that they are just as capable and prepared as their White counterparts. All of the research contends that African American males are reacting to external pressures and societal factors. There is nothing in the literature about African American males reacting to or coping with any internal pressures such their perceptions of their very own academic abilities.

According to Purkey and Schmidt, human behavior is the outward product of how we see or perceive ourselves and the situations in which we are involved (1987). A person's perception is reality to him or her. Based on the 14 premises of the perceptual tradition, all behavior is a function of the individual's perceptual field (Purkey & Schmidt, 1987). One's perceptual field includes, but is not limited to, self-concept, which is a complex system of learned beliefs, attitudes, and opinions that each person holds to be true about his or her personal existence (Purkey, 1988). Self-concept also refers to a student's perceptions of competence in both the academic and non-academic domains.

The purpose of this study is to provide some factors that contribute to the underachievement of high school African American males who have the family support, socioeconomic status, and academic ability to be successful. This study is different from the other studies on this topic in that it focused on the African American male students' perceptions of how they view their own academic ability, how they define academic success, and how they feel about their academic performance. Rather than concentrating so much on the external and societal factors, the study sought to ascertain the participants' perceptual fields and to determine the relationship between self-concept (perception) and academic performance.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

To better understand the phenomenon at hand the study was examined from the social constructivist theoretical perspective. In this worldview, individuals seek to understand the world in which they live by developing subjective meanings of their experiences - meanings that are directed toward certain objects or things. In this worldview the goal of research is to rely on the participants' views of the situation. The subjective meanings that are developed by the participants are negotiated socially and historically through interaction with others (Creswell, 2007). The social constructivist worldview allowed me to identify some factors that contribute to the underachievement of capable African American males by making sense of or interpreting the meanings the participants have about their world. The study provided me with a better understanding of their perceptions and experiences.

The qualitative approach that was used to research this phenomenon is case study. A case study is a detailed investigation of a single individual or group. Case study is the search for meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, and the end product being richly descriptive (Merriam, 2009). The case study is a holistic approach which aims to capture all of the details of a particular individual or group that are relevant to the purpose of the study, within a real life context (Yin, 2009). To do this, case studies rely on multiple sources of data, including interviews, direct observation, video and audio tapes, internal documents, and artifacts. The final report is a narrative with thick, rich descriptions. Case studies can be used for descriptive, explanatory, or exploratory purposes (Yin, 2009). For any of these purposes, there are two distinct case study designs:

single-case study design and multiple-case study design. Single-case studies are just that, an examination of one individual or group. Multiple-case studies use replication, which is the deliberate process of choosing cases that are likely to show similar results. This helps to examine how generalizable the findings may be. The chosen design for this study was single-case. There was detailed investigation of one group, African American high school males who were experiencing the same phenomenon which was underachievement in high school.

A case study is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system. Case study is less of a methodological choice than a choice of what is to be studied. The "what" is a bounded system, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries (Merriam, 2009). In this study the "what" was African American male underachievement in a single local high school. The case or in this study the cases then, were six high school African American 11th and 12th grade male students. According to Creswell (2007) case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes.

Aligned with Yin (1994), I believe the case study research requires identifying the theoretical perspective at the very beginning of inquiry since the worldview impacts the research questions, analysis, and interpretation of the findings. Rather than starting with a theory, I generated or inductively developed a pattern of meaning from the responses to the

questions that I asked the participants. In accordance with Creswell (2007), the questions were broad, general, and open-ended so that I could listen carefully to what the participants had to say and what they reported that they do in their life settings.

This study sought to identify factors that contribute to the underachievement of capable high school African American males utilizing the qualitative research design. The study allowed these young men to share their stories and perceptions about academic schooling, peer pressure, relationships, and home life. Their stories shed some light on how they viewed themselves and other African American males and helped us to better understand why they achieve at rates that are lower than their White counterparts.

This chapter provided a description of the research methodology. The chapter was broken down into the following sections: a) rationale for the qualitative method, b) rationale for case study approach, c) participant selection, d) data collection, and e) data analysis.

Rationale for Qualitative Methodology

According to Creswell (2007) researchers conduct qualitative research because a problem or issue common to a particular often marginalized group needs to be explored. This exploration is necessary because of a need to study a group or population, identify variables that can be measured, or hear silenced or underrepresented voices. Researchers want a complex, detailed understanding of the issue. The detail is established by talking to people, empowering them to share their stories. Qualitative research made it possible for high school African American male voices to be heard. This method helped them to make

meaning of their experiences with school and to explain how these experiences hinder them from reaching their full potential. Bogdan and Biklen (2006) assert that qualitative research helps the researcher study the concept as it is understood in the context of those who experience it.

Rationale for Case Study Research

An effective qualitative approach to exploring the phenomenon, the underachievement of capable African American males in high school, is case study research. Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information such as observations, interviews, and documents and reports a case description and case-based themes (Creswell, 2007). More specifically I conducted an instrumental case study in which I focused on one issue (African American male underachievement) set in one bounded case, a single high school in a single school district (Creswell, 2007). Conducting an instrumental case study affords the investigator the opportunity to focus on a specific issue rather than the case itself. The case then becomes a vehicle to better understand the issue (Stake, 1995). Given the purpose of the study, instrumental case research was an appropriate approach because it allowed me to concentrate on the phenomenon, underperforming African American males, by discerning the perceptions of those who were experiencing the phenomenon first handedly. I was then able to identify tangible factors that contribute to African American male underachievement.

Data Collection

Participant Selection

An important step in the research process is to find people or places to study and to gain and establish rapport with the participants to ensure good data (Creswell, 2007). Another equally important step in the process is determining a strategy for the purposeful sampling of individuals or sites. This purposeful sampling should intentionally sample a group of people that can best inform the researcher about the issue under examination (Creswell, 2007). Thus the participants for the study were African American male students in grades 11 and 12 from a local high school in the rural South. These participants had demonstrated proficiency (the ability to perform at grade level) in Reading and/or Math prior to beginning their high school careers. Previous scores on the North Carolina End of Grade Reading and Math tests were used to determine proficiency. The participants' grade point averages had dropped since entering high school as well. Their current grades reflected C's, D's, and F's in the core academic subjects (English, Math, Science, and Social Studies/History). A total of six African American male students were selected to participate in the study and agreed to participate in one interview that lasted approximately 30 minutes.

To fully understand the phenomenon, I wanted to capture the stories of individuals who had experienced at least two years of high school. Therefore, I selected six males from the local high school in grades 11 and 12. By selecting six participants I was able to get six different perspectives and experiences which provided a rich amount of data to adequately study the phenomenon, the underachievement of African American males. Six African

American male students from the same high school of approximately 900 students provided

me enough information to saturate the data. The selection criteria clearly eliminated the

effects of the 9th and 10th grade transitional years. This also helped me to determine if there

were factors or trends that are prevalent at the end of the high school career, once the young

men have had the opportunity to establish themselves and their reputations. By selecting

participants at the end of high school as opposed to the beginning, I tried to determine if the

individual student's perceptions were impacted by exposure and maturity. Likewise,

selecting one site allowed me to highlight the participants' individual experiences as well as

capture the culture or climate of a particular school.

Most of these young men attended school in this district since starting school. In

addition, many of the participants in the study attended school with each other since

elementary school and have been in classes together; therefore, several of them knew each

other. These young men have the same group of friends, play sports together, and share

similar interests. However, each of them had their own unique personalities and dispositions.

Purposeful sampling strategy means that the inquirer selects individuals and sites for

study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the central phenomenon in

the study (Creswell, 2007). I selected my participants by utilizing the snowball or chain

strategy, which is identifying cases of interest from people who know people who know what

cases are information-rich. The snowball technique relies on a system of professional

networking to identify individuals who meet the criteria established by the researcher (Miles

& Huberman, 1994). At the school level the people who know what cases can provide rich

data for the intended study are the guidance counselors; therefore, I relied on the guidance counselor to provide the names of students who met the criteria mentioned earlier. Therefore, I did not have to obtain permission to view all students' records to select my participants.

Accessibility to information and to participants is the primary reason I selected this particular high school in which to conduct my study. Approximately 15 years ago I taught at this high school. The current counselor and the Assistant Principal, both of whom had knowledge and access to the information essential for this study, were colleagues of mine during my tenure at the local high school. These two individuals were critical to the snowball strategy that I used to gain access to the participants. Both the counselor and the Assistant Principal have been at this high school for almost two decades and are extremely knowledgeable of the students' strengths and weaknesses as well as school programs and the curriculum. The guidance counselor schedules students in classes, many of which have prerequisites such as certain grade point averages or test scores before being allowed to take the classes. He is aware of student grades also because he assists with printing report cards and mailing transcripts to colleges. Therefore, he knew which students met the criteria for the study. I relied on him to provide names of students who met the criteria. This professional networking saved time and prevented pilfering through student records to find eligible participants. In addition, once the participants were selected the counselor was able to provide me with student records such as attendance records, report cards, and progress reports. The Assistant Principal handles the discipline at the high school and was able to provide me with access to the participants' discipline data when applicable.

Once I obtained the names of participants who met the criteria I randomly selected 30

names and sent out detailed invitations to participate in the study which included the purpose

of the study, the expectations, and time commitment (Appendix A). If they agreed,

permission forms were sent home to all students, not just those under the age of 18

(Appendix B). This was done to help build trust and rapport with the significant adults in the

lives of the participants. Upon receiving parent permission, I randomly selected six of the

students agreeing to participate in the study. I then called each of them and set up a date and

time for the interview.

Participant Interviews

Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people

interpret the world around them and when we are interested in events that we cannot replicate

(Merriam, 2009). The key to getting good data from interviews is to ask good questions.

Different types of questions yield different information. Likewise, the way in which the

question is worded is a crucial consideration in extracting the desired information (Merriam,

2009). Questions need to be understood by the interviewees and should be in a language that

is familiar to them. Words that reflect the respondents' world views improve the quality of

data obtained during the interview. Each individual participated in a 30 minute semi-

structured interview that was audio-taped and transcribed at a later time. The interviews

were recorded on a hand-held mini digital voice recorder. The file was named respectively

the pseudonym given to the participants and dated as a way of identifying the recording at a

later time. The recordings were transferred to a password protected computer kept in a

locked office. Immediately after being transferred to the computer, the recordings were

deleted from the hand-held mini digital voice recorder.

A semi-structured interview was appropriate for this study because the questions were

flexibly worded and were not asked in a predetermined order (Merriam, 2009). The

participants were asked questions that focused on school experiences, their relationships with

faculty, family values, and peer acceptance. Patton (2002) suggests six types of questions

that allow the researcher to get good data. Of the six types, the questions that the participants

were asked fell into the following categories: 1) experience and behavior questions - get at

the things the person does or did, his or her behaviors, actions, and activities, 2) opinion and

value questions - tell the person's beliefs or opinions or what he or she thinks about

something, 3) feeling questions – tap the affective dimension of human life, 4) knowledge

questions – elicit a participant's actual factual knowledge about a situation, and 5) sensory

questions – try to elicit more specific data about what is seen, heard, and touched. Another

type of question that was used in the interview is the ideal position question that elicited both

information and opinion (Merriam, 2009).

An interview protocol or guide that allows the researcher to write responses to the

interviewees' comments was used to conduct the interview (Appendix D). The interview

questions started broad to invite the interviewee to open up and talk. By the end of the

interview, the questions narrowed in scope and become more personal. All questions were

open-ended in efforts to yield descriptive data about the phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). In

the event the participants' responses needed further elaboration or clarity, probes and follow-up questions were inserted.

During the interviews I stayed to the questions, completed the interview within the allotted time, was respectful and courteous, and offered very little if any advice. The most important point was to be a good listener (Creswell, 2007). These individuals were giving up their personal time; therefore, I intended to give them the opportunity to be heard and to share their stories.

In order to really understand what influenced the participants' understanding of their experiences and to fully expose their perceptions, the interview questions covered the following topics: home life, school experiences, teacher relationships, peer relationships, and peer expectations. Topics that were considered for the interview but were rejected because relevancy could not be established were as follows: the likelihood of dropping out of school, perceptions of career and technical education, the influence of drugs and sex, and the presence of physical and emotional disabilities (or the absence thereof).

Observations

I conducted observations as another data collection source. I visited the school two times during the process to observe in the classrooms of the participants, hallways, and cafeteria. Each observation lasted approximately 90 minutes. I visited once before the interviews and again after the interviews. The purpose of the observation after the interview was to observe from the participants' vantage point. After hearing their stories and having knowledge of their perceptions, I was able to view the school from their perspectives. An

observational protocol guide to record and journal information was utilized to assist with

managing the data (Appendix E). To avoid interjecting personal feelings during the note

taking or journaling process, I utilized a qualitative research strategy known as bracketing.

Bracketing is a key part of some qualitative research philosophies, especially phenomenology

and other approaches requiring interviews and observations. Also known as mind mapping

or phenomenological reduction, this process helped to develop a non-judgmental attitude

about the participants preventing the information provided from impeding the perception of

the phenomenon at the heart of the study (Spirko, 2011).

Documents

The final piece of data collection was documents (Appendix G). Securing the identity

of the students, I collected transcripts of the participants which included grades, test scores,

attendance, and class rank since 9th grade. This information was used to examine previous

and current student performance.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process used to answer your research questions. The overall

process of data analysis begins by identifying segments in your data set that are in response

to your research questions (Merriam, 2009). Textual data, transcripts and journal notes,

should be examined using some form of content analysis. Qualitative research does not seek

to quantify data. Instead, it uses analytical categories to describe and explain social

phenomena (Pope et. al., 2008). In this study I used open coding to analyze the data. In

addition to employing open coding to analyze the data, I used a priori coding as well which

relied on previously identified themes. The themes evolved from my conceptual framework

perspective, the stereotype threat theory. The coding started with themes previously

identified in the conceptual model such as negative stereotyping and disassociation.

After listening to the recordings of the participants' interviews, the data was put into

transcription text. I then compared one unit of information with the next, looking for

recurring regularities in the data (Merriam, 2009). This process broke the information down

into bits of information. I then assigned the bits of information to categories or themes,

patterns, and answers to research questions which brought these bits of information together

again. Some categories may be sub-divided, and others subsumed under more abstract

categories (Merriam, 2009). I began with bits of detailed segments of data, clustered the data

units together, then named the cluster. As I moved through the data collection, I was able to

check out these tentative categories with subsequent interviews, observations, and documents

(Merriam, 2009). Once I reached saturation, that is, when there was no new information

coming forth, I was in the deductive mode. In this mode I looked for information that

supported my final set of categories.

Reliability and Validity

Validity and reliability are concerns that can be approached through careful attention

to a study's conceptualization and the way in which the data are collected, analyzed, and

interpreted and the way in which the findings are presented (Merriam, 2009). Although

qualitative researchers can never really capture an objective truth or reality, there are some

strategies that can be used to increase the credibility of the findings. One of the most widely

known strategies that researchers can employ to firm up the internal validity of the study is triangulation (Merriam, 2009). In this study I used the triangulation strategy of multiple sources of data, collecting data through a combination of interviews, observations, and document analysis. What the participants told me in the interview was checked against what I observed at the school and what I read about in the documents relevant to the phenomenon of interest (Merriam, 2009).

Adequate engagement in data collection was another strategy that was used to increase the credibility of the findings. The amount of time spent conducting interviews and observations varies based on the nature of the study. However, as the researcher, I aimed to reach saturation, that is when no more new data or information surfaced. Adequate time spent collecting data was coupled with purposely looking for variation in the understanding of the phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). Failure to find strong supporting evidence for alternative ways to present the data or contrasting explanations, helped to increase confidence in the original, principal explanation.

Another strategy that increases credibility that was utilized in this study was the researcher's position or reflexivity – the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher, the human instrument (Merriam, 2009). Investigators must explain their biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research topic. This information was revealed about the researcher in great detail in chapter one in the *Researcher Subjectivity Statement*. Such clarification allowed the reader to better understand how the researcher may have arrived at the particular interpretation of the data. This also helped to explain how the

researcher's values and expectations influenced the conduct and conclusions of the study (Merriam, 2009).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I provided a rationale for using the qualitative approach as the methodology for conducting my research. I explained why case study, multiple case study to be more precise, was the most appropriate qualitative approach to use. The chapter outlined the criteria that was used for selecting the participants for the study. Information about the interview questions was provided. The best way to obtain good information during the interview was to ask good questions. There were six types of questions that ensured detailed responses. To increase the reliability and validity of the study, multiple sources of data collection were utilized. Explanations about both, observations and documents, were provided in this chapter. Another topic that I discussed in this chapter was data analysis, outlining the techniques that were used to code the findings. The final section of this chapter spoke to the credibility and validity of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This chapter will briefly review the purpose of the study, the research question, and the methodology, and then discuss the findings. This chapter will also present a profile for each case and their perceptions. All cases have been assigned a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. After each case profile the participants' interviews will be analyzed and categorized into emergent themes that became evident during the data analysis. The data will be presented in both aggregate terms and individual responses. Providing the participants' individual responses and their direct quotes allows the researcher and the reader to hear their stories and to view the phenomenon from their vantage point. A summary of the emergent themes will follow.

Review of the Purpose

The purpose of the study was to examine the different perceptions that shape African American male high school students' understanding of their experiences that lead to their success or lack of success in school. In addition, through the voices of the participants, the study identified factors that explain the underachievement of African American male students who are academically capable, have sufficient resources, and home support. Unveiling their experiences with school and their perceptions of success, will help educators and communities see the need to change our approach to working with our young African American male students.

Research Question

Educators and researchers have been perplexed for years about this phenomenon. This study explored the perceptions of underachieving high school African American males who have the family support, socioeconomic status, and academic ability to be successful. By examining their perceptions of school success, peer pressure, experiences with school, and societal influences, I hope identified some common factors that contribute to low achievement of capable African American males.

The following research question was examined in the study:

What are the perceptions of underachieving high school African American male students of the factors contributing to their underperformance?

Methodology

The qualitative approach that was used to study this phenomenon is the multiple case study design. Data were collected from observations, interviews, and documents. The interviews were conducted at the local public library after school hours and on the weekends. Two 90-minute observations of the school were conducted observing the classrooms of the participants, hallways, and cafeteria. The first observation occurred before the interviews and the second observation took place after the interviews. The purpose of the observation after the interview was to observe from the participants' vantage point. After hearing their stories and having knowledge of their perceptions, I was able to view the school from their perspectives. An observational protocol guide to record and journal information was used to

assist with managing the data (Appendix 5). The final piece of data collection was documents provided by the assistant principal and the guidance counselor. These documents included report cards and transcripts. Transcripts from the interviews, the observation protocol, and the documents were open coded to identify themes that directly related to the research question: What are the perceptions of underachieving high school African American male students of the factors contributing to their underperformance?

The results of this study revealed the perceptions of 11th and 12th grade high school African American males who were not performing to their full intellectual capacity as they did previously in elementary and middle school, despite having home, family, and adequate financial support.

The Participants

The participants for the study were African American male students in grades 11 and 12 from a local high school in the rural South. These participants demonstrated proficiency (the ability to perform at grade level) in Reading and/or Math prior to beginning their high school careers. Previous scores on the North Carolina End of Grade Reading and Math tests were used to determine proficiency. The participants' grade point averages had dropped since entering high school. Their current grades reflected C's, D's, and F's in the core academic subjects (English, Math, Science, and Social Studies/History). A total of six African American male students were selected to participate in the study.

To fully understand the phenomenon, I captured the stories of individuals who had experienced at least two years of high school. Therefore, I selected six males from the local high school in grades 11 and 12. The selection criteria eliminated the effects of the 9th and 10th grade transitional years. This also helped me to determine if there were factors or trends that are prevalent at the end of the high school career, once the young men have had the opportunity to establish themselves and their reputations. Selecting participants who were at the end of their high school career as opposed to the beginning, allowed the students' perceptions to be impacted by exposure and maturity. Likewise, selecting one site allowed me to highlight the participants' individual experiences as well as capture the culture or climate of this particular school.

Purposeful sampling strategy means that the inquirer selects individuals and sites for the study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the central phenomenon in the study (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, I selected my participants by utilizing the snowball or chain strategy, which is identifying cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich. The snowball technique relies on a system of professional networking to identify individuals who meet the criteria established by the researcher (Miles & Huberman, 1994). At the school level the people who knew what cases could provide rich data for this study were the guidance counselor and the Assistant Principal.

During my first visit to the high school I met with the guidance counselor and explained to him the purpose of my study and the criteria for participation. On the second

visit approximately a week later he provided me with a list of 45 names of students who met the criteria. I randomly selected 30 names by going down the list and selecting every third name starting with number one. That process yielded 15 names; therefore, I repeated the process however I started with number two. This gave me 14 more names. I then selected the first name at the top of the list which gave me the 30 names I needed. I sent out detailed invitations to the 30 young men inviting them to participate in the study. The invitation included the purpose of the study, the expectations, and time commitment (Appendix A). Once they returned the invitation, permission forms were sent home to all students' parents (guardians) not just those under the age of 18 (Appendix B). This was done to help build trust and rapport with the significant adults in the lives of the participants. Upon receiving parent permission, I randomly selected six of the students agreeing to participate in the study by pulling six permission forms from a box. I then called each of them to set up a date and time for the interview.

The interviews were held at a public library in a private conference room. The interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes primarily because the participants were reluctant to elaborate their responses even with extensive prompting. With the permission and approval of the participants the interviews were recorded using a hand-held digital audio micro recorder. All participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities. The file was named according to the pseudonym and was transferred to a password protected computer kept in a locked office. Immediately after being transferred to the computer, the recordings were deleted from the hand-held mini digital voice recorder. The school and the school district were also assigned fictitious names to protect the participants' identities.

Case # 1: James

James is an 18 year old senior who has attended Bandby County Schools, a small rural school district, since kindergarten. He is very popular among his peers and extremely outspoken. Just this school year during homecoming 2012-13 he was crowned Mr. Mills High School. James is a member of the boys' varsity basketball team and has played for four years. He lives with his mother, his sister, and great aunt, and plans to attend college after high school. He is very confident in his academic ability and feels that "there are a lot of Black guys out there doing their thing and holding down good grades. People don't know about it. None of the people I hang around would look down on me for doing good in school. I think they would just say James is doing his thing. They know I have always been smart (*laughter*)." James spoke clearly and with confidence during the interview and added humor at times.

Study Habits

James had always been a pretty strong student academically prior to entering high school. He felt really good about himself and sometimes came across as arrogant to those who did not know him. James took full responsibility for his academic performance and behavior in school. He felt that his mother and teachers had done their part. The rest was strictly up to him.

> I need to study more than just one or two hours every other night. It's all on me. I
> can't blame it on my Moms or the teachers. Can't nobody do it but me. I guess I

kinda lost track of my grades, started hanging with the wrong crowd, and partying. I was real immature. I'm straight now.

When asked about his study habits and needs, James admitted that he needed to do more studying. However, he did think what little studying he was doing was somewhat successful. James's response was as follows:

I aint - I'm not even gone lie and sit here and say that I'm the perfect person and go home and study for like two hours a day because I don't. I know I don't. I might go home…. Like we might take notes in class one week and I might look at them probably three times out of that week. But when I look at 'em, I look at 'em. Like I actually study dem. Like I have a good memory. I mean I don't……to be honest I don't even have to study. Well I'm not gone say I don't have to study, but I've never had to study. It's like everything locks in my head once we're doing it in class. I've been doing okay with that. I've been doing really well with that. I don't do too much studying, but when I study I make sure I study good. It's like three times a week for like 30 minutes maybe.

I don't think it's enough time. Even though I'm making good grades I feel like I could be a straight A student, cause I'm not applying myself by just studying three times a week. That's not applying myself like I'm suppose to.

James obviously has been doing well in high school according to his standards, and he is quite content with his grades as they are. If he applied himself just a little more he

could do so much better. For James to know this and even articulate it himself is baffling. He is admitting that he does not wish to do any more than he is doing.

Transition to High School

During James's middle school years he started hanging around with a rough crowd of students that his mother really did not approve of, and his grades started to slip. He also started to have some discipline issues in school as well. Once he reached high school his passion for basketball curtailed some of his discipline issues because the teachers would talk to his coach. The coach would sit him out of practice and out of the games if he did not do what was expected of him in class. Nevertheless, James still experienced some difficulty transitioning to high school:

> In middle school I fell off. It wasn't like I was flunking or anything. Now I was still making A's, B's, and C's, but I was kinda jokin around and hanging around with the wrong crowd getting into a little trouble…making little dumb decisions..nothing big that got me suspended for the year or anything…just little dumb stuff…being stupid and immature.

Elementary school was a breeze for him. He thrived during those years earning all A's and high B's. His behavior was fine, but he admits that he always had a flare for hanging with a rowdy crowd of kids. He was attracted to that type of student. It was very easy for him to get distracted if he was not careful. He admitted that he did have a scare during his 9th grade year, but he has managed to get himself back on track.

In elementary all S's to all A's and B's. My B's were in the 90's…no 85's or nothing. It was just strictly school. Now it's easier to get off task 'cause aint nobody setting no good examples or nothing. You got a lot of people doing the wrong stuff. My grades used to be all A's and B's and straight S's. When I got to middle school, I got a couple of C's here and there, but when I got to high school, I got my first D ever…my first D ever! I mean when you're in middle school you did a little partying, but high school that's when you start partying and experiencing a lot of new things like girls…heavy! A lot more distractions. I aint gone lie when I got to high school I was thinking more about what I could get into like playing ball with my boys and chillin', girls, hanging out… I really wasn't concentrating on my work.

I don't really make a lot of D's and F's, but when I do it might be on a test. If I make one it's 'cause I didn't prepare or pay attention. I have to like study now and pay attention. Before I never had to study. I just got good grades. But now you have to like at least study for while.

Even though James comes across as a confident young man who does not question his academic ability, he admits that the transition from middle to high school was rather difficult for him. Earlier in the interview he stated that he never had to study, but later in the interview he revealed that while he may not study a lot, he has to study a little in order to survive at the high school level.

Complacency

James felt really good about his academic performance at school. Even though he was not making the grades that he could have been making he was very confident with how others saw him. He felt like he was doing so much better than they were that he was somewhat of a role model. He was proud of his academic progress and thought his friends were proud of him also:

> Academic success…ummm that's hard. Let's see that means really holding it down in school and doing your thing. Like making A's and B's. I make A's, B's, and C's. If I studied more or applied myself I could make better grades, but I'm doing pretty good though.
>
> I don't have the type of friends that's like…okay like growing up I did get like with the wrong crowd. I aint gone lie. I have been with some hood kids…like some street kids but they have never judged me. When I was growing up I was not like your D's and F type of student. They knew I was always making A's and B's. They were like "dang boy your grades are good." They were like "that's what's up." Just cause they couldn't do it, they never got mad at me 'cause I did it. I don't have those kind a friends. If anything they are proud of me.
>
> I have…I'm well known at school. My mom works there in the office, and I play basketball. I guess that's why I'm so popular. I have lots of friends. I have a set of friends who make A's and B's and another set who makes straight F's. I don't just

hang with one group. I'm not judgmental like that, and my friends would never judge me for making good grades.

He named a few African American males who were doing fairly well in school, making grades similar to his. However, he could not name any who were extremely academically competitive. This is how he described the African American boys who were doing well in school:

> They have the type of reputation that they are the type of boys you want to hang with. They don't get into trouble. Nobody calls them lame or anything. These are boys on the basketball team…role models.

James never really came out and said the teachers did not care about the students; however, he did express their inability to assign homework or to offer much if any assistance with course selection. He revealed that he relied heavily on his mother for academic guidance:

> Since I've been at E. K. Mills High School I haven't had any homework. This is my senior year, and I can't recall having any or much homework. If I have, I can do it in the morning. I don't know if it's because I'm that smart or what, but my teachers just don't give homework. I haven't had too much homework.

> I didn't get any help from my teachers in choosing my classes. My mom helped me pick my classes. She told me the honors courses would look better on my transcript for college, plus they were weighted.

If I could change one thing about school I would hold a meeting with some of the

teachers and try to change their attitudes toward the students because some of

teachers rub off bad on the students before they get to know them. I would make sure

that they made sure all of their students in that school are making good grades or at

least putting forth the best effort. Even if you like have study groups in between

time…between classes…it's okay because some people don't know how to study or

go home to a messed up home. So have like a study group to like help people out…to

push them to the best of their ability.

James appeared to be somewhat frustrated at this point in the interview because the

more he talked the more he realized that there was a lack of support at the high school level.

He even began to blame the teachers and their attitudes for the students' lack of success.

Case #2: Will

Will is an 18 year old senior at E. K. Mills High School and has attended Bandby

County Schools since kindergarten as well. He appears to be rather quiet and reserved;

however, he is quite the opposite. Will is known for being the life of the party and the class

jokester. Will is popular and well liked by his peers. Although he is not very active in sports

or extracurricular activities, he is especially known for his "swagger" and his fashion sense.

Will is a fashion trend setter at the E. K. Mills High School. Initially Will did not elaborate

on his responses, and the questions had to be reworded and repeated in order to get him to

give more. He appeared nervous at the beginning of the interview and fumbled with his

hands. However, he loosened up toward the middle of the interview, and his true personality

began to show. Will was interviewed at the local library after school one day since he does not participate in sports.

Study Habits

Will had always earned good grades in elementary and middle school primarily because he had so many family members encouraging him and demanding that he do well in school. His mother who was a young single parent had the support of a very large family of women with dominant personalities. They all took a part in raising him. His mother was very active in the schools. She worked as a substitute teacher in Bandby County Schools and made certain she stayed abreast of what was going on in the schools. She also surrounded Will with academically successful students and kept him active. Will, however, did have to work a little more than just average to earn the grades he earned in elementary and middle school. He was quite the class clown and enjoyed making his classmates laugh. The teachers would contact his mother often.

> Well I had a lot of maturing to do. I mean… when I first got to high school, I kinda got in trouble a lot for cuttin' up in class and making people laugh. We used to pick on the Biology teacher so bad, man, I think he got fired or something 'cause that joker didn't come back the next semester. I feel bad about it now, and I'm trying to get back on track. I'm making B's and C's now.

Will who was not quite as talkative as James, also admitted to not studying often. He felt that studying one hour a day was a sufficient amount of time; however, he did not always commit to one hour a day.

I mean I do slight studying. If I'm partnering up with somebody in class I'll study with them. If we got a test like on a Friday, I might study like two times that week. But I aint gone lie bout like a hour a day. Well a hour a day two days a week maybe. As far as me studying a hour a day, I think that's enough maybe a little bit more, but not two days a week.

He did not appear confident in his answer. Therefore, I was not convinced that Will studied two days a week. Regardless, he admitted that he did not as often as he should, which explained why he had not performed as well as he could in school. The lack of studying at the high school level also contributed to his difficult transition to high school.

Transition to High School

Since entering high school Will has lost contact with some of the family members who were dominant figures in his life. Two of his family members have passed and others have aged and are not as active as they once were. The rigor of high school proved to be a bit challenging for Will as well. Will has failed Spanish I and Spanish II. Therefore, he will graduate in the Spring, but he will only receive a "minimum course completion" diploma. He must attend community college or complete an on-line course in order to get a diploma

that meets the state of North Carolina high school standards. Will reflected back on his school career and revealed that things used to be much easier:

> The work in elementary and middle school was easy. I understood most teachers' techniques or teaching. I made straight A's and B's. Now it's a different environment with harder work. I used to like understand the teachers' techniques. Now the teachers try to switch it up and do stuff more advanced and lose half the people in the class. My grades dropped. I make A's, B's, C's, and maybe a D on progress reports, but I pull it up 'cause they let us re-test or redo the work.

> I was immature when I first got to high school. I matured my junior and senior years. Like no horse playing or talking back to the teacher. I have to pay attention in class now and study a little each day. My grades could be better if I studied more 'cause I don't like it when I make D's and F's. It means like I didn't know the work, but I usually go back and take it over, make it up, or try again.

Will, like many of the other high school students who take advantage of the retest policy, know before taking the tests that he has studied insufficiently. However, they take it knowing they can retest. Generally when the students retake tests or quizzes the teachers give partial credit, which means they will earn a C, and the students are content with that grade.

Complacency

Will is a senior in a junior homeroom and needs to pass all of his subjects this semester in order to receive a minimum credit diploma and march on graduation day with his classmates. Because of his academic situation Will will settle for any passing grade that he can get. He admitted to doing this to himself by getting off to a bad start. Will stated that he and many of his classmates played in class so badly that they caused one teacher to resign. Many of the students in that class were also African American males who did not take the class seriously. Will could not give the names of any African American males at the high school who were doing exceedingly well academically:

> I know like five or maybe seven Black guys in my class…it's not in the double digits…who are doing well in the senior class. I don't know any in the other classes. If they are doing well, I think students describe them as people who are going somewhere with their life…on the right track. The people I hang with don't call them lame or pick on them.

Although Will felt like the teachers did not offer much support to the students at the school, surprisingly he did not speak negatively about any of them:

> We don't have…like most teachers don't assign homework like that anymore. I didn't get any help from my teachers in picking my classes. Actually I didn't get much help at all 'cause there are very few counselors, and they couldn't get to all of us. I got help from my mama and older friends.

I have a good relationship with my teachers. If I don't do well in class or my grades like start slipping, they like pull me to the side and ask me what's going on and if I need any help. Oh now if I don't do what I'm supposed to do, they email my mama *(laughter)* cause she told them to let her know what's going on. Man she is always in touch with my teachers. One thing I would change about school is more teachers. Like more teachers because the classes are crowded. Most of the kids are not getting the work because they don't get the attention they need, and the teachers like my Biology teacher can't control the classes.

Will defined academic success as making A's, B's, and C's; however, he has not been earning those grades. Yet he seems to be content with his situation. After all he will be graduating in June. He is not certain what he really wants to do after he graduates from high school. Although he says he has thought about going to college, he has not completed any college applications.

Case #3: Chuck

Chuck is a 16 year old junior at E. K. Mills High School who lives with his mother, father, and younger brother. He too has attended Bandby County Schools since kindergarten; however, he attended one of the smaller schools further out in the county with less than 250 students in grades PreK through 5. Therefore, he appears to be somewhat introverted and is not well known by his peers who attended the larger schools within the city limits prior to coming to the high school. He does not play sports or participate in extracurricular activities; however, he has a small cluster of close friends and has a very positive opinion of himself

and school. He admits "I was scared at first when I came to middle school because it was so many people. I made my first bad grades in middle school about the 6th grade until I got use to what was going on. Man I thought my daddy was gone kill me. But I got it together . Then I hit high school….Umph!" Chuck was extremely nervous and very serious during the interview.

Study Habits

When asked why he was not performing in high school as well as he had performed in elementary and middle school, he responded:

Not studying…The work is real hard now and sometimes I don't understand. I didn't care at first. I mean I cared, but I'm more focused now. I gotta graduate. I wanna go to the Navy like my brother and my daddy, and they told me I got to pass the ASVAB. They say it's hard. I don't want to be stuck here and can't get no job. But I guess *(chuckle)* I got to start studying. I prepare for my tests and quizzes like by looking at my notes. I study almost like every two days, yeah every two days. My grades are like they are because I don't study. I need to study more.

Chuck, similar to all of the other participants, does not know how to study. Studying is a complex process that is comprised of multiple components. Not all students need all components. Many students do not even realize what components they need and master the art of studying until late in their high school years or once they reach college (Fry, 2012).

Transition to High School

Chuck lives out in the county approximately 20 miles from E.K. Mills High School. He attended a PK - 5 elementary school that consisted of less than 250 students. There were so few students at each grade level that many of his classes were combination classes of more than one grade level. All of the teachers knew all of the students and their families. The small class size afforded Chuck the opportunity to receive much needed one-on-one and small group instruction. This played a major role in his academic success at the elementary level. Chuck relished in the memories of elementary and middle school:

Elementary school was very easy for me. It was small; not a lot of people, but middle school was different. It changed. It was bigger…a whole lot more people! My grades started going down. I made A's, B's, and C's in elementary. But in middle school I started to make C's and D's.

When Chuck started to attend high school he admits to being terrified because he remembered what the transition was like from a small elementary school to middle school. However, the transition was not as difficult as he thought it would be. This is how he described his transition to high school:

In high school my A's and B's are slowly coming back. When I first got to high school I made C's and D's. Now during my junior year my grades are going back up. I feel more confident. Like I know what I'm doing. When I came to high school I had a lack of focus. I never understood how to study or that I had to study. Now I

know I have to study if I want to pass. I wish they had more tutoring classes so

students like me can go in and get some help.

Based on the participants' responses it is evident that tutoring sessions at the high

school level are greatly needed particularly for students like Chuck who come from

extremely small community schools. The high school curriculum has proven to be more

rigorous than the middle school curriculum. Without the extra help with the class work

Chuck is forced to do the best he can with studying, which often resembles complacency.

Complacency

Although Chuck admitted that his grades were lower than they should be because he

was not studying enough, he did not feel that his friends would think any differently about

him if his grades improved. Therefore, fear of being rejected by his friends was not a reason

for his lack of performance. When asked what he thought his friends might say if he

improved his grades in school, he replied:

> It wouldn't matter to my friends if I changed or improved my grades. They probably
>
> would ask me if I could help them. I don't know any African American males at my
>
> school who are doing really good in school…ungt, ungt…nope…no really smart
>
> ones. I guess people would say they were doing what they were supposed to do.
>
> Most of my friends make B's and C's… about the same range as me. Academic
>
> success is making A's and B's and doing something with your life after you graduate.
>
> I could study more…a whole lot more (giggle).

Like many of the other participants in the study Chuck did not feel that the teachers offered much help in selecting classes or encouraging the students, particularly African American males, to register for advanced or honors classes. This is what Chuck had to say about the teachers:

> Barely…teachers barely assign homework or individual assignments. I can talk to my teachers. We cool. They pull me aside when I start slipping and ask me if I'm okay and everything or if I need help. They could give me like some practice…like more homework. Naw…none…no assistance with picking my classes. I had family members to make suggestions. They asked me what did I want to do after high school, and told me to take classes that I could use after high school.

If Chuck could change one thing about his high school he "would provide more help for anybody that needs it during the school day 'cause everybody can't stay after school." Chuck's parents work, and since he relies on the bus to get home, transportation is an issue for him. At times he needs the extra help, but this support is not embedded in the school day. The next participant, Carl, also expresses his concern about the difficulty of the high school curriculum and his lack of proper study skills.

Case #4: Carl

Carl is a 17 year old junior who attends E. K. Mills High Schools. Like the other participants, he too has attended school in Bandby County his entire school career. He lives with his mother and younger sister next door to his grandmother and two aunts. The family

is very close, and they all take part in helping to raise him. His mother and father separated three years ago. Fortunately, the separation did not impact him negatively in school or other areas. Carl does not participate in any extracurricular activities at school. He spends his spare time working part-time at a local grocery store and is very mature and independent for his age. He is small in stature and terribly shy [around adults], but he is quite popular among his peers. During the interview he was extremely nervous. Carl smiled the entire time and asked for a few questions to be repeated. He defined academic success as "making B's and C's." When asked about A's, he responded, "they're too hard to get. That's too much work. The work is too hard *(laughter)."* After high school he would like to attend college or get a good paying job.

Study Habits

When asked about his school performance and why he is not performing as well as he could or should be performing, he replied:

> Man this stuff is hard now. It's crazy. I could study more than just 30 minutes before the tests. It use to be real easy. I didn't never study before high school. Most of it is the teachers. They can't teach *(laughter as he covers his face).* God it's so boring. You can't understand them 'cause you get lost 'cause you can't pay attention. Man the teachers don't even try to make it interesting! I mean I be trying but I don't know. And my mama she be trippin'. So I aint got no choice. Plus I want a good job. I study like right before I go into "that" class…'bout 30 minutes before I go in to take the test. Yeah, I probably would do better if I studied longer.

Carl's response, almost identical to that of Chuck and Will, validates that the participants' academic performance has declined in high school because they do not know how to study and do not spend enough time studying. In the next section Carl admits that not studying sufficiently has been the root cause for the difficult transition to high school.

Transition to High School

Similar to Will, Carl is being raised by a single parent, his mother, who has had the support of four sisters and a mother who helped rear Carl. Carl, his mother, and his sister live next door to his maternal grandmother and two aunts. They have been very active in his school career and have had high expectations of him. Prior to high school he enjoyed pleasing them because they would reward him by giving him money and praise. Although they continue to have high expectations of him, and he is a fine young man who respects them and stays out of trouble, he admits that high school is different:

Easy. Elementary and middle school were easy for me. The work was real easy. I made A's, B's, and C's. I made my first low grade in high school in the 9th grade. I thought my mama was going to kill me. School is hard now. The work is hard. It's hard to get A's. Naw you don't get them anymore. I have started caring more about my grades and school since my 9th grade. I think I've matured since the 9th grade. I don't study like I should but man the work is so hard. I don't know if I really studied if it would make that much difference. I try to pay attention but they just be going so fast *(giggle).* Sometimes I drift off and like don't be paying attention. Like in

Spanish II, I don't know what that woman be saying. I think they need more tutoring after school at the high school level.

At this point in the interview I felt that Carl was choosing not to study because he had given up on making A's in high school. He was content with C's and was concerned with getting out of high school.

Complacency

Early in the interview Carl admitted that his goal after high school was to get a good paying job or go to college. He really has made no plans to attend any particular college and revealed that he does not aim for A's anymore because they were too hard to get. When asked about his grades and African American male academic performance at E. K. Mills, this is what he had to say:

Academic success at the high school level is B's and C's. Those A's are gone. It's too hard to get A's now. Naw…you don't get the A's now. Even if I did study more, man…I still wouldn't get A's.

I don't really talk to my friends about my grades. I don't know too many if any Black boys who are doing really well in school now. It used to be a lot when we was young. Most of them are doing 'bout like I'm doing. Well it's a couple of nerds out there. Yeah…I call them nerds. They are not lame. They are just nerds. That's how people describe them. It's not a bad thing. They are just smart nerds.

Carl gave the impression that he did not like for teachers to push him too much even if it meant he would do better in school. He was content with the teachers not assigning homework and basically leaving him alone. This is what Carl said about the teachers:

The teachers don't assign homework like that. Well, in Spanish they do. That's like the only class though. We have homework every night in that class. She's a new young teacher. When I slip up they email my mother. I like the teachers who don't push me. Those teachers who push you like Mrs. Smith, she be snappin' sometimes. It's a little too much. My teachers could give more work and push me a little more. Just a little.

A person came into our homerooms and helped us with picking our classes, but my teachers have never helped me with my classes. It was like the guidance counselor or an advisor who helped me with my classes. I think the teachers need to change. They are so boring.

Similar to James, Carl blamed the teachers at his high school for the lack of performance of the students because of their teaching styles and unwillingness to engage the students. The next participant, Taylor, shares some of the same sentiments.

Case #5: Taylor

Taylor is a 16 year old junior at E. K. Mills High school. Taylor is extremely popular in school. Taylor has been voted by his classmates to be on the school's homecoming court since 9th grade. He is very athletic and participates in soccer, basketball, and track. Taylor

lives with his father and his mother, who is a Principal in Bandby County Schools. Until

very recently his older brother whom he idolized lived with them. He admits that his brother

leaving for college during his 10th grade year had a major impact on him. He became very

depressed and felt lost because his brother was his best friend and his "road dog" on the

weekends. His brother's friends, most of whom were seniors, were his friends. Therefore,

when they all graduated he had to readjust and find a new set of friends. He says, "I tried to

be hard and act like I didn't care. Then I talked smack to the coach one day at practice

'cause I saw how he treated my brother and the other players when they played and he won't

gone do that to me. Any way I got put off the team. I wanted to die. Sports was everything

to me. Me and my brother been playing sports since we was four. When I got kicked off the

team, I let my grades drop. I just didn't care no more."

Study Habits

Taylor stressed often during his interview how dominant and demanding his parents

were. He actually admitted a few times during the interview sometimes the expectations that

his parents and his teachers placed on him were too much. Taylor seemed to be rebelling

against the expectations that people have of him. He does not like being "the principal's"

child. When asked specifically why he was not performing as well in high school as he did

in elementary and middle school, he replied:

> I don't know…man everybody expects so much out of me. They just don't know
>
> how hard it is to be me. I just want to be like all of the other students. Everybody is
>
> watching Taylor like I got to be perfect. 'Cause they know my mama gone snap.

Man everything I do they go tell my mama. That's so embarrassing 'cause they say stuff like, 'We'll see what happens when your mother finds out,' or 'Do I need to call your mama?' in front of the whole class. Man…. that stuff is so embarrassing. I just got tired and that work is hard! Y'all just don't understand. And then them teachers be going so fast.

See my mama she works for the school system. She a Principal, and she be knowing everything about my grades and what I be doing in class and all. See we got this computer program in our school system called Parent Assist where like your parents can go in and check your grades. My mama be on that thing it seem like everyday! Before I get in the car good she be on my back about me studying. She email my teachers and they tell her when I have tests and quizzes. She make me come down stairs and study at the kitchen table. I aint gone lie. If she didn't make me study, I probably wouldn't study for my tests and quizzes. But for real though, sometimes I be forgetting I got a test or a quiz until she remind me. Man she be snappin' and going off, 'cause the only time I study is before a test or a quiz for bout a hour. My grades look real bad this year 'cause I could be doing better.

Although Taylor's mother was extremely involved in his academics and placed high expectations on him, he still struggled at the high school level. Even the support from home was not enough to ease the transition from middle school to high school.

Transition to High School

Taylor like all of the other participants in the study did exceedingly well in elementary and middle school. However, Taylor revealed that his struggles started as early as 4th grade with Math. Each year since 4th grade he has struggled with passing the Math End-of-Grade (EOG) and End-of-Course (EOC) tests. Consequently, since entering high school the curriculum has gotten more rigorous and is difficult for him. This is how he described his school transition:

> Elementary school was easy for me. I always made the honor roll and got these little Terrific Kids awards for good grades and good behavior. My brother would get mad 'cause he couldn't never get the Terrific Kid award. I thought I was all smart and bad going to the little AG classes with all the White kids and stuff. The teachers thought I was so sweet and cute. I didn't like to get into trouble. I would cry if I did. Now when I got to middle school, I gotta be honest, that Math won't no joke! I got my first C in 7th grade. Then I got back on track by the 8th grade. That mama of mine won't no joke when it came to grades, and don't say nothing bout Pops.
>
> When I got to high school boy, boy, boy… They put me in Honors English. Those kids in there were talking like college kids. I knew I was in the wrong class, but my mama would not let me get out. I mean I got a C and all, but that class was hard. Then things started to go downhill. I got my first D. I was scared to go home. I had to retake my Biology EOC and barely passed. High school is hard. We don't have homework, but you supposed to study. I don't have nothing to study. How you gone

study? In middle school we had homework. You did the little worksheets or math

problems…sometimes read and answer questions. In high school I just study right

before a test. My grades have dropped way off. It's just too much work to get them

good grades. We got sports, games, and practice.

After this response I questioned whether sports, the games and the practices, were

responsible for Taylor's decline in school performance because he mentioned that he had

been playing sports since elementary school. Obviously he had played sports in middle

school and managed to maintain good grades. There had to be another reason for the decline

in his grades. In the next section he reveals that he wanted to be like all of the other males in

the building.

Complacency

Although Taylor does not feel that his friends would pick on him for doing well in

school, he admitted that he no longer wants the reputation of being a good student. When he

was younger his mother made them do their homework every evening and go to church every

Sunday. They sang in the Youth Choir and served as ushers. His classmates saw him as the

good little boy who never got into trouble. This is what Taylor had to say about academic

success:

I don't think it would matter to my friends if I started doing real good in school

'cause I used to make real good grades any way, but I don't really want to do too

good. Then I look like a little nerd. I would look real soft. See it's hard being me.

My mama is a Principal in the school system. She used to work at a high school and a middle school where she took care of the kids who got into trouble. Kids use to talk about how hard she was. Then my daddy works for the prison system. Man, all I use to hear was "Taylor you scared to do anything. Yo mama and daddy gone kill you. They got you on lock. Don't show off. You know yo mama gone come up here." I got tired a being a little goody goody. Plus she use to make us go to church and sing in the choir and usher.

Naw…I don't know too many Black guys that are doing real good in school. I know some who might be making B's, C's, and D's 'cause they don't feel like doing all that work and they don't want to look too soft.   Yeah…everybody think academic success is making A's and B's, but when you get to high school that stuff change. It's hard to make those A's. I guess I could do better if I studied more, but I'm just saying.

Taylor appears to be doing as well as he is doing in school because his parents demand that he pass his subjects, and his mother is in constant contact with his teachers. Taylor has rebelled against school and struggles with the fact that his parents are so persistent and domineering. This is what he had to say about the teachers at E. K. Mills:

I don't ever have homework. My mama she still be trying to make me study. She go on Parent Assist and be emailing my teachers to see what I'm suppose to be doing or what I'm not doing. I didn't get much help from my teachers about what classes to take. My mama and daddy's friends at my school told my mama and them what I

needed to take. That's how I knew what to take. Man I'm telling you them teachers don't care. If my mama did not email them all the time, they would just leave me alone. Well I kinda like the teachers who push me to do more 'cause then I do better in school. I hate to say it but it seem like the Black teachers are the ones who care. They make you do yo work and be snappin' and going off when you don't do it. Like this one teacher…she didn't play. Because of her I passed Math though. I had one…naw, two Black teachers since I've been here at Mills High School, and both of them made me work. I didn't play around in those classes. They would embarrass you in a minute and would call yo mama. Come to think of it, both of them are principals now.

If I could change high school I would have required tutoring for small groups. Man aint nobody going in for tutoring on they own. Do you know how much they gone get ragged on. Unngh unngh…that aint cool. See if it's required you can play it off 'cause everybody got to go. When I go to tutoring now, I go early in the morning so don't nobody see me. `

Taylor no longer wanted to be the smart kid that the teachers admired. All he wanted to do was fit in with the other boys in school. His entire school career he had been known as the teacher's son, the assistant principal's son, and now the principal's son. Alex, the next participant could relate to Taylor since his mother is an assistant principal.

Case #6: Alex

Alex is a 17 year old junior at E. K. Mills High School. His situation is a little different from the other research participants in that he lives in a neighboring county, but his parents drive him to school in Bandby County each day. Alex attended school in the county in which he resides until the 6th grade. His father, a social worker, and his mother, an Assistant Principal, felt that the schools in his county were substandard to Bandby County Schools and were becoming unsafe. Therefore, they chose to enroll him in Bandby County Schools in hopes that he would receive a better quality education.

Alex, a short (5'5"), overweight (230 lbs.) teenager who wears glasses is not involved in sports or extracurricular activities. During the interview he was surprisingly comical and rather entertaining. He admitted that he is somewhat the class clown. However, because he did not start in Bandby County Schools until middle school, is not active in extracurricular activities, and currently lives in another county, he is not well known by his peers, nor does he know very many of his schoolmates. He was relaxed and answered the questions with ease often showing his sense of humor. When asked if he could change one thing about school what it would be, his response was:

> Go to school on Monday and that's it. Don't go the rest of the week. No tests. No homework. You do the work on your own. I would be real motivated to do the work because I know I would only have to go that one day. Now dat's what I'm talking 'bout. One day a week. Yeah that would solve everything *(laughter).*

After this response Alex's sense of humor was glaringly clear. However, he did point out that he used his sense of humor to mask his true feelings about his lack of study skills and difficulty transitioning from middle school.

Study Habits

Alex, like several of the other participants, has strong parents who value education and place high demands on him. Alex admitted to studying primarily because his parents insist that he does and will place him on punishment if he does not do well. This is how Alex described how he feels about studying:

> When I'm really trying to do good I might like study one hour every night. That's like when I'm trying to pull my grades up and get off punishment *(giggle).* But usually I don't do all that studying. Man they tell us we aint got no homework…just look over your notes. Now how many high school students you know gone pull out their notes every evening when we aint got no homework? Me…I mostly study when I know we got a test or something. I got to admit though, that be a whole lot of material. I guess I would do better if I studied more.

Like all of the other participants Alex did not spend enough time studying; therefore, he experienced quite of bit of difficulty once he reached high school. Alex and Will both tried to use humor to hiding their struggles with the transition.

Transition to High School

Alex is a rather comical young man and can find humor in everything. However, he admitted that upon entering high school, it became difficult for him. He revealed that he tried to "play it off" like it did not matter, but it really frightened him. Alex humorously described his transition to high school as serious:

> When I got to high school the work got real hard. See this thing got serious. I was like "What the world?" But then I tried to play it off like it didn't matter. I used to make people laugh in class. My grades just got worse and worse. My mama and daddy started putting me on punishment, and I was like "Oh well." See they don't understand this stuff is hard. I know if I study more my grades would probably go up, but it's hard to explain. If I don't have homework, what do I study? I mean I can look at my notes, but what am I looking for? Now that I'm in my junior year I try a little more and I'm a little more focused 'cause man I got to graduate. If I can make it through this year, I might have it made.

It was really difficult to read Alex. He joked so much I could not really tell if he was truly concerned about his grades or not. I felt that he and Taylor both were simply trying to graduate to appease their parents. Both participants mentioned that they wanted to go to the military. Neither of them had a desire to go to college.

Complacency

Alex could do much better in school. He revealed during the interview that he could do much better in school. Alex seemed to think that academic success is not for everyone. He is content with just passing his classes and doing what the other students are doing. This is what he had to say about his performance as well as other African American males' performance in school:

> If I started doing better in school my friends would feel the same about me. They wouldn't talk about me. Now some people might call me lame or nerd *(shrug)*, but I don't care. I don't know of any Black guys doing real good in school…none in particular. If it was I think people would say they were successful…going to be successful in life…like they gone blow up later on.

> Academic success…yeah, that' A's and B's. But it could be B's, C's, and D's depending on what you want to do later on. 'Cause everybody aint going to college. I want to go to the military. Most of my friends make C's and D's.

> Alex described his relationship with his teachers as "good." However, they do not give much homework. He even admitted that the teachers did not care if the students learned or not. This is what Alex had to say about the teachers:

> I don't have homework really. Maybe in Math and English. No homework in other classes. We can't even bring our text books home.

I get along pretty good with my teachers. If I go to them for help, they'll help me. If I stopped trying or didn't put forth the effort in class, really they don't pay attention to you. They keep teaching to the other kids. They just ignore you. See my mama is an Assistant Principal and you know how they are. They got to always be calling and emailing the teachers. The teacher might try to say something to you if they think your mama is coming up there or gone be on their back, but they really don't care if you get it or not. My teachers did not help me pick my classes. My mom, dad, and my older sister helped me pick my classes. I told you they don't care. For real though, they need more tutoring days. Oh and rewards for students. I feel like if the teachers tutored and gave rewards I would work harder.

While Alex was actually joking about doing better in school if he could be rewarded, Peterson and Deal (1998) argue that when rewarding students on a regular basis in built into the culture of the school, students tend to do better in school. African American males who attend schools with a positive school cultures that promote and reward academic success do much better because they view success as the expectation, not the exception.

Themes

During careful study and analysis of the interview transcripts, observation protocol and notes maintained by the researcher, and documents, three dominant themes emerged:

1. Poor study habits
2. Difficulty with the transition from middle school to high school

3. A culture of complacency

Poor Study Habits

The research question guiding this study was: What are the perceptions of underachieving high school African American male students of the factors contributing to their underperformance? Some of the interview questions that examined the participants' study habits as a possible factor were: How often do you study? The follow-up question was: Tell me why you think that is enough time or not enough time for studying. After conducting the interviews it was apparent that all of the participants in the study revealed that the lack of studying contributed to their underperformance in school. Most reported that homework was not assigned on a regular basis and that they rarely studied unless they had a test. All of the participants also felt that the amount of time obligated to studying was not sufficient.

Difficulty Transitioning from Middle School to High School

The participants in the study shared that they were academically successful in elementary and middle school. While they were honored for making the A/B honor roll and demonstrating good behavior, they all experienced some grade slippage in middle school. Most of them admitted to making their first C in middle school, and at some point getting mixed up with "the wrong crowd." Nevertheless, all of the participants were really proud of their accomplishments early in their school careers and raved about how they never had to study. They felt like the work in elementary and middle school was easy. However, they soon realized that the rigor of the high school curriculum proved to be quite difficult.

The guiding questions that led to this theme were as follows: What was school like for you in elementary and middle school? How has school changed for you? What do you think it would take for your grades to improve?

Culture of Complacency

One of the most interesting findings of the study was an attitude of complacency amongst the research participants and a culture of complacency at the school. For the purposes of this study complacency means a sense of contentment and satisfaction with the current status of affairs. All of the young men clearly defined academic success as making A's and B's in school and not having any discipline problems. While they all experienced academic success in elementary and middle school to varying degrees and admitted to feeling "good" when they made A's and B's in high school, they appeared to be content with making the grades that they currently make. They admit to not studying often enough, and they feel that if they did study more, their grades would improve. Also they do not think they would be judged critically by their peers if they did improve their grades in high school. Obviously, they feel content with what they are doing. Most of their friends make grades that are similar to theirs, and they cannot identify any African American male students at their school who are doing exceptionally well academically.

Surprisingly, they feel that their teachers genuinely care about them and want them to learn. However, the teachers do not push them to do more. If the students start to slip academically in their classes the participants said the teachers do pull them aside and ask if there is a problem. If the parents have communicated with the teacher that they wish to be

notified when the student gets off track, the teacher may notify the parents. Otherwise, the

teachers do not take it upon themselves to call parents. They allow the students to make

failing grades. The parents find out when or if the pick up report cards, which is after the

fact and too late for the parents to do amend the situation.

Summary Finding 1: Poor Study Habits

There were seven questions that were asked of the participants during the interview

that directly targeted study habits and the correlation to grades. The questions were as

follows: Describe how you feel when you receive A's and B's on assignments., How do you

feel when you make D's or F's?, Tell me how you prepare for tests or quizzes., How often do

you study?, Tell me why you think that is enough time or not enough time for studying.,

What do you think it would take for your grades to improve?, and how often do your teachers

assign homework or individual assignments?

The study revealed that the participants were not studying each night. They studied

primarily if they had a quiz or a test the next day, and that was only for a short period of

time. As James so eloquently put it:

> "Like I have a good memory. I mean I don't……to be honest I don't even have to
>
> study. Well I'm not gone say I don't have to study, but I've never had to study. It's
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> like everything locks in my head once we're doing it in class. I've been doing okay
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> with that. I've been doing really well with that. I don't do too much studying, but

when I study I make sure I study good. It's like three times a week for like 30 minutes maybe."

After careful examination of the interviews it became evident that here were two main reasons why these young men did not study. The first reason why they did not study is that they do not know how to study. Based on Alex's question, it is evident that these young men don't know how to study. "If I don't have homework, what do I study? I mean I can look at my notes, but what am I looking for?" Studying is not a skill that is taught in elementary or middle school, and high school teachers assume that the students know how to study prior to reaching high school. Fry (2012) describes studying as such a complex activity that the average teacher does not attempt to teach study skills because there are so many components to studying. Each skill serves a different function, and not all students need all skills. Some skills may work for some students and not work for others. It just depends on the student's learning style. Therefore, most teachers never attempt to teach study skills. They allow the students to figure it out for themselves. There are some students who are smart enough to create system that works for them. However, these young men revealed that when they studied they "looked over" their notes for about 30 minutes to an hour, and this strategy is not working for them.

Another reason these young men do not study is because they did not know they needed to study. Evidence of this is James saying, "I never had to study." He did not realize that homework is a form of studying. However, the participants said they rarely ever have homework assigned to them. One of the participants implied that when the teachers tell them

they have no homework, that means no homework. He does not study because he sees no reason to study when there is no quiz or test. The participants admitted that they had homework in middle school. Having homework forced them to look at the material again that evening. Homework is a method of studying. It is a form of practice. Homework and practice are related, connected by the context when students are learning on their own and applying new knowledge (Bempechat, 2004). Effective teachers approach this kind of learning experience as any other—matching the planned activity to the learning goal. Research on homework indicates that it should be approached not as an afterthought to the school day, but as a focused strategy for increasing understanding

According to Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001) practice means students are engaged in applying new learning, often repeatedly. The goal of practice is for students to get as close to mastery as possible. Homework assignments provide the time and experience students need to develop study habits that support learning. They experience the results of their effort as well as the ability to cope with mistakes and difficulty (Bempechat, 2004). Mastery requires focused practice over days or weeks. After only four practice sessions students reach a halfway point to mastery. It takes more than 24 more practice sessions before students reach 80 percent mastery. And this practice must occur over a span of days or weeks, and cannot be rushed (Marzano et. al., 2001).

In elementary and middle school the participants did their homework and the parents made sure the homework was done. This kept them focused on what they covered that day in class. As high school students they are seeing the information for the first time in class.

They never see it again until test or quiz time. They are not able to recall the information

because they have been away from it for so long. Lack of studying on a regular basis was

definitely one of the factors that contributes to African American high school male

underachievement.

Summary Finding 2: Difficulty Transitioning from Middle School to High School

Some key interview questions that helped to identify the second theme, difficulty

transitioning from middle school to high school, were as follows: Tell me what it was like for

you in elementary and middle school. How has school changed for you? How do you feel

you have changed? How much assistance were you given in selecting your classes? and If

you could change school, what would you change about it?

All of the participants shared their stories of success in elementary school, making the

A/B honor roll, winning awards for good behavior, and easing through the curriculum.

Taylor, a junior, felt important because he was pulled to attend the advanced classes. He

stated during his interview, "Elementary school was easy for me. I always made the honor

roll and got these little Terrific Kids awards for good grades and good behavior. I thought I

was all smart and bad going to the little AG classes with all the White kids and stuff."

Some experienced minor setbacks in middle school; however, they were able to hold

it together and get back on track. Ironically, every participant referred to high school as

"hard." The work has gotten more difficult for them. Many of them experienced their first

low grade in high school. They shared that the curriculum moved so quickly that they had

difficulty keeping up in class. The participants pretended to understand and would not ask

for help in class because they did not want anyone to know that they needed help with their work. When asked what they would change about school, several of them answered they would provide more tutoring for students. The participants were admitting that they needed more support with academics. One participant, Taylor, stated that even if they had tutoring at the high school, students would be hesitant to go because they "would get ragged on so badly." Students would label them as slow. These young men who were seen as smart students in middle school and leaders in the high school cannot afford to be seen going to tutoring. Their whole image would be ruined. This support, however, is embedded the middle school concept. The middle school classes are set up into pods of students who have similar learning needs and characteristics. Therefore, the teacher moves along at a pace that is designed for the students in that class. Middle school also utilizes small group collaborative learning as one of their teaching strategies.

The most important function of middle schools is to address the developmental needs of the students, who are transitioning and have a set of needs different from elementary or high school students. Dickinson (2001) argues that the developmental needs of middle school students include intellectual, social, emotional, and physical aspects, and all must be addressed for optimal student learning and well-being. Thus, middle school philosophy can loosely be defined as intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development for students. This middle school philosophy has been shown to improve student performance and other areas when enacted successfully (Dickinson, 2001).

Generally, a team approach is used at the middle school. A team is a group of teachers who have the same group of students (100-120) every day. Their classrooms are

clustered together in the same wing of the building. The team consists of anywhere from two or four teachers. Together, teams teach science, language arts, social studies, and mathematics.

There are many advantages of being on a team. Classrooms which are contiguous make it easier for students to get back and forth to class on time, especially since lockers are located in the team area of the wing. Since team teachers have the same planning period, they are able to plan for curriculum integration, interdisciplinary units, field trips and special activities for their students. Communication and support among teachers is much greater with this approach. Parent conferences are made easier by the fact that all of a student's basic skills teachers are available at the same time of the day. Students also feel like they are part of a group when on a team. It creates a "school within a school." The team helps provide the child an atmosphere which is similar to that in his elementary school.

Middle school students go from the team concept where they are supported and nurtured to the high school environment where they are expected to function independently. The participants revealed that their teachers did not provide much assistance with selecting classes. They relied on family members or older friends to decide which classes to take. High school students are expected to move from class to class on their own in crowded halls of 1,200 students or more. Each teacher is concerned with his or her own curriculum and assigns work and tests that may conflict with other teachers' assignments and activities. The teachers do not call parents to set up conferences or to provide warnings unless the parents initiate the correspondence. As the Alex stated, "They expect the students to get it on their own."

Without the structures and support provided at the middle school level the African American male struggles once they reach high school. As James put it, "There are so many more distractions in high school…like girls, hanging with your boys, and partying." Taylor agreed, "See in middle school, you still walk in a line. You only have to deal with maybe like 100 students, and all of your teachers know you and are trying to help you succeed. Man in high school it's too many distractions…people everywhere, smoking, cussing…You on your own.

Summary Finding 3: Culture of Complacency

The most startling and disappointing finding in this study was a culture of complacency at E. K. Mills High School amongst the students and the faculty. The participants in the study had all experienced academic success prior to entering high school and defined academic success as making A's and B's. They all admitted to not liking it when they earned D's and F's. Therefore, one would think that the participants would continue down this path. On the contrary, none of them were willing to put forth the effort to make the grades that they had once made in elementary or middle school. It was not because they feared their peers would harass or taunt them if they did improve their grades. As a matter of fact, they thought their peers would be proud of them. Chuck stated, "I think they would be okay. They probably would come to me and be like can I help them." All of their friends earn grades similar to theirs, and they could not identify any African American males who were performing exceedingly well academically.

In addition, all of the participants shared that they had strong support from home. Many of their parents communicate with their teachers on a weekly basis and check their

performance daily on the web based data management system that the district has implemented. Each of the participants revealed that they received some type of punishment if they did not do well in school. Taylor even confessed, "I was scared to go home." Carl humorously admitted, "I thought my mama was gone kill me." Nevertheless, the participants continue to earn average grades, not the A's and B's that they are expected to make.

When the participants were younger they wanted to please their parents. Will stated it best when he said, "I thought I was doing something getting' my little certificates and posing for the camera. Everybody would make a big deal out of me." These young men are no longer concerned with pleasing their parents or their teachers. Kids who previously had been willing to conform to please their parents will suddenly begin asserting themselves — and their opinions — strongly and rebelling against parental control (Soetevent & Kooreman, 2012).

During my observations of the school I was shocked to find students with their heads on their desks. Some were texting on their cell phones. The teachers did not engage the students in the lessons. They lectured in monotone voices and interacted very little with students. The students looked off into space and only a few responded when the teacher asked questions. Alex stated in his interview, "The teachers don't care. If you go to sleep, they ignore you and keep teaching." During class change I smelled cigarette smoke when I passed the restrooms and the stale marijuana scent that lingered in the students' clothing as they herded through the crowded halls. The stench was overwhelming. Yet everyone walked along as if it were normal. The students wore their hoods and hats in the halls. Some

sported ear pods in their ears and bounced in rhythm to the music that was being emitted from their phones or iPods.

Some students moved aside as the Assistant Principal and I walked through the halls; however, there were several who did not move. One student accidently bumped the Assistant Principal and never said excuse me or acknowledged that he had bumped him. A student who bumped my shoulder apologized only after I raised my eyebrows and glared at him for a few seconds. It was then he realized I was his former principal. He apologized profusely and hugged me.

The student and teacher behavior as well as the expectations of both staff and students are indicators of the school culture. Culture is the stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals built up over time (Peterson & Deal, 1998). It is a set of tacit expectations and assumptions that direct the activities of school personnel and students. School culture is not a static entity. It is constantly being constructed and shaped through interactions with others and through reflections on life and the world in general (Finnan, 2000). School culture develops as staff members interact with each other, the students, and the community. It becomes the guide for behavior that is shared among members of the school at large. Culture is shaped by the interactions of the personnel, and the actions of the personnel become directed by culture.

Hollins (1996) argues that schools are shaped by cultural practices and values and reflect the norms of the society for which they have been developed. Societal values are a major component of school culture. The general ideologies of society at large and the communities surrounding individual schools become reflected in the culture of schooling.

The governance of schools also shapes culture (Hollins, 1996). The hierarchy of leadership at the state, district, and school levels creates the parameters within which cultures can be created. In other words, teachers are expected to follow the dictates of the principal and other administrators regardless of other cultural aspects of the school. Furthermore, students are expected to follow the dictates of teachers as well. This hierarchy contributes to the culture of schools regardless of individual teaching or leadership styles.

The culture of a school can be a positive influence on learning or it can seriously inhibit the functioning of the school. Hanson & Childs (1998) describe a school with a positive school climate as a place where students and teachers like to be. It is a place that has a climate of support and encouragement (Hanson & Childs, 1998).   After careful observation of the school and the information provided by the participants, I surmised that the culture of E. K. Mills High School was one of the mitigating factors prohibiting these young men from truly flourishing.

Another interesting discovery that was made after my first observation was the demographic breakdown of E. K. Mills High School. E. K. Mills is considered the primary campus and consists of approximately 900 students. Of the 900 students 65% of them are African American males. Less than 20% of the remaining students at E. K. Mills are White. All of the other students (approximately 300) are enrolled in the E. K. Mills School of Health and Life Sciences, which exists in the same building but housed in a different section of the building. The two schools have two different principals and do not share teachers or classes. The School of Health and Life Sciences consists of 70% White students, most of whom are college bound White females going into the Health profession. The teachers for this school

were highly recruited, and the atmosphere in that part of the build felt very different from the primary campus where the study was conducted.

The first two findings, poor study habits and difficulty transitioning from middle school to high school, are directly related to the school culture. Culture is the stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals built up over time (Peterson & Deal, 1998). It is a set of expectations and assumptions that direct the activities of school personnel and students.

Chapter Summary

After meticulous analysis of the interview transcripts, observations, and documents, three key themes were extrapolated from the data: poor study habits, difficulty with the transition from middle school to high school, and a culture of complacency. All of the participants admitted that while they do not have homework assigned to them on a regular basis, they do not put enough time into studying for their courses. Many of them actually stated or hinted to not knowing how to study since they have left middle school. In middle school homework was their way of studying. Now that they have reached high school they do not know how to prepare for class and crave tutorial sessions to fill that chasm.

The lack of structure at the high school and independence were revealed by all of the participants as well. Each of them smiled and reveled in the memories of the A/B honor roll and the many accolades bestowed upon them at the elementary and middle school level. Those memories no longer exist. They spoke openly about the difficulty of the high school courses. One would think that success in middle school would have prepared them for the

rigor of high school; apparently not. Each of these young men who once breezed through the middle school curriculum is struggling to get through the high school curriculum without the support of a team of caring teachers. Elementary and middle school may have been geared towards making the students feel good about themselves and gave them a sense of belonging to a team or a group. They also rewarded things that were not necessarily academic, but social. Hence, the good grades and awards may have been given for good behavior, for effort, and for extra credit. Some were honored for the way they looked or dressed and for their manners. These were behaviors that were important to parents and teachers. By their junior and senior years in high school, pleasing teachers and parents was no longer important to them. It was all about them and their success as an individual and what they thought was important whether they were prepared for the set curriculum or not.

The most intriguing finding was a culture of complacency for both students and staff at the high school. The participants in the study clearly felt confident that they could do much better academically. They even defined academic success as earning A's and B's and not having any discipline problems; however, they were not willing to work for those grades. Apparently, they were fine with this because all of their friends and peers earned similar grades. Ironically, there was no fear of being ridiculed for doing well in school. They simply felt that they were doing as well as they wanted to do in school despite the fact their parents constantly pushed them and demanded that they do better.

While the teachers sincerely cared for the students and wanted them to be successful in class, they did not push them to excel. Most of the teachers do not assign homework or much practice for the students. It is completely up to the students to push themselves.

Chapter five will discuss key findings, describe theoretical and practical implications, provide recommendations for practice and further inquiry, and draw conclusions for the study.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter highlights the major findings from this study on African American high school males' perception of factors contributing to their academic underachievement in a high school in a small town in the rural South. The chapter will also describe theoretical and practical implications of the study and will conclude with recommendations for practice and future research on the study of African American male students.

Review of the Purpose of the Study

African American males face social injustices that effectively undermine their potential, self-perception, and opportunity to achieve in academic settings (Whiting, 2009). African American males are over-represented in special education, under-represented in gifted education, over-represented among dropouts, and over-represented among students who are unmotivated and choose to disengage academically (Kafele, 2010; Schott Foundation, 2010; Smiley, 2011). The disproportionate failure of African American males in the educational system has a direct correlation for their over-representation in the criminal justice system and high unemployment rate (Kafele, 2010; Smiley, 2011). African American males make up approximately 8.6 percent of K – 12 public school enrollment in the United States; however, they represent roughly 60 percent of all incarcerated youth (Smith, 2005).

After examining the dismal statistics one can see that there is obviously a major problem with the social and educational status of the African American male in our country. Even more disturbing is the underachievement of the African American male who has the

potential to do so much more. The purpose of this study was to identify some factors that contribute to the underachievement of high school African American males who have not had to experience the multiple contexts such as insufficiencies in school resources, inadequacy of school programming, family and community socioeconomic circumstances, and learner characteristics, which often mitigate academic success. Instead, these students have demonstrated academic success prior to entering high school and have necessary supports in place. Based on the research, these young men should have positive perceptions of their academic ability due to their experiences with school success. Focusing on African American males who possess the qualities and resources to be successful, yet underachieve, helped shed some light on their experiences with school and why they are not working to their full potential.

The primary research question was: What are the perceptions of underachieving high school African American male students of the factors contributing to their underperformance? I specifically used instrumental case study to focus on one issue (African American male underachievement) set in one bounded case, a single high school in a single school district (Creswell, 2007). Conducting an instrumental case study afforded me the opportunity to focus on a specific issue rather than the case itself. Given purpose of the study, instrumental case research allowed me to concentrate on the phenomenon, underperforming African American males, by discerning the perceptions of those who were experiencing the phenomenon first handedly. I was then able to identify tangible factors that contribute to African American male underachievement.

I focused on six African American males in grades 11 and 12 in an average sized high school of approximately 1,200 students in a small town in the rural South. To hear their stories and to understand their perceptions I interviewed the participants individually using a semi-structured interview format. I also conducted two observations of the high school that they attend. One observation occurred before the interview and the other took place after the interviews so that I could view the school from their perspective during the second interview. I observed the students changing classes and moving through the halls as well as them interacting with each other during lunch time in the cafeteria. I also observed both students and teachers in some of the classes. Open coding was used to analyze the data and to extrapolate themes related to the research questions.

The results of this study revealed factors that contribute to the underachievement of African American male high school juniors and seniors as perceived by them. Hearing their responses will help educators and community leaders see what we are doing at the high school level that impedes the success of our African American males and warrants refinement or removal.

Negative Stereotypes

The scope of this study was situated within the conceptual framework of Steele's (1997) stereotype threat model – the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype. Claude Steele's stereotype threat hypothesis posits that when there are negative stereotypes about the intellectual capacity of certain stigmatized groups, members of the group suffer

aversive consequences (Osborne & Walker, 2006). Group members who are most strongly identified with the stigmatized domain in question (e.g., intellectual or academic ability) are most likely to suffer the effects of stereotype threat (Osborne & Walker, 2006). This model argues that socio-cultural factors negatively influence minority students' ability to remain interested in academics. According to this theory, negative stereotypes associated with the ethnicity cause students of color to underachieve academically because of the fear of predicted failure. Although all students experience some form of anxiety in school, students of color experience additional anxiety which causes them to withdraw rather than to achieve academically.

The stereotype threat focuses on a social-psychological predicament that can arise from widely-known negative stereotypes about a specific group. The existence of such a stereotype means that anything anyone from that group does that conforms to it makes the stereotype more plausible as a self-characterization in the eyes of others, and in one's own eyes (Steele & Aronson, 1995). When the allegations of the stereotype are negative, this predicament may be self-threatening enough to have disruptive effects of its own.

Whenever African American students perform an explicitly intellectual task, they face the threat of confirming or being judged negatively about their group's intellectual ability and competence (Steele & Aronson, 1995). This self-threat may interfere with the intellectual functioning of these students during standardized tests. This threat does not impact groups that are not judged in this manner. Over time this threat has a greater effect on African American students. It pressures these students to protectively dis-identify with achievement in school and related intellectual domains (Steele & Aronson, 1995). This

protects the student from the self-evaluative threat caused by the stereotypes; however, it may lead to lack of interest, decreased motivation, and ultimately a decline in academic achievement (Steele, 1992).

After careful examination of the school culture and looking at the study through the conceptual lens of the negative stereotype threat theory, it is evident that negative stereotyping is embedded in the culture of E. K. Mills High School. The participants' behavior, teacher expectations, and data retrieved from my observations are remnants of the stereotype threat that is prevalent at E. K. Mills High School. According to Steele (1997), stereotype threat impacts stigmatized students who are identified with academics in varying ways. First, stereotype threat may impact their academic performance. Academic performance may be inhibited due to heightened levels of anxiety during testing situations coupled with the fact that the participants have not studied thoroughly enough or at all. Due to the pressure of this stereotype of intellectual inferiority, this increased anxiety becomes a chronic condition, which over time is seen as an aversive stimulus. This prompts these students to seek escape from the undesirable stimulus which may manifest itself as disidentification and withdrawal (Osborne & Walker, 2006). Disidentification will reduce the experienced anxiety levels because academics is no longer a domain central to the self-concept (Steele, 1997). On the other hand, withdrawal would eliminate the anxiety by removing the student from the situation in which the anxiety was occurring (Osborne & Walker, 2006). At the middle school level supports were built in to keep these anxieties at a minimum; therefore, the participants were able to perform well academically in middle school.

The stress of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype can be an overwhelming experience (Schmader & Johns, 2003). The biggest challenge of targets of negative stereotype is to accurately determine if the stereotype actually exists because if they believe the stereotype really exists then its consequences become real (Wout et. al., 2009). If targets believe that this threat does exist, they must psychologically prepare to cope with it. While preparing for this threat serves as a protective mechanism, it also drains cognitive resources, thereby impairing performance on intellectual tasks (Schmader & Johns, 2003). It was the sentiment of some of the participants in the study that the teachers at E. K. Mills did not care if they learned or not. Therefore, the participants have determined that the stereotype actually exists for them. Once the students believe the stereotype is real, then it becomes real at least in its consequences, which is manifested as low performance and lack of effort.

Implications

Much progress has been made in understanding factors that contribute to the underachievement of African American males in high school, and there is research on the negative stereotype theory and how the stereotype restricts the academic success of the African American student. However, there is very little information on how perceptual tradition and self-concept impact African American males' performance in high school. This study contributes to the current research on the academic performance of African American male students by identifying factors that contribute to the underachievement of intellectually capable African American male students. This study yielded three major factors that contribute to the underachievement of African American male high school students. The first

finding was poor study habits. Many of the participants either did not know how to study and others had done so well in school previously that they did not know they needed to study. The second finding was difficulty transitioning from middle school to high school. The participants revealed that the small team concept that was implemented at the middle school provided them with the extra support that they needed in order to be successful. Once they reached high school they were expected to do everything on their own and in isolation in addition to mastering a more rigorous curriculum. The transition was a bit much for the participants. The final finding was a culture of complacency at E. K. Mills High School. The students and the teachers alike were content with the way things were going. The students barely study and were content making the grades that they make even though they define academic success as making A's and B's. The teachers do not push them to do more even when they know they are capable of doing better, and the parents are not contacted on a regular basis to intervene before it is too late to do anything about the grades.

In addition to the three findings that emerged from the data analysis, this study also contributes to the current research by explaining how the participants' perceptual fields impact their behaviors and decisions.

Theoretical Implications

Claude Steele's (1998) negative stereotype threat theory was used to contextualize the study of the phenomenon, the underachievement of the African American high school male. Claude Steele's stereotype threat hypothesis posits that when there are negative stereotypes about the intellectual capacity of certain stigmatized groups, members of the group suffer

aversive consequences (Osborne & Walker, 2006). Group members who are most strongly identified with the stigmatized domain, hence African American males who were successful in school prior to entering high school in question (e.g., intellectual or academic ability) are most likely to suffer the effects of stereotype threat (Osborne & Walker, 2006). According to this theory, negative stereotypes associated with the ethnicity cause students of color to underachieve academically because of the fear of predicted failure. While the participants of the study expressed that their teachers care about their learning to some degree, they do not feel that the teachers push them to excel. The teachers do not assist them with the selection of their classes and do not encourage them to take advanced classes. Low teacher expectations, poor study habits, and lack of effort have become a part of the school culture. Teachers allowing students to keep their heads on their desks and to text during class is indicative of their feelings about the students' intellectual or academic ability. Not assigning homework or holding students accountable for learning via requirement of individual assignments are also indicators of negative expectations. Students who have done well consistently for the first nine years of school suddenly shut down. They feel that the teachers do not have confidence in their academic ability so they internalize that belief and make it their reality because it is easier for them to dis-identify with the stigmatized domain in question, their academic ability.

Perceptual Tradition and Self-concept Theory

This study was viewed through the lens of the negative stereotype theory framework. Steele's (1997) stereotype threat model is an appropriate conceptual framework for this study

because it takes into consideration the external societal factors that contribute to the African American male's disassociation with school. It helps one make sense of such a complex phenomenon, capable African American males performing substantially lower than their White peers in school. Although this theory minimizes such factors as poor motivation, distracting peer pressure, lack of family values, and the unsettling suggestion of genes, it does not reject the perceptions that African American males bring to the table that also heavily influence their decision to not work to their full potential.

As indicated in the summary of findings the study points to external factors that influence the performance of African American high school males. However, the main objective of the study is to examine the perceptions of the participants to see what they think is the cause of their underachievement. The research question for this study was: What are the perceptions of underachieving high school African American male students of the factors contributing to their underperformance? The key word here is perception(s). Perception is defined as an individual's belief in one's level of competence or adequacy in academic and nonacademic domains based on one's past experiences. The core of this approach is the supposition that positive self-perceptions of competence are causal of many positive outcomes, including good academic performance (Valentine et. al., 2004).

Perception refers not only to the senses but also to meanings, which is the personal significance of an event for the person experiencing it (Purkey & Schmidt, 1987). These meanings extend far beyond sensory receptors to include personal experiences such as feelings, desires, aspirations, and the ways people view themselves, others, and the world. Each person is a conscious agent who experiences, interprets, constructs, decides, and acts.

Behavior is a product of the ways people see themselves and the situations in which they find themselves rather than a complex bundle of stimuli and responses or the product of unconscious urges (Purkey & Schmidt, 1987). The perceptual tradition places importance on each person's perceived world – looking at the world as it is experienced by the perceiving person.

The perceptual tradition purports that all behavior is dependent upon an individual's personal frame of reference and is a function of the perceptions that exist for the person at the moment of behaving (Purkey & Schmidt, 1987). Of the 14 premises of the perceptual tradition five of the premises apply directly to the findings of this study. Listed below are the basic assumptions of the premises that apply to the study:

Assumption 1: What individuals choose to perceive is determined by past experiences as mediated by present purposes, perceptions, and expectations.

Assumption 2: Individuals tend to perceive only that which is relevant to their purposes and make their choices accordingly.

The participants in the study had all experienced academic success in their pasts and admitted that they felt good about their success because it had pleased their parents and teachers. However, as current high school juniors and seniors their purpose had changed. They were more interested in wearing the right clothes, impressing girls, and hanging out with their friends. Once they reached high school it was more important for them to fit in with the other high school boys. The perception was that all of their peers were doing about the same academically. Although they admitted that the work was harder, they never doubted whether they had the ability to do the work and improve their grades. They simply

did not want to put forth the effort to work to that degree. That would make them stand out, and that is not the image they wanted at the high school level. In addition, teacher expectations and the support at the high school level were substantially lower than that at the middle school level, which had been their past experience.

Assumption 3: Choices are determined by perceptions, not facts. How a person behaves is a function of his or her perceptual field at the moment of acting.

Assumption 4: Beliefs can and do create their own social reality. People respond with feelings not to "reality" but to their perceptions of reality.

The Thomas theorem formulated by W. I. Thomas which states, "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Thomas, 1928). The interpretation of the situation causes the action. Regardless of what we believe to be true about academic success or performance, what matters is what the participants perceive to be real. When asked to define academic success, all participants quickly stated "making A's and B's. That is the definition they have been told and that they have memorized, but that is not what they believe to be true for them. It may be true for other subgroups but not for them. As long as they were passing their classes and were accepted by their peers, they perceived that to be successful in school. After all they were doing better than most African American males who stay in the discipline office or suspended and may not graduate. In their eyes they are pretty successful.

Assumption 5: Reality can exist for an individual only when he or she is conscious of it and has some relationship with it.

The reality for these young men is that they go to school each day knowing that they can do so much better than they are doing academically, but it is not common place anymore so why bother. The culture of the school does not celebrate or push the success of African American male. The participants could not name any African American males who stood out as someone who was doing exceptionally well academically. There were some who were performing averagely such as themselves. Their reality is that they need tutoring and support at the high school level that is not being offered. The reality is that many of their peers will not graduate, but most if not all of the participants are on the right track for graduating on time. The reality is the teachers do not know what to do with them in a class of 35 to 40 students, many of whom do not wish to be there. So when they earn the B's, C's, and maybe an occasional D, they feel like they have been academically successful.

Based on these five assumptions, it is clear that all behavior is a function of the individual's perceptual field. This explains why it may make perfectly good sense to these academically capable African American males to underachieve in high school, but may make no sense to those of us observing externally.

<p style="text-align:center">Practical Implications</p>

There are several schools where African American male students are thriving and doing well academically, and then there are other schools where their academic performance is deplorable. What are those schools doing that is working for African American males? There are two major areas that should be explored that may improve the performance of

African American males at the high school level. The first area is school culture, and the

second area is motivating the African American male student . Research says that the culture

of a school plays a critical role in the success of not only African American male students but

all students. This study revealed in its findings that the culture of E. K. Mills High School is

contributing to the underperformance of African American males. Peterson (2009) offers

some suggestions on how to shape and improve school culture to help maximum student

performance.

1. All staff members (with an emphasis on all) should stress the importance of

academics.

2. Strong leadership should guide the instructional program. Even if the principal has

a curriculum support person or Assistant Principals who assist with monitoring the

curriculum, the principal should be knowledgeable of the curriculum and should

make certain that it is carried out.

3. The curriculum should be based on clear goals and objectives that are explicitly

articulated and monitored on a regular basis.

4. There must be high expectations for quality instruction.

5. Incentives and rewards are used to build strong motivation and implemented

throughout the building.

6. Parents are invited to become involved.

7. Teachers and administrators continually strive to improve instructional

effectiveness.

8. There are pleasant [physical] conditions for learning.

The findings of my study support Peterson's suggestions. I found that the African American male high school students could have benefitted greatly from some type reward or incentive system. Award ceremonies were a part of their middle school and elementary school experience. They had grown accustomed to being encouraged to earn the rewards. It had become an expectation not an exception. To add, I concur that this whole process must be spearheaded by school leadership in order for it to take root in the building.

In addition to these findings on school culture *Developing and Assessing School Culture: A New Level of Accountability for Schools* (2010) argues that there are three conditions that are needed to foster positive school cultures. The first condition that schools need is measures of success and areas for improvement that go beyond test scores. Schools must be held accountable to external standards, and standardized testing is part of that accountability. However, test scores must never become the sole measure of school success. When they do, they limit our vision of what a good school is. Because many schools become preoccupied with preparing students for high-stakes tests in math and reading, they tend to neglect areas such as science, social studies, the arts, physical education, and health. Too often, they dismiss civic involvement, social-emotional growth, and character development all together. The solution is not to eliminate testing but to keep it in proper perspective so that it does not diminish the holistic mission of education. Schools and classrooms must approach assessment and all their work in a manner that develops the whole person, including crucial skills such as creative problem-solving, teamwork, respect for diversity, ethical decision-making, and commitment to human rights and social justice.

The second condition outlined in *Developing and Assessing School Culture: A New Level of Accountability for Schools* (2010) is that educators must have a comprehensive understanding of what school culture is. While there is a growing understanding and evidence of the importance of school culture, we still need to develop a common national vocabulary for defining and discussing it. A positive school culture broadly conceived includes the school's:

- social climate, including a safe and caring environment in which all students feel welcomed and valued and have a sense of ownership of their school

- intellectual climate, in which all students in every classroom are supported and challenged to do their very best and achieve work of quality; this includes a rich, rigorous, and engaging curriculum and a powerful pedagogy for teaching it

- rules and policies that hold all school members accountable to high standards of learning and behavior

- traditions and routines, built from shared values, that honor and reinforce the school's academic and social standards

- structures for giving staff and students a voice in, and shared responsibility for, solving problems and making decisions that affect the school environment and their common life

- ways of effectively partnering with parents to support students' learning and character growth

- norms for relationships and behavior that create a professional culture of excellence and ethics

Finally, schools need tools for developing and assessing school culture, and must be held accountable for their school cultures. One culture-building tool used by a growing number of schools is a "code of character," or "school touchstone." Touchstones are developed over a period of weeks or even months with input from school leaders, staff, students, and parents. They typically are written as a series of "we" statements that express the school's collective commitments, high standards, and academic performance. Equally important, a school's culture-building efforts must include a system for *assessing* school culture. What gets measured, matters.

Another key area that practioneers need to explore is how to work with the African American male student. One of the most vexing problems confronting educators today is the chronic achievement gap between African American male students and their peers of other ethnic groups. Kaefele (2010) believes this gap exists because educators do not know how to teach the African American male. He (2010) offers strategies for getting African American middle and high school male students to value learning, improve their grades, and maintain high standards for themselves.

Teachers must first get to know their students. Just as teaching any subject, one cannot teach what he does not know. Teaching African American males is no different in that the teacher must get to know them in order to teach them. The best place to start is getting to know their learning styles. Teachers should get to know their African American males and differentiate their instruction accordingly. The classroom environment should be student-centered so that the teacher can observe them working in a variety of situations and activities using problem-solving skills.

Kaefele (2010) also suggests that teachers should get to know the goals of their African American male students. They should strive to help these young men reach their goals by maintaining high expectations at all times and talking to the students about their aspirations. The teacher should make all efforts to encourage them and help them see that they can attain their goals. Many African American males do not expect to do well in school much less in life. The teacher's role should be to make them believe they have limitless opportunities so that they change their destructive way of thinking.

Another key strategy for educators is to stay aware of their students' "everyday" experiences. Most teachers are White middle class females and have no idea what African American males experience on a daily basis. Teachers should get to know what happens to them before they even come to school each day, how they get to school, and what happens to them when they leave school. All of this helps the teacher to understand the African American male.

Next, Kafele (2010) suggests that teachers should be knowledgeable of the challenges that African American males face. It is a challenge for any African American male to let his guard down and let the teacher and their peers know how intelligent he really is for fear of being ridiculed. Therefore, the teacher should create a classroom environment where it is acceptable for all students to be smart.

One last strategy that Kafele (2010) suggests is teachers should know the history behind the African American male student. African American males have a culture that is very different from most of their teachers. The teacher must ask herself is she is okay with their culture being different from hers and know how she is going to deal with those

differences. She should be prepared to deal with undesirable behavior and lack of motivation. There is no doubt these behaviors will occur, but how will the teacher deal with it in the classroom. The African American male history is their collective pasts of which they are both product and reflection.

It is paramount that educators understand that educating the African American male is a complex task. Ensuring a positive school culture and knowing how to work with these young men is the key to motivating them to be successful.

Limitations of the Study

Although efforts were taken to conduct the research as thoroughly as possible, there are a few limitations to this study. One of primary limitations is the design of the study. Case study design was used to capture the vantage points and perceptions of the participants, which is risky because it is not always reality (Stake, 1995). I relied on the participants to recall information and to speak openly and candidly about topics that may have been very private and sensitive to them. The participants chosen for the study were 16, 17, and 18 years old, and they were interviewed by a school administrator who was close in age to most of their parents. Some of the participants may have given responses to the interview questions because they felt that is what the interviewer wanted to hear. They also may not have spoken as candidly as they could have for fear that their responses would be discovered by their administrators and teachers and negative consequences would follow.

Another limitation of the study is the small sample size of the participants. The participants represented a population of African American high school juniors and seniors from one high school in rural North Carolina. African American male students in the rural

South may behave very differently than African American male students in larger urban areas. Some of this may be due to life styles and exposure to different cultures. Also, there are two other high schools in the school district. This study only represents the perspectives of the participants at one high school in the district. Even though the three high schools are located in the same district in the rural South, the experiences of African American male high school students who participated in the study may not be similar to the experiences of the young men at the other two high schools.

One final limitation is researcher bias. According to Maxwell (2004) no interviewer is completely free of bias. This was revealed and acknowledged in my subjectivity statement, which minimized the researcher bias; however, it did not completely remove it. The bias that I know I bring is the lack of effort on the teachers' part to push young African American males to success. However, to address this limitation, I used the triangulation strategy of multiple sources of data, collecting data through a combination of interviews, observations, and document analysis. I checked what the participants told me in the interview against what I observed at the school and what I read in the documents that I collected (Merriam, 2009).

Directions for Future Research

More extensive research is needed in the area of African American male underachievement. There are major initiatives across the country to improve the dropout rate of African American males and to close the achievement gap between African American males and their peers of other ethnic groups. However, there is very little research on the underachievement of African American males who are academically and intellectually

capable, have the support from home, and have sufficient resources. This study will add to the body of literature when examining the underachievement of capable African American males who should be performing much better than they are.

A concept not explored in this study that needs more research is the influence of non-school related activities on African American male underachievement. Some of the participants alluded to "more distractions" once you reach high school. More in-depth research about the influence of drugs, alcohol, and females [sex] on African American male performance in school should be considered. This will help us to better understand if there are factors other than what is going on inside the school that is hindering them from performing as well as they should in school. In addition to the exposure to drugs, alcohol, and sex, teenagers generally start to function independently and spend more time hanging out with friends and less time with their parents. Many of them start driving. What impact does this new found freedom have on African American male school performance? This is an area that should also be considered because it runs hand in hand with drugs, alcohol, and sex since the involvement of those activities generally happen during the time when they are with peers and not with their parents.

Another area that should be explored further is how African American males perform for African American teachers from similar backgrounds. Kafele (2010) argues that most teachers are middle class White females who do not understand the African American male experience. Would these young men perform better for African American teachers, male or female, who understand their culture and backgrounds. Two of the participants specifically

referred to two African American teachers who had taught them since they were in high school. They both revealed that the African American teachers pushed them to do their work and "didn't play" or "be snappin."

The future of our African American male students is bleak at best, especially if we cannot get our brightest young men who are the most capable of being successful to achieve in school. Further research in the two areas mentioned is worthy of investigating if we are going to fully understand why these young men are not working to their full potential.

Summary and Conclusion

This study examined the different perceptions of African American male high school students of the factors that contribute to their underachievement in school. The study specifically sought to identify some factors that contribute to the underachievement of high school African American males who have not had to experience the multiple contexts such as insufficiencies in school resources, inadequacy of school programming, family and community socioeconomic circumstances, and learner characteristics, which often mitigate academic success.

The qualitative, multiple case study design was used to study the phenomenon, African American male underachievement. More specifically, the instrumental case study design was used to focus more intensely on one issue set in one bounded case (Creswell, 2007). The instrumental case study afforded me the opportunity to concentrate on the phenomenon by discerning the perceptions of African American high school males through

the use of individual interviews. The interviews were recorded onto a digital recording device and transcribed at a later time. Other sources of data collection were observation notes and documents pertaining to student academic performance. The transcripts, observation notes, and documents were analyzed and triangulated based on preliminary codes and themes.

Data analysis revealed three major findings contributing to the underachievement of academically capable African American males at the high school level. The major findings were as follows: poor study habits, difficulty transitioning from middle school to high school, and a culture of complacency. The findings suggest that in order to motivate African American males who have the intellectual ability, home support, and sufficient financial resources yet underachieve, schools must implement a positive school culture that supports the academic success of all students and train teachers to implement strategies to support and educate the African American male student.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Proposed Letter of Invitation

Dear [Participant Name],

I am currently a North Carolina State University student working on my dissertation research and hoped you might be interested in participating in my study. The purpose of my study is to find out how African American high males feel about their ability to be successful in school. I am also interested in finding out what keeps them from working to their full potential in high school, which is known as underachieving. To clarify the study, underachievement does not mean failure. The participants are in no way failing their grades. They simply are not working to their full potential. Where they once were making A's and B's in elementary and middle school, they now make B's and C's, and D's (maybe an occasional F). Underachievement (underperformance) is defined as a discrepancy between the student's performance and his actual ability.

I am very excited about the opportunity to listen to the young men's stories about their lives and how they perceive their academic ability and how they feel about being successful in school. My hope is to better understand why African American males are not performing as well as they could perform in high school. This information will help educators and communities see the need to change our approach to working with our young African American male students. I would also hope that sharing your personal stories will be enjoyable and interesting to you and your families.

If you chose to participate in the study, you will be asked to commit to a 60 minute in-person interview that will take place off campus at the local library after school hours. Your names or the name of your school and district will not be revealed in the study. Fictitious names will be given to the participants, the school, and the district. However, it is possible that participants could be identified by those who know they are participating.

The interviews will be recorded on a mini digital voice recorder. The recordings will be transferred to a password protected computer that will be locked in an office. Immediately after the recordings have been transferred to the computer, the recordings will be deleted from the mini digital voice recorder.

Please let me know if you are interested in participating in the study or would like to meet with me to discuss this process in more detail. You have received a total of four letters, two copies of this invitation for you and two copies for your parents/guardians of permission to participate. Complete and return one of the letters along with your parent's/guardian's permission to participate to your guidance counselor, who will forward the forms to me. After receiving your forms agreeing to participate in the study, I will contact you to set up the

first interview. If you have any questions or concerns, I can be contacted at
tythomas@ncsu.edu.

If you are not interested in participating in the study at this time, I understand and thank you
for reviewing my invitation.

Sincerely,

Tonya C. Thomas

I give my son, _____, permission to participate in the study
                        (Name of participant)
conducted by Tonya Thomas, a graduate student at North Carolina State University who is
collecting dissertation research data. I understand that my son's name or the name of his
school and school district will not be revealed in the study. The information that will be
provided will be used for research purposes only.

APPENDIX B

Proposed Letter of Invitation and Permission

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am currently a North Carolina State University student working on my dissertation research and hoped you might be interested in participating in my study. The purpose of my study is to find out how African American high males feel about their ability to be successful in school. I am also interested in finding out what keeps them from working to their full potential in high school, which is known as underachieving. To clarify the study, underachievement does not mean failure. The participants are in no way failing their grades. They simply are not working to their full potential. Where they once were making A's and B's in elementary and middle school, they now make B's and C's, and D's (maybe an occasional F). Underachievement (underperformance) is defined as a discrepancy between the student's performance and his actual ability.

I am very excited about the opportunity to listen to the young men's stories about their lives and how they perceive their academic ability and how they feel about being successful in school. My hope is to better understand why African American males are not performing as well as they could perform in high school. This information will help educators and communities see the need to change our approach to working with our young African American male students. I would also hope that sharing your personal stories will be enjoyable and interesting to you and your families.

If you allow your son to participate in the study, he will be asked to commit to a 60 minute in-person interview that will take place off campus at the local library after school hours. Your son's name or the name of your school and district will not be revealed in the study. Fictitious names will be given to the participants, the school, and the district. However, it is possible that participants could be identified by those who know they are participating.

The interviews will be recorded on a mini digital voice recorder. The recordings will be transferred to a password protected computer that will be locked in an office. Immediately after the recordings have been transferred to the computer, the recordings will be deleted from the mini digital voice recorder.

Please let me know if you are interested in allowing your son to participate in the study or would like to meet with me to discuss this process in more detail. Your son has received a total of four letters, two copies of the invitation for him and two copies of the letter of permission for parents/guardians. Complete and return one of the letters along with your son's letter of invitation to the Junior/Senior guidance counselor, who will forward the forms

to me. After receiving your forms granting your son permission to participate in the study, I will contact him to set up the first interview. If you have any questions or concerns, I can be contacted at tythomas@ncsu.edu.

If you are not interested in allowing your son to participate in the study at this time, I understand and thank you for reviewing my invitation.

Sincerely,

Tonya C. Thomas

I give my son, _____, permission to participate in the study
                               (Name of participant)
conducted by Tonya Thomas, a graduate student at North Carolina State University who is collecting dissertation research data. I understand that my son's name or the name of his school and school district will not be revealed in the study. The information that will be provided will be used for research purposes only.

APPENDIX C

Interview Guide

Purpose of Study: The purpose of the proposed research is to examine the different experiences that shape African American male high school students' perception about being successful in school. The study will seek to identify factors that explain the underachievement of African American male students who are academically capable, have sufficient resources, and home support. Insight gained from these findings will help educators and communities see the need to change our approach to working with our young African American male students.

Research Question:
What are the perceptions of underachieving high school African American male students of

the factors contributing to their underperformance?

Participant Selection Criteria: The participants in the study will be African American male students in grade 11 - 12 from a local high school in the rural South. The participants must have demonstrated proficiency in Reading and/or Math prior to beginning their high school careers. The participants' grades will reflect C's, D's, and F's in the core academic subjects (English, Math, Science, and Social Studies/History).

Participant Selection Procedures: Snowball sampling will be used to identify eligible participants. Potential participants will receive a letter of invitation for themselves and a letter of permission for their parents/guardians. Once the letters of invitation and permission forms have been returned, details about the study will be shared and the first interview will be scheduled. The researcher will follow all IRB guidelines and ensure full and informed consent of the research participants.

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

1. Introduction
Introduce myself and my interest in pursuing this topic. Thank the participant for agreeing to participate in the study and review the purpose of the study.

2. Informed Consent
Review and sign the informed consent document. Ask the participant if he has any additional questions or concerns before beginning the interview.

3. Background/Demographic Information
Collect the following information from the participant: age, grade, and address.

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Interview Questions:

Home Life
With whom do you live?

How much emphasis is placed on academics in your home?

What happens if you don't do well in school?

How often do your parents/guardians communicate with your teachers?

School Experience
Tell me what it was like for you in elementary and middle school.

How has school changed for you?

How do you feel you have changed?

Why do you continue to come to school?

What plans do you have after high school?

How do you define academic success?

Describe how you feel when you receive A's and B's on assignments.

How do you feel when you made D's or F's?

Tell me how you prepare for tests or quizzes.

How often do you study?

Tell me why you think that is enough time or not enough time for studying.

Why do you think you get the grades that you get?

What do you think it would take for your grades to improve?

If you did improve your grades, how do you think your friends would feel?

What would they say?

Name a few African American boys who are doing well in school?

How would you or others describe them?

What do people say about them?

How often do your teachers assign homework or individual assignments?

Describe your relationship with each of your teachers.

What happens when you do not put forth effort (i.e. sleeping, not turning in assignments, failing tests) in class?

How do you feel about teachers who push you to do more?

Do you believe your parents or teachers should do more to make you work harder?

What could your teachers do to make you more successful in school?

How much assistance were you given with selecting your classes?

What types of grades do most of your friends make?

What could you do differently to make better grades and to be more successful in school?

If you could change school, what would you change about it?

APPENDIX E

Observation Protocol

Length of Activity: 90 Minutes	
Descriptive Notes	**Reflective Notes**
Classroom:	
Hallways:	
Cafeteria:	

APPENDIX F

Observation Notes

Observation Protocol

1-31-13

Length of Activity: 90 Minutes	
Descriptive Notes	**Reflective Notes**
Classroom: – U.S History class -- • Teacher lectured – told history lessons & studies. Students sat in rows. The room was a little warm & stuffy; 26 students – still some empty seats left. • Teacher pulled the test up on Moodle & reviewed the format. -- Sr. English class -- • Teacher reviewed Beowulf – teacher did most of the talking. Some students responded when called on. Teacher reviewed an EPIC poem.	• students were apathetic – heads on desk, teacher did not correct or address this behavior • one female student was asleep woke up when hunched in the arm by the AP – then started texting • students were inattentive and very relaxed. Teacher negotiated with them so they would work.
Hallways: Students had to write their own poem. • noticed 2 students walking in hallway near the restroom • Students moved in a slow but orderly manner towards their classes. • Some stood in the middle of the hall -- people moved around them. • smelled cigarette smoke when I passed the restrooms.	→ No one asked students for a pass. Several staff passed them. Assume staff trusted them or "feared" them why is no one saying anything? -- I know they smell the smoke!
Cafeteria: • students sat by ethnicity. "White, Spanish, Black" -very loud! most students did not eat.	Extremely segregated.

2/13/13

Observation Protocol

Length of Activity: 90 Minutes	
Descriptive Notes	**Reflective Notes**
Classroom: – Read 180 – • Remedial class – 19 males – 2 teachers / general ed ; 1 EC teacher • EC teacher taught a small group of 7 at a table. She shared background information & asked questions prior to the students reading the story aloud. • 6 students read independently • 5 students completed a computer activity	• Extremely interactive class! • Students were very involved & seemed to enjoy the class
Hallways: • Students wore HATS! • students bumped the AP and did not apologize! • a former student accidentally bumped me. The halls were crowded but not so much so that he didn't see me or couldn't move over. Students had earphones in their ears • I smelled marijuana/pot in the clothes of the students	• I was shocked that he did not address this behavior !! • Hats – Are hats allowed? What about hoods. Students • students are allowed to wear hats, hoods, & earphones! This was not allowed when I was at the high school or middle school. nor at my school now.
Cafeteria: " most students spent their time talking. • students moved from one table to another, but were address by staff.	• students were somewhat disrespectful when addressed by staff about their movement. • Two students engaged in an altercation, but the male staff member was able to gain control rather quickly.

[left margin, rotated] Ex. EC teacher circulated to assist students on the computer & the independent readers.

APPENDIX G

Transcripts

CREDIT HISTORY

Course	Mark	Quality Points Weighted	Quality Points Unweighted	Earned Credits	Previous School	Flag
Grade 09 — 2009/10						
4518265 Digital Communication Systems	82	2.2500	2.2500	1.0000		
3083265 Earth/Space Science	79	1.7250	1.7250	1.0000		
9811265 Health/Pe	86	4.0000	4.0000	1.0000		
7061235 PREP FOR ALGEBRA I	83	2.3750	2.3750	1.0000		
3025265 Algebra I	83	2.3750	2.3750	1.0000		
1071265 English I	84	2.5000	2.5000	1.0000		
6119265 Fundamentals (?) Tech	80	5.0000	1.5000	1.0000		
9022265 World History	12	1.2500	1.2500	1.0000		
Grade 10 — 2010/11						
3020265 BIOLOGY	81	2.1250	2.1250	1.0000		
8411265 COMPUTER APP (DATS)	80	2.1250	2.1250	1.0000		
7117265 (MASONRY I)	80	3.0000	3.0000	1.0000		
9016265 PHYS ED COED LIFETIME ACTIVITIES	98	4.5000	4.5000	1.0000		
7611265 AUTOMOTIVE SERV TECH I	11	1.5000	1.5000	1.0000		
9002265 CIVICS & ECONOMICS	78	1.7500	1.7500	1.0000		
1022265 ENGLISH II	81	2.1250	2.1250	1.0000		
3003265 GEOMETRY	82	2.2500	2.2500	1.0000		
Grade 11 — 2011/12						
1023265 ENGLISH III	80	1.5000	1.5000	1.0000		
1002265 LATIN I	79	1.1250	1.1250	1.0000		
3010265 PHYSICAL SCIENCE	83	2.3750	2.3750	1.0000		
7062265 PREP FOR ALGEBRA II	88	3.1250	3.1250	1.0000		
3024265 ALGEBRA II HONORS	84	3.5000	2.5000	1.0000		
9015265 PHYS ED STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING	86	2.7500	2.7500	1.0000		
9031265 U S HISTORY	86	2.0000	2.0000	1.0000		
5410265 VISUAL ARTS I	86	3.1250	3.1250	1.0000		
Grade 12 — 2012/13						
9015265 PHYS ED STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING	84	2.5000	2.5000	1.0000		
3070265 PRE-CALCULUS HONORS	81	3.1250	3.1250	1.0000		
5060265 SCIENTIFIC & TECH VISUAL I	87	2.0000	2.0000	1.0000		
5461265 VISUAL ARTS SPECIALIZATION (BEGINNING), PHOTO	91	3.3750	3.3750	1.0000		
1024265 ENGLISH IV						

STUDENT INFORMATION

Page: 1 of 4

Name
Address

Student ID
Student Nbr
Schedule
Gender: Male
Graduation: 06/07/2013 (Expected)
Course Of Study: FRC1 (...)

Contact

School No.
Grades: 09,10,11,12,Off
Accreditation: State & SACS
College Board Code: 340489

CREDIT HISTORY

Course	Mark	Quality Points Weighted	Unweighted	Earned Credits	Previous School	Flag
Grade 09 2009/10						
Digital Communication Systems	82	2.2500	2.2500	1.0000		
Earth/Environ Science	79	1.0750	1.0750	1.0000		
Health/PE	86	4.0000	4.0000	1.0000		
PREP FOR ALGEBRA 1	83	2.3750	2.3750	1.0000		
Algebra I	83	2.3750	2.3750	1.0000		
English I	84	2.5000	2.5000	1.0000		
Fundamentals Of Tech	70	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000		
World History	72	1.2500	1.2500	1.0000		
Grade 10 2010/11						
BIOLOGY	81	2.1250	2.1250	1.0000		
COMPUTER APPL (CATS)	80	2.1250	2.1250	1.0000		
MASONRY I	80	2.0000	2.0000	1.0000		
PHYS ED COED LIFETIME ACTIVITIES	98	4.7500	4.7500	1.0000		
AUTOMOTIVE SERV TECH I	71	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000		
CIVICS & ECONOMICS	78	1.7500	1.7500	1.0000		
ENGLISH II	81	2.3750	2.3750	1.0000		
GEOMETRY	82	2.2500	2.2500	1.0000		
Grade 11 2011/12						
ENGLISH III	80	1.5000	1.5000	1.0000		
LATIN I	75	1.1250	1.1250	1.0000		
PHYSICAL SCIENCE	83	2.3750	2.3750	1.0000		
PREP FOR ALGEBRA II	89	3.1250	3.1250	1.0000		
ALGEBRA II HONORS	84	3.0000	2.8000	1.0000		
PHYS ED STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING	86	2.7500	2.7500	1.0000		
US HISTORY	85	2.0000	2.0000	1.0000		
VISUAL ARTS I	85	3.1250	3.1250	1.0000		
Grade 12 2012/13						
PHYS ED STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING	84	2.5000	2.5000	1.0000		
PRE-CALCULUS HONORS	81	3.1250	3.1250	1.0000		
SCIENTIFIC & TECH VISUAL I	80	2.0000	2.0000	1.0000		
VISUAL ARTS SPECIALIZATION (BEGINNING) PHOTO	84	3.2750	3.2750	1.0000		
ENGLISH IV						

STUDENT INFORMATION

Name
Address

Contact

Student Id
Student No
Birthdate
Gender: Male
Graduation: 06/07/2013 (Expected)
Course Of Study: PPC1 (1x240x10 planned)

School No
Grades: 09,10,11,12/GR
Accreditation: State & SACS
College Board Code: 340488

CREDIT HISTORY

Course		Mark	Quality Points Weighted	Unweighted	Earned Credits	Previous School	Flags
Grade 09	2009/10						
15162XS	Digital Communication Systems	82	2.2500	2.2500	1.0000		
1080XS	Earth/Environ Science	79	1.0250	1.6750	1.0000		(1)
9811CXS	Health/PE	90	4.0000	4.0000	1.0000		1x
7461XXS	PREP FOR ALGEBRA 1	81	2.3750	2.3750	1.0000		0
2025XXS	Algebra I	83	2.8750	2.7750	1.0000		1x
1071CXS	English I	84	2.9650	2.5650	1.0000		1x
6110CXS	Fundamentals Of Tech	70	5.0000	1.0000	1.0000		
1020XXS	World History	72	1.2500	1.2500	1.0000		0
Grade 10	2010/11						
3450XXS	BIOLOGY	81	2.1250	2.1250	1.0000		x
6411DXS	COMPUTER APPL (DATS)	80	2.1250	2.1250	1.0000		
7117XXS	MASONRY I	80	2.0000	2.0000	1.0000		
9010XXS	PHYS ED COED LIFETIME ACTIVITIES	98	4.5500	4.5500	1.5000		
7611XXS	AUTOMOTIVE SERV TECH I	71	1.5000	1.5000	1.0000		
1020XXS	CIVICS & ECONOMICS	78	1.7500	1.7500	1.0000		0
1072XXS	ENGLISH II	81	2.1250	2.1250	1.0000		x
2030XXS	GEOMETRY	82	2.7500	2.7500	1.0000		x
Grade 11	2011/12						
1073XXS	ENGLISH III	80	1.5000	1.5000	1.0000		0
1080XXS	LATIN I	77	1.1250	1.1250	1.0000		x
3010XXS	PHYSICAL SCIENCE	83	2.3750	2.3750	1.0000		x
7062XXS	PREP FOR ALGEBRA II	69	0.1250	0.1250	1.0000		0
2024XXS	ALGEBRA II HONORS	84	3.0000	2.0000	1.0000		1
9015XXS	PHYS ED STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING	85	2.7500	2.7500	1.0000		
6411XXS	U S HISTORY	86	2.0000	2.0000	1.0000		x
3415DXS	VISUAL ARTS I	85	2.1250	2.1250	1.0000		
Grade 12	2012/13						
9015XXS	PHYS ED STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING	94	3.5000	3.5000	1.0000		
2110XXS	PRE-CALCULUS HONORS	81	3.1250	2.1250	1.0000		1
3406XXS	SCIENTIFIC & TECH VISUAL I	90	2.0000	2.0000	1.0000		
3461XXS	VISUAL ARTS SPECIALIZATION (BEGINNING) PHOTO	91	3.5750	3.2750	1.0000		
1074XXS	ENGLISH IV						x

Grade 12   2012/13

11/672X8   LATIN I   OP

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA BOARD OF GOVERNORS
MINIMUM ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS REMAINING

ENGLISH IV   LATIN II

PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

Cumulative GPA Total Points are Calculated as of the end of   6/26/2013
Cumulative GPA Weighted: 2.5030   Total Points Weighted   66.7500
Cumulative GPA Unweighted: 2.0125   Total Points Unweighted   50.7500
Class Rank (7/1 1/2010):   65 of 121   Total Credits   Cumul 78.0000   Pr...ual 28.0000

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TESTING INFORMATION

End of Grade Test			End of Course		
8th Grade Math		05/10/2009	Algebra I		06/01/2010
8th Grade Math			Algebra I		
Percentile	69		Met Exit Standard?	Y	
Development Scale	364		Achievement Level	III	
Achievement Level	III		Scale	151	
8th Grade Reading		05/10/2009	Percentile	52	
8th Grade Reading			English I		06/01/2010
Achievement Level	III		English I		
Percentile	51		Percentile	59	
Development Scale	359		Achievement Level	III	
10th Grade Writing		03/01/2011	Met Exit Standard?	Y	
10th Grade Writing			Scale	153	
Achievement Level	II		Fundamentals of Technology		06/03/2010
Scale	11		Fundamentals of Technology		
			Scale	076	
			Digital Communications Systems		06/09/2010
			Digital Communications Systems		
			Scale	087	
			Biology		01/01/2011
			Biology		
			Achievement Level	II	
			Percentile	10	
			Scale	138	
			Biology		01/10/2011
			Biology		
			Achievement Level	II	
			Scale	145	
			Percentile	27	
			Computer Applications I		01/14/2011
			Computer Applications I		
			Scale	060	
			Masonry I		01/19/2011
			Masonry I		
			Scale	045	
			Biology		01/25/2011
			Biology		
			P Review committee/Principal gave ext or		
			Civics & Economics		06/01/2011
			Civics & Economics		
			Scale	145	
			Percentile	27	
			Achievement Level	II	
			Civics & Economics		06/10/2011
			Civics & Economics		
			Percentile	42	
			Achievement Level	III	
			Scale	149	

AWARD/ACHIEVEMENTS AND EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES
No Data For Student

CURRICULUM-RELATED WORK EXPERIENCE
No Data For Student

02/20/2013

IMMUNIZATION INFORMATION

2	04/11/1995
3	12/18/1995
1	05/29/1998
2	06/11/1999
1	04/11/1995
2	06/28/1995
3	08/28/1995
4	06/11/1999
1	05/24/1995

ATTENDANCE INFORMATION

Year	School		Grade	Days Present	Abs
04/05	390332		04	175	6
05/06	390332		05	176	4
06/07	390332		06	176	4
07/08	390334		07	177	3
08/09	390334		08	177	2
09/10	390324		09	173	2
10/11	390324		10	170	8
11/12	390324		11	178	2
12/13	390324		12	111	1

PREVIOUS SCHOOLS INFORMATION
  No Data For Student

Signature of Principal or Designee Certifying This Transcript

Name:_____ Date:_____

02/20/2013   Page: 1 of 2

STUDENT INFORMATION

Name: Student Id:
Address: Student No:
                                                               Birthdate:
                                                               Gender: Male
Contacts: Graduation: (Undefined)
                                                               Course Of Study: FRC1 (7) 2009/10 (Intended)

SCHOOL INFORMATION

                                                               School No:
                                                               Grades: 09,10,11,12,GR
                                                               Accreditation: State & SACS
                                                               College Board Code: 342985

CREDIT HISTORY

Course	Mark	Quality Points Weighted	Unweighted	Earned Credits	Previous School	Flags
Grade: 09 2010/11						
70452XS FOODS I FUNDAMENTALS	72	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000		
90112XS HEALTH/PE (REQ 9-12)	95	3.8750	3.8750	1.0000		U
20202XS INTRODUCTORY MATH	70	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000		
40242XS WORLD HISTORY	72	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000		U
20232XS ALGEBRA I	70	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000		U
30382XS EARTH/ENVIRON SCIENCE	58	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000		U
10212XS ENGLISH I	71	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000		U
90152XS PHYS ED STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING	87	2.8750	2.8750	1.0000		
Grade: 10 2011/12						
40522XS CIVICS & ECONOMICS	70	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000		U
20302XS GEOMETRY	74	1.2500	1.2500	1.0000		U
90152XS PHYS ED COED LIFETIME ACTIVITIES	78	1.7500	1.7500	1.0000		
54152XS VISUAL ARTS I	85	2.6250	2.6250	1.0000		
61452XS CAREER MANAGEMENT	75	1.3750	1.3750	1.0000		
30382XS EARTH/ENVIRON SCIENCE	70	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000		U
10222XS ENGLISH II	70	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000		U
95152XS LIBRARY/MEDIA ASSIST	47	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000		
Grade: 11 2012/13						
20242XS ALGEBRA II	59	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000		U
10232XS ENGLISH III	70	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000		U
30102XS PHYSICAL SCIENCE	70	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000		U
10512XS SPANISH I	70	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000		U
20242XS ALGEBRA II						UP
30202XS BIOLOGY						UP
10522XS SPANISH II						UP
40212XS U.S. HISTORY						UP

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA BOARD OF GOVERNORS
MINIMUM ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS REMAINING

ENGLISH IV   ADVANCED MATH
ALGEBRA II   LIFE/BIOLOGICAL SCIENCE
US HISTORY   SPANISH(1)

02/20/2013

PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

Cumulative GPA Total Points are Calculated as of the end of   02/20/2013

Cumulative GPA Weighted:	1.2375	Total Points Weighted:	24.7500	
Cumulative GPA Unweighted:	1.2375	Total Points Unweighted:	24.7500	
Class Rank (02/13/2013):	122 of 138	Total Credits:	Earned 17.0000	Potential 20.0000

TESTING INFORMATION

End of Grade Test			End of Course		
8th Grade Reading		05/01/2010	Foods I - Fundamentals		01/18/2011
8th Grade Reading			Foods I - Fundamentals		
Achievement Level	III		Scale	054	
Percentile	56		Algebra I		06/01/2011
Development Scale	360		Algebra I		
8th Grade Math		05/10/2010	Scale	152	
8th Grade Math			Achievement Level	III	
Development Scale	357		Percentile	56	
Achievement Level	III		English I		06/01/2011
Percentile	41		English I		
			Achievement Level	III	
			Percentile	70	
			Scale	156	
			Career Management		06/05/2012
			Career Management		
			Scale	87	

AWARD/ACHIEVEMENTS AND EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES
No Data For Student

CURRICULUM-RELATED WORK EXPERIENCE
No Data For Student

IMMUNIZATION INFORMATION

3	07/12/1996
1	12/17/1995
2	01/18/1996
3	09/25/1996
1	05/02/1997
2	08/17/2001
1	03/01/1996
2	05/06/1996
3	09/12/1996
4	07/15/1998
5	08/17/2001
1	05/02/1997

ATTENDANCE INFORMATION

Year	School		Grade	Days Present	Abs
07/08	390332	Mary Potter Interm - RETIRED	06	180	0
08/09	390331	Mary Potter Middle	07	180	0
09/10	390331	Mary Potter Middle	08	177	3
10/11	390324	J. F. Webb High School	09	180	0
11/12	390324	J. F. Webb High School	10	179	1
12/13	390324	J. F. Webb High School	11	111	1

PREVIOUS SCHOOLS INFORMATION
No Data For Student

Signature of Principal or Designee Certifying This Transcript

Name: _____ Date: _____

STUDENT INFORMATION

Name: Student Id:

Address: Student No:

Birthdate:

Gender: Male

Contacts: Graduation: (Undefined)

Course Of Study: FRC1 (7) 2009/10 (Intended)

School No:

Grades: 09,10,11,12,GR

Accreditation: State & SACS

College Board Code: 342985

CREDIT HISTORY

Course	Mark	Quality Points Weighted	Quality Points Unweighted	Earned Credits	Previous School	Flags
Grade: 09 2010/11						
30382XS EARTH/ENVIRON SCIENCE	72	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000		U
20202XS INTRODUCTORY MATH	84	2.5000	2.5000	1.0000		
90152XS PHYS ED STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING	74	1.2500	1.2500	1.0000		
54152XS VISUAL ARTS I	83	2.3750	2.3750	1.0000		
20232XS ALGEBRA I	87	2.8750	2.8750	1.0000		U
10212XS ENGLISH I	81	2.1250	2.1250	1.0000		U
90112XS HEALTH/PE (REQ 9-12)	80	2.0000	2.0000	1.0000		U
40242XS WORLD HISTORY	75	1.3750	1.3750	1.0000		U
Grade: 10 2011/12						
30202XS BIOLOGY	83	2.3750	2.3750	1.0000		U
10222XS ENGLISH II	78	1.7500	1.7500	1.0000		U
70452XS FOODS I FUNDAMENTALS	81	2.1250	2.1250	1.0000		
20302XS GEOMETRY	85	2.6250	2.6250	1.0000		U
40522XS CIVICS & ECONOMICS	81	2.1250	2.1250	1.0000		U
77112XS MASONRY I	89	3.1250	3.1250	1.0000		
54372XS PHOTOGRAPHY	88	3.0000	3.0000	1.0000		
54162XS VISUAL ARTS II	93	3.6250	3.6250	1.0000		
Grade: 11 2012/13						
77122XS MASONRY II	88	6.0000	6.0000	2.0000		
10512XS SPANISH I	79	1.8750	1.8750	1.0000		U
40212XS U.S. HISTORY	77	1.6250	1.6250	1.0000		U
20242XS ALGEBRA II						UP
30502XS CHEMISTRY						UP
10232XS ENGLISH III						UP
54175XS VISUAL ARTS (PROFICIENT)						P

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA BOARD OF GOVERNORS
MINIMUM ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS REMAINING

ENGLISH III   ENGLISH IV

ADVANCED MATH   ALGEBRA II

PHYSICAL SCIENCE   SPANISH(1)

02/20/2013

PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

Cumulative GPA Total Points are Calculated as of the end of 02/20/2013

Cumulative GPA Weighted:	2.2875	Total Points Weighted:	45.7500
Cumulative GPA Unweighted:	2.2875	Total Points Unweighted:	45.7500
Class Rank (02/13/2013):	63 of 138	Total Credits: Earned 20.0000	Potential 20.0000

TESTING INFORMATION

End of Grade Test			End of Course		
8th Grade Math		05/01/2010	Algebra I		06/01/2011
8th Grade Math			Algebra I		
Development Scale	365		Achievement Level	IV	
Achievement Level	III		Percentile	86	
Percentile	73		Scale	162	
8th Grade Reading		05/10/2010	English I		06/01/2011
8th Grade Reading			English I		
Percentile	31		Scale	151	
Achievement Level	II		Achievement Level	III	
Development Scale	354		Percentile	49	
			Biology		01/01/2012
			Biology		
			Achievement Level	II	
			Percentile	22	
			Scale	143	
			Biology		01/10/2012
			Biology		
			Achievement Level	III	
			Percentile	38	
			Scale	148	
			Foods I - Fundamentals		01/11/2012
			Foods I - Fundamentals		
			Scale	84	
			Masonry I		05/31/2012
			Masonry I		
			Scale	82	

AWARD/ACHIEVEMENTS AND EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES
No Data For Student

CURRICULUM-RELATED WORK EXPERIENCE
No Data For Student

IMMUNIZATION INFORMATION

2	12/30/1996
3	04/29/1997
1	01/12/1998
2	07/31/2001
1	12/30/1996
2	02/28/1997
3	04/29/1997
4	07/31/2001

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ATTENDANCE INFORMATION

Year	School	Grade	Days Present	Abs
01/02	365/330	8	175	4
02/03	3000.00	01	175	0
03/04	388008	02	173	1
04/05	395080	03	175	2
05/06	290119	04	173	1
06/07	390638	05	175	4
07/08	700149	06	180	0
08/09	290804	07	181	1
09/10	390314	08	180	1
10/11	890004	09	180	0
11/12	390804	10	174	0
12/13	890024	11	180	0

PREVIOUS SCHOOLS INFORMATION
No Data For Student

Signature of Principal or Designee Certifying this Transcript

Name _____ Date _____

02/20/2013

Page: 1 of 3

STUDENT INFORMATION

Name:

Address:

Student Id:

Student No:

Birthdate:

Gender: Male

Contacts:

Graduation: (Undefined)

Course Of Study: FRC1 (7) 2009/10 (Intended)

School No:

Grades: 09,10,11,12,GR

Accreditation: State & SACS

College Board Code: 342985

CREDIT HISTORY

Course	Mark	Quality Points Weighted	Unweighted	Earned Credits	Previous School	Flags
Grade: 09 2010/11						
30382XS EARTH/ENVIRON SCIENCE	70	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000		U
10212XS ENGLISH I	80	2.0000	2.0000	1.0000		U
20202XS INTRODUCTORY MATH	89	3.1250	3.1250	1.0000		
90152XS PHYS ED COED LIFETIME ACTIVITIES	100	4.0000	4.0000	1.0000		
20232XS ALGEBRA I	85	2.6250	2.6250	1.0000		U
61452XS CAREER MANAGEMENT	85	2.6250	2.6250	1.0000		
90112XS HEALTH/PE (REQ 9-12)	86	2.7500	2.7500	1.0000		U
40242XS WORLD HISTORY	77	1.6250	1.6250	1.0000		U
Grade: 10 2011/12						
30202XS BIOLOGY	79	1.8750	1.8750	1.0000		U
10222XS ENGLISH II	84	2.5000	2.5000	1.0000		U
90152XS PHYS ED COED LIFETIME ACTIVITIES	84	2.5000	2.5000	1.0000		
95302XS SPORTS MEDICINE/ATHLETIC TRAINER	81	2.1250	2.1250	1.0000		
40522XS CIVICS & ECONOMICS	70	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000		U
20302XS GEOMETRY	72	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000		U
64172XS MICROSOFT WORD, POWERPOINT & PUBLISHER	86	2.7500	2.7500	1.0000		
54152XS VISUAL ARTS I	95	3.8750	3.8750	1.0000		
Grade: 11 2012/13						
20242XS ALGEBRA II	72	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000		U
10512XS SPANISH I	73	1.1250	1.1250	1.0000		U
40212XS U.S. HISTORY	70	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000		U
54162XS VISUAL ARTS (INTERMEDIATE)	95	3.8750	3.8750	1.0000		
10232XS ENGLISH III						UP
90152XS PHYS ED COED LIFETIME ACTIVITIES						P
30102XS PHYSICAL SCIENCE						UP
10522XS SPANISH II						390700 UP

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA BOARD OF GOVERNORS

MINIMUM ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS REMAINING

ENGLISH III

ADVANCED MATH

SPANISH(1)

ENGLISH IV

PHYSICAL SCIENCE

02/20/2013

PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

Cumulative GPA Total Points are Calculated as of the end of 02/20/2013

Cumulative GPA Weighted:	2.2188	Total Points Weighted:	44.3750
Cumulative GPA Unweighted:	2.2188	Total Points Unweighted:	44.3750
Class Rank (02/13/2013):	70 of 138	Total Credits: Earned 20.0000	Potential 20.0000

TESTING INFORMATION

End of Grade Test			End of Course		
8th Grade Math		05/01/2010	English I		01/01/2011
8th Grade Math			English I		
Achievement Level	III		Achievement Level	III	
Development Scale	360		Percentile	66	
Percentile	53		Scale	155	
8th Grade Reading		05/01/2010	Algebra I		06/01/2011
8th Grade Reading			Algebra I		
Achievement Level	III		Achievement Level	III	
Percentile	60		Scale	151	
Development Scale	361		Percentile	52	
			Biology		01/01/2012
			Biology		
			Percentile	24	
			Scale	144	
			Achievement Level	II	
			Biology		01/10/2012
			Biology		
			Achievement Level	II	
			Percentile	30	
			Scale	146	
			Biology		01/25/2012
			Biology		
			P Review committee/Principal gave ext cr		
			Microsoft Word, Power Point & Publisher		05/31/2012
			Microsoft Word, Power Point & Publisher		
			Scale	93	

AWARD/ACHIEVEMENTS AND EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES
No Data For Student

CURRICULUM-RELATED WORK EXPERIENCE
No Data For Student

IMMUNIZATION INFORMATION

1	07/25/1996
2	08/28/1996
3	02/04/1997
1	10/10/1997
2	09/13/2000
1	09/30/1996
2	12/10/1996
3	02/04/1997
4	09/13/2000

ATTENDANCE INFORMATION

Year	School	Grade	Days Present	Abs
03/04	390212	03	179	1
04/05	390212	03	177	1
05/06	390332	04	178	2
06/07	390332	05	179	1
07/08	390332	06	179	1
08/09	390332	07	179	1
09/10	390331	08	179	1
10/11	390324	09	183	0
11/12	390324	10	179	1
12/13	390324	11	180	3

PREVIOUS SCHOOLS INFORMATION

School
satmda

College Board
342084

NC Public School
Yes

Signature of Principal or Designee Certifying True Transcript

Name _____ Date _____

02/20/2013   Page: 1 of 3

STUDENT INFORMATION

Name:
Address:

Contacts:

Student Id:
Student No:
Birthdate:
Gender: Male
Graduation: (Undefined)
Course Of Study: FRC1 (7) 2009/10 (Intended)

School No:
Grades: 09,10,11,12,GR
Accreditation: State & SACS
College Board Code: 342985

CREDIT HISTORY

Course	Mark	Quality Points Weighted	Unweighted	Earned Credits	Previous School	Flags
Grade: 09 2010/11						
61452XS CAREER MANAGEMENT	73	1.1250	1.1250	1.0000		
90112XS HEALTH/PE (REQ 9-12)	93	3.6250	3.6250	1.0000		U
20202XS INTRODUCTORY MATH	82	2.2500	2.2500	1.0000		
40242XS WORLD HISTORY	80	2.0000	2.0000	1.0000		U
20232XS ALGEBRA I	78	1.7500	1.7500	1.0000		U
30382XS EARTH/ENVIRON SCIENCE	76	1.5000	1.5000	1.0000		U
10212XS ENGLISH I	86	2.7500	2.7500	1.0000		U
62002XS PRINCIP OF BUSINESS BE	79	1.8750	1.8750	1.0000		
Grade: 10 2011/12						
75112XS AUTOMOTIVE SERV TECH I	77	1.6250	1.6250	1.0000		
20302XS GEOMETRY	76	1.5000	1.5000	1.0000		U
90152XS PHYS ED COED LIFETIME ACTIVITIES	92	3.5000	3.5000	1.0000		
30102XS PHYSICAL SCIENCE	77	1.6250	1.6250	1.0000		U
40522XS CIVICS & ECONOMICS	79	1.8750	1.8750	1.0000		U
10222XS ENGLISH II	71	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000		U
64172XS MICROSOFT WORD, POWERPOINT & PUBLISHER	87	2.8750	2.8750	1.0000		
90152XS PHYS ED STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING	79	1.8750	1.8750	1.0000		
Grade: 11 2012/13						
30202XS BIOLOGY	71	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000		U
64192XS MICROSOFT EXCEL & ACCESS	89	3.1250	3.1250	1.0000		
10512XS SPANISH I	67	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	390700	U
40212XS U.S. HISTORY	70	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000		U
20242XS ALGEBRA II						UP
1023VXS ENGLISH III					390314	UP
64142XS MULTIMEDIA AND WEBPAGE DESIGN						P
99819XS ONLINE COURSE						EP
54152XS VISUAL ARTS (BEGINNING)						P

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA BOARD OF GOVERNORS
MINIMUM ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS REMAINING

ENGLISH III   ENGLISH IV
ADVANCED MATH   ALGEBRA II
FOREIGN LANGUAGE(2)

PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

Cumulative GPA Total Points are Calculated as of the end of   02/20/2013

Cumulative GPA Weighted:	1.8938	Total Points Weighted:	37.8750
Cumulative GPA Unweighted:	1.8938	Total Points Unweighted:	37.8750
Class Rank (02/13/2013):	91 of 138	Total Credits: Earned 19.0000	Potential 20.0000

TESTING INFORMATION

End of Grade Test			End of Course		
8th Grade Math		05/01/2010	Career Management		01/13/2011
8th Grade Math			Career Management		
Percentile	49		Scale	083	
Development Scale	359		Algebra I		06/01/2011
Achievement Level	III		Algebra I		
8th Grade Reading		05/10/2010	Achievement Level	III	
8th Grade Reading			Percentile	66	
Percentile	47		Scale	155	
Development Scale	358		English I		06/01/2011
Achievement Level	III		English I		
			Percentile	59	
			Scale	153	
			Achievement Level	III	
			Automotive Service Technology I		01/13/2012
			Automotive Service Technology I		
			Scale	57	
			Microsoft Word, Power Point & Publisher		06/04/2012
			Microsoft Word, Power Point & Publisher		
			Scale	92	

AWARD/ACHIEVEMENTS AND EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES
No Data For Student

CURRICULUM-RELATED WORK EXPERIENCE
No Data For Student

IMMUNIZATION INFORMATION

	2	06/26/1996
	3	11/11/1996
	1	09/08/1997
	2	07/11/2001
	1	06/26/1996
	2	08/27/1996
	3	11/11/1996
	4	04/11/2001
	1	04/11/2001

ATTENDANCE INFORMATION

Year	School	Grade	Days Present	Abs
03/04	390312	02	172	8
04/05	390312	03	175	5
05/06	390332	04	172	8
06/07	390332	05	175	5
07/08	390332	06	174	6
08/09	390331	07	174	6
09/10	390331	08	174	6
10/11	390324	09	172	8
11/12	390324	10	173	7
12/13	390324	11	109	3

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APPENDIX H

Informed Consent Form

North Carolina State University
INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH
This form is valid from 1/25/13 through 1/25/14

Title of Study : The Underachievement of High School African American Males: What are Their Perceptions of the Factors Contributing to Their Underperformance?

Principal Investigator: Tonya C. Thomas   Faculty Sponsor: Paul Bitting,

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of the study is to examine the different perceptions that shape African American male high school students' understanding of their experiences that lead to their success or lack of success in school. In addition, the study will identify factors that explain the underachievement of African American male students who are academically capable, have sufficient resources, and home support. This study will seek to understand the perception of underperforming African American male high school students who should be achieving at much higher rates.

What will happen if you take part in the study?
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to commit to a 60 minute in-person interview that will take place at the local library in a private conference room. . The interviews will be recorded on a mini digital voice recorder. The recordings will be transferred to a password protected computer that will be locked in an office. Immediately after the recordings have been transferred to the computer, the recordings will be deleted from the mini digital voice recorder.

Risks
Although the researcher will assign each participant a fictitious name and take every precaution to ensure that their identities and the identity of the high school and school district are not identifiable, there is a slight possibility that someone who knows the participants could read the dissertation and may be able to identify them in the research. Fictitious names will be given to the participants, the school, and the district. However, it is possible that participants could be identified by those who know they are participating.

Benefits
There are no known benefits to the participants of the study. However, the information gained from this study may be used to help school districts and administrators create school cultures where it is acceptable for African American males to make good grades and excel in school, and to help educators and communities see the need to change our approach to working with young African American male students.

Confidentiality
The information in this study will be kept confidential. All recordings, notes, and other data will be securely stored in the researcher's private residence and will not be associated with the participants' names, school name, or school district name. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that may link you to the study. You will only be asked to participate in an oral interview. At no time will you be asked to write anything, which could possibly be linked to your identity.

Compensation
You will not receive any compensation for participating in this study.

What if you have questions about this study?
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Tonya C. Thomas, at tythomas@ncsu.edu.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?
 If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-4514).

Consent To Participate
"I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled."

Subject's signature_____   **Date** _____
Parent's signature (if under 18)_____   **Date** _____
Investigator's signature_____   **Date** _____