

From: [Mary R. Levinsohn-Klyap](#)
To: [Eva Yiu](#)
Subject: FW: IRB Proposal for Dissertation
Date: Thursday, January 15, 2015 1:17:22 PM
Attachments: [IRB Synopsis - Donyall Dickey .doc](#)
[Interview Questions for Disseratation - Edited.doc](#)
[Dissertation Defend Date May 2015 7-27-14 .doc](#)

Thank you!

Mary Klyap, Ph.D.
Coordinator, Shared Accountability
Howard County Public School System
410-313-6978
"Together, we can"

From: Donyall D. Dickey [drdickey10@yahoo.com]
Sent: Thursday, January 15, 2015 11:59 AM
To: Mary R. Levinsohn-Klyap
Subject: IRB Proposal for Dissertation

Mary,

As we discussed, I am seeking permission to interview 8 African American males who despite being at risk for failure have succeeded/are succeeding academically as measured by performance on the Maryland School Assessment.

I would only need to interview each boy (preferably former students of mine from Murray Hill Middle School. The interviews would be 30-45 minutes per student and could be done during or after school hours. The name of the school, the district, and the students will remain anonymous (I am required to keep it anonymous).

Each participant/family will be compensated \$200 for their participation in the form of an American Express Gift Card.

Thank you for your consideration. My dissertation committee required me to reshape my study and I am so ready to walk across the state this summer.

I have attached my IRB Proposal, APPROVED Interview Protocol and APPROVED Dissertation Proposal.

Donyall


(267) 331-6664 (F)
www.educationalepiphany.com

HUMAN RESEARCH STUDY SYNOPSIS (VERSION DATE:11/26/2014)

TITLE: The African American Middle School Male Achievement Gap and Performance on State Assessments

SPONSOR (FOR EXTERNAL FUNDING ONLY):

IRB # (if already assigned, otherwise leave blank--will be assigned upon submission):

STUDENT-LED PROJECT: YES NO

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (MUST BE GWU FACULTY)

LAST NAME: Tekleselassie FIRST NAME: Abebayehu DEGREE: Ph.D.
DEPARTMENT: Educational Leadership SCHOOL: George Washington University
ADDRESS: 2121 Eye Street, NW - Washington, D.C. 20052
PHONE (DAY): 202-994-0132 EMAIL: selassie@gwu.edu

PRINCIPAL CONTACT (IF OTHER THAN P.I.) STUDENT COORDINATOR OTHER:

LAST NAME: Dickey FIRST NAME: Donyall
PHONE (DAY): [REDACTED] EMAIL: drdickey10@yahoo.com

RISK LEVEL

Indicate which of the categories below accurately describe this study, where “minimal risk means that “the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests.” (45 CFR 46.102(h)(i))

- Minimal risk
 Greater than minimal risk

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR SIGNATURE

My signature indicates that I will respect and protect the rights and welfare of individuals enrolled in this research project. I will also carry out my responsibilities as Principal Investigator as outlined in [Federalwide Assurance of Protection for Human Subjects](#), for which GW is registered with OHRP/DHHS, and as detailed in GW HRPP policies & procedures. I will be guided by the principles contained in the [Belmont Report](#) and The Code of Federal Regulations governing research with human subjects ([45 CFR 46](#)). I have verified that all members of the research team have agreed to accept the responsibilities required of their roles and I provide my assurance that all will be kept fully briefed on the details of the study. I have queried all members of the research team to determine if they have an economic interest in this study as defined by GW policies.

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

DEPARTMENT CHAIR OR MEDICAL CHAIR SIGNATURE

My signature indicates that this project has been reviewed by the appropriate departmental parties, who have judged that 1) there is a scholarly and a scientific justification for the protocol, that the study is feasible, and that the proposed methods are scientifically valid, 2) the PI is sufficiently qualified by training and experience to conduct the research, 3) that the department has made the space and time commitment necessary to carry out the project, 4) that the financial implications of the research have been considered and deemed acceptable to the department and 5) that all ethical principles have been appropriately addressed.

**Medical Studies - If the PI is an MFA faculty, signature of
Alan G. Wasserman, MD, or Gary Simon, MD, PhD
-OR-**

Date

Non-Medical Studies - Department Chair Signature

Date

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

1. Grey Fields indicate areas for response.
2. Write all responses in layman’s terms as reviewers may be from outside your field.
3. Do not copy/paste from the protocol-responses should not address issues outside of question domain.
4. Call the Office of Human Research for help filling out this form at 202-994-2715

Section I. Study Characteristics

1. Sites

a. GW’s Role in the Project (select one):

- Sole Site (GW is the only IRB involved in this study)
- Lead Site (Lead Researcher is GW-based, other IRB’s are also evaluating)
What other institutions are participating?
- Participating Site (Lead Researcher is not GW-based, other IRB’s also evaluating)
What is the lead institution?
- Data Collection Site (GW researcher role limited to data analysis, other IRB’s also evaluating)
What is the lead institution?

b. Research Locations (list locations where subjects participate in GW IRB-supervised activities or from which data is retrieved)

Organization/Facility/Location (include city, state)

Research Activity (including recruitment, consenting, subject/researcher interaction or retrospective data retrieval)

Howard County Public School System / 10910 Clarksville Pike / Ellicott City, MD 21042

Participants will be recruited by letter and telephone call (the script of the telephone call will be identical to the letter sent home to parents/guardians). Parent/guardian who agrees to have their child participate in the study will have be required to sign the intent to participate letter attached to the participant recruitment letter and have it send to the school's main office (by potential participants) for pick up within 10 days of receipt of the invitation letter or to the research via U.S. mail.

All African American males in the eighth grade will be invited to participate, however final unit of study will consist of 20 boys, who after a record review of their offocial cummulative record, earned a score of proficient or advanced on the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) despite having exhibited two or more of the six criteria for being designated as at-risk for underachieving academically, including: (1) having been reared in a family in the lowest socioeconomic quartile; (2) having been reared in a single-parent home or a home without their biological parents; (3) having earned grades of C’s (on average) or lower in grade 5 and 6; (4) having been retained a grade; (5) having changed schools two or more times outside of the normal progression; or (6) having an older sibling who dropped out of school.

Acting as the primary instrument for data collection, the researcher will conduct 30 to 45 minute (in-person), semi-structured interviews with structured, open-ended questions in a classroom or non-classroom setting familiar to participants' and therefore conducive to authentic responses.

2. a. Research Team

Last Name, First (External Org if app.)	GW Faculty, GW Staff, GW Student or External?	Research Activities Performed (indicate subject recruitment, consenting, “prospective” or “retrospective” data collection, data analysis, other)
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Dickey, Donyall - George Washington University Doctoral Candidate

Each participant will be interviewed separately and will not be aware of the other participants in the study. The interview questions are reflective of the literature on school process factors and the protective

factors associated with resilience. The interview protocol includes (1) the primary research questions, which were not asked of the participants; (2) key interview questions that were based on the primary research questions and were posed to each participant in the same order; (3) probes designed to anticipate the need for clarification of participant responses; (4) space for the researcher's notes and reflections after the interview; and (5) space for observational notes.

The data will be collected using a digital recording device and transcribed into field notes for analysis. Consideration will be given to establishing rapport with participants and interview locations in order to provide participants with a comfortable environment to share their experiences in school. Each interview will be conducted in a classroom or common area familiar to each participant with the written permission of a parent or guardian before, during, or after school hours. Each participant will be asked to choose the classroom or common area for each interview to: (1) enhance the development of the rapport with the participant and the researcher; and (2) avoid sites that impact the participants' willingness to divulge their feelings regarding their lived experiences in school.

A profile of the experience and perceptions of each participant was written in narrative form using the actual words of the participant to minimize interpretation on the part of the researcher; and transcribed data was coded by emergent themes. The researcher will hire an independent, trained coder to analyze the data collected. The independent coder's analysis of the data will be compared to researcher's coded data to promote inner-rater reliability and strengthen inferences drawn from the findings.

- b. **Effort.** What percentage of the PI's total professional effort is devoted to the study and/or paid for by the Sponsor? **Note: This question applies to all research regardless of funding.** For student research, please estimate the amount of time that the PI will supervise the student.
- c. **Curriculum Vitae (CV).** If the Department Chair or Medical Chair has a conflict of interest with certifying the PI's qualification (e.g., the Department Chair is the PI), please include a copy of the PI's CV with the submission. ATTACHED NOT APPLICABLE
- d. **Conflicts of Interest.** Do any members of the research team have any economic interest in or consulting relationship with a for-profit company that provides products or services that are a subject of the proposed study?
 No Yes/explanation of how conflict of interest will be managed

Section II. Narrative

1. Background.

- a. What are the principal objectives of the study? (1-2 paragraphs)

Notwithstanding school reform initiatives and programs, underperformance among African American pupils in this nation, as compared to their non-minority peers, persists, with the African American male clustered at the bottom of the distribution of every indicator of school failure (Garibaldi, 1992; Mickelson & Greene, 2006). Although a host of studies have been conducted, reporting the disparity of performance among racial and ethnic groups, their design are inadequate to understand underachievement among African American males as compared to other groups and within the group. The paucity of discourse specifically on the middle school African American male persists in the literature. Since it is during the middle years that the achievement gap widens by as much as two grade levels (Alexander & Entwistle, 1998), there is much to be learned from the contextualized experience of at-risk boys who, despite being at risk for failure, exhibit resilience and perform academically.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is not to present evidence regarding well-known and documented disparities in achievement across racial and socio-economic groups, but to gain direct insight from students who were at significant risk for failure and yet managed to achieve regardless of extended exposure to compound social and educational disadvantages. Moreover, this study is designed to examine the unique challenges that African American males encounter in their schools and/or classrooms that explain the gender gap in educational outcomes in middle school and to understand how resilient African American males succeed in school despite adversities, thereby understanding the school level enabling characteristics contributing to their academic achievement.

- b. (1) What is the justification for conducting this study in the context of field advancements and (2) How will the study contribute to generalizable knowledge outside of your research entity (publishing, establishing national standards, etc.)? (2-3 paragraphs)
- *Note: If you have no intent to publish, be sure to complete the [Human Subject Research Determination Worksheet](#) to determine if your study requires submission to the Office of Human Research*

The difficulties that African American males face in educational systems contribute to disengagement from the educational process (Swanson, Spencer & Peterson, 1998) is the primary justification for conducting this study. Since education is viewed as a primary impetus toward social and economic mobility as well as a mechanism for redressing inequities, (Jordan, 1999) then the early schooling experiences of the African American male have potentially broad consequences for students' future educational attainment and is therefore of significant societal and scholarly value. Despite decades of school reform efforts, the African American male (those educated in schools with low and high performing aggregates) continues to lag behind his non-minority peers (Maryland State Department of Education, 2012).

African American boys are more likely than any other group to attend school in a sociocultural context that increases their risk for poor academic outcomes (Vigdor & Ludwig, 2007). To contribute to generalizable knowledge pertaining to this group of learners in crisis, this study is designed to advance the knowledge of the field by engaging participants who have firsthand experience with the public education to gain insight from their reality as they experience it. This study excludes the quantitative approach to examining underperformance, which (1) homogenizes individuals into a myopic group and (2) is limited in its ability to consider the lived experience of participants. This design of this study is purposeful and consistent with the researcher's intent to contribute to generalizable knowledge by capturing insight, collected from the point of view of at-risk and resilient African American boys from similar homes and schools who had every reason to fail, but did not.

2. Subject Identification and Recruitment.

"Identification" refers to determination of potential participants for future recruitment activities.

"Recruitment" refers to communication activities up until consent that support solicitation of participation.

- a. Maximum number of subjects to be recruited (or number of retrospective records): 20
Give rationale for why/how this number was chosen. (1 paragraph)

Ritchie, Lewis, Lewis and Elam (2003) suggest that samples for qualitative studies are generally much smaller than those used in quantitative studies. There is a point of diminishing return to a qualitative sample. As a qualitative study goes on, more data does not necessarily lead to more information. This is because one occurrence of a piece of data, or a code, is all that is necessary to ensure that it becomes part of the analysis framework. Frequencies are rarely important in qualitative research, as one occurrence of the data is potentially as useful as many in understanding the process behind a topic. Given the labor intensive nature of qualitative research, analyzing a large sample can be impractical. Qualitative samples must be large enough to assure that most or all of the perceptions that might be important are uncovered, but at the same time if the sample is too large data becomes repetitive and eventually superfluous. Charmaz (2006) suggests that the aims of a study are the ultimate driver of the project design, and therefore the sample size. Given that the aim of this study is to finding meaning by understanding the lived experience of the participants' schooling and the fact that there is a limited number of academically successful African American male eighth graders in the population from which the sample will be drawn, the sample size was set at 20.

b. Specify the age range of subjects to be recruited for the research: **13-14**

c. Indicate any special populations to be involved in the research. N/A

- Pregnant Women, Fetuses or Neonates
- Prisoners
- Children
- Educationally Disadvantaged
- Economically Disadvantaged
- Mentally Ill
- Decisionally-Impaired

- Employees
- Students
- Illiterate
- Non-English speaking
- Other (specify):

d. In the space below (2-4 paragraphs):

- (1) List the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the identification of potential subjects (condition, ethnicity, employer/position, age, etc.), justifying any exclusion criteria.
- (2) Indicate where, how and from whom information regarding these criteria will be accessed, obtained or otherwise determined (i.e. “medical records review from GWU-Hospital for presence of condition xyz”)

The research sample was drawn from a population of 694 middle school students ranging from ages 11-14 in a mid-sized Maryland school district serving students in grades 6-8. Participation in the study was on a voluntary basis. The first twenty eighth grade males who met the selection criteria and responded to the request for participation in the study became the final unit of analysis. The criterion-based selection process was used to ensure that the sample directly reflected the purpose of the study and the identification of information-rich cases. Resilient participants were those who earned a score of proficient or advanced on the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) despite having exhibited two or more of the six criteria for being designated as at-risk for underachieving academically, including: (1) reared in a family in the lowest socioeconomic quartile; (2) reared in a single-parent home or a home without their biological parents; (3) earned grades of C’s (on average) or lower in grade 5 and 6; (4) retained a grade; (5) changed schools two or more times outside of the normal progression; or (6) have an older sibling who dropped out of high school.

Information regarding each of the 5 selection criteria will be obtained from the school district's database/information system by the school administration/principal or his designee which is typically the guidance counselor of the school that participants attend.

e. If obtaining, viewing or collecting records or data from medical or clinical settings to support subject selection, are all potential subjects currently under treatment by a member of the research team listed above?

N/A No Yes/identify investigator(s) and explain treatment relationship:

f. Explain how and from whom subjects’ *contact information* will be obtained for recruitment purposes?

N/A or Explain: **The researcher will obtain contact information from the school administration/principal or his designee which can be an assistant principal, guidance counselor, or data clerk of the school which participants attend.**

g. (1) Check all recruitment methods that apply:

Email Phone Flyer Online Ad Verbal Announce Referral/Snowball Other

(2) Describe in detail how each of these methods will be utilized. Include:

➤ *Who is executing each particular outreach method*

- *Locations (verbal announce in P.I. classroom, already-scheduled patient apt., location of flyers, etc.)*
- *How subjects may privately indicate interest in participating (prior to consent)*
- *Initial as well as follow-up recruitment activities*

The researcher/George Washington Doctoral Candidate will execute each outreach method. The invitation letter and consent form will be sent to the potential participants' home via U.S. mail. The consent document included in the correspondence will allow potential subjects and their parents guardians to indicate interest or a lack of interest in the comfort of their homes. As a follow-up recruitment activity, participants will be offered an incentive to volunteer. The incentive is an American Express gift card for each participant to be transferred to the parent/gaurdian via U.S. mail at the completion of the participant interview. The principal/designee will be asked to encourage parents/gaurdians to allow their child to participate, making phone calls in the interest of the study to secure participants. At the close of the interviews, the researcher will cover the costs of the a luncheon for the administrative team in appreciation for the use of the facility to conduct the study.

3. Informed Consent Process. (See [Tips on Informed Consent](#) for more information).

a. Indicate applicable consent procedure (check one):

- Standard subject consent (obtaining subject signature)
- Waiver of documentation of consent (verbal consent obtained from subject with no signature)
*Justify:
- Waiver of consent (subject unable to indicate consent)
*Justify:

*See Charts 10 & 11 at [OHR Decision Charts](#) for eligibility requirements

b. Give a detailed description of your informed consent process. Your narrative should include the following elements (3-5 paragraphs):

Required

- *Who will consent/assent the subjects*
- *When consent will occur relative to recruitment and research activities*
- *Where or through what communication channels (telephone, email, etc) it will occur*
- *How privacy will be assured for the subject throughout*
- *How subjects will be given a chance to ask questions and opt out prior to research*
- *How subjects will receive a copy of signed consent form*

If applicable

- *Special considerations for children (assent procedures, etc.), pregnant women, new-borns, fetuses, prisoners, illiterate, non-English-speaking (see [Federal Guidelines](#))*
- *Include an assent process for children aged 7 years or older, and include how parental permission will be obtained*
- *How undue influence will be minimized in authoritative relationships (professor-student, doctor-patient).*
- *Use of Evaluation to Consent or other measures for decisionally-impaired subjects*
- *Methods/amount of compensation*
- *Use of deceptive or withheld information and plan for subject debriefing*
- *Foreign-language translation measures*

The custodial parent/guardian will be required to give consent by signing the consent document/intent to participate letter. The consent document will be mailed to the home of each potential participant prior to any research activity. After 20 participant has agreed to participate, a follow-up/thank you letter will be mailed to the home with information regarding next steps (including a timeline). A copy of the signed consent document/intent to participate letter will be attached to the individual household's follow-up/thank you letter. The researcher will retain the original.

The researcher's contact information (telephone number and email address) will be included in the follow-up communication with a prompt for the parent/guardian to contact the researcher in the event that (1) they have questions or concerns leading up to their child's interview; or (2) in the event their child has questions or concerns leading up to their child's interview that they wish to pose on behalf of the participant. The researcher will not converse with the participant directly prior to his one-on-one interview. A transcript of any and all communication with parents will be kept to document all interaction with the researcher. All names and identifiers will be redacted from the transcript. The researcher will refrain from providing insight to the questions on the interview protocol, as not to have an impact on the authenticity of the data collected during the actual interview.

Parents/participants who wish to opt out can take one of three actions to communicate their intent: (1) verbally notify the principal/designee who will notify the researcher; (2) call the researcher on the number provided on the thank you/follow-up letter; or (3) email the researcher using the email address provided on the thank you/follow-up letter.

No longer than one week after the completion of the one-on-one interview, the researcher will send a final thank you letter via U.S. mail with to a \$200 American Express Gift Card. The correspondence will be sent to the attention of the parent/guardian of each participant. The gift card is the sole incentive to be offered to each participants/family for being a part of the study. This correspondence represents the final communication to each participant/parent/guardian.

4. Research Design.

- a. Provide a step-by-step (1, 2, 3...) description of your research study design, with an emphasis on the specific actions of and interactions with human subjects.**

Your description should include the following elements as applicable:

- *Describe frequency, duration and location of activities in which subjects participate*
- *Indicate all data sources and identify and attach all data collection instruments (surveys, tests, etc.)*
- *Precisely describe experimental/control design groups*
- *Distinguish between research-specific procedures and standard-of-care or other procedures that would occur even if the research wasn't being conducted*
- *Describe and justify any deceptive measures including use of placebo or withholding/alteration of specific information from subjects*
- *Indicate if/when audio-recording or video-recording are used*

By design, this interpretive, qualitative research will explore the presence of relationships and the individual's construction of reality, thus capturing the participants' perspectives (DeGroot, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The interview protocol includes (1) the primary research questions, which will not directly posed; (2) interview questions that are based on the primary research questions and will be posed to each participant in the same order; (3) probes

designed to anticipate the need for clarification of participant responses; (4) space for the researcher's notes and reflections after the interview; and (5) space for observational notes.

Each participant will participate in a single, one-on-one interview with the researcher as the primary data collector not to exceed 45 minutes in duration in a setting most comfortable to the participant, which might include a classroom, the library, the counselor's office, or the main office conference room in his school. Data sources include (1) the students cumulative record which contains: (a) Maryland state assessment scores; (b) socio-economic status designation; (c) report card grades; (d) retention information (if applicable); (e) names of schools each participant has attended and (2) the consent letter/intent to participate which includes each participant's parent/guardian response to two questions that will be used to identify and qualify participants: (a) Is your child being currently raised in a single-parent household or in a household without his biological parents? and (b) Does your child have an older sibling who dropped out of school?

Each semi-structured interview with open-ended questions will be audiorecorded using ScreenFlow software which will be converted to digital MP3 files by the researcher and mailed to a professional transcriber. The professional transcriber will produce the transcript of each interview and mail them to the researcher.

- b. How will the collected data be analyzed to answer the research question? (1-2 paragraphs)
➤ Describe statistical tests and software, thematic analysis, what factors will be compared

Each semi-structured interview with open-ended questions will be audiorecorded by the primary research using ScreenFlow software which will be converted to digital MP3 file. The researcher will hire a professional to transcribe each interview. A profile of the experience and perceptions of each participant will be written in narrative form using the actual words of the participant to minimize interpretation on the part of the researcher. The data (participants' perception of their lived experiences as a student) will be coded by emergent themes by the researcher. The researcher will also hire an independent, trained coder to analyze the data collected. The independent coder's analysis of the data will be compared to researcher's coded data to promote inner-rater reliability and strengthen inferences drawn from the findings.

5. Data Management & Security

- a. What personal/demographic data will be collected (check all that apply):

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Name	Location of	<input type="checkbox"/> Employer/School Name	
<input type="checkbox"/> SSN		<input type="checkbox"/> Residence or	<input type="checkbox"/> Department/Division
<input type="checkbox"/> Medical Record #		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Employer/School including:	<input type="checkbox"/> Position/Job
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Age or <input type="checkbox"/> DOB		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> State/Other Region	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Grade/Year Level
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ethnicity		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Zip code/postal code	<input type="checkbox"/> Course/Class
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Gender		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> City	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Telephone #		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Street address	
<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (list):			

- b. (1) Describe primary research data collected (i.e. "attitudes regarding alcohol use", "biomarkers related to pregnancy", etc.) **and** (2) either list specific data points or reference attached collection instruments (i.e. "see ER Survey and Data Sheet #1"):

Not applicable.

- (2) When this primary research data is recorded (written-down or entered) by investigator or subject, will it be (check all that apply):

- (a) Identified directly with any personal/demographic data points listed in 5.a.?

Which data points or “all”?

Justification (data and identifiers should be recorded separately per (b) unless impracticable):

- (b) Identified indirectly, through use of a unique alphanumeric code that links to any personal/demographic data points listed in 5.a. using a key stored securely and separately?

Which data points or “all”?

- (c) Maintain data anonymity by not doing (2.a.) or (2.b.)

- c. Is the research team viewing or collecting *Protected Health Information* (i.e., medical records)? No Yes

➤ See [Protected Health Information Determination Worksheet](#), attach appropriate documents and integrate proper text in Consent Form (see Consent Guidance documents).

- d. Provide a detailed description of data-entry, transfer, storage and destruction procedures.(3-6 paragraphs)

Your description should include all of the following elements:

- *Methods to minimize risk of breach of confidentiality including anonymous data collection, use of coding and identity key, sealed envelopes, lock-boxes, digital firewalls b/w data & identity, etc.*
- *Specify digital vs. hard copy and locations for data, key and/or subject roster (data and key should be separate, secured locations; indicate if research data are stored in medical records).*
- *How and when measures will be taken to remove identifying data and codes as soon as possible.*
- *Use of encryption (above minimal risk) and/or password-protection (minimal risk) on computers.*

- *When hard copy or digital versions of data, key, recordings and roster will be destroyed. How long they will otherwise be stored and for what purposes.*

Each interview will be conducted by the primary researcher. The researcher will assign a pseudonym to each participant prior to the interview and before the interview begins, each participant will be (1) informed that the researcher will refer to him using his assigned pseudonym, and (2) asked to refrain from using his actual name throughout the interview as not to reveal his identity. This step was taken in the research process to ensure that the transcriber and independent coder do not have access to the participants' demographic information. The raw data from each interview (with pseudonyms) will be transferred to the transcriber in MP3 format via certified mail on an USB Key (signature required) and transferred to the researcher via the same process. The transcript of each interview (with pseudonyms) will be transferred to the independent coder via certified mail on a USB Key (signature required) and will be transferred to the researcher via the same process.

The researcher will refrain from labeling the hardcopy or digital copy of each interview by name of participant. Instead, the primary researcher will assign each participant a pseudonym, as not to associate the actual name of each participant with the content of his interview. The identity key for the data will be stored in a password protected Google account that will be emptied and deleted following the dissertation defense (not to exceed 8 months after interview). The password for the Google account will be reset bi-weekly by the researcher until the time that the accounts are deleted.

The following data will be kept a separate password protected Google account: (1) the participants' cumulative record excerpt which contains (a) Maryland state assessment scores; (b) socio-economic status designation; (c) report card grades; (d) retention information (if applicable); (e) names of schools each participant has attended; and (2) the parent's/guardian's response to the following questions: (a) whether the participant is currently being raised in a single-parent household or in a household without his biological parents; and (b) whether one or more of the participant's siblings dropped out of school. The key for this data will be kept in a separate password protected Google account which will be emptied and deleted following the dissertation defense (not to exceed 8 months after interview). The password for the Google account will be reset bi-weekly by the researcher until the time that the accounts are deleted. It will not be necessary for anyone outside of the researcher to have access to this portion of the data, as this data will be used to qualify students for participation in the study.

e. Publication and presentation.

- (1) Results will be published, presented or otherwise shared outside of my research entity in the following manner (check one):
- Data will be aggregated or summarized such that no individual data will be communicated
 - Some individual results will be communicated.
 - (a) How will individual results be attributed, specifying use of descriptors from 5.a. (i.e. “one employee of company abc said _____”)?
 - (b) What is the range of the number of subjects in the study who are associated with each of these attributing descriptors (i.e. “5-6 subjects are employees of the company that will be named”)?
- (2) Will recordings be used in presentations or for any other reasons other than data analysis?
- No Yes
- If yes, explain and submit [Audio/Video Release Form](#):*

6. Risks & Benefits.

- a. Describe all risks to the subject. **Include physical, psychological/emotional, cognitive, privacy, social/cultural stigma, financial, and legal risks.** Confidentiality risks should already be addressed above at Question 5.d.

Common risks that should be acknowledged include:

- *Emotional discomfort, anxiety or other affective risk from survey questions*
- *Breach of privacy from other people observing consenting or research participation*

As a consequence of participating in this study, subjects are in no risk of physical, cognitive, social, financial, or legal harm. Psychologically/emotionally, subjects could experience anxiety from the two questions regarding how they believe adults in their school treat them. Participants' privacy could be at risk, as other students could observe a participant entering or exiting the interview area.

- b. **Radiation.** Will subjects be exposed to radiation during the research? No Yes
- *If yes, please explain use of radiation in detail including maximum number of subject exposures over 12 months, distinguishing between standard of care and research. For research, please specify the type of device and make/model.*
- c. What steps will be taken and research procedures implemented to minimize all risks?
- *Describe additional precautions for special populations as defined at 2.b.(2)(see [HHS 45 CFR 46 Subparts B-D](#) for considerations specifically regarding children, pregnant women, new-borns, fetuses and prisoners)*

To mitigate psychological/emotional risk, the researcher will describe the interview process and purpose as means to capture each participants' honest perceptions of their lived experience as a student. Participants will be assured that any and all information shared in the interview will not in any way be connected to their identity, nor will any adult in their school have access to their responses. To avoid opportunities for breach of privacy, the researcher will not be visible entering or leaving the interview area. Each participant will be escorted to and from the interview area by a single designated school personnel and asked not to divulge any information to the faculty, staff, or students regarding the activity/researcher's time with participants. There will be a 15 minute break between each interview as to keep the identity of participants private from other participants (participants will not be permitted to convene in a waiting area for their interview to begin).

- d. Describe the potential benefits of the research.
- *Please specify the direct benefits to subjects (if any) and the benefits to the class of research subjects.*

Notwithstanding school reform initiatives and programs, underperformance among African American pupils in this nation, as compared to their non-minority peers, persists, with the African American male clustered at the bottom of the distribution of every indicator of school failure (Garibaldi, 1992; Mickelson & Greene, 2006). The paucity of discourse specifically on the middle school African American male persists. Since it is during the middle years that the achievement gap widens by as much as two grade levels (Alexander & Entwistle, 1998), there is much to be learned from the contextualized experience of at-risk boys who, despite being at risk for failure, exhibit resilience and perform academically. While participation in this study may not provide a direct benefit to subjects, the potential benefits to the class of research subjects are significant, including, but not limited to actionable intelligence necessary to inform policy and practice appropriately linked the nature of the phenomenon under investigation to instrumentation sensitive to the unit of analysis selected for study.

Section III. Study details for medical or other therapeutic or diagnostic studies N/A

1. Registered on the www.ClinicalTrials.gov? NA

2. FDA-Regulated Studies:

a. Drug Studies (select one): N/A

Drug study requiring an IND

(IND Number: _____, or provide IND Letter from the FDA)

Study not requiring IND, involves off-label use of approved drug

Provide rationale or proof:

b. List of all research agents administered to human subjects in this study.

Agent	FDA Status	Source	Stored Where?	Dispensed By?
N/A				

c. Device Studies (select one): N/A

1. Categorize the device: Not Applicable

2. IDE/HDE# IDE/HDE Sponsor:

Interview Protocol: Middle School African American Boys and Performance on the Maryland School Assessment

Conceptual Framework: Resilience

Research Questions:

1. What specific challenges do African American males encounter in their middle school that undermine their academic success?
2. How do resilient African American males overcome those challenges to succeed academically?
3. What enabling school level factors exist that supported their success?

#	Factor/Research from which Interview Question Stems (with a Focus on School Enabling Characteristics)	Interview Question
1		Do you do well academically (on the Maryland School Assessment - MSA)? <u>If so, what contributes to your success?</u>
2		Are you at-risk for failing <u>courses and/or your current grade? If so, what is contributing to your being unsuccessful</u> academically (on the MSA)?
3	Values/Beliefs	Is there any value in performing well academically?
4	Academic Self-Esteem	Do you believe that you are smart? If so why? If not, why not?
5	<u>Low Teacher Expectations</u>	What do your teachers think about your ability to achieve academically? How do you know what they think?
6	<u>Schooling Experience</u>	<u>Does anyone at your school communicate with your family regarding your success/failure? If so, tell me what about that communication.</u>
7	Schooling Experience/School Culture	Is your school a place that makes you <u>want</u> to learn/achieve academically? If so, what about your <u>school</u> makes you want to learn/achieve? If not, what about your school keeps you from wanting to learn/achieve academically?
8	Schooling Experience	How do adults in your classes treat you? Does their treatment of you in class have anything to do with how well you achieve academically?
9	Schooling Experience	How do adults treat you in non-classroom settings (like the hallways and cafeteria)? Does their treatment of you in non-classroom <u>settings</u> have anything to do with how well you achieve academically?
10	Schooling Experience	Describe the assignments you are required to do for school. Are they low-level, busy-work activities or activities that require you to think critically and solve problems?
11	<u>Impact of Instructional Approaches</u>	<u>Does a particular type of instruction/instructional decisions made by your teacher(s) have an impact on your ability to achieve academically? If so, which ones and how so?</u>

Interview Protocol: Middle School African American Boys and Performance on the Maryland School Assessment
Conceptual Framework: Resilience

#	<u>Factor/Research from which Interview Question Stems (with a Focus on School Enabling Characteristics)</u>	<u>Interview Question</u>
12	Peer Associations/Social Connections	Do your friends do well academically? If so, does their performance in school have anything to do with how well you perform academically?
13	Peer Associations/Social Connections	Do some of your friends perform poorly academically? If so, does their performance in school have any impact on your academic performance?
14	Peer Associations/Social Connections	What do your friends think about performing well academically?
15	School Culture	Is it cool to do perform well academically? Why do you say so?
16	School Culture	As an African American male, does performing well academically get one teased? If so, what might other students say to tease an African American boy who performs well in school?
17	<u>Characteristics of Resilient Children</u>	<u>When the bell rings for school tomorrow, and you could have a wish granted to remove one person, thing, behavior, or practice from your school that stands in your way of performing as well as you could academically, what would you wish for?</u>
18	<u>Attachment Figure Research</u>	<u>Do you have an adult(s) in school that pushes you to perform well academically? If so, who is it? What do they say and/or do to push you to perform well academically?</u>
19	<u>Characteristics of Resilient Children</u>	<u>Outside of a mentor or a friend, what drives you to perform well academically?</u>
20	<u>Characteristics of Resilient Children</u>	<u>Who is responsible for your academic performance? Why do you believe this?</u>
21	<u>Characteristics of Resilient Children</u>	<u>Do you ask for academic help when you need it? Why? Why not?</u>
22	<u>Characteristics of Resilient Children</u>	<u>What characteristic(s) of your school keeps you from performing as well as you could? How do you get around that characteristic of your school and perform academically despite the characteristic(s)?</u>

THE AFRICAN AMERICAN MIDDLE SCHOOL MALE ACHIEVEMENT GAP AND
PERFORMANCE ON STATE ASSESSMENTS

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Overview

Since the first educational progress report in 1970, we have witnessed four decades of persistent achievement gaps for African American children (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2009). White students significantly outperform their minority peers by multiple measures in both primary and secondary schooling experiences (Osborne, 1999). This imbalance of performance is demonstrated in K-12 report card grades, standardized test scores, dropout rates, and grades in college (American Council of Education, 1990; Bachman, 1970; Demo & Parker, 1987; Herring, 1989; Nettles, 1988; Simmons, Brown, Bush, & Blyth, 1978). Notwithstanding school reform initiatives and programs, underperformance among African American pupils in this nation, as compared to their non-minority peers, persists, with the African American male clustered at the bottom of the distribution of every indicator of school failure (Garibaldi, 1992; Mickelson & Greene, 2006).

Alexander and Entwistle (1998) found that the achievement gap between White and U.S. minority students is diminutive during the inaugural years of schooling, but expands by as much as two grade levels by middle school. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), with a large, nationally representative sample of 13-year-olds reported that White students scored 23 or more points higher on average than African American students on the NAEP (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013) in reading. In 2012, White students scored 28 or more points higher on average than African American students on the same assessment in mathematics. In 2007, with a

similar sample, NCES reported a 29-point and a 31.5-point achievement gap in reading and mathematics scores respectively, between African American and White primary and middle school students. In addition to being outperformed by his White peers in reading and mathematics, the African American male lags behind African American female in reading (in both primary and middle school), and contrary to trends in the aggregate data, is outperformed by his African American female peers in mathematics (at the primary and middle school level). Underperformance among African American males remains constant throughout high school.

Academic underachievement among African American males has been persistent, pervasive, and disproportionate (Lomotey, 1990). Furthermore, the African American male student has historically demonstrated academic underachievement in this nation at a higher rate than any other racial, ethnic or gender group (Davis, 2003; Noguera, 2003; Osborne, 1999). Although the failures and difficulties of African American males in the U.S. educational system have been well-documented, much less attention has been given to the complex, lived experience of the African American male's schooling experience.

Statement of the Problem

African American children start school substantially behind their peers and fall nearly 0.10 standard deviations further behind each year from first to third grade (Fryer & Levit, 2006). National data show that when both race and gender are considered the greatest gaps are found for African American boys (Coley, 2011; Matthews, Kizzie, Rowley, & Cortina, 2010). Data from the NAEP (2012) indicated that by fourth grade, African American boys enrolled in public schools scored an average of 23 points lower in both reading and 25 points lower in mathematics than White boys, which translates to a

three-quarter to one full standard deviation difference, respectively. Even within the subset of children who qualified for free lunch, the differences between African American and White boys were roughly half a standard deviation for both reading and mathematics (Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Rouse, & Chen, 2012). Academic underperformance among African American boys worsens on universal indicators of student performance throughout his secondary educational experience (Gibbs, 1988; Irvine, 1990; Polite & Davis, 1999). This trend of underperformance among African American males is exacerbated within the African American community at the postsecondary level with a 28% gender gap in undergraduate enrollment (as compared to African American females) and a 42% graduate school enrollment gap (as compared to African American females) in 2008, representing the most significant gap of all racial and ethnic groups in the nation (Aud, KewalRamani, & Fox, 2010).

Typified in the literature on achievement among African Americans are studies that simply state what is already widely known; African American males underachieve when compared to other groups. Although a host of studies have been conducted, reporting the disparity of performance among racial and ethnic groups, their design are inadequate to explain and describe the complexity of underachievement of the African American male as compared to all other groups in the nation. Reporting that African American middle class males perform lower than expected given their socioeconomic status may be useful to body of knowledge on the achievement gap. However, socioeconomic status provides an incomplete analysis of the academic performance of the African American male. Clark (1983) argued that the myopic study of traditional home process factors such as socioeconomic status and family structure can only offer

negligible insight into the lived experiences of the African American learner. Such studies, Clark suggested, contribute the blind spots of knowledge and understanding of achievement among this group of students who have demonstrated crisis levels of underachievement.

The NCES (2013) reported dismal performance among the nation's eighth graders. Only 36% of U.S. eighth graders were proficient in reading and mathematics proficiency. According to the Maryland State Department of Education (2012), it is in the middle school that students' progress stalls, performance diminishes, and the achievement gap becomes more profound. Balfanz (2009) argued that African American students are more likely to be educated in an urban environment or nonselective high school and that such schools, typically, educate students who enter with skills representative of children three to four years their junior, foreshadowing disappointing outcomes. The findings of the Maryland State Department of Education, Easton et al, and Balfanz, underscore the imperative for expanding empirical knowledge regarding the middle school African American male and his schooling experience.

The NCES (2011) also reported that 15% of African American eighth graders demonstrated reading proficiency, while 14% of the same population met the proficiency standard in mathematics. Similar to national trends, the achievement gap in Maryland (as measured by performance on state mandated standardized assessments) reveals a widening disparity of performance in a comparison of African American and White students. The 13-point reading achievement gap in grade four widens to a 20-point gap by grade eight and the 13-point mathematics achievement gap widens to a 33-point gap by grade eight (Maryland State Department of Education, 2012). Consistent with the

findings and assertions from the NCES and Maryland State Department of Education, Balfanz (2009) conducted a longitudinal study on middle school grade students, citing that sixth graders who failed reading or mathematics had only a 10% to 20% chance of graduating from high school with his peers. As suggested by Balfanz, it is in the middle school years that the achievement gap among minority populations widens exponentially. To that end, the study of the African American male achievement gap and its antecedents could provide educators with a springboard for planning and implementing research-based instructional practices geared to mitigate underachievement.

The research in the field suggests that there is some consensus that home and school process factors influence student achievement during the critical years (Clark, 1983; Davis & Jordan, 1994; Gutman & Midgley, 2000; Ogbu, 2003; Pettigrew, 2011; Sullivan, 2012). However, this same body of literature is characterized by studies that investigate the impact of a single variable to advance understanding of underachievement among African American male students. A review of the literature reveals a narrow analysis of the African American achievement gap through singular home or school process factor studies accompanied by unsubstantiated assertions without consideration for the impact of resilience among students who are successful academically despite their lived experiences.

For example, that which we know about the impact of gender on achievement among African American students is inadequate to understand underperformance among African American males. We do know that girls at the elementary level are closing the performance gap in mathematics when compared to their non-minority peers and that African American boys are out performed by African American girls in reading at the

primary grades and in middle school (Perie, Moran, & Lutkus, 2005), but consensus on causal factors among researchers has yet to be met. Assertions made by the existing literature on the widening of within-race African American achievement gap are insufficient to explain the underperformance of the African American male as compared to his same-race female peer. The African American male is raised in the same neighborhoods, under the same family structure (two-parent, one-parent, extended family member as guardian, or otherwise). The African American male is educated in the same schools by the same teachers as his same-race female peer, but significantly underperforms his female peer throughout his public education career. Studies on the African American achievement gap without an instrument for collecting data sensitive to (1) the impact of both school and home process factors as they converge on the lived experiences of its subjects to increase the risk of academic failure; and (2) fail to consider how some boys manage to achieve despite social and educational disadvantages may result in findings and assertions that provide partial insight to the achievement gap that persists between the African American male and female, but most notably between African American males from the same or similar socioeconomic background, family structures, and schools.

Another narrow analysis of the African American achievement gap is Steele's (1992) stereotype threat study. Steele's theory is widely used to explain underachievement among African American males. He argued that the African American male disengages from active participation in the learning process in an effort to manage his anxiety for being viewed as unequal to his non-minority peer. Several assumptions underlie this theory: (1) all African American boys are impacted by this school process

factor; (2) African American boys are impacted by this process factor in all types of schools (urban, suburban, and rural); (3) the extent to which African American boys are impacted by this process factor is universal and; and (4) African American boys are impacted by this factor at the same point(s) in their educational experience. Although useful, this theory cannot be used in isolation to understand underachievement among the African American male. The study of one contributing factor to understand underachievement among African American males without regard to how some boys at risk for failure might demonstrate resilience is insufficient.

Majors (1988) conducted a study on the impact of the cool pose on academic achievement among African American males. He argued that boys actively conceal their academic ability as a mechanism to either obtain and/or retain a measure of masculinity in the school setting by disassociating themselves from a feminine pursuit – academic achievement. Majors’ cool pose theory is widely accepted as a school process factor of academic achievement among African American males; however, this population sample did not include male subjects from diverse racial and ethnic groups. Without (1) data from male subjects from divergent backgrounds in the sample to understand the impact of the cool pose on a larger population; and (2) an analysis of how some boys from the same or similar schools did not succumb to this process factor while others did, Major’s findings are at best inconclusive, and his assertions lack generalizability.

The inherent danger of reliance on research that proposes a causal relationship between one factor and underperformance among African American males is the ill-informed policy that may be formulated and adopted by policymakers with good intentions. For example, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation and the

reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) which were intended to reform public education in the U.S and close the achievement gap have had very little impact on student achievement among African American males (Lee, 2006). The law required: (1) accountability and higher standards, mandating states to ensure that all students met high academic standards to avoid sanctions for underperformance; (2) annual reading and mathematics assessments to provide parents with information about their child's performance and metrics for reporting the extent to which each school was successful; and (3) consequences for schools that failed to demonstrate "adequate" yearly progress, including corrective action (Bush, 2001). In most states, basic trends are almost exactly what they were before the act became a law. There have been no significant changes in the achievement gap since the legislation was enacted (Lee, 2006).

Nearly 60 years after the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, a ruling handed down to engender equity in access and outcomes, the law still does not guarantee outcomes and the African American male lags behind in all measures of academic success. Noteworthy in literature is the assertion the African American male, himself, is a primary source of his achievement problems (Lomotey, 1990; Perry 2003). If there is any truth to that assertion, perhaps the resilient African American male is the primary source of his academic success.

Purpose and Research Questions

Achievement gaps constitute important barometers in educational and social progress (Lee, 2006). The focus of educational policy has shifted from equity to excellence during the past two decades (Bracey, 2002; O'Day & Smith, 1993) and the era of high-stakes testing has generated considerable discussion among researchers,

educators, and policymakers. However, the paucity of discourse specifically on the middle school African American male persists. Since it is during the middle years that the achievement gap widens by as much as two grade levels (Alexander & Entwistle, 1998), there is much to be learned from the contextualized experience of at-risk boys who, despite being at risk for failure, exhibit resilience and perform academically.

The purpose of this study was not to present evidence regarding well-known and documented disparities in achievement across racial and socio-economic groups, but to share direct insight from students who were at significant risk for failure and yet managed to achieve regardless of extended exposure to compound social and educational disadvantages. This study was designed to examine the unique challenges that African American males encounter in their schools or classroom that explain the gender gap in educational outcomes in middle school and to understand how resilient African American males succeed in school despite adversities, thereby understanding the school level enabling characteristics contributing to their academic achievement.

Research Questions

1. What gender specific challenges do African American males encounter in their middle school that undermine their academic success?
2. How do resilient African American males overcome those challenges to succeed academically? What enabling school level factors exist that supported their success?

Statement of Potential Significance

Education is viewed as a primary impetus toward social and economic mobility as well as a mechanism for redressing inequities (Jordan, 1999). Nonetheless, the difficulties

that African American males face in educational systems contribute to disengagement from the educational process (Swanson, Spencer & Peterson, 1998). Davis and Jordan (1994) argued that the academic success of the African American male is the precursor to the social issues that he is likely to have as an adult. If their argument deserves acknowledgment, then the early schooling experiences of the African American male have potentially broad consequences for students' future educational attainment and is therefore of significant societal and scholarly value. Ogbu (2003) found evidence to support the assertion that even the middle class, African American male performs lower than expected given their family's socioeconomic status. Among African American males, this low level of academic performance is evident by significantly lower grades in primary and secondary school (Demo & Parker, 1987; Simmons, Brown, Bush, & Blyth, 1978), standardized test scores (Bachman, 1970; Herring, 1989; Reyes & Stanic, 1988; Simmons et al., 1978), disproportionate dropout rates (American Council of Education, 1990; Steele, 1992), and lower grades in college (Nettles, 1988). Despite decades of school reform efforts, the African American male continues to lag behind his non-minority peers (Osbourne, 1999; Mickelson & Greene, 2006).

Alexander and Entwistle (1988) argued that the African American achievement gap that emerges in the primary grades and rapidly widens thereafter underscores the urgency and significance of an inductive approach to this pervasive issue. The negligible performance gap between White and minority U.S. students in inaugural years of their K-12 education expands by as much as two grade levels by grade six. In middle school grades, progress for the African American student, particularly the male, diminishes and the achievement gap widens. In fact, according to the NCES, 15% and 14% of African

American eighth graders, nationwide, reached proficiency in reading and mathematics respectively (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).

Although the state of Maryland is making progress at the middle school level as demonstrated by performance among eighth graders on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in reading and mathematics, the 13-point reading gap in reading between White and African American fourth graders nearly doubles to 20 points by eighth grade and nearly triples to 33 points by grade eight on the MSA (Maryland State Department of Education, 2012). Maryland, African American middle school boys, (those educated in schools with low and high performing aggregate populations) have demonstrated similar levels of underachievement on state assessments as their same-race peers across the nation. Findings from this study may provide school leaders tasked with narrowing the achievement gap a more profound understanding of the lived experiences of their African American male students.

This study was conducted to contribute to the professional literature on achievement among African American males. Common in the literature were studies on single, predictable, home process factors such as socio-economic status, family structure, race and ethnicity, familial educational attainment, or school process factors such as urbanicity, disidentification, school climate, teacher expectations, and culturally relevant instruction which provided an incomplete view of the achievement gap. Accompanied by single process factor studies were immodest assertions about the larger African American male student population. Also pervasive in the literature, were single process factor studies paired with diminutive samples used to argue causal relationships between the factor under examination and underachievement among African American students.

Excluding a quantitative approach to examining underperformance, which (1) homogenizes individuals into a myopic group and (2) is limited in its ability to consider the lived experience of participants, this study is the result of stories told from the point of view of at-risk and resilient African American boys from similar homes and schools who had every reason to fail, but did not.

Few studies exist on the examination of academic achievement within the African American male student group; therefore this study will serve as a professional response to the dearth of within-group studies in the literature on African American male student achievement. The NAEP Trends in Academic Progress Report, which analyzed 30 years of student performance in reading and mathematics (Peire, Mortan, & Lutkus, 2004), noted that nation's attention on between-racial and ethnic groups should not serve as an impediment for study of the within-race achievement gap among African American students. Since that statement, the NCES has yet to focus its human and capital resources on such studies, resulting in a body of literature offering limited assertions and knowledge on how widely accepted home and school process factors might impact achievement among African American males from similar homes and schools.

Smith, Kahn, Heinecke, and Jarvis (2004) suggested that policy formulation is often based upon the interests of the affluent and politically connected. If their assertion has any merit, it is possible that current policies and correlate practices are likely to continue to have a negligible impact on promoting achievement among African American male students in Maryland and across the nation. Traditionally, the African American community in this country has been both economically disadvantaged and politically disconnected, perpetuating policymaking-table representation disparities at the local,

state, and federal level. Such disparities in representation have resulted in either a contemptible lack of legislation or in a bevy of policies that, while perhaps good intentioned, fail to meet the specific and complex needs of the African American male pupil in this nation.

Our nation's current political climate has made gaining access to the policymaking agenda, which was already an arduous task, a more difficult task. For groups that have yet to attain an abundance of material wealth and prominence, right of entry to policymaking influence must be engineered with more than passionate rhetoric. The policymaking aspirations of those in ardent support of disenfranchised groups like the African American male must be equipped with research that is (1) targeted; that is, it focuses on both home and school processes as they act in concert upon the lowest performing group of students in our nation; (2) underpinned by resilience theory; considering that African American male students may not be a powerless group, unable to persist despite impediments to their academic success; (3) compelling, by linking the early schooling experiences of the African American male to the potential academic issues that he is likely to have as an adolescent and beyond; and (4) methodologically relevant, appropriately linking the nature of the phenomenon under investigation to instrumentation sensitive to the unit of analysis selected for study.

For example, NCLB imposed an accountability policy for all student groups, but failed to produce 100% proficiency for all student groups by 2014 – in part, because the policy was based upon what we already knew about underperforming student groups rather than that which we needed to understand about their lived schooling experiences. As a result, the substantial disparities in the educational experiences of the African

American male have not been addressed by recent federal policy (Lee, 2006). During the 1970s, education and social policies worked to narrow the achievement gap by guaranteeing a minimally adequate level of achievement for minorities through compensatory education, minimum competency testing, school desegregation, equalization of school funding, the war on poverty, and affirmative action (Lee, 2006). As the focus of education policy has shifted from equity to excellence during the last two decades, there is a potential tension between academic excellence and equity (Bracey, 2002; O'Day & Smith, 1993). Under the Bush administration, the federal education reform agenda and policy for closing the achievement gap required states, school districts, and local schools to ensure that all students met high academic standards by developing a system of sanctions and rewards and by implementing annual academic assessments in reading/English and mathematics. However, the policy did not directly address issues of equity. The NCLB policy failed to produce adequacy and equity of school resources. The policy did not result in a highly qualified teacher assigned to every classroom, nor did it result in evidence-based funding for reforms for schools serving our nation's lowest performing students. High academic expectations and the administration of standardized assessments in the absence of equitable access to quality instruction and attention to the specific needs of students at risk of failing did not close the achievement gap, even after a decade of implementation.

Like the failed NCLB policy, the Obama administration's \$4.35 billion dollar Race to the Top Fund signed into law as a part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 was also arguably based on what we already know about low performing students rather than that which we need to understand about their lived

schooling experiences. Unlike the unfunded NCLB policy, the Race to the Top program is an attempt of the government to underwrite educational reform. An extension of the NCLB policy, the Race to the Top policy reset high expectations for all students; expanded the adoption of standards, assessments, and data systems; refocused the attention of school leaders on recruiting highly qualified teachers; and propagated a general goal of turning around the lowest performing schools; however, much like the failed NCLB policy, its abortive approach to understanding the most consistently underperforming student group in our nation's history will invariably result in diminished returns. High levels of funding, do not guarantee that students will receive a quality education (Williams & Noguera, 2010). Policy must also be informed by the nonacademic needs of children (social, emotional, and psychological), which far too often go unmet and in some cases undiscovered. Rather than waiting until its too late to analyze the extent to which African American males develop protective factors to mitigate the effects of being at-risk to failure during critical years, educational policy and funding should be reflective of a diagnostic and prescriptive approach to the unique needs of each student. Social scientists and advocates for African American boys have charged that our current body of research on the achievement gap is inadequate to address the urgent and complex problems facing this student group (Anderson, 2008; Howard 2008). They postulate that research on African American boys has been disconnected from the mission of public educators, nor has it been intentionally positioned within communities of inquiry that would hold researchers, educators, and policymakers accountable to the African American male population for generating intelligence regarding what is behind

being behind and what has promise for promoting educational well being (Garcia Coll & Garrido, 2000; Jackson & Moore, 2008).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used to guide this study has its underpinnings in the work of Garmezy (1971), Garmezy and Nuechterlin (1972), Garmezy *et al* (1979) and Anthony (1974) who are credited with providing the foundation of the concept of resilience – the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances. Garmezy (1974), Garmezy and Rutter (1983), Anthony (1987) and Werner and Smith (1988) conducted investigations on specific populations of resilient children. The researchers investigated outcomes among children who were classified as being at risk for negative life outcomes as a result of exposure to a variety of individual, family, and environmental factors, synonymous with the home and school process factors as outlined in chapter two of this study. Rather than focusing on the children who were casualties of the negative factors and unresponsive to instructional and psychosocial strategies prevalent in the literature, Garmezy *et al*, focused instead on those who had not succumbed. Garmezy and his contemporaries conducted their studies through the lens of the following questions: What was it about these children that allowed them to survive and succeed? What made these children apparently immune to the factors that negatively affected their peers from similar homes and schools?

Because youth experience stressful life events and degrees of parental monitoring that can impact their educational experiences and subsequent resilience (Luthar, 2006; Trask-Tate & Cunningham, 2010; Trask-Tate, Cunningham, & Lang-DeGrange, 2010), the context of the everyday experience of at risk students is crucial when examining

educational resilience (Cunningham & Swanson, 2010). Slaughter and Rubin (2001) argued that school officials have tremendous influence during adolescent years. Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1997) suggested that resilient students are strongly influenced by teacher expectations and the classroom environment. This study recognized that the acquisition of developmentally appropriate competencies results from complex transactions of person, context, and time (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Swick & Williams, 2006). Each child is unique and brings a distinctive set of characteristics into the world, which transact with the expectations of multiple systems within the child's ecology to influence development. For young children, their most influential systems are home and school (Huston & Bentley, 2010).

The purpose of this research was not to provide evidence pertaining to well-known and documented disparities or normative challenges associated with the developmental period of adolescence, rather to examine factors within the context of the homes and schools of middle school, African American males identified as at risk of underachieving that managed to succeed academically. This study took advantage of the research that has been conducted on the African American achievement gap; home and school process factors purported to contribute to and impede academic achievement among African American male students; and extant research on the constructs of resilience. The present study sought to advance understanding of the achievement gap by combining what was widely known about the at risk, middle school aged African American males with an examination of the perspectives and lived experiences of members of the student group who, despite many factors acting in concert, achieved academically.

Summary of Methodology

An interpretive, qualitative study was conducted to gain access to and understand the lived schooling experiences resilient, at-risk African American students. The research sample was drawn from a population of 59 African American males from a population of 693 middle school students ranging from ages 11-14 in a mid-sized Maryland school district. Thirty percent of the majority-minority middle school population qualified for free or reduced meals in 2012. As participation in the study was on a voluntary basis, the first 12 males who met the selection criteria and responded to the request for participation in the study became the final unit of analysis. The criterion-based selection process was used to ensure that the sample directly reflected the purpose of the study and the identification of information-rich cases. Two categories of participants were identified from the population: “resilient” and “non-resilient.” Implicit in the concept of resilient were two critical conditions: (1) exposure to significant threat or severe adversity; and (2) the achievement of positive adaptation despite major assaults on the developmental process (Garmezy, 1990; Luthar & Zigler, 1991; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990; Rutter, 1990; Werner & Smith, 1982, 1992). Resilient participants were those who earned a score of proficient or advanced on the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) despite having exhibited two or more of the six criteria for being designated as at-risk for underachieving academically, including: (1) reared in a family in the lowest socioeconomic quartile; (2) reared in a single-parent home or a home without their biological parents; (3) earned grades of C’s (on average) or lower in grade 5 and 6; (4) retained a grade; (5) changed schools two or more times outside of the normal progression; or (6) have an older sibling who dropped out of high school. Non-resilient

participants were students who exhibited two or more of the six criteria for being designated as at-risk for underachieving academically, including: (1) reared in a family in the lowest socioeconomic quartile; (2) reared in a single-parent home or a home without their biological parents; (3) earned grades of C's (on average) or lower in grade 5 and 6; (4) retained a grade; (5) changed schools two or more times outside of the normal progression; or (6) have an older sibling who dropped out of high school, but earned a basic score on the Maryland School Assessment (MSA).

Acting as the primary instrument for data collection, the researcher conducted thirty-five minute, semi-structured interviews with structured, open-ended questions. For the purpose of particularization—taking a case and knowing it well, not primarily as how it is different from others, rather what it is and what it does, each participant was interviewed separately and were not aware of the other participants in the study. Interview questions were reflective of the literature on school process factors and the protective factors associated with resilience. Each interview was audiotaped and conducted in a classroom familiar to each participant with the written permission of a parent or guardian before, during, or after school hours. A profile of the experience and perceptions of each participant was written in narrative form using the actual words of the participant to minimize interpretation on the part of the researcher; and transcribed data was coded by emergent themes. The researcher hired an independent, trained coder to analyze the data collected. The independent coder's analysis of the data was compared to researchers coded data to promote inner-rater reliability and strengthen inferences drawn from the findings. The participant permission letter, which required a parental signature, included a confidentiality clause. To ensure the board of education and site-based leaders

that the name of the system, school, participants, and names of all parties involved would not become the subject of negative press, the researcher agreed to use pseudonyms and signed an agreement of the same.

Limitations

— This study has a number of limitations that should be noted. Since qualitative research is not a linear, data collection and analysis for this study was a simultaneous activity. The researcher mitigated the impact of the data collection protocol by: (1) audiotaping each interview to ensure that everything that was said was preserved for analysis; and (2) writing reflections immediately following each interview in order to record insights suggested by data collected from each interview, descriptive notes on the verbal and nonverbal behavior of each participant, and parenthetical thoughts of the researcher, to produce trustworthy findings. Since the researcher acted as the primary instrument for data collection as the interviewer, all data collected was inherently subject to the researcher's bias. To diminish the impact of researcher bias, the interviewer constantly checked for and maintained neutrality with regard to the respondents' knowledge, regardless of how antithetical to the interviewer's beliefs or values the respondents' position might be.

— The research sample was drawn from a population of African American males enrolled in eighth grade at a single, majority minority middle school; therefore, generalization about the larger population of all African American males in this nation and factors acting on academic achievement must be made within the boundaries set by the sample and scope of the study. By design this study was not designed to generalize or to test theory. The underlying purpose of this study was to understand what occurs in

~~context, open discourse on the implications of what occurs, and the relationships linking occurrences; therefore, the purposive sampling procedures employed by the researcher were for the aim of discovering and gaining insight, which must be gained from a sample from which the most can be learned. The researcher mitigated the possible influence of sample size on applicability of findings by beginning with a tentative number of participants to be included, knowing that the number of sampled units could be adjusted in the course of the investigation in order to arrive at a point of saturation and redundancy.~~

Definition of Key Terms

Academic Achievement – Success on a measure of school performance measured by proficiency on the 2012 administration of the Maryland School Assessment

Achievement Gap – The race-based performance gap between White and minority students

At-Risk – Demonstrating two or more of the following criteria: reared in a family in the lowest socioeconomic quartile; reared in a single-parent home or a home without biological parents; earned grades of C's (on average) or lower in grade 5 and 6; held back a grade; changed schools two or more times outside of the normal progression; or have an older sibling who dropped out of high school

Home Process Factors – Issues, circumstances, or conditions to which students are exposed to in the home

Low Socioeconomic Status – Students are designated as from a low socioeconomic status household when their parent(s)/guardian(s) apply and qualify for free and/or reduced school meals

Maryland School Assessment (MSA) – The standardized test administered in Maryland to measure individual student and student-group achievement in reading, writing, and mathematics. The performance of race-based and service groups on this assessment is used to designate schools as passing, failing, or in need of improvement based upon the percentage of students in each group who pass or fail until the year 2014

Parental Involvement – The participation of custodial parent(s)/guardian(s) in their child’s curricular and/or extracurricular schooling experience

Resilience – The process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances

School Process Factors – Issues, circumstances, or conditions to which students are exposed to in their local, public school

Underperformance – A gap in scaled scores on the Maryland School Assessment when compared across individuals or groups of students

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The seminal "Coleman Study," also known as the Equality of Educational Opportunity Study (EEOS) was commissioned by the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in 1966 to evaluate the accessibility of equal educational opportunities to children of different races, color, religion, and national origin. Conducted in response to provisions of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, this study served as the landmark American educational investigation on disparities and their collective impact on minority student achievement. The study included a focus on in-school practices and culture (school process factors) that impact academic attainment for African American students. More than 40 years later after several waves of educational reform, it is widely accepted that school process factors and home process factors act in concert as catalysts for underachievement among African American students (Huston & Bentley, 2010). Furthermore, the impact of school process factors on student achievement has received attention in the literature, but more research is necessary to better understand impediments to and resolutions for the underachievement of African American male students, in particular.

This literature search included sources and references spanning 48 years, from 1960 to 2013. It included literature on factors of the achievement gap including home

process factors such as socioeconomic status and family structure and school process factors such as teacher perception, school culture, the oppositional culture model, disidentification, peer attitudes, cooperative learning, culturally responsive teaching, direct instruction, basal reading, guided notes, interactive instruction, and authentic intellectual instruction. The key terms: African American male, achievement gap, and academic achievement were used to find relevant dissertations, peer reviewed articles, and a litany of position papers. From January 2008 to December 2013, this literature review included sources from JSTOR, OVIDSP, the Education Research Information Clearinghouse (ERIC) database, Proquest, EBSCO Host Academic Search Premier, Highwire Press SAGE Publications, and reference lists from related articles.

Plight of the African American in U.S. Public Education

Findings from educational and psychology research have repeatedly suggested that students from U.S. minority groups are likely to be outperformed by their White peers (Osborne, 1999). Characteristic of this underperformance are lower grades in school (Demo & Parker, 1987; Simmons, Brown, Bush, & Blyth, 1978), lower standardized test scores (Bachman, 1970; Herring, 1989; Reyes & Stanic, 1988; Simmons et al., 1978), higher dropout rates (American Council of Education, 1990; Steele, 1992), and lower grades in college (Nettles, 1988). For example, in 1999, the average reading and mathematics achievement test scores of eighth grade African American males in Chicago were a full year below grade level, the lowest of any racial, ethnic, or gender group (Easton, Rosenkranz, Bryk, Jacob, Luppescu, and Roderick, 2000).

Despite several decades of school reform efforts, 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 (Mickelson & Greene, 2006). Even middle-class African American males perform lower than expected given their family's socioeconomic levels (Ogbu, 2003; Polite & Davis, 1999). African American males are disproportionately placed in special education classes, are suspended more often, and are assigned to lower academic tracks than their White peers. Furthermore, the African American male experiences lower rates of parental involvement and are more likely to attend a poorly funded, urban school (Anyon, 1997; Eitle, 2002; Gutman & Midgley, 2000; Williams & Noguera, 2010). The disproportionate failure of the African American male in the American public educational system had been identified as a major cause for their over-representation in the criminal justice system and high unemployment rate (Garibaldi, 1992; Stewart, 1992). For example, the African American male represented approximately 8.6 % of the nation's K-12 public school enrollment, but comprised about 60% of all incarcerated youth (Schott Foundation, 2005; Smith, 2005). The disparity in academic achievement among African American students begins in the early grades and becomes increasingly pervasive over time. Alexander and Entwistle (1988) found that the achievement gap between White and minority U.S. students is minimal or nonexistent at the beginning of schooling has been shown to widen by as much as two grade levels by sixth grade. In 2013, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the primary entity for collecting, analyzing, and reporting data related to education in the United States and other nations, which produces the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a nationally representative and continuing assessment of what American students know and can do in various subject areas including reading and mathematics, reported a 23-point gap in reading between African

American and White primary (age 9) and secondary (age 13) students. In mathematics, the gap widens to a 25-point gap at age 9 and increases to 28 points by age 13.

NCES studies have shown a consistent finding of White students outperforming their African American peers in both reading and mathematics (Braswell, Dion, Daane, & Jin, 2005). The 2012 NAEP, which was administered in selected states and districts to a sample of 213,100 fourth graders and 168,200 eighth graders in reading and 209,000 fourth graders and 175,200 eighth graders in mathematics is used as the tool to measure student achievement of American students at ages 9, 13, and 17. The 2012 Report Card, reported trends in academic progress across three decades of student performance in reading and mathematics: from 1971 to 2012 for reading and from 1973 to 2012 for mathematics. The report card revealed that while the African American-White achievement gap in reading is declining on the aggregate scales, the achievement gap has remained significant over the 30 years of this longitudinal study on the relative scales. Although the differences in reading scores for African American and White students have decreased between the first (1971) and the most recent (2012) assessments across all three ages, White students scored significantly higher on average than African American students at each age level in 2012 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). More specifically, the reading score gap between African American and White students at age 9 decreased by 21 points between 1971 and 2012. At age 13 the gap decreased from 39 points in 1971 to 23 points in 2012. At age 17, the gap decreased by 27 points between 1971 and 2012. On average, African American students are consistently outperformed in reading by their White peers by 24 points.

The same trend of underperformance was reported in the area of mathematics. While the differences in average scores for African American and White students at all ages decreased between the first (1973) and the (2012) assessment in mathematics, White students consistently outperformed their African American peers at each grade level (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). More specifically, at age 9, the mathematics achievement gap decreased from 35 points in 1973 to 25 points in 2012. At age 13, the gap decreased from 46 points to 28 points in 2012. At age 17, the gap decreased from 40 points in 1973 to 26 points in 2012. On average, White students outperformed their African American peer in mathematics by more than 26%.

From elementary school through middle school, the African American female outperforms her African American male peer. The 2007 NCES Report Card for Reading reported a 9-point gap at age 9 in reading and a widening gap by age 13 at 13 points. In comparison, the reading gap between African American males and females exceeds the achievement gap between all other racial and ethnic groups at the elementary and secondary levels. Contrary to trend in the aggregate data which reveals males tend to outperform females in mathematics, the disaggregated data in the 2007 NCES Report Card for Mathematics revealed a 2-point gap in favor of African American females at age 9 and a 1-point gap in favor of African American females at age 13.

Table 1

Points in Reading Performance Gap in Elementary and Middle School, by Race/Ethnicity and Gender, 2007

Race/Ethnicity	Age 9	Age 13
African American	9	13

American Indian/Alaska Native	6	11
Asian/Pacific Islander	8	9
Hispanic	6	9
White	6	10

NOTE. From Lee, J., Grigg, W., and Donahue, P. (2007). *The Nation's Report Card: Reading 2007* (NCES 2007-496). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC.

The trend of African American male underperformance as compared to his female counterpart is also pervasive in high school grades. The existing literature suggests that the student group having the most persistent lag in academic achievement is the African American male (Gibbs, 1988; Irvine, 1990; Polite & Davis 1999). Leake and Leake (1992) found that only 2% of African American males enrolled in the public secondary school system of a large Midwestern city achieved a cumulative grade point average of at least 3.0 on a four-point scale, while more than three-fourths of African American males in that system were performing below average. Consistent with the aforementioned findings, Garibaldi (1992) asserted that education statistics consistently reveal that African American male students cluster at the bottom of the distribution of virtually every indicator of school failure including: dropouts, absenteeism, suspension and expulsion, and low standardized test scores. Roderick (2003), in an examination of the early high school experiences among African American male adolescents in Chicago, found that African American males experienced much more dramatic declines in school performance and teacher ratings between grade eight and nine. Equally alarming, Roderick (2003) found that only 40% of the males graduated from high school compared to 80% of the females.

The National Center for Education Statistics (2010) reported a widening academic progress gap within the African American population at the postsecondary level, representing the most significant gap of all racial and ethnic groups in America. [The Schott Foundation for Public Education \(2011\), a national organization that monitors the progress of African American males, reported that only 47% of African American males graduate from high school.](#) In 2008, of all African Americans enrolled in undergraduate programs of study, 36.2% were male while 63.8% were female, representing a 27.6% gap in enrollment within the population. The same comparison among other racial and ethnic groups by gender revealed the following gaps between males and females, each comparison significantly in favor of female enrollment.

Table 2

Percentage of Undergraduate Fall Enrollment in Degree-Granting Institutions, by Race/Ethnicity and Gender, 2008

Race/Ethnicity	Male	Female	Gap in Enrollment
African American	36.2	63.8	-27.6
American Indian/Alaska Native	40.1	59.9	-19.8
Asian/Pacific Islanders	46.0	54.0	-8.0
Hispanic	42.0	58.0	-16.0
White	44.5	55.5	-11.0

Note. National Center for Education Statistics (2010). *Status and trends in the education of racial and ethnic minorities.* Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC.

A similar gender gap in African American enrollment in graduate programs of study exists in the population. In 2008, of all African Americans enrolled in graduate programs of study, 28.7% were male, whereas 71.3% were female, representing a 42.6%

gap in enrollment within the population. A comparison of each racial and ethnic group by gender revealed a significant gap between males and females, in favor of female enrollment.

Table 3

Percentage of Graduate Fall Enrollment in Degree-Granting Institutions, by Race/Ethnicity and Gender, 2008

Race/Ethnicity	Male	Female	Gap in Enrollment
African American	28.6	71.3	-42.6
American Indian/Alaska Native	37.3	62.7	-25.4
Asian/Pacific Islanders	44.7	55.3	-10.6
Hispanic	37.0	63.0	-26.0
White	40.3	59.7	-19.4

Note. National Center for Education Statistics (2010). *Status and trends in the education of racial and ethnic minorities*. Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC.

Although a host of studies have been conducted on the achievement gap, they are insufficient to provide a complete view of the lived experience of the African American male student. Clark (1983) argued that the narrow study of socio-demographic characteristics of family units merely provide a sketch or minimal insight into the overall lifestyle of the African American learner. He suggested, that studies on this segment of society solely attribute structural factors such as socioeconomic status to the underperformance of African American students, giving improper credence to a set of harmful assumptions about the mental capacities and activity patterns of children and their parents. Clark argued that this incomplete view of the African American student results in ameliorative prescriptions and unsuccessful support programs that derive from

dubious assumptions and perpetuation of a predominance of studies that focus on between-group comparisons and aggregate data that tend to conceal the gender gap among African American students. Davis and Jordan (1994) argued that the difficulties facing the African American male in U.S. schools demands much more focus, both theoretically and methodologically; that is – meaningful research must be conducted to gather more in-depth knowledge of the African American male’s experience in schools from kindergarten to post-secondary school.

Historical Explanation of the Gender Achievement Gap

Historically, the educational attainment of men has been consistently higher than that of women in this nation. However, during the past three decades there has been a dramatic shift in the educational landscape. From elementary through graduate school, females have been excelling at an increasing rate. Elementary school-age boys are more likely to be retained in a grade, receive lower grades, be assigned to remedial classes, and demonstrate egregious behavior (Jacob, 2002). Simultaneously, elementary girls are closing the achievement test score gaps in mathematics and consistently outperform boys in reading through the middle level (Perie, Moran, & Lutkus, 2005). In addition to receiving better grades, female high school students graduate at higher rates and are more likely to attend undergraduate and graduate school (KewalRamani, Gilbertson, Fox, & Provasnik, 2007; [Toldson, Braithwaite, & Rentie, 2009](#); [Schott Foundation for Public Education \(2011\)](#); [Whiting & Ford, 2009](#)).

In a study examining the effect of living in a single-parent family headed by a woman on the educational attainment of children, Krein and Beller (1988) found that the negative effect is significantly larger for boys, suggesting that boys are more likely to

underperform academically when their household is run by a single-mother. Although Krein and Beller's findings are consistent with the earliest studies on this factor which also indicated that males who lived in single-parent families completed fewer years of schooling than males from two-parent families (Blau & Duncan, 1967; Featherman & Hauser, 1978; [Freeman, 1974](#); [McKinnon, 2003](#); [Holcomb-McCoy & Hines, 2013](#)), each of the aforementioned studies used different control variables or definitions of single-parent family. Such inconsistencies in the operational definition of single-parent family prevalent in the literature render findings on single-parenthood as an explanation of gender differences in educational attainment arguably inconclusive.

Steele's (1992, 1997) theory of stereotype threat identified negative stereotypes as a factor of underachievement among students of color. Although the stereotype threat, at its core, was found to impact students of color and has been used to explain trends of underperformance among African American boys. Steele suggested that this threat might also apply to other students who are members of minority groups for which negative group stereotypes concerning academic ability might abound, such as girls and women in mathematics and science endeavors. Steele argued that the concern of appearing foolish or giving the wrong answer in an academic setting may not only be personally damaging to African American boys, it might also have a similar impact on the female learner by confirming the negative group stereotype. This increased level of anxiety is aversive, and as a self-protective measure, these students are likely to devalue or reduce identification with a particular subject or with academics altogether. Consequently, this aversion, may serve to reduce stereotype-induced anxiety as it allows students to be no longer

concerned with evaluation on that domain (Epps, 1970; Katz & Greenbaum, 1963; Osborne, 1997; Osborne & Rausch, 2001).

The link between gender, achievement beliefs, and academic achievement has been studied and documented extensively (Crandall, 1969; Dweck & Elliott; Eccles, 1983; Stein & Bailey, 1973). Using data from eighth and 10th-grade students in the 1988 National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS), Catsambis (1994) found that 10th-grade girls were less likely to report liking mathematics, reported feeling uncomfortable in mathematics classes, and performed at lower levels compared to their male counterpart. Muller (2004) argued that attitudes might affect students' behavior and result in differences in achievement in the area of mathematics. Consistent with assertions made by Steele and Catsambis, Muller (2004) cited that boys and girls tend to have different attitudes toward mathematics and their ability to succeed in that area. Eccles, Adler, Futterman, Goff, Kaczala, Meece and Midgley (2005) found that gender differences in self-concept emerged in middle school prior to the stage of development at which students typically make individual decisions about course enrollment in high school. These findings call into question the nature of the relationship between attitudes and coursework, arguably suggesting a decidedly complex process by which gender differences and the subsequent achievement gap in mathematics among females may emerge.

Parental involvement may influence children's attitudes, which may, in turn, affect academic performance (Epstein, 1991; Muller, 1993; Muller, 1998; Stevenson & Baker, 1987). In a study on the socialization of school-age boys and girls, Block (1983), consistent with Muller's assertions, claimed that parents were more restrictive and more

nurturing with daughters, but encouraged their sons to act without constraint and to explore freely. Entwisle, Alexander, and Olson (1994) argued that parents' adamant encouragement of their sons to explore and take advantage of neighborhood resources contributes to the gender gap in mathematics achievement. Garfinkel and McLanahan (1986) linked the father's presence in the household to the development of analytical thinking skills among boys. Their findings would not allow researchers to do more than speculate that the difference in boys' ability to think analytically was positively correlated to the father-child relationship. More research on the impact parental involvement is needed in order to make conclusive statements and broad generalizations about its divergent impact on boys and girls.

Classroom experiences may have an impact on the gender achievement gap. Eccles and Blumenfeld (1985) suggested that teachers might play a role in the maintenance of sex-differentiated goals and attitudes. Research has suggested that students start school with sex-differentiated goals and attitudes (Eccles & Hoffman, 1984; Huston, 1983). The researchers argued that these attitudes appear to consolidate into sex-differentiated beliefs regarding mathematics and scientific abilities in early adolescence (Eccles-Parsons, 1984). Although teachers do not appear to be the source of the beliefs, they appear to do very little to inhibit their development or to provide boys and girls with the type of redirect that might lead them to reevaluate or dismiss their sex-stereotyped beliefs (Eccles and Blumenfeld, 1985). In this way, teachers may be unknowingly reinforcing gender-driven academic underperformance among girls.

Consistent with assertions made by Eccles and Blumenfeld (1985), the American Association of University Women (1992) conducted a groundbreaking study about how

schools were failing to meet the needs of young girls. The researchers found that schools promoted underachievement in mathematics study by refraining from requiring girls to answer clarification questions following an erroneous response. They also found that boys were more regularly called upon, and if not they were just as likely to call out the answer leaving their female counterpart to sit quietly, disengaged and subsequently less likely to take advanced mathematics and science courses (American Association of University Women, 1992).

According to the 2004 NAEP, males who have made it through 12 years of schooling have significantly poorer reading skills than their female peers. In every age group tested, boys scored lower than girls for more than three decades on U.S. Department of Education reading assessments (Perie, Moran, & Lutkas, 2005). In fact, the longer boys are in school, the wider the gender gap becomes. According to Costello (2008), brain researchers have discovered that males and females process information differently, suggesting that males listen with only one side of their brain, while females use both sides. Costello argued that the images of brain activity in males and females engaged in listening and reading reveals that only the left hemisphere “lights up” in males, whereas both sides “light up” in females.

While not yet conclusive, brain research findings provide validation of Costello’s claims germane to gender differences and learning, particularly in the area of reading. Komer (2006) argued that boys and girls have slightly different brain chemistry that may cause each to think differently and therefore achieve at different levels and junctures in their development. Suggesting not only does the male brain have slightly different chemistry from the female, researchers (Gurian, 2001; Sax, 2005; Sousa 2001) argued

that the structure of the male and female brain is actually different. Gurian (2001) argued that the female system of nerves, the corpus callosum, which connects the right and left hemispheres of the brain is, on average, 20% larger than it is in males. This difference in size, according to Gurian may explain why females seem to be able to use both sides of the brain to process information, multi-task more efficiently, and take in more sensory information than males. These differences in brain anatomy and function have the may have wide reaching ramifications and be useful in explaining the why girls generally outperform boys in reading and writing from early childhood throughout life and assist educators in fewer reading disability diagnoses among boys.

Majors (1989) theorized the “cool pose,” describing it as a façade used by African American boys in educational settings to mask academic inability with a defense mechanism, hyper masculinity. Widely accepted as a phenomenon adversely impacting the African American male’s ability to demonstrate academic achievement, few have explored the impact of this behavior on White middle-class males. In fact, Epstein (1998) argued that further research is required to explore the role that masculinity plays on how boys negotiate schooling and its effect on academic achievement. Martino (2000) studied Australian, middle-class high school boys and found that their view of “normal” boy behavior influenced how they learn and what they learn as well as how they related to others. Subjects highlighted the intentional rejection of the value of education as embodied by their overtly disruptive behavior in class and in their open derision of boys who achieved academically. The findings suggested that the negative behavior, though counterproductive to academic achievement, resulted in students earning desirable status among their peers. Subjects associated femininity with academic diligence, earning good

grades, going to class on time, and going to the library. Consistent with Major's and Martino's assertions, Davis (2006) suggested that there are multiple ways of being male given the contexts of time, place, experience, and position, citing that education is perhaps one of the most critical contexts. Based on the extant literature, Davis argued that if we fail to address the adolescent masculinity issue and recognize its potential power and influence, reformers of education may undermine current and future efforts to rectify underperformance among boys.

The within-race gender gap among African Americans needs significant attention. There are limitations to our current body of educational risk research that hinder effective action (Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Rouse, & Chen, 2010). Studies are often conducted with homogeneous samples of convenience that included only those children who are exposed to a particular risk and respond to that risk in similar manner (Coulton, Korbin, Su, Chow, 1995; Ziesemer, Marcoux, & Marwell, 1994). Although the between-race gap has narrowed marginally, underperformance of African American males when compared to their African American female peers continues to widen (Boyd-Franklin & Franklin, 2001; Garibaldi, 1992; Majors & Billings, 1992; NCES, 2005). African American boys and girls are reared in the same households, families, neighborhoods, and attend the same schools; therefore they are exposed to similar risk and protective factors. It is possible that boys and girls are exposed to different learning experiences within the same classroom and/or school. Their unique schooling experiences may have a distinct and disproportionate effect on boys as compared to girls.

Fordham and Ogbu (1986) argued that the African American male learner falls victim to gender-role socialization that encourages and rewards academic disengagement,

which places him in a destructive self-victimization cycle as a participant in his own failure. Holland (1989) argued that perception of most school-related activities as feminine and irrelevant to the development of their male identity is linked to the academic performance of many African American boys. Dumias (2002) found that girls are more likely than boys to be involved in the kinds of cultural activities associated with elite cultural capital (e.g. private art, dance, and music lessons). Consequently, young African American males are even less likely than females to have the stock of knowledge associated with the cultural capital that promotes high levels of academic achievement. Mickelson and Green (2006) suggested that parents may invest family resources differently for their male and female children. Mickelson and Green (2006) also claimed that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (among African American families), those with less cultural capital, and those with little parental involvement are likely to demonstrate lower levels of academic achievement.

Extant research suggests that the gender gap among African American students becomes prominent during middle school years (Davis & Jordan, 1996; Ford, 1992; Ford & Harris, 1992). Consistent with this argument, Mickelson and Green (2006) argued that the explanation of underachievement among African American boys may be linked to teacher attitudes, peer attitudes, disidentification, and school climate, suggesting that eighth grade African American males' academic performance begins to develop and to align in ways that foreshadow the disappointing school outcomes associated with older African American male students nationwide. Though limited, the literature provides some insight to the unique plight of African American student, the attitudes of those who are responsible for educating them and the potential negative impact of such attitudes. In an

examination of the performance among African American males in New Orleans, Garibaldi (1992) conducted an ex-post facto study using information collected from surveying 500 teachers, 3,523 parents, and 2,250 African American male subjects. In addition to qualitative data collection, the researcher also used multiple quantitative sources of information from the 1986-1987 school year for each subject, which included data on: (1) retention, (2) suspension, (3) expulsion, (4) academic achievement as defined by performance on standardized assessments in reading and mathematics (CTBS), (5) grades, and (6) participation in extracurricular activities.

Garibaldi found that although African American males accounted for only 43% of the system's population, these students represented 58% of non-promotions, 65% of suspensions, 80% of expulsions, 45% of dropouts, and were likely to score below the mean on the reading and mathematics sections of the standardized assessment. The researcher also found that 95% of the African American male participants surveyed, expected to graduate from high school, 40% of whom believed that their teachers did not set high enough goals for them and 60% of whom believed that their teachers could push them harder to achieve. What is of particular interest to the lived experience of the students in this study is the response of the majority of the teachers to a question regarding the expectations held for their African American male pupils. Sixty percent of the teachers (60% percent of whom taught in elementary schools and 70% of whom had 10 or more years of experience) did not believe that their African American students were college bound, while 80% of their parents did believe their sons were college bound. The findings of this study, replicated in other school systems, most notably Prince George County (MD) and Milwaukee (WI) suggested that the academic performance of African

American male students, as poor as it has become, can worsen, particularly when compounded with the inherent danger of teachers who view their African American male students as a monolithic group of learners with myopic interests, goals, and abilities.

The literature suggests that peer attitudes may have a profoundly negative impact on the academic achievement of the African American male in particular. The oppositional culture explanation (resistance model) may provide some insight into the achievement disparity between African American males and females. The oppositional culture explanation posits that historically oppressed minorities resist school goals (Ogbu, 1978). Fordham and Ogbu (1986) conducted an ethnographic study in order to examine African American students' fear of "acting white" as factor of diminished academic effort and achievement. The researchers used multiple sources of data to gather information on 33 African American juniors from a high school in Washington, D.C., including: standardized test scores (PSAT, CTBS, and Life Skills Exam—a DC Public Schools requirement for all students in grade 11), grade point average (as recorded on official transcripts), attendance (as recorded in cumulative records), and interviews (conducted over a period of one year). The researchers found that both male and female students, regardless of their ability and academic performance made purposeful attempts to refrain from appearing to adopt attitudes and behavior associated with "acting white." Under-achieving students and high-achieving students were found to have varying strategies for coping with the "burden" of fitting in with their peers while simultaneously excelling academically. Under-achieving students were likely to use avoidance as a strategy. Out of fear of being teased, they simply chose to put less time and effort into their schoolwork. Conversely, high-achieving students were likely to carefully manage their school persona

by cloaking it in other behaviors that minimized peer-related hostility against themselves as academically successful students by: (1) intentionally acting as a clown or comedian, (2) choosing friends who might protect them in exchange for helping them with schoolwork, (3) participating in athletics, and/or (4) refusing to participate in academic extracurricular activities. The small size of the sample, coupled with the fact that findings from one study, in one school, in one city were used to make generalizations about a nation of African American students presents a need study in this issue with a more broad and diverse sample.

Osborne (1995) conducted an ex-post facto study to test the three assumptions underlying Steele's (1992) theory of race and disidentification which suggested that African American children disidentify or detach their self-esteem from academic performance in order to protect themselves from academic underperformance. Osborne studied African American and White students from a nationally represented sample of middle school students. Using the data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988, the researcher operationally defined disidentification as the lack of a relationship between academic self-esteem and global self-esteem and found that: (1) African Americans scored lower on measures of academic achievement than Whites, which supported Steele's assumption of the disidentification theory; (2) African Americans do not have lower self-esteem than White students, which replicates previous research on the subgroup and sustained Steele's second assumption of disidentification; and (3) over time the correlation between self-esteem and achievement weakened in African Americans, particularly for African American males, which partially reinforced Steele's third assumption on race and disidentification. The use of a weighted population sample

inflated the degrees of freedom used for significance testing in inferential statistics, but the researcher achieved representativeness of the sample by scaling case weights so as to sum to the study's sample size, thus creating a nationally representative sample while maintaining the correct degrees of freedom for inferential tests and strengthening the findings. The findings of this study suggested that African American males disidentify with school at a higher rate than African American females and White students, supporting the seminal theory proposed by Steele.

Osborne (1997) conducted a companion ex-post facto study in order to determine the relationship between race and disidentification among African American, Hispanic, and White students using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988. Osborne found that although the self-esteem of African Americans remained higher than whites at each two-year, research checkpoint, the grades and achievement scores as measured by a battery of four core academic achievement tests of the African American students dropped over time. The trend illustrated the researcher's assertion of a discrepancy between academic achievement realities and self-view and supported the researchers hypothesis that underachievement among the African American male participants may have been caused by disidentification. Although the researcher's use of a short form of the Rosenberg Self-View Inventory may have weakened the strength of the findings, Osborne's use of multiple sources of data including: (1) a national data set; (2) self-report assessments on grade point average and academic achievement at three checkpoints; (3) academic achievement test scores at three checkpoints; and (4) information gathered from transcripts, parents, and administrators represented the use of triangulated data, strengthening the researcher's findings. This study underscored the

urgency for assisting African American boys in the act of associating personal self-esteem with academic performance as a tool for closing the African American male achievement gap.

Researchers have argued that school climate may have an impact on the academic performance among African American boys. Holder (2006) conducted a case study to identify the presence and implications of institutional influences on the academic achievement among five struggling African American male students. The researcher found that the participants did not believe that the institution contributed to their difficulties in school. The boys did not believe that inequitable practices or policies were actively used to discriminate against them or value some students more than others. Conversely, the participants believed that: (1) they had ineffectual relationships with their teachers; and (2) attended a school with a lack of structure necessary to cultivate effectual relationship building. The use of triangulated data to collect information through 27 interviews, classroom observations, and student records, combined with a member check, peer debriefing, and a negative case analysis strengthened the researcher's findings, therefore lending credibility to researcher assertions otherwise limited by a small population sample. Consistent with the body of literature on school climate as a factor of underperformance among African American students, the findings of this study suggested that improved teacher-student relationships may be linked to closing the achievement gap for African American males (Babad, Bernier, & Rosenthal, 1991; Baker, 1991; Casteel, 2000; Davis & Jordan, 1994; Roderick, 2003; [DiPrete & Buchmann, 2013](#)).

The NAEP Trends in Academic Progress report that analyzed three decades of student performance in reading and mathematics. Peire, Mortan, and Lutkus (2004)

argued that although much of the nation's attention has shifted to the performance between different racial and ethnic groups, it is important to continue to examine the trends in the within-group score gap. Since that statement, the NCES has only reported a single set of findings comparing the performance of students within racial and ethnic groups by gender for ages 9 and 13 – even after the organization's leadership amplified the importance of research in this area.

Clark (1983) conducted an ethnographic study to determine the link between academic achievement among poor African American students and the quality of family life. Clark contended that the study of the relationship between family background and educational attainment among minority populations has been limited to structural factors such as marital status of parents, income, or amounts of parents' formal education which are insufficient to explain why: (1) some African American families with high aspirations for their children are able to translate their aspirations into reality through their children's success in school; and (2) why other families with equally high aspirations are unable to achieve the same outcomes. Although there is a long history of survey research that indicates that African American low-income families have high educational aspirations for their children, Clark found distinct differences in family life processes (home process factors) between the homes of high and low achievers.

An analysis of the 10 case studies conducted revealed that the family life of high achievers was characterized by: (1) explicit literary nurturing activities including reading, writing, and topical dialogues; (2) explicit practice in social etiquette; (3) indirect literacy-enhancing activities such as word games and hobbies; (4) interactive communication that provided opportunities for direct instruction, feedback opportunities,

and reinforcement opportunities; and (5) the provision of an emotional climate conducive to the development of academic and social skills through personally satisfying activities. The same analysis, revealed that the family life of low-achieving, low-income African American students was characterized by an “unsponsored independence” style of parent-child communication, in which the predominate parental behavior was described as authoritarian and included such patterns as: (1) limited parental involvement and interest in the child’s home activities; (2) inconsistent knowledge of child’s in-home and out-of-home activities; (3) infrequent parent-child activities involving literary tasks such as studying, reading, writing, and information sharing and creating; (4) limited parental teaching, advising, and demonstration of concepts and ideas to the child; (5) inconsistent or non-existent parental expectations and standards for “responsible” child behavior in the home, classroom, and neighborhood settings; (6) frequent criticisms and dissatisfaction expressed to the child about his or her worth and ability; and (7) inconsistent discipline or irresponsible role behavior modeled before the child, and frequent disagreement and conflict over the legitimacy of enforcing parental authority.

Since African American boys and girls come from the same family backgrounds, are equally likely to be reared in a low socioeconomic household in similar neighborhoods, attend the same majority-minority populated schools, and are reared by parents (single or otherwise) with similar levels of educational attainment, conventional socio-demographic characteristics of the family unit (home process factors) may only provide minimal insight into the within-group achievement gap. Single home and school process factor research may also be insufficient to provide a comprehensive picture of the achievement gap and inform policy. Studies of risk experiences have documented the

unique effects of multiple risks and resilience (e.g., Gutman, Sameroff, & Cole, 2003; Pungello, Kupersmidt, Burchinal, & Patterson, 1996), however, they are not typically conducted within important subpopulations. Research that is positioned within local communities that is sensitive to the heterogeneity within a subpopulation would provide actionable intelligence (Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Rouse, & Chen, 2012).

As argued by Clark (1983), literature pertinent to family and school outcome falls primarily into two types. First, there are studies of achievement and success which focus on the family's socio-demographic characteristics, including intactness, size, occupation, income and education, and so forth. Such studies have traditionally excluded study of the internal dynamics of family life. Second, there are studies that illuminate family process factors and culture, without referring directly to offspring achievement or success. Clark (1983) attempted to apply the methods and insights of the second approach to the issues raised by the typical achievement study and in the process, may have broadened what we know about the roles of home process factors as they contribute to the variations in achievement among African American boys and girls.

The results of Clark's study of 10 students (low and high performing, single and two-parent families) from low-socioeconomic households suggested that resiliency may be a product of home process factors, but there still remains a gap in the literature on whether gender is a factor in the academic achievement of African Americans. There is varying degrees of agreement among scholars on the purported impact of school process factors on diminishing the achievement gap between African American males and females. The extant literature comes short of answering important questions. For these

reasons, there is much research to be conducted on the African American male achievement gap.

Access to high-quality academic experiences through curriculum, teachers, and other school activities is of particular importance for the African American male, who is already marginalized in the school setting (Fin & Cox, 1992; Irvine, 1990; Sanders & Reed, 1995). Kunjufu (1983) argued that there is a wealth of evidence that African American males are much more likely to be victimized by schools than are African American females and that this legacy of victimization has major, long-term, negative implications. Holland (1989) argued that the lags in achievement found by some researchers is an outgrowth of the African American male's inability or disinterest in fulfilling his role as conventional learners in traditional school settings. This biased assertion is dangerous and represents an unsubstantiated indictment of the entire student group. This literature review was intended to provide to extant research on widely accepted factors of underachievement among African American students through an analysis of context-driven home and school process factors and their potential impact on their subsequent ability to succeed academically.

Middle School Achievement and the African American Male

Davis and Jordan (1994) argued that educational experiences often serve as the antecedents to many of the social and economic ills students face later in life. Thus inequities in schooling have potentially broad consequences for students' future educational attainment, employment, and family relations. A longitudinal study, conducted by Alexander and Entwisle (1988, 1992, 1994) on Baltimore Elementary students revealed that African Americans and Whites started first grade with very similar

mathematics and reading skills, but African Americans fell behind Whites between first and ninth grades. Jencks and Phillip (1998) reported that African American six-year-olds' vocabulary scores match those of White five-year olds, representing a one-year achievement gap and by the age of 17, African American students had vocabularies comparable to 13-year-old Whites, representing a widened achievement gap extended to four years. Mickelson and Green (2006) argued that by middle school, the pieces of the underachievement puzzle are beginning to take shape and to align in ways that foreshadow the disappointing school outcomes correlated with high school failure and dropout. This disparity that widens precipitously after the elementary grades supports the urgency for research on middle school achievement on the aggregate, but most urgently on the student group that lags behind all others consistently.

According to the Maryland State Department of Education (2012) it is in middle school that students' progress slows, performance declines, and achievement gaps persist. The NCES (2013) reported that only 36% of U.S. eighth graders were proficient or better in reading, two percentage points above the fourth grade average, while 36% of U.S. eighth graders were proficient or better in mathematics, a 6-point drop from grade four. In both reading and mathematics, their fourth grade counterparts outperform African American eighth graders. Only 15% of African American eighth graders reached reading proficiency and 14% of the same population attained proficiency in mathematics (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013).

Maryland middle school students are facing a challenge similar to the achievement gap pervasive at the national level. On the Maryland School Assessment (MSA), while 95% of White fourth graders were proficient in both reading and

mathematics, 82% of the African American children in the same cohort attained proficiency in both subject areas (Maryland State Department of Education, 2012). In the same year, 89.5% of White eighth graders attained proficiency in reading and 83.5% of the same population attained proficiency in mathematics, while African American students in the same cohort attained proficiency at a rate of 69.5% and 50.3% respectively – which represents a 20% and a 33.2% achievement gap in the two major tested content areas. Equally troubling at the middle school level in Maryland is the single-digit gap in mathematics and reading performance on the MSA among fourth graders from low socioeconomic households that more than triples in mathematics (to 18.3 points) and more than doubles in reading (to 12.8%) by the time students reach eighth grade.

Balfanz (2009), in a longitudinal study on middle grades students in six school districts, argued that students' middle grades experiences have a tremendous impact on the extent to which they will close achievement gaps, graduate from high school, and become prepared for college. Consistent with the findings and arguments made by the Maryland State Department of Education and the NCES, Balfanz suggested that it is the middle grades that must be seen as the launching pad for secondary and post-secondary learning, citing that it is during the middle grades, particularly in lower-performing schools that serve high-poverty populations, that achievement gaps often become achievement chasms. Balfanz (2009) found that sixth graders who failed mathematics or English/reading, or attended school less than 80% of the time, or received an unsatisfactory behavior grade in a course had only a 10% to 20% chance of graduating high school on time. Balfanz's findings also supported the notion that once a sixth grader

has demonstrated either a lack of interest in or an inability to be successful academically, absent successful intervention, this trajectory of underperformance is unlikely to change on its own volition. He continued by arguing that first year of the middle grades (typically the sixth grade year), much like the ninth grade, appears to be a make-or-break year and is compounded by the fact that in urban environments, nonselective high schools often primarily educate students who enter with skill levels of typical fifth or sixth graders. Across the districts studied, the vast majority of students demonstrated off-track indicators in the sixth grade.

The imperative for meaningful research on middle school achievement and the possible need to reconceptualize middle grades student support in the U.S. public education system may be signaled as early as grade six. Balfanz (2009) suggested that teachers had the strongest impact on whether or not a student would close or widen the achievement gaps in the middle grades. The researcher argued that if, for two of the three years, students were in classrooms in which the average student attained more than a year's growth in a year's time, all were considerably more likely to close their achievement gaps. The findings of this National Middle School Association study also suggested that attendance and student behavior had an independent and additive impact on the likelihood that a student would close achievement gaps. The findings indicated that students needed not only strong teachers to achieve at acceptable levels, but the students needed also to show up, behave appropriately in class, and put forth diligent effort in order to learn, suggesting that student choice can positively impact academic success. Balfanz (2009) also argued that middle schools leaders should pay close

attention to shaping both learning opportunities (school process factors) and student motivations (resilience) in order to promote academic achievement.

Meaningful research on middle school achievement is timely. According to the Maryland State Department of Education (2012), the majority of eighth graders complete middle school without the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful in high school. Teachers of high school freshmen reported that one-quarter to one-third of their classroom time is devoted to re-teaching skills and content that should already be common knowledge (ACT, 2007). Thirty percent of Maryland high school students who completed a core curriculum (four years of English and three years of mathematics, science, and social studies) needed remediation in mathematics in college, and 12% needed remediation in English (Maryland Higher Education Commission, 2006). Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Burke-Morrison (2006) reported that 45% of all high school dropouts attributed their leaving – at least in part – to the fact that they started high school already behind academically).

Despite efforts toward equality, the fact is that African American boys are more likely than any other group to attend school in a sociocultural context that increases their risk for poor academic outcomes (Vigdor & Ludwig, 2007). Davis and Jordan (1994), using data drawn from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88) found that contextual (school process) factors influenced achievement among African American middle school boys attending school in an urban setting. Factors included urbanicity, an emphasis on discipline, the inability of teachers to motivate students, and absenteeism among teachers. The researcher's findings suggested that urban middle schools are more likely to be non-supportive environments, inherently less likely to spur

academic achievement than suburban and rural schools. Urban schools are more likely to be characterized by adult authority, teacher power, control, low expectations, and extrinsic motivation to engage students (Patrick, Turner, Meyer, and Midgley (2003). Davis and Jordan (1994) argued that the time teachers spent handling discipline-related issues translated into lost instructional time and subsequent underperformance. Tizard, Blatchford, Burke, Farquhar, and Lewis (1988) suggested that there is a link between an increased focus on discipline, a diminished instructional focus on the part of the teachers, and underperformance among students whom they serve. Similarly, Pallas (1988) reported a significant relationship between school climate and student achievement, noting that teachers are often unprepared to promote achievement in troubled secondary school environments. While poverty and urbanicity do not cause academic failure, it is a factor that profoundly influences the character of schools and student performance, in at least three broad and interrelated ways: (1) in most cases, considerably less money is spent on the education of children educated in these schools; (2) the nonacademic needs of children (social, emotional, and psychological) go unmet and often have an impact on student success; and (3) schools serving large numbers minority students lack the resources and expertise to respond to student's academic needs (Williams & Noguera, 2010).

Davis and Jordan (1994) found that middle school teachers who assigned more homework and who demanded greater effort and performance from their African American male students also issued higher grades, which may be linked to their high expectations of students. Findings suggested that these teachers may have sincerely believed that their African American students were not only capable of academic rigor,

but were also worthy of grades that recognized their effort. Conversely, the researchers argued that lower-grading teachers were found to have either lacked confidence in their African American male students, held low expectations for them, or a combination of both. They assigned little homework because they believed that their African American male students would not or were incapable of completing the work. The researchers also found that among the variables, teacher absenteeism had the most profound impact on African American male achievement, indicating that high teacher absenteeism can be traced to underachievement among African American males. Davis and Jordan (1994) argued that home process factors, school process factors, and protective factors were found to impact achievement. Students who spent more time studying diligently, did better. Students who performed well in the past and those from middle-class families, performed better academically. Conversely, student who had poor attendance and had been retained were more likely to underperform.

Consistent with findings from extant literature, remediation, retention, and suspension were found to be negatively associated with failure among African American males in middle school. These “extra help” delivery mechanisms and disciplinary sanctions are both symptoms and causes of failure (Davis & Jordan, 1994). African American males are more likely to be placed in remedial classes or retained than their White classmates (Jackson, 1975). Remediating students or holding them in grade seldom results in getting them back on track (Alexander, Entsisle, & Dauber, 1995). After retention, many African American males continue to falter academically and often give up all together as evidenced by high dropout rates. Suspension is one of the most severe punishments that schools administer to students and research has shown that the African

American male is the predominate recipient of such action (Costenbader & Markson, 1994; Garibaldi, 1988; Moody, 1978). Unlike remediation and retention, suspension is a response to behavioral infractions. However, students do not typically view this sanction against their behavior as distinct from sanctions against their individual self. Therefore, the precarious relationship that many middle school, African American males have with teachers and school leaders is strained further by perceived personal conflict (Polite, 1993).

In a study of eighth graders in the Charolette Mecklenburg School System, Mickelson and Greene (2006) found that African American males who have more negative attitudes toward education, do not thrive academically, are tracked into less-challenging classes, and in some cases, enter middle school with lower levels of prior achievement are likely to have lower academic outcomes. Mickleson (1990) examined the effects of the contradiction between African American educational ideologies and the actual rewards African Americans tend to receive from education. This contradiction affects the African American male's school behavior (Mickelson, 1990). On one hand, African Americans understand that an education translates into opportunities and mobility. On the other hand, real world experiences often paints a different picture. This contradiction can be overwhelming for adolescents and arguably results in a disproportionate number of the African American boys devaluating schooling. As it comes to tracking, which becomes more common in middle school when course assignments begin to be differentiated based on ability, the African American male is often underrepresented in higher-level classes. Oakes (2005) suggested that tracking perpetuates social and educational inequities among minority groups – particularly

among African American males, as they are grossly underrepresented in highly-able and gifted classrooms and because students in lower track classes are more likely to receive inferior educational experiences.

Lleras (2009) using data from the NELS:88 to follow the effects of mathematics placement, school related behaviors, and achievement in more than 6,500 public school students as they progressed from middle school to 10th grade, found that increased access to more advanced and rigorous coursework in high minority urban schools had a significant, effect on achievement among African American students. Lleras argued that more challenging middle-school math coursework and increased access to advanced courses may be key to closing the race-based academic achievement gap, citing that there is a feedback loop between math placement, student effort, and academic achievement. The researcher claimed that over time these factors affect each other; that is – students who take more advanced math courses in middle school lengthen their lead over time, and the positive school-related behaviors developed in those advanced courses lead to even higher levels of achievement. Lleras suggested that the contrary is also possible, arguing that lower math placement in the middle school significantly lowers a student's chances of getting into higher level math courses in high school, which translates into fewer skills, negative behavior, and greater achievement gaps in later grades.

Roderick (2003) conducted a longitudinal study to examine the early high school experiences and school outcomes among African American adolescents utilizing triangulated data by examining official school records, teacher assessments, and parent interviews. The researcher found that the transition from middle to high school for African American males was characterized by significant declines in performance and

disproportionate failure. By twelfth grade, 60% of the African American males in the sample had dropped out of school compared to 20% of females from the sample.

Roderick (2003) used a three-stage methodology to examine the schooling experiences and outcomes among 15 African American male students. In the first stage, a case study of each student was conducted to analyze trends in behavior, performance, and enrollment for the period of transition. In the second stage, each case was analyzed to identify common experiences. Participants were placed into three categories: withdrawers, disengaged, and resilient. In the third stage, Roderick examined the three groups to identify trends in four domains: (1) prior school performance and skills, (2) levels and changes in parent/guardian involvement and community supports, (3) experience with class work and relationships with teachers and administrators, and (4) changes in attitudes, goals, and identity. Roderick found that despite individual student ability, lesser degrees of parental and community supports were associated with academic difficulties among participants.

Several instructional strategies (school process factors) have been found to have varying degrees of impact on the academic achievement among African American children, particularly boys. Patterson (2005) conducted an experimental study in order to test the effectiveness of guided notes among African American emotional and behavior-disabled special education students. Subjects participated in a total of 27 sessions including: baseline condition, introduction of guided notes, return to baseline conditions, and a reintroduction to guided notes. The researcher found that each participant made academic gains regardless of disability. Student behavior was characterized by listening, observing the teacher, and writing only to work on important facts presented through

instruction. Patterson's findings support extant research in the literature (Hamilton, Seibert, Gardner, & Talbert-Johnson, 2000; Yang, 1988). Findings suggested that when students' notes are partially completed, students with special needs are not presented with the challenge of simultaneously listening to the teacher lecture, processing information, deciding what is important, and recording important facts to remember. Highlighted by this study is the importance and potential impact of simple strategies used inside the classroom by teachers to promote academic achievement among African American male students.

Hicks (2006) conducted a study in order to determine the impact of reading instruction methodology on the student achievement among African American males as measured by performance on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. A statistical analysis (ANOVA) revealed that neither program, Direct Instruction or the Harcourt Trophies Basal Series reading program proved to impact the participants' academic performance as measured by individual and within-group performance on a standardized assessment in three of the four domains including: initial understanding, interpretation, and strategies. In contrast, the statistical analysis revealed a significant difference on one of the four domains for both curricular programs, critical analysis. African American male subjects who received Basal Series reading instruction demonstrated a better ability to read critically on the standardized assessment. Although the researcher failed to indicate teachers' years of experience and their rating officer's evaluation of teacher performance as a possible factors of student achievement, the findings are consistent with research on the achievement of African American learners and the small-group instructional practices and benefits indicative of Basal Series reading (Cochran-Smith,

1995). While the population sample was purposive, selecting participants from four Broward County elementary schools, the researcher matched schools on several demographic factors, including: race, socioeconomic status, and academic performance. The sample allowed for the generalizability of assertions to the larger urban population. This study emphasized the necessity for more targeted research on the impact of instructional methodology on the African American male learners' ability to read for understanding, interpret ideas, use strategies to navigate complex texts, and make inferences, generalizations not found explicitly in reading material.

In a study on Chicago's Public schools and the impact of instructional approaches on achievement among urban, African American students, Newmann, Byrk, and Nagoaka (2001) conducted another ex-post facto study with a sample of 4,900 participants in three grades to examine achievement in writing and mathematics as measured by performance on standardized assessments. After examining more than 2,000 writing and mathematics assignments and making comparisons to student performance on two widely used standardized assessments, researchers found that students who received assignments requiring more challenging intellectual work achieved greater than average gains on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, with scores 20% higher than the national average. In the absence of such instructional demands, the students scored 25% lower than the national average in reading and 22% lower than the national average in mathematics. The researchers also found that students who received intellectually challenging work outperformed their unexposed peers by as much as 32 points in reading and 48 points in mathematics. Newmann, Byrk, and Nagoaka (2001) also found that both high and low-achieving students benefited from exposure to authentic intellectual work. The

researchers utilized the Many-Facets Rasch Analysis (MFRA) to construct overall measures for the intellectual quality of all assignments based on scores on the three standards with separate scales for each grade and subject, thus strengthening the validity of the subsequent findings. The researchers also used a second rater who scored a random sample of assignments. A special design was established for double scoring in order to accurately assess and adjust each assignment score for the differential effects associated with individual raters.

The findings of this study suggested: (1) no particular instructional strategy assures the success of all students; and (2) challenging intellectual work may promote academic achievement among poor, urban African American students. The limited available evidence from prior research suggests that students exposed to teaching which demands complex intellectual work are likely to do as well as or better than students exposed to basic-skills instruction only (Newmann, Bryk, & Nagoaka, 2001). Little research was found in the review of the literature on the intellectual demands embedded in classroom and homework assignments. Studies that have attempted to examine the impact of intellectual demands in the classroom setting on standardized assessment scores among African American males have not included large numbers of students across different grade levels and content areas (Lee, Smith, & Croninger, 1992; Silver & Lane, 1995; Tharp, 1982).

In a study conducted specifically to measure the impact of cooperative learning on the academic achievement among African American males, Wilson and Caston (2004) used the case study model and qualitative interview data gathered from 16 regular education students in rural Mississippi on topics related to home and school experiences

and how the two environments impacted academic success. The researchers found that the participants were faced daily with family-related situations that diminished their ability to achieve academically. Wilson and Caston found that participants rated cooperative learning as their most preferred method of classroom learning. Participants expressed the desire for limited interaction with teachers. Although this study examined the impact of instruction based on cooperative approaches to learning was limited to an examination of elementary African American male students in a rural America, the Winther and Volk study (1994) on a cooperative learning science curriculum which examined student achievement among high school students in an urban setting, resulted in similar findings. African American students, regardless of grade, perform better academically as a result of exposure to instruction infused with cooperative learning opportunities. The findings of this study were consistent with prior research on African American males and their affinity for cooperative learning which resulted in improvements in their: (1) academic performance; (2) behavior and attendance; (3) self-confidence and motivation; and (4) school and classmate satisfaction (Hudley, 1997; Quinn, 2002).

The extant research revealed a significant amount of attention given to the development of academic interventions that support increased levels of achievement for low income, minority children (Bempechat & Wells, 1989). Although being an African American child in America does not necessarily mean that one will come from an economically disadvantaged home, there is an undeniable relationship between being poor and African American. Classroom management strategies and student motivation have been listed among the top quartile of variables having the most profound impact on

student achievement outcomes (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1990). Hudley (1997), using a mixed-method approach underpinned by the cognitive evaluation theory, conducted a case study on the impact of a teacher management practices on the academic motivation of middle school, African American males. The researcher utilized triangulated data gathered from instruments including the: (1) Children's Academic Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (CAIMI); (2) Self-Perception for Learning Disabled Students, an adaptation of the Self-Perception Profile for Children; and (3) semi-structured interviews consisting of 18 open-ended questions on background information, instructional goals, classroom strategies, and discipline strategies.

The findings provided ambiguous support for the relationship between autonomy, control, perceived competence, and intrinsic motivation as they might act together to promote academic achievement. Hudley (1997) found that the teacher endorsed and preferred forms of cooperative learning activities including team competitions, through which students competed to demonstrate their knowledge and peer collaboration activities, designed to pair students to ensure assignment completion. The findings were consistent with studies found in the literature on the African American male achievement and the effects of cooperative learning. Peterz (1999) argued that research consistently demonstrated that the leaning styles of African American males were unique and cooperative learning was the most effective method of teaching such a population. Ladson-Billings (1994) argued that when educators matched teaching and learning preferences, implementing cooperative learning to match learning styles, students of color were more academically responsive in the learning process. Ladson-Billings' findings suggested that school-based policies, district policies, and community influences

have a diminished impact on academic achievement when compared to an individual teacher's approach to facilitating instruction (Wang, Reynolds, & Walberg, 1995).

Studies on the impact of culturally responsive teaching and its impact on achievement among African American boys were prevalent in the literature. Murrell (1994) conducted a micro-ethnography in order to investigate the impact of a culturally unresponsive teaching style on achievement among 12 urban, African American males in middle school mathematics. After a one-week term of researcher immersion into the school life at each of the four sites, Murrell found results consistent with prior research on culturally responsive teaching, including: (1) each of the 12 participants most frequently entered into instructional discourse in their respective classrooms only after a request from the teacher for information; (2) focus students rarely responded to open-ended questions, unless their responses were a part of a unison response to the teachers' invitation to the initiation of instructional talk; (3) the participation of focus students was limited to the classic role of supplying information (teacher initiation, learner response, and teacher evaluation); and (4) as teachers engaged in more instructional talk as a means of exploring and elaborating mathematical principles and concepts, the focus students did not regard the discussion as an increased focus on mathematical learning. Instead, students tended to regard the emphasis on instructional talk as a string of operations and concepts with little or no thematic coherence, merely as a new regimen to be mastered to meet their teachers' requirements. This study did not prove that culturally unresponsive teaching leads to the underperformance of African American males, but it did underscore the apparent conflict between math talk and the personal style of self-expression common

in African American males, suggesting that teachers may need to identify and augment those frames of instructional discourse that do not support learning for this population.

Howard (2001) conducted a case study to examine the instructional pedagogy of four teachers lauded for promoting the academic achievement among African American students through culturally responsive instruction. The researcher found three pedagogical themes in the data: (1) effective teachers of African American students were not exclusively concerned about students' academic and cognitive development, but also their social, emotional, and moral maturation; (2) teachers in this study had a firm understanding of the importance of language for their students and used culturally consistent communication competencies to facilitate instructional discourse in their respective classrooms; and (3) the critical attribute of effective teachers of African American learners had a commanding ability to assist students in the development of skills for making academic gains. Although the strength of the findings was compromised by the researcher's decision to allow teacher participants to be named "effective" through subjective means, the researcher made a concerted effort to use a two-stage process for narrowing the participant pool from 12 to four teachers through the construction of a conceptual framework composed of numerous pedagogical practices that had been previously described in research as culturally relevant for African American students. Howard also used an observation schedule designed to measure the frequency of culturally relevant practices in the potential participants' daily instructional repertoire. The findings would have been strengthened by a decision to use at least one standardized test as method for measuring teacher effectiveness as a result of exposure to the "effective teacher." The use of the grounded theory approach to analyze data

strengthened the credibility of the findings, allowing the researcher to relate findings to extant theories, provide additional descriptions, different interpretations, and contextual accounts of those theories (Howard, 2001). Consistent with a number of studies in the body of literature, this study suggested that teachers who understand the importance of skill development in conjunction with cultural awareness can create a rigorous learning environment that promotes academic achievement among African American students (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Cooper (2003) examined the observable behaviors of four culturally responsive elementary teachers on achievement African American achievement gap. The researcher found that: (1) African American students demonstrated the most academic growth in the classroom with a teacher who demonstrated the most profound knowledge of the content; (2) students responded favorably when the teacher demonstrated an ability to provide a mixture of whole and group instruction; (3) African American students worked well in cooperative learning groups; and (4) an animated style of expression to deliver instruction helped the African American student maintain a high level of engagement – all consistent with culturally relevant pedagogy. Unlike the aforementioned study conducted by Howard (2001), the findings of this study were strengthened by the researcher's decision to use academic measures to qualify its participants, requiring that the students of participants demonstrate three years of standardized scores above the district mean in language and mathematics as well as district assessment scores above the district mean. The findings of the study were consistent with the extant studies in the literature on the same topic and grade level which suggest that the culturally relevant pedagogical practices of teachers can have a profound impact on closing the achievement gap among

African American males (Bush, 1997; Cooper, 2003; Haycock, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Lamotey, 1990).

Wheeler (2007) conducted a descriptive case study using ethnographic methods to investigate the link between achievement among African American boys and the literacy instructional practices of two urban, primary teachers regarded as culturally responsive. The researcher found that the teachers' classroom practices supported the communication styles and literacy development of the African American male students as demonstrated by: (1) a genuine relationship with students in their classes, (2) respectful relationships with the parents of their students; and (3) strategies and approaches used by the teacher to facilitate literacy instruction while minimizing behavioral issues. The findings were strengthened by the use of triangulated data, passive participation as a method of collecting data in the real-world setting, the use of member checking to ensure the accurate representation of behavior and perspectives, and the researcher's conscious effort to control for the tendency of researcher subjectivity. This study, consistent with the body of literature, suggested that African American students, particularly males, benefit academically when teachers develop caring relationships with them and implement instructional strategies that connect to their unique learning style and cultural experiences (Foster, 1993; Gay, 2000; Irvine 2002; Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Siddle-Walker, 1996).

Fields (2007) conducted a qualitative portraiture study designed to examine the profile of six individuals identified as exemplary teachers of African American males and their impact on the academic achievement. The researcher found that the participants personal attributes included: (1) a warm, personable, and supportive disposition; (2)

teacher flexibility, enthusiasm, and high expectations for all students; (3) genuine care for student well-being; (4) an ability to bridge the child's home-life with the demands of schooling by considering the child's culture in instructional activities and connecting with child's common vernacular; (5) the infusion of cooperative learning activities, and (6) purposeful movement to accommodate the kinesthetic learning preference of African American males. The researcher's findings were strengthened by a series of researcher decisions including the inclusion of African American and White teachers as study participants, triangulated data, member checking, taped interviews to identify easily missed verbal nuances, and the maintenance of memos for a record of the research process used as a guide for researcher reflection, clarification, and data analysis. Findings were consistent with extant research and suggested that culturally responsive teacher attributes, regardless of race and ethnicity, can have a positive impact on the academic success among African American males (Bredenkamp & Copple, 1997; Delpit, 1998; Hale, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2001).

Characteristics of Resilient Children and Enabling School Conditions

Resilience is widely understood as a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity. Consistent with the notion that each child brings a unique set of characteristics into the world which transact with the expectations of multiple systems within the child's ecology to influence development (with school being one of the most influential systems), the early experiences of African American boys can either impede or enhance the development of competencies necessary to demonstrate resilience (Huston & Bentley, 2010). Implicit in the notion of resilience are two critical conditions: (1) exposure to significant threat or severe adversity; and (2)

the achievement of positive adaptation despite major assaults on the developmental process (Garmezy, 1990; Luthar & Ziglar, 1991; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990; Rutter, 1990; Werner & Smith, 1982, 1992). According to Chen and Kufman (1997) it is possible that students exposed to adversity can also be exposed to a number of protective factors, which mitigate risk and promote resilience. Chen and Kufman (1997) found that students who were exposed to multiple risk factors were much more likely to underachieve academically and therefore unlikely to demonstrate resilience than students who were exposed to no risk factors.

Examining exposure to risk factors in the context of schooling when seeking to describe educational resilience is crucial (Cunningham & Swanson, 2010). Slaughter-Defoe and Rubin (2001) argued that school officials have tremendous influence during the adolescent years. The researchers followed 56 African American children and their families from head start to grade 12. The results from their longitudinal study demonstrated the magnitude of influence changes from primary grades to the early middle school. While parental influences were evident in the early grades, the influence of teachers on educational outcomes began to trump parental influence in the later grades (Slaughter-Defoe & Rubin, 2001). The researchers also suggested that resilience is often associated with achievement within school systems that have numerous social and economic challenges. While negotiating the normative challenges associated with the developmental period of adolescence, many African American students are also exposed to community violence, poverty, and racism – yet some subsequently demonstrate resilience despite how they experience the world outside of their school.

According to Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1997) schools focused on promoting resilience among African American adolescents might concentrate attention on the impact of teacher expectations/adult support, race-related stressors, the classroom climate, and academic self-esteem in order to promote achievement. Using a nationally representative sample, Horn and Chen (1998) suggested that resilient students have more positive attitudes about school and positive peer associations. Jordan (1999) posited that while education is viewed as a primary impetus of social and economic mobility as well as a mechanism for redressing inequalities, the difficulties that African American males face in schools contribute to disengagement from the educational process and widen the achievement gap. According to Swanson, Spencer, and Peterson (1998), disengagement is displayed in the form of poor academic performance with little or no concrete educational goals. Disengaged students often: (1) withdraw both socially and emotionally from school climate; (2) interact minimally with others; (3) fail to find their niche in the academic system; and (4) fail to develop adequate levels of commitment to the institution of learning (Kelly, 2003). To the contrary there is significant consensus that teachers and the school environment are critical protective factors for fostering resilience. These school process factors include (1) developing caring relationships that teach social skills while providing unconditional positive regard and a culture of care, respect, and support; (2) setting high, achievable, and explicit expectations for academic performance and classroom behavior; and (3) providing opportunities to actively engage in meaningful learning experiences (Cunningham & Swanson, 2010; Bernard, 2004; Henderson & Milstein, 1996).

Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Rouse, and Chen (2012) suggested that research on resilience among African American boys lacks adequate consideration of academic engagement, a protective factor that has a known relationship with academic performance and resilience. Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Morison (2006) proposed that most boys go through a gradual process of disengagement from school, noting a positive correlation between engagement and resilience. Schools interested in fostering resilience among African American boys might promote behaviors in the classroom that include attention control, persistence, flexibility, and problem solving as they support student engagement in learning opportunities (Schaefer & McDermott, 1999; Yen, Konold, & McDermott, 2004). Corroborated by Chang and Romero (2008) and Gottfried (2011), engagement (defined as attendance and on-task behaviors) promotes student achievement among students at risk for academic underperformance. School leaders seeking to enable resilience might examine the mediating role of engagement on academic achievement among African American boys.

In a study on the determinants of resilience in high-stressed youth, Blocker and Copeland (1994) suggested that school officials interested in promoting resilience among adolescents at risk for academic failure might seek opportunities to unite students with an adequate identification figure/mentor who does not necessarily have to originate from the family in order to serve as an attachment figure. Mehr (1983) reported that the child who in early childhood has the freedom to explore and discover, appears to lead to the independent, task-oriented, problem-solving student protected from underperformance by a sense of curiosity. Supported by findings from Swanson, Spencer, and Peterson (1998), Losell and Bliesener (1990) argued that students who possess a positive sense of self, or a

sense of personal power to exercise a degree of control over the environment are more likely to demonstrate resilience. The researchers suggested that the resilient individual believes that he/she can exert influence to shape the events in his/her life; thus, life events are not viewed by them as luck or chance, but rather as a product of individual ability. Consistent with the extant literature, Losell and Bliesener (1990) also argued that resilient individuals tend to be socially responsive; that is, they are socially cooperative, participant, and therefore less likely to engage in passive withdrawal.

In a study on late elementary and secondary school African American boys, Gutman (2006) argued that classrooms with focus on teaching critical thinking skills serve as a protective factor. Shumow, Vandell, and Posner (1999) asserted that learning environments, which foster self-regulation and academic self-confidence often, mitigate the direct effects of sociocultural risk factors. Though teachers, school psychologists, and the educational system as a whole can do little by themselves to prevent or treat early risks, they can directly intervene to promote resilience through the provision of emotional and instructional support, thereby lessening the effect of the risk factors on student achievement (Institute of Education Sciences, 2007).

Summary

There is a profound need to extend our knowledge of the African American achievement gap. Nationally representative samples may not be what the field needs to address the heterogeneity that exists within the subpopulation of African American boys. Research that is positioned within local communities and is sensitive to the value of within group inquiry might provide practitioners and policymakers actionable intelligence to develop local intervention to the relations between risk, resilience, and educational

outcomes (Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Rouse, & Chen, 2012). The literature on school process factors and achievement among at-risk middle school, African American boys were overwhelmingly characterized by the study of a single process factor. Single school process factor studies are arguably representative of the gross oversimplification of a complex phenomenon, resulting in an incomplete understanding of the impact of both home and school process factors on academic achievement among African American boys and misguided reformation initiatives. The findings of empirical research on the African American achievement gap supports the argument that home and school process factors may be explicitly linked to academic underperformance. The absence of inquiry representative of the complexity of the lived experiences of this population of learners and, in some cases – ambiguous findings, underscores the necessity for meaningful research. The African American achievement gap will continue to widen without a diagnostic prescription informed by the study of the perspectives and experiences of those whom are impacted most directly by contextual and protective factors based on their unique, individual ecology and resilience.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The Black-White achievement gap poses a persistent, if not intractable problem for education policy researchers (Anderson, 2012). Despite advances in civil rights, educational methods and technology, findings indicate that African American children start school behind their peers and fall further behind as they matriculate through their career in public education (Fryer & Levit, 2006). National data show that when race and gender are considered, the greatest gaps are found for African American boys (Coley, 2011; Matthews, Kizzie, Rowley & Cortina, 2010). Data from the NAEP (2012) indicated that by eighth grade, African American boys enrolled in public schools scored an average of 19 points lower in mathematics than White boys and 23 points in reading respectively. Even within a subset of children who qualified for free lunch, the difference between African American and White boys was a half a standard deviation for both reading and mathematics in 2009 (NCES, 2009). This achievement gap has persisted in high school dropout rates and enrollment in undergraduate and graduate programs for decades (American Council of Education, 1990; Bachman, 1970; Demo & Parker, 1987).

To increase the likelihood that this study produces actionable intelligence that informs civic action, this study was not conducted to investigate that which is already widely accepted and known about the African American achievement gap – African American boys are at risk for failure. This study was designed to understand why some African American boys at risk for failure did not fail academically, while other African American boys from similar schools and classrooms failed. Rather than a focus on the children who had succumbed to at-risk factors or pathologies, this study was informed by

the research of Kabosa (1979) and Antonovsky (1979), which focused on understanding the resources of resistance to adversity available to participants.

Description of Design

In interpretive, qualitative research, education is considered to be a process and school is a lived experience (Merriam, 1992). Understanding the meaning of the process or experience constitutes the knowledge to be gained from an inductive, theory-generating (rather than a deductive or testing) mode of inquiry, which allows for multiple realities to be constructed socially by individuals. Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991) argued that interpretive studies assume that people create and associate their own subjective and intersubjective meanings as they interact with the world around them. Denzin and Lincoln (2000), consistent with Merriam (1992) and Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991) argued that qualitative research puts a face on participants' experiences when the researcher interacts one-on-one with the student and searches for entry into understanding their relationships and world of lived experiences. By design, interpretive, qualitative research can explore the presence of relationships and the individual's construction of reality, thus capturing the participants' perspectives through multiple means (DeGroot, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Since the focus of this study was designed to gain access to the real-life experiences of at-risk, middle school African American boys to understand resilience through their experiences in school and their perceptions. This study was informed by the Garnezy (1981) early investigations of competence amidst stress, wherein he studied invulnerability in a small group of "odds-defying" African American children who overcame recondite stress associated with poverty and prejudice, to become competent

and well-adjusted. Consistent the Denzin and Lincoln (1994) description of qualitative research, this study is grounded in a naturalistic approach to its subject matter with the researcher as the primary instrument and richly descriptive findings focused on identifying, documenting, and knowing through the interpretation of the participants' world views, values, meanings, beliefs, and characteristics of life events and situations.

Selection of Site and Participants

The research sample was drawn from a population of 59 African American males from a population of 694 middle school students ranging from ages 11-14 in a mid-sized Maryland school district serving students in grades 6-8. Thirty one percent of the majority-minority middle school population qualified for free or reduced meals in 2012. The pseudonym Oak Lane Middle School was used to identify the school to protect the identity of the school and the research site. The student body was 42.8% African American, 25.4% White, 13.5% Hispanic, 12.5% Asian, and 5.8% Two or More Races. Nearly 9% of the student body received special education services while nearly 5% of Oak Lane students received support to learn English. As measured by performance on the Maryland School Assessment (MSA), on average, 87% of all students scored proficient or advanced in both reading and mathematics. Nearly 93% of all White students scored proficient or advanced on the reading portion of the assessment, while 85% of the African American population reached proficiency or beyond – representing a 7-point proficiency gap. Likewise, nearly 91% of all White students scored proficient or advanced on the mathematics portion of the MSA, while 82% of the African American population reached proficiency or beyond – representing an 8-point proficiency gap.

After a period of three years in which the school struggled to demonstrate adequate yearly progress (2004-2007), the Oak Lane Middle School experienced six years of steady gains and was removed from the state's school improvement list in 2010 after demonstrating adequate yearly progress for three consecutive years. The researcher, a career educator with fifteen years of school leadership experience, had colleagues in several districts within the state, including the district in which Oak Lane Middle School resides. Oak Lane Middle School was chosen because of its demonstration of resilience, ease of access to students, and its geographical location (proximity to the researcher).

Participation in the study was on a voluntary basis. The first twelve males who met the selection criteria and responded to the request for participation in the study became the final unit of analysis. The criterion-based selection process was used to ensure that the sample directly reflected the purpose of the study and the identification of information-rich cases. Two categories of participants were identified from the population: "resilient" and "non-resilient." Implicit in the concept of resilient were two critical conditions: (1) exposure to significant threat or severe adversity; and (2) the achievement of positive adaptation despite major assaults on the developmental process (Garmezy, 1990; Luthar & Zigler, 1991; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990; Rutter, 1990; Werner & Smith, 1982, 1992). Resilient participants were those who earned a score of proficient or advanced on the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) despite having exhibited two or more of the six criteria for being designated as at-risk for underachieving academically, including: (1) reared in a family in the lowest socioeconomic quartile; (2) reared in a single-parent home or a home without their biological parents; (3) earned grades of C's (on average) or lower in grade 5 and 6; (4)

retained a grade; (5) changed schools two or more times outside of the normal progression; or (6) have an older sibling who dropped out of high school. Non-resilient participants were students who exhibited two or more of the six criteria for being designated as at-risk for underachieving academically, including: (1) reared in a family in the lowest socioeconomic quartile; (2) reared in a single-parent home or a home without their biological parents; (3) earned grades of C's (on average) or lower in grade 5 and 6; (4) retained a grade; (5) changed schools two or more times outside of the normal progression; or (6) have an older sibling who dropped out of high school, but earned a basic score on the Maryland School Assessment (MSA).

Instrumentation and Interview Procedures

Acting as the primary instrument for data collection, the researcher conducted 30 to 45 minute, semi-structured interviews with structured, open-ended questions. For the purpose of particularization—taking a case and knowing it well, not primarily as how it is different from others, rather what it is and what it does, each participant was interviewed separately and was not aware of the other participants in the study. Interview questions were reflective of the literature on school process factors and the protective factors associated with resilience. The interview protocol was used as a guide. It included: (1) the primary research questions, which were not asked of the participants; (2) key interview questions that were based on the primary research questions and were posed to each participant in the same order; (3) probes designed to anticipate the need for clarification of participant responses; (4) space for the researcher's notes and reflections after the interview; and (5) space for observational notes.

Data Collection and Recording

After approval was granted to conduct this study, permission was obtained from the International Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. To assure the board of education and site-based leaders that the name of the system, school, participants, and names of all parties involved would not become the subject of negative press, the researcher agreed to use pseudonyms and signed an agreement of the same. The researcher provided a participant permission letter, which included: (1) a description and intent of the study; (2) a parental signature requirement; (3) a participation agreement form; and (4) a confidentiality clause.

According to Clark and Creswell (2010), decisions regarding qualitative data collection should reflect considerations for: (1) site selection and participants to ensure the collection of rich detail and understanding of the central phenomenon; (2) the value of open-ended questions as a means for collecting unfiltered data; and (3) setting as a function of quality data collection. To that end, data collection took place from July 2014 through September 2014 and consisted of 30 to 45 minute, semi-structured interviews with structured, open-ended questions. The data were collected using a digital recording device and transcribed into field notes for analysis. Consideration was given to establishing rapport with participants and interview locations in order to provide participants with a comfortable environment to share their experiences in school. Each interview was conducted in a classroom or common area familiar to each participant with the written permission of a parent or guardian before, during, or after school hours. Each participant was asked to choose the classroom or common area for each interview to: (1) enhance the development of the rapport with the participant and the researcher; and (2)

avoid sites that impact the participants' willingness to divulge their feelings regarding their lived experiences in school.

A profile of the experience and perceptions of each participant was written in narrative form using the actual words of the participant to minimize interpretation on the part of the researcher; and transcribed data was coded by emergent themes. The data was kept in a secure location before and during the collection and analysis process. The researcher hired an independent, trained coder to analyze the data collected. The independent coder's analysis of the data was compared to researcher's coded data to promote inner-rater reliability and strengthen inferences drawn from the findings. The site-based school administration was provided with a transcript of each participant's interview with the name of each participant redacted.

Methodological Assumptions

This study was conducted to gain insight into how the participants describe their lived experience as a student in their school. Qualitative study is concerned primarily with process over outcomes. The central assumption in this type of inquiry is the view that individuals interacting with their social world can construct reality; therefore there is a presupposition that meaning is embedded in the experience of each participant and meaning is assessed through the researcher's perceptions (Merriam, 1998). To minimize the impact of reality as subjective and multiple (as seen by each participant), each participant was interviewed separately and was not aware of the other participants in the study. To mitigate the potential impact of the researcher on the researched and to increase the likelihood that the data collected on the phenomenon of interest was from the participant's perspective rather than the investigator's perspective, each student was

asked to respond to a set of standardized research questions without deviation.

Participants' responses were transcribed verbatim and themes were identified from those transcriptions by the principal researcher. An independent coder identified emergent themes in isolation of the primary researcher to diminish researcher bias and strengthen the assertions associated with the findings.

Limitations

This study has a number of limitations that should be noted. Since qualitative research is not a linear, data collection and analysis for this study was a simultaneous activity. The researcher mitigated the impact of the data collection protocol by: (1) audiotaping each interview to ensure that everything that was said was preserved for analysis; and (2) writing reflections immediately following each interview in order to record insights suggested by data collected from each interview, descriptive notes on the verbal and nonverbal behavior of each participant, and parenthetical thoughts of the researcher, to produce trustworthy findings. Since the researcher acted as the primary instrument for data collection as the interviewer, all data collected was inherently subject to the researcher's bias. To diminish the impact of researcher bias, the interviewer constantly checked for and maintained neutrality with regard to the respondents' knowledge, regardless of how antithetical to the interviewer's beliefs or values the respondents' position might be.

The research sample was drawn from a population of African American males enrolled in eighth grade at a single, majority-minority middle school; therefore, generalization about the larger population of all African American males in this nation and factors acting on academic achievement must be made within the boundaries set by

the sample and scope of the study. By design this study was not designed to generalize or to test theory. The underlying purpose of this study was to understand what occurs in context, open discourse on the implications of what occurs, and the relationships linking occurrences; therefore, the purposive sampling procedures employed by the researcher were for the aim of discovering and gaining insight, which must be gained from a sample from which the most can be learned. The researcher mitigated the possible influence of sample size on applicability of findings by beginning with a tentative number of participants to be included, knowing that the number of sampled units could be adjusted in the course of the investigation in order to arrive at a point of saturation and redundancy.

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Due to the sensitive information about individual students that you are requesting, we are unable to approve your research request. In order to determine which set of students meets all of the criteria for your research questions, various offices and personnel would need access to confidential student data that they are not authorized to access. Additionally, it would be necessary to receive parental consent for each student in the entire population (all African-American males in grades 7-8) before it would be possible to identify your research sample.