ABSTRACT

SPENCER, NATALIE FAYE. The Will to Achieve: A Phenomenological Study of the Experiences of African American High Achieving Students and Their Parents. (Under the direction of Dr. Marc A. Grimmett).

The purpose of this research study was to understand the experiences of high achieving African American students and their parents. The experiences of high achieving African American students and their parents have been missing from literature on the academic achievement of African American students. Much of the literature that has been published focuses on the achievement gap, underperformance of African American students and the absence of African American parents in their child’s education (Ford, et al, 2008). The studies that have been published that investigate parental involvement primary feature samplings of white students (Yan, 1999). The continued conversation about the academic disparities between many black and white youth only serve to perpetuate the societal narrative that African American students are somewhat intellectually inferior to white students (Carter-Andrews, 2009).

Six high achieving African American students and their parents participated in this study. Data were collected utilizing a demographic survey, semi-structured interviews, and a narrative student visual representation activity (i.e., student self-portrait). Two coders and one auditor analyzed the demographic surveys from both parent and student research participants, semi-structured interviews, and student self-portraits. Codes were determined using a thematic coding process to find recurring themes. After each coder individually coded the data, the coding team met and created a master code list that consisted of individual codes and subsequent themes.
The findings of this research study suggest that high achieving African American students want to achieve and do well. They do not feel the need to hide their achievement identities. The student research participants were motivated and excited about learning. Parents of students participating supported their children and wanted the best for them. Student participants also had a strong desire and will to achieve and to serve as leaders and role models to their peers.

School counselors can encourage positive identity development by taking an interest in high achieving students and their development. A school wide initiative school counselors can employ to help this identity development is to create a high achievers club where students with a GPA of 3.5 or above come together to not only socialize, but to help each other. Also, counselors that promote high achievement and academic success can help match high achieving students with students in need of academic support. Creating a tutoring program enables high achieving students to take on leadership roles within their school, as well as to help others and promote achievement and success. Many of the students participating in this research study discussed the importance of support systems.

Future research should focus more on the interaction of school personnel. Parent and student research participants both mentioned involvement with school counselors, teachers, and coaches. It would be worthwhile to gather the thoughts of attitudes of school personnel in positions where they counsel and advise students. The participants in this current study expressed some interaction with school personnel but it was limited. Future studies can focus primarily on communication with school counselors.
The Will to Achieve: A Phenomenological Study of the Experiences of African American High Achieving Students and Their Parents

by
Natalie Faye Spencer

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of North Carolina State University in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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DEDICATION

For my parents,

Manzell and Hester Spencer,

my siblings,

Sherri, Manzell,Jr, Nicole, Jason,

&

my niece, Selah Alexandria

Thank you for your constant love and support. I could not have completed this without you in

my life!
BIOGRAPHY

Natalie Faye Spencer was born in Wadesboro North Carolina and is the daughter of Manzell and Hester Spencer. At an early age Natalie discovered her love of learning and education. She attended Anson Senior High School and challenged herself by taking honors and advanced placement classes. After graduation, Natalie attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill where she majored in English and minored in African American Studies. During her senior year, Natalie realized she wanted to pursue a career in School Counseling. She earned a Master’s of Education degree in school counseling and started her career as a school counselor at Cary High School located in Cary, NC. During her career at Cary High School, Natalie enjoyed assisting parents, students, faculty, and staff. After working three years as a school counselor, Natalie enrolled in the Counselor Education doctoral program at North Carolina State University. She worked as a graduate assistant for the North Carolina State Teaching Fellows for three years and enjoyed assisting pre-service teachers. In Fall 2009, Natalie received the Preparing The Professoriate Fellowship and taught an undergraduate counselor education course during the Spring 2010 semester.

In addition, Natalie is actively involved in professional organizations. She served as the president of the Nu Sigma Chi chapter of Chi Sigma Iota and is a member of the American School Counselor Association, American Counselor Association, and North Carolina Counselor Association. In addition, Natalie is a licensed professional counselor in the state of North Carolina and National Certified Counselor. Currently, Natalie is employed as a school counselor for Wake County Public School system.
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First, I acknowledge God for watching over me throughout this journey. This would not have been possible without my faith and belief in a higher being. I thank my family for supporting me and encouraging me to stay the course and strive for excellence. I thank my parents for everything. You never told me to stop dreaming or try something else. I am eternally thankful for your support, love, and for helping me when I needed it the most.

Sherri- Thank you for blessing our family with Selah and for always finding a way to make me laugh. Manzell- Thanks for your encouragement and for believing in me. Jason-Thanks for always helping me see things from multiple perspectives. Nicole- My dear twin. Thanks for everything! There are not enough words in the dictionary to capture how much I appreciate you. God created you when he created me for a reason. We’ve been by each other’s side since the beginning. My experiences would be meaningless if I did not have your support. You’ve read every draft, lifted me when I could not go any further, and been my biggest supporter. Thank you for being you. Thank you for being my twin. Thank you for being my sister. Thank you for being my friend.

I express my sincere gratitude to the North Carolina State Counselor Education department. I am forever thankful for the patience and guidance I received from my dissertation chair, Dr. Marc A Grimmett. Thank you for reading multiple versions of my dissertation and helping to ease my mind throughout this dissertation process. It wasn’t easy, but I made it! Thank you to Dr. Stanley Baker, Dr. Ed Gerler, and Dr. Pamela Martin for serving on my committee. I value your support, guidance, and efforts as I worked toward
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Thank you to the students and parents that participated in this research study. This would not have been possible without your participation. Continue to achieve and make your dreams come true. The world is yours! Go get it!

Any omissions are purely of the mind and not of the heart. I have been privileged to meet and work with some wonderful individuals. I cannot name you all, but you are very much a part of the fabric of my life. Thank you for your support.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES .................................................................................................................. x
LIST OF TABLES .................................................................................................................... xi

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................... 1
  Statement of the Problem ...................................................................................................... 1
  Underachievement of the Higher Achiever .......................................................................... 3
  John Ogbu, Cultural Ecological Theory .............................................................................. 4
  A. Wade Boykin, Triple Quandary ..................................................................................... 5
  African American Families ................................................................................................. 6
  Rationale for Study ............................................................................................................. 7
  Research Questions ........................................................................................................... 8
  Definition of Terms ........................................................................................................... 9

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ......................................................................... 11
  Theoretical Foundations ...................................................................................................... 13
    Boykin’s Triple Quandary Theory ..................................................................................... 13
    John Ogbu’s Cultural Ecological Theory .......................................................................... 16
    Ogbu’s Oppositional Framework ...................................................................................... 19
    Joyce Epstein’s Overlapping Spheres of Parent Involvement ..................................... 20
    The Relationship Between Triple Quandary and Cultural Ecological Theory .......... 22
  Relevant Research ............................................................................................................ 25
    High Achieving African American Students ................................................................. 25
    African American Student Racial Identification .......................................................... 26
    Attitude Toward School .................................................................................................... 29
    Parent Involvement ........................................................................................................ 30
    Parent Involvement and Social Class ............................................................................. 31
  Summary and Gaps in Literature ...................................................................................... 32

CHAPTER THREE: METHOD .................................................................................................... 34
  Research Design ................................................................................................................ 35
    Participants ...................................................................................................................... 37
    Researcher as Interviewer ............................................................................................... 37
  Instrumentation and Procedures ........................................................................................ 39
    Demographic Questionnaire .......................................................................................... 39
    Semi Structured Interview – Students .......................................................................... 40
    Narrative Research Method - Visual Representations Students .................................. 41
    Semi Structured Interview – Parents ............................................................................ 42
  Data Analysis .................................................................................................................... 43
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Data Analysis ................................................................. 50
  Descriptive Statistics .................................................... 52
  Student/Parent Dyads .................................................. 52
    Shannon and Paul Morgan ........................................ 52
    Miranda and Carrie Dale .......................................... 53
    Elyse and Stephanie Grady ....................................... 54
    Billy and Susan Strong ........................................... 54
    Mille and Vivian Williams ........................................ 55
    Michael and Rachel White ....................................... 56
  Emergent Themes ...................................................... 58
  Student Themes and Codes .......................................... 59
Research Question One Findings ...................................... 60
  Student Experience ................................................... 60
    Student Challenges ................................................ 61
    Diversity ............................................................. 61
    Opportunity .......................................................... 63
    Friendship Influences ............................................. 64
Research Question Two Findings ...................................... 65
  Billy ................................................................. 65
  Elyse ............................................................... 66
  Shannon ............................................................. 68
  Miranda ............................................................. 69
  Millie ............................................................... 70
  Michael ............................................................ 71
Endogenous Factors .................................................... 73
  Self-Perception/Identity ........................................... 73
Scholastic Achievement .................................................. 74
  Motivation ........................................................... 74
  Dedication To Work ................................................ 75
  Goals For Future ..................................................... 75
Research Question Three Findings .................................... 76
  Parent Themes and Codes ........................................... 77
    Parent Challenges ................................................ 78
    Motivation .......................................................... 79
    Opportunity ........................................................ 80
    Religious Influence ............................................... 81
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Family Time</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Models and College Preparation</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question Four</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Involvement</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Involvement</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Student Common Themes</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Purpose</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of Findings</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question One</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question Two</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question Three</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question Four</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration of Meaning of Findings</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Counselors and Counselor Educators</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Future Research</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A: Demographic Form- Parents and Students</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B: Semi Structured Interview Questions- Parents and Students</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX C: Multiple Selves – Visual Representation Activity – Students</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX D: Code List</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Overlapping Spheres of Influence of Family, School and Community on Children’s Learning ..............................................................21
Figure 2. Visual Representation of Qualitative Methodology ..................49
Figure 3. Billy’s Visual Representation ......................................................66
Figure 4. Elyse’s Visual Representation .....................................................67
Figure 5. Shannon’s Visual Representation .............................................68
Figure 6. Miranda’s Visual Representation ..............................................69
Figure 7. Millie’s Visual Representation ...................................................70
Figure 8. Michael’s Visual Representation .................................................71
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Kappa Score Results ................................................................. 46
Table 2. Student and Parent Profiles ....................................................... 57
Table 3. Student Themes and Codes ....................................................... 60
Table 4. Parent and Student Codes ......................................................... 78
Table 5. Parent and Student Themes ....................................................... 89
CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research study is to understand the experiences of high achieving African American students and their parents. Data were collected utilizing the qualitative technique such as semi-structured interviews and narrative student visual representation activity. A variety of qualitative techniques were selected because they provided rich and authentic detail that can only come from personal experiences and feelings. This study adds to the current literature about high achieving African American students by acknowledging the experiences of both parents and students of this often underserved group.

Statement of Problem

The experiences of high achieving African American students and their parents have been missing from literature on the academic achievement of African American students. Much of the literature that has been published focuses on the achievement gap, underperformance of African American students and the absence of African American parents in their child’s education (Ford, et al, 2008). The studies that have been published that investigate parental involvement primary feature samplings of white students (Yan, 1999). The continued conversation about the academic disparities between many black and white youth only serve to perpetuate the societal narrative that African Americans are somewhat intellectually inferior to white students (Carter-Andrews, 2009).

In order to combat such negative messages, it has been suggested by scholars to focus more attention on the academic success of black students (Carter-Andrews 2009; Fordham...
2008; Perry, 2003). Exploration of successful African American students is needed because of the overabundance of research about the underperformance of African American students. (Conchas, 2006, 2001; Conchas & Noguera, 2004; Lightfoot, 1983). The experiences of successful African American and other racial minority students are overshadowed by the studies that focus on failure (Conchas, 2004; Lightfoot, 1983). This imbalance of published research only confirms negative stereotypes and beliefs that have persisted in American schools for decades.

In addition, parental involvement has been regulated to negative stereotypes as well. According to Conchas (2006), African American parents are often blamed for the underperformance of African American children. The disparity amongst the academic achievement and retention of African American students has lagged behind that of white children as long as such data has existed (Steele and Aronson, 1998). With so much negative attention drawn to the underperformance of African American students, the gains and achievements of high achieving African American students are often overlooked.

It should be noted that a recent study by Huff, Houskamp, Watkins, Stanton, and Tavegia (2005) examined the experiences of parents of gifted African American children, however, the study focused primarily on the experiences of children aged 9-16. Consequently, the present study seeks to examine the experiences of high achieving African American students enrolled in high school and their parents.
Underachievement of the High Achiever

High achieving black students have been described as “the best and the brightest” and attain academic and professional success (Fries-Britt and Griffin 2007; Solano, 1987). Underachievement has been characterized as the difference between potential or ability and performance or achievement (McCoach and Siegle, 2003; Dowdall and Colangelo, 1982; Whitmore, 1980). Carter-Andrews (2009) asserts that mainstream achievement ideology falsely believe success lies within the individual and students should take ownership of their successes and failures, yet it fails to account for “structural conditions that might constrain and even impede students’ abilities to achieve their maximum potentials in school and life” (p. 465).

Two theories seek to explain this phenomenon and discrepancy between ability and performance that impacts achievement. John Ogbu’s Cultural Ecological Theory (1986), in particular his notion of Oppositional Culture and A. Wade Boykin’s Triple Quandary Theory (1986) have been two prominent and often referenced theories that seek explore the achievement gap and performance of black students. Both theories were further explained in reference to their basic constructs, tenets, and ideology.

Also, this study will explore Joyce Epstein’s (1986, 1995) model of home-school partnership. Epstein assert that high school vary in the extent to which they communicate and involve parents in their children’s education. It is believed that schools can build lasting relationships with parents as students proceed through the schools (Epstein, 1986, 1995). Epstein (1986, 1995) provides a model of overlapping spheres of internal and external forces
that influence home-school interaction amongst families. Six types of involvement include: Parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. Epstein’s theory and model of parent involvement will be explored further in this study. This model is of particular interest to the parents of high achieving African Americans and their involvement and perceived support from schools in their child’s education.

**John Ogbu, Cultural Ecological Theory**

John Ogbu proposes an insightful and somewhat controversial theory to explain African American student underachievement. John Ogbu’s Ecological Theory examines four important layers in reference to minorities, schooling, and coping strategies as the following: (a) general idea that student’s academic success is impacted by community forces and system forces, and that not enough attention has been paid to the ways in which community forces contribute to involuntary minority student failure; (b) The distinction of voluntary, involuntary, and autonomous minorities; (c) The recognition of universal, primary, and secondary discontinuities between students and the school they attend; and (4) The idea that involuntary minorities have developed survival strategies such as “uncle tomming, collective struggle, hustling, emulation of whites, and camouflage” (Foster, 2004, p. 370). These constructs are intermixed throughout Cultural Ecological Theory and have been criticized by scholars. They are broad and very general, however, Ogbug asserts, they have been applied to a wide range of scholarly work.
An additional construct of Ogbu’s Cultural Ecological Theory is the Oppositional Culture framework some minorities assume. As previously stated, Ogbu has identified specific adaptations involuntary minorities develop to protect and maintain group identity in the face of oppression (Anthony & Irving, 2003; Ogbu, 1985, 1991). It is believed that an individual with oppositional identity will not “feel comfortable dressing, acting, speaking, or engaging in activities” (Irving & Hudley, 2008, p. 375). By engaging in mainstream activities, some African Americans youth believe it implies acceptance of white values, attitudes, and identity. Therefore, the “stronger a students’ oppositional attitude the lower his or her academic achievement” (Mickelson, 2003, p. 368). Adopting an oppositional outlook toward schooling further impedes the potential of African American youth because of the fear of “acting white”. On the contrary, many scholars, including Steele (2003) contend Ogbu’s belief that African Americans have not developed an academic tradition is misguided. According to Steele, there is no evidence to support that historically African Americans have developed mistrust of school and school people. Although Ogbu’s theory has been criticized by many in academia, his theory has created a dialogue about Africans Americans and achievement that continues to be referenced.

A. Wade Boykin’s Triple Quandary

Boykin’s Triple Quandary Theory (1986) provides a framework for understanding the racial socialization messages of African American children. Boykin’s theoretical framework purports that African Americans must negotiate three realms of experience simultaneously: the mainstream, the black cultural experience, and the minority experience (Boykin, 1986).
In addition to the Triple Quandary and the experiences of African Americans, Boykin (1986) “considers the inevitable conflicts faced by children who must learn to navigate in three realms of experience, coping strategies they adopt to deal with those conflicts, school experiences, and the coping strategies expressed in school settings” (p. 59). When African Americans enter into a school setting they must negotiate the cultural values and styles of behavior demonstrated at home with the mainstream expectations and values displayed at school. Often times, these two experiences clash creating a dilemma for some students as they navigate their cultural identity with their academic status.

The Triple Quandary in which African Americans negotiate three realms, the socialization of African American children, and the influence the negotiation the three realms have on the schooling of African American children are all important constructs as counselors and educators interact and educate African American children and adolescents. Boykin’s theoretical framework is particularly relevant in regards to education and schooling of high achieving and gifted African Americans. The three realms and the function of schooling can create a better understanding of the adaptive coping strategies, socialization and schooling of African American children.

**African American Families**

In the past several decades, the structure of families in the United States has changed dramatically with distinct change in Black families (McAdoo & Younge, 2009). According to data collected during the 2009 US Census, an estimated 41.8 million African Americans reside in the United States. Out of this group, 44% of families with single-race black
households were married. It should also be noted that the percentage of children living with two parents varied by race and origin. Data collected during the most recent US Census found that 85% of Asian, 38% of black, 69% of Hispanic, and 78% of white, non-Hispanic children live in two-parent households. It is important to note the changing family demographic because the nature of a child’s household can influence support and resources available to children. (McAdoo and Younge, 2009).

Numerous studies have acknowledged the influence of situational variables such as parental occupation, education, socioeconomic status, marital status, race, and ethnicity on student outcomes (Ford et al, 1998; Bhatnagar and Sharma, 1992; Christenson, Rounds, and Gorney, 1992; Dulaney and Bethune, 1995; Gonzales, Cauce, Friedman and Mason, 1996; Hortacsu, 1995; Mulkey, Crain, and Harrington, 1992; Murray and Sandqvist, 1990;). These studies examine how families promote positive achievement orientations in students despite income structure (Ford, et al, 1998). It has been reported that students are more likely to experience school success with more parental involvement (Ford, et al, 1998). However, there are always exceptions to student success and achievement. Some students thrive and achieve despite lack of parental involvement, which includes communicating and reinforcing performance and achievement success. This study examined high achieving students from a variety of family structures and backgrounds.

Rationale for Study

Much has been reported and written about the underachievement of African American students. Limited focus on the academic success and high achieving African
American students lends a very skewed and unfair representation of African American students and their intellectual ability. Few research studies examine the experiences of high achieving African American students and their parents. This study seeks to expand upon research that has been conducted independently on high achieving students and the parents of high achieving students. Examining both together will increase the overall understand of student experiences and parental support provided by parents to student.

The purpose of this research study is to understand the experiences of high achieving African American students and their parents utilizing a phenomenological approach and narrative inquiry technique. Data will be collected using triangulation of interviews, observations, and journals. This approach was selected in order to capture first hand experiences of students and their parents. The results produced will severe as a resource for parents, educators, administrators and other school officials to better serve high achieving students and their parents.

**Research Questions**

This study will focus on the experiences of both high achieving African American adolescents as well as the parents of students identified as members of this group. The following research questions will guide this research study:

1. What are the social and academic experiences of high achieving African American adolescents?
2. How do high achieving African American students visually construct academic achievement?
3. How do the parents of high achieving African American adolescents support and encourage the personal, social, and academic development of their child (ren)?

4. How do schools and school employees (teachers, principals, staff, etc) contribute to the overall experiences of high achieving African American adolescents and their parents?

**Definition of Terms**

1. **African American or Black**- A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (US Census Bureau, May 2010).

2. **Adolescents**- an individual between the ages of 12 to 18 years old. This is the stage where we are between adulthood and childhood and life becomes more complex as we discover our identity, social interactions, and morality (Erikson, 1950).

3. **Development**- The process of human physical, emotional, and intellectual development and the ability to make choices from childhood through adulthood (Piaget, 1920).

4. **High Achieving**- One who has shown above average potential as measured by standardized intelligence or achievement during high school or who has demonstrated superior performance in one or more academic areas (Herbert and Reiss, 1999).

5. **Family**- A family is a group of two people or more (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together; all such people (including related subfamily members) are considered as members of one family (US Census Bureau, May 2010).
6. **Phenomenology** – Inquiry method that seeks to investigate, understand and describe the meaning of lived experiences of an individual or group (Lopez and Willis, 2004).

7. **Narrative Inquiry** – Qualitative research method utilized to help people make meaning of their lives using a variety of data collection methods (i.e. journals, storytelling, letter, interviews, photos, life experiences, etc) (Merriam, 2000).
CHAPTER TWO:

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter provides an overview of academic achievement, African American youth and schooling, underachievement of high achieving and gifted African American students, African American families, theoretical framework of John Ogbu’s (1986) theory of African American youth and achievement and A. Wade Boykin’s Theory of Triple Quandary (1986). Also, this chapter will examine Joyce Epstein’s (1987, 1995) theoretical model of family school and community partnerships.

John Ogbu’s Cultural Ecological Theory (1988) was selected because it provides a critical lens for the academic and social demands minority student experience. Ogbu’s theory argues that two sets of factors influence minority school performance: how society at large and school view minorities (the system) and how groups respond to those treatments and to schooling (community forces). Furthermore, Ogbu notes the difference in school performance between immigrant and nonimmigrant minorities is partly due to differences expressed within each community.

The basis for understanding John Ogbu’s Cultural Ecological first arose in a joint publication (Fordham & Ogou, 1986) where the authors asserted a “cultural frame of reference and collective identity should be included among the widely recognized, interlocking societal, school, and community factors known to influence minority students’ school performance”
Ogbu believes culture plays an important role in the academic success of African American children. Ogbu later expounded upon his initial thesis written with Fordham and developed a basic typology “consisting of universal cultural differences, primary cultural differences, and secondary differences” (Ogbu, 2008, p. 8). Furthermore, Ogbu distinguishes between voluntary, involuntary, and autonomous minorities (Foster, 2004). Ogbu describes the differences between the different types of minorities and the survival strategies of involuntary minorities and cultural norms. In particular, African American youth experience dissonance related to being academically successfully without distancing self from African American culture. Therefore, Cultural Ecological Theory provides a useful framework to review the success and psycho-social well being of African American adolescents. In the thirty years since John Ogbu first published his theoretical framework, several research and scholarly articles have been published that have been critical of Ogbu’s initial theoretical orientation.

Boykin’s Triple Quandary Theory (1986) was selected because it implies African Americans negotiate three identities: African American social identity, minority social identity, and American social identity. The basis for Boykin’s Triple Quandary Theory is that, “the academic performance of minority children remains a persistent, troubling, and seemingly intractable national problem” (Boykin, 1986, p. 57). Even twenty years after Boykin developed his theoretical framework, the schooling of African American and minority children still remain a troubling epidemic across the country.
Theoretical Foundations

Boykin’s Triple Quandary Theory

Boykin’s theoretical framework purports that African Americans must negotiate three realms of experience simultaneously: the mainstream, the black cultural experience, and the minority experience (Boykin, 1986). The first realm in which African Americans experience in the Triple Quandary is that of the mainstream experience. The mainstream experience refers to desire of individuals to attain the American dream and engage in mainstream society. Mainstream values are transmitted via mass media and African American families judge their own success and failure against white middle class standards (Boykin & Toms, 1985). Mainstream forces are the most pervasive and all members of the society have contact with the mainstream negotiation. When African American children enter school, multiple identities and mainstream expectations often differ. Negotiation happens “because schools require them to acquire values and beliefs that are incongruent with cultural styles they have learned at home” (Boykin, P. 76, 1986). Consequently, schooling, Triple Quandary, and the individual can clash.

The second realm Boykin identified in which African Americans negotiate is that of the Black cultural experience. The Black cultural experience refers to the West African cultural ethos that are intermixed within the Black experience. Boykin (1986) purports there are nine interrelated but distinct dimensions that are expressed with African Americans. The nine interrelated dimensions include: Spirituality- conducting one’s life as though its essence were vitalistic or full of life rather than mechanistic or routine, as though transcending forces...
significantly govern the lives of people. **Harmony**- placing a premium on life and placing an emphasis on wholeness rather than discreteness. **Movement**- approaching life rhythmically, particularly as expressed through the patterned interwoven mosaic of music, movement, and percussiveness. **Verve**- psychological affinity for variability and intensity of stimulation, particularly stimulation emanating from the movement mosaic complex. **Affect**- a premium placed on emotional sensibilities and expressiveness. **Communalism**- sensitivity to the interdependence of people and the notion that group concerns transcend individual strivings. **Expressive Individualism**- a premium attached to the cultivation of distinctiveness, spontaneity, and uniqueness of self-expression. **Orality**- a special emphasis on oral and aural modes of communication, especially the use of the spoken word to convey deep textural meanings not possible through the written word. **Social Time Perspective**- a commitment to time as a social phenomenon much more than a concoction objectively drawn through clock, calendars, and other inanimate markers. Due to the “debilitating intrusions of racism, oppression and the necessity to function within the American social context, it would be unrealistic to presume the African culture remains intact and is expressed full blown in African Americans” (Boykin & Toms, 1985, p. 40). Even with limited expression, Boykin and Toms (1985) posit Black cultural motifs are “passed on” through daily encounters with parents and other family members.

The third and final realm is that of the minority experience. The minority experience is based on the adaptive styles African Americans develop as a result of being a member of a minority group. The socialization process becomes complicated as African Americans learn
to respond to racially and economically problematic circumstances (Boykin & Toms, 1985). Consequently, the status of being a member of an oppressed group produces adaptive orientations and coping strategies. Two adaptive and coping strategy dimensions include: whether to take an active or passive role in confronting the realities of racism and oppression and whether to actively engage or disengage in the system and orient self to the mainstream institutions or operate separately from such institutions. The aforementioned adaptive coping styles or classification systems shed light on the range of possible adaption (Boykin & Toms, 1985).

In addition to defining the three realms of the Triple Quandary, Boykin expands the three realms in which African Americans must negotiate and the subsequent function on schooling. As children enter institutions such as school, they become more attuned to the values that are promoted by those institutions (Boykin, 1986). To understand the situation and the cultural challenges experienced by African American children, Boykin (1986) identified four distinct planes of interaction between children and school as: what children do or do not do, what they can or cannot do, what they will or will not do, and what they will and will not do. Furthermore, it should be noted that in “culturally homogenous populations what children actually do in an academic setting is based on what they can do, will do, and on what they understand they should do” (Boykin, 1986, p. 76). The four planes as described by Boykin can interfere with African American children and their overall learning as they navigate the demands of school and cultural styles and values presented at home. Boykin’s theory further states that problems arise for African American children when they view
teachers as the oppressor and to protect their integrity they engage in negative coping styles or become “contemptuous, cynical, and alienated from school” (Boykin, 1986, p. 79).

Additionally, Boykin’s theoretical position states that it is irresponsible to assume academically successful students may or may not have adapted passive coping strategies or shed their Black cultural background in order to conform to the Euro-American can-will-should solution. By assuming all academically successful students adapt passive coping styles will discount those that develop coping styles that are not passive in nature. There are a number of factors that influence the experiences of African American children and there is great latitude for diversity of expression within the Triple Quandary (Boykin, 1985).

The Triple Quandary in which African Americans negotiate three realms, the socialization of African American children, and the influence the three realms as on the schooling of African American children are all important constructs as counselors and educators interact with and educate African American children and adolescents. Boykin’s theoretical framework is particularly relevant in regards to education and schooling of high achieving and gifted African Americans. The three realms and the function of schooling can create a better understanding of the adaptive coping strategies, socialization, and schooling of African American children.

**John Ogbu’s Cultural Ecological Theory**

John Ogbu’s Cultural Ecological (CE) Theory has been widely researched and critically analyzed over the years by various scholars. According to Ogbu, CE Theory is “a framework for studying and understanding the various factors that influence minority
student’s school performance” (Ogbu, 2008, p. xxv). CE Theory posits “cultural and social adaptations to years of discriminatory treatment have resulted in survival strategies among African Americans that contradict their stated educational values (Irving & Hudley, 2008). Ogbu’s broad theory incorporates both societal and school factors as well as “the dynamics within the minority communities” (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 158). Ogbu and Simons (1998) define ecology as the “setting”, “environment”, or world of people. In addition, “cultural” is broadly defined as the way people see and behave in the world.

Consequently, Ogbu’s theory of minority student performance states there are two factors that influence minority student performance “how society at large and the school treats minorities (the system) and how minority groups respond to those treatments and to schooling (community forces)” (Ogbu, 1999, p. 156). The system Ogbu references refers to the “educational polices and pedagogy” within the schooling (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 158). Community forces are the “way in which minorities perceive and respond to schooling as a consequence of treatment and how and why a group became a minority” (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 158).

There are several constructs and definitions that comprise Ogbu’s CE theory. Foster (2004) asserts the most important and consistently articulated aspect of Ogbu’s theory is the academic achievement of minority students and the distinction between different kinds of minorities. Ogbu and Simons (1998) classifies groups as either “autonomous, voluntary (immigrant), or involuntary (non immigrant)” (p. 164).
Autonomous minorities are people who belong to groups that are small in number and different in ethnicity, race, religion or language from the majority group. Members in this group include the Amish, Jews, and Mormons. Ogbu does not focus a great deal of attention on this group because “they may be victims of prejudice, but are not subordinated groups in a system of rigid stratification” (Ogbu, 1993, p.169). Voluntary (immigrant) minorities are those who “have more or less willingly moved to the United States because they expect better opportunities than they had in their homelands or place of origin (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 164). It is important to note voluntary minorities develop an instrumental approach to their presence in the United States and do not view their presence as forced upon them. Examples of voluntary minorities in the United States are immigrants from Africa, Cuba, China, India, the Caribbean, and Mexico. Involuntary (non immigrants) are the final and last classification of minorities. Involuntary minorities are people “who have been conquered, colonized, or enslaved” (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 165). Involuntary minorities are distinguished by two distinct features with the first being they were forced to become part of the United States and second they interpret their presence in the United States forced on them by white people (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Furthermore, involuntary minorities are often economically disadvantaged, experience cultural and language difficulties, and perform poorly in school. Ogbu’s assumptions about involuntary minorities have been widely criticized (Banks, 1996; Ford et. al, 1998; Foster, 1997; Gaines, 1996; Perry, 2003; Perry, Steele and Hilliard, 2003) because it does not account for the wide variety of diversity and community factors that influence the experiences of involuntary minorities.
In addition, defining the system and community forces and the different types of minorities, Ogbu details four important layers. The layers include: 1) student’s academic success is impacted by community forces and system forces, with not enough attention paid to the ways in which community forces contribute to involuntary minority student failure; (2) The distinction of voluntary, involuntary, and autonomous minorities as three types of minorities; (3) The recognition of universal, primary, and secondary discontinuities between students and the school they attend; (4) involuntary minorities have developed survival strategies such as “uncle tomming, collective struggle, hustling, emulation of whites, and camouflage” (Foster, 2004, p. 370). These constructs are intermixed throughout CE Theory and have been criticized by scholars (Banks, 1996; Ford et. al, 1998; Foster, 1997; Gaines, 1996; Perry, 2003; Perry, Steele and Hilliard, 2003). While the constructs mentioned above are broad and very general, however, Ogbu asserts, they have been applied to a wide range of scholarly work.

**Ogbu’s Oppositional Framework**

An additional construct of Ogbu’s CE Theory is the oppositional culture framework some minorities assume. As previously stated, Ogbu has identified specific adaptations involuntary minorities develop to protect and maintain group identity in the face of oppression (Anthony & Irving, 2003; Ogbu, 1985, 1991). It is believed that an individual with oppositional identity will not “feel comfortable dressing, acting, speaking, or engaging in mainstream activities (Irving & Hudley, 2008, p. 375). By engaging in mainstream activities, some African Americans youth believe it implies acceptance of white values, attitudes, and
identity. Therefore, the “stronger a students’ oppositional attitude the lower his or her academic achievement” (Mickelson, 2003, p. 368). According to Ogbu, adopting an oppositional outlook toward schooling further impedes the potential of African American youth because of the fear of “acting white.”

Joyce Epstein’s Overlapping Spheres of Parent Involvement (1986, 1995)

Joyce Epstein’s (1986, 1995) model of home-school partnership will also serve as a theoretical model for this study. Epstein asserts that high schools vary in the extent to which they communicate and involve parents in their children’s education. It is believed that schools can build lasting relationships with parents as students proceed through the schools (Epstein, 1986, 1995). Epstein (1986, 1995) provides a model of overlapping spheres of internal and external forces that influence home-school interaction among families. Epstein’s theory and model of parent involvement will be explored further in this study. It should be noted that Epstein’s theoretical model was modified in 1995 to include the family, the school, and the community as environments that educate children. According to Epstein “the degree of overlap is controlled by three forces: time, experiences in families, and the experience in school” (2001, p. 27).

This model (See figure 1.1) is of particular relevance to the parents of high achieving African American students, their involvement and perceived support from schools in their child’s education. According to Epstein (2001), family practices of involvement outweigh the family background variables when determining whether and how students progress and
succeed in school. Epstein’s model of overlapping spheres consists of the shared responsibilities of school and family.

**Figure 1. Overlapping Spheres of Influence of Family, School, and Community on Children's Learning (Extended Structure of Theoretical Model) Epstein, 1995**

In addition to the overlapping spheres of parent, child, and school environment, Epstein (2001) posits six types of involvement parents engage in the six types of parent involvement with schools and they include: *Parenting*—the basic expectation that parents will parent child(ren) appropriately and that schools will assist with this involvement by providing workshops related to parenting, nutrition, and other health services. *Communicating:* this step includes basic communication from school in regard to reports
from school such as report cards, attendance records, course selection, parent-teacher-conferences, achievement, behavioral reports, and goal setting. *Volunteering*- this level of parent involvement refers to parent volunteers, how schools recruit parent volunteers and the degree of parent participation. *Learning at Home*- during this level of parent involvement, the school is regarded as providing appropriate information about student’s homework and how activities at home promote student and family interaction. *Decision Making*- in this level of parent involvement in school and advocacy- in other words, refers to parental involvement with decision making on PTA and advisory councils. *Collaborating with the Community* – the final level of involvement includes how schools reach out to communities and parent involvement.

**The Relationship Between Triple Quandary and Cultural Ecological Theory**

Ogbu and Boykin reference each other’s theoretical frameworks in their research. Ogbu performed a comparative analysis of his findings from an ethnographic study that was conducted to understand the low performance of African American students attending Shaker Heights High School in Ohio (1997). Ogbu compared Boykin’s notion of the Triple Quandary in reference to cultural differences, learning conflicts, cultural racism hegemony, socialized ambivalence, and self-contradiction. After conducting more than one hundred classroom observations, Ogbu did not observe instances where cultural barriers prevented African American students from learning or being unable to “master a lesson because they were being taught European American culture and values in European American pedagogy
(Ogbu, 2003, p. 38). Instead, Ogbu found, “through comparative research the problems caused by cultural differences were temporary and some minorities eventually learn to accommodate or adopt the “white ways” as presented to them at school and thereby become academically successful (Ogbu, 2003 p. 39).

Ogbu’s research at Shaker Heights (1997) also explores the challenges faced by academically successful African Americans. These students did not succumb to negative peer pressure because of family upbringing and support, choosing friends wisely, and interpreting peer pressure as a distraction and taking necessary steps to avoid distractions (Ogbu, 2003, p.217).

Boykin also referenced Ogbu’s theoretical framework and expands upon Ogbu’s initial assumptions about the schooling and challenges experienced by African American children. Ogbu (1986) suggested that many African American youth become aware of the limiting effects of barriers to upward mobility and job ceiling experience by African Americans and view academic achievement as a mainstream value that benefits White Americans. In return, African American students that perform well academically are viewed as “sell outs” or “acting white.” This negative approach to schooling has been central to negative attitudes African American youth develop toward high achieving African Americans. Sankofa, Hurley, Allen, and Boykin (2005) considers “the importance of culture and its presence in American systems of education” (p. 248). Furthermore, Sankofa et al. (2005) asserts that the United States is founded on and rewards mainstream cultural ideas and rewards behavior consistent with such ideals resulting in a disconnect between cultural values
learned at home and those presented in schools (Sankofa et al., 2005). The subsequent disconnect “contributes to the development of negative perceptions of academic success” that is available to African American youth (Sankofa, et al., 2005, p. 249). These negative attitudes and perceptions in turn reflect the inability of schools to embrace and reward a wider set of values in the learning context.

Many of the critiques of Ogbu’s model cites “the model’s inability to account for the intra-group variability found within the African American population” and the theory does not explain “why some African Americans who place significant importance on their ethnic identity when defining themselves also as high achievers in education” (Irving & Hudley, 2008, p. 375). Ogbu recognized the variability critique, and modified his original CE theory. Fordham and Ogbu assert, “the cultural ecological explanation has undergone modifications because the original did not explain the differences in school success among Black students (2008, p. 597). Ogbu and Fordham modified the cultural ecological explanation by “going beyond factors of instrumental exploitation and instrumental responses to examine the expressive dimension of the relationship between the dominant group and minorities” (Fordham & Ogbu, 2008). To measure the newly modified CE theory, Ogbu and Fordham conducted an ethnographic study of high achieving students attending a high school in Washington, DC. An analysis of semi structured interviews and observations, found that academically successful students engage in a variety of activities (sports, clubs, or other “black activities”) or develop coping strategies (camouflage academic success or refrain from bragging). Whereas, the findings are not all encompassing, it does offers a more
comprehensive view of the African American schooling experience and addresses scholarly critiques of the original CE Theory Ogbu, accounts for the variability in African American students, and academically successful African American adolescents.

After analyzing both theories and the belief that both are not individual, but community focused, I contend that Ogbu’s Cultural Ecological Theory and Boykin’s Triple Quandary Theory serve as a foundation for this study on high achieving African Americans students.

** Relevant Research**

**High Achieving African American Students**

High achieving African American students have been described as “the best and the brightest” and attain academic and professional success (Fries-Britt and Griffin 2007; Solano, 1987). The term high achieving is used instead of the term gifted because gifted implies something that is innate whereas high achieving implies an attainable goal for a broader range of individuals who work hard (Freeman, 1999). High achieving African Americans represent a diverse and complex community of students (Fries-Britt, 2002) ranging from varied socioeconomic backgrounds, parental educational level, and family incomes. Because few studies focus on successful African American students, it is easy to assume academic excellence is uncommon for African American students (Fries-Britt, 2002). Many scholars believe too little attention is given to the achievement of African American students who excel in school without shedding their racial sense of self (Anderson, 1998; Carter, 2001; Hilliard, 2003; Perry, 2003). In other words, little attention has been given to African
American achievers who maintain a positive racial self-concept. Some researchers suggest schooling is somewhat controlled by White, middle class norms and ways of being (Carter, 2001; Darder, 1991, de Mairrais and LeCompte, 1999; Fordham and Ogbu, 1986; Nieto, 2003). This belief and lack of cultural integration can create a dissonance amongst minority students, in particular African American students.

**African American Student’s Racial Identification**

Many studies have examined the influence of African American racial identity on student’s academic performance (Archer-Banks, 2007; Ford et al., 1998). According to Tatum (2003), when African American children enter puberty not only do they explore identity by asking “Who am I?” they also include thinking about “Who am I ethnically and/or racially? “What does it mean to be African American?” Ultimately, the influence of racial identity intensifies when African American children transition to adolescence. As students, begin to explore their racial identity they begin to search for balance between academic success and racial identity. In their study of thirty-three eleventh graders in Washington, D.C., Fordham and Ogbu (1986) found that although some students had been academically successfully, they discovered ways to downplay their academic success to avoid peer rejection.

Some students develop an oppositional identity in order to combat accusations of “acting white” (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986; Tyson, Darity, and Castellino, 2005). Tatum (2003) believes successful African American students “need a strategy to find acceptance among their peers. Racelessness Fordham (2008) is when individuals “assimilate into the
dominant group by de-emphasizing characteristics that might identify them as members of the subordinate group (Tatum, 2003, p. 221). In contrast to Fordham’s concept of racelessness, Ward (1990) studied twenty high school students and found that racial identity, personal commitment and academic achievement successfully converged because students reported feeling good about their race. It was found that the students in the study rejected White society’s “negative evaluation of Blackness” (Witherspoon, Speight, and Thomas, 1997, p. 347).

Although much has been written in reference to self-concept and self-esteem and student achievement (Ford & Harris, 1997), however racial identity is worthy of investigation because race affects one’s socio-emotional and psychological health in significant ways. Carter and Goodwin (1994) assert that “racial identity involves one’s psychological response or resolution to one’s race” (p. 308). To fully understand the importance of racial identity, one must understand how racial identity is constructed.

In a recent study, Wiggan (2007) utilized a grounded theory approach to illustrate the factors that contribute to the success of seven high achieving African American students. This study adds to the literature of high achieving African American students because it “views African American students through the lens of resilience rather than the debilitating culture of poverty or opposition” (Wiggan, 2007, p. 342). Rather than focusing on disengagement and oppositional cultural theory (Ogbu, 2008), Wiggan highlights the factors that contribute to student engagement and the academic success of high achieving African Americans.
In addition to Wiggin’s (2007) article, Graham and Anderson (2008) presented findings from a case study and ethnographic perspective that analyzed the extent to which three academically gifted African American male high school seniors attending a predominantly African American urban high school connect with their ethnicity and academic identity. The following three major themes emerged in regards to their experiences: (a) School is serious to me; (b) I’m real big into knowing my heritage; (c) without guidance, we’d all be heathens (Graham & Anderson, 2007). The results of the data collected suggest that “African Americans in this urban high school value educational attainment” (Graham & Anderson, 2007, p. 493). Furthermore, the data collected refutes Ogbu’s and Fordham’s (1986) notion of an oppositional framework in which students disengage and perform poorly because academic success is viewed as conforming to mainstream ideology or “selling out”/“acting white”. Having “significant others” and an extensive social network helped the young men in this study strive for academic success and overcome barriers and obstacles.

One’s racial identity is integrated into one’s personality and depends on numerous influences such as family, community, society, one’s own interpretative style and the manner in which peers validate, deny, or ignore aspects of one’s identity (Carter & Godwin, 1993). With this in mind, racial identity development of high achieving or gifted African American students can influence a students’ academic success and social interactions. Huff, Housekamp, Watkins, Statnon, and Tavegia (2005) argues that gifted African American children experience a dissonance between school and culture because of the need to prove “investment” in the African American community and therefore reject academic excellence.
Ultimately, high achieving African American students are often faced with not only maintaining academic success, but also remaining true to their racial identity and self-concept.

**Attitude Toward School**

A student’s attitude can have powerful affects on behavior (Ford, et al., 1998). African American’s attitudes toward academic success may be more strongly related than those of White students (Lee, Winfield, & Wilson, 1991; Hall, Howe, Merkel, & Lederman, 1986). It has been suggested that underachievers exhibit more negative attitudes toward school than high achievers (Mandel & Marcus, 1998) and when students value the goals of school they will engage in academics and do better academically (Pintrich and DeRoot, 1990; Wigfield, 1994). Goodenow and Grady (1993) found that feelings of belonging in school are associated with levels of engagement and academic motivation including expectations for success and school motivation and interest in school. Researchers (Steele, 1992; Goodenow, 1993), have suggested that some African American students dis-identification with school is the result of achievement problems and students feel unsupported and discouraged by school staff and academically successful students in school.

Further, some African American students have been described as “feeling hostile toward and untrusting of school” (Voelkel, 1997). There has been support to the claim that African American students feel conflict, distrust, and suspicion toward school, consequently, making it difficult to internalize the goals and outcome of institutions (Voelkel, 1997; Jaynes & Williams, 1989; Ogbu, 1986). Previous research has shown that African American students place high value on school, but their academic efforts diminished in the presence of

In her study, Voelkel (1997) examined the relationship between early school behaviors, achievement, and feelings of identification with school of male and female African American and White eighth-graders. Voelkel examined racial group differences and found students with higher academic achievement and higher levels of classroom participation had higher degrees of identification. African American and female students had higher identifications with school, however their feelings were not a result of prior academic achievement, but more so classroom participation and being engaged in school. Voelkel recommends that educators identify problem behaviors and encourage in class participation to combat negative attitudes toward school.

**Parent Involvement**

Parents often provide their children’s first educational experiences and strongly influence academic achievement (Ford, Wright, Grantham, and Harris, 1998). Initial research on the pathology of black families often compared Black families with White families and primarily used data gathered on the latter (Ford, et al., 1998). In a study Clark (1983) examined the achievement and underachievement of Black students and their families. Clark (1983) noted that families of achieving Black children were assertive in parent involvement efforts, set realistic and high expectations for their children, established role boundaries, and maintained positive parent-child relations.
In addition, Clark (1983) found that parents of underachieving students were less involved in child’s education, showed lack of confidence in their parenting skills and set unclear and unrealistic goals for children. Clark’s findings provide support for the idea that a parent’s orientation toward achievement weighed heavily in student success. In their study, Huff, Houskamp, Watkins, Stanton, & Tavegia (2005) analyzed the data from fifteen families of gifted African American adolescents. The authors found that parents perceived that administrators and teachers lacked adequate training to support gifted African American adolescents. The findings from Huff, et al (2005) demonstrate the level of frustration many African Americans experience when interacting with school systems.

Epstein’s (1995) overlapping spheres of influence and six types of school-family involvement is important to student learning and development. Sanders (1998) sought to build on Epstein’s theory of overlapping spheres of influence by examining the factors affecting academic achievement of African American Urban Adolescents. In her study, Sander found that that student’s perceptions of teacher and parental academic support and church involvement positively influenced academic achievement though significant influence on students’ academic self-concepts and school behaviors. The results of this study support the idea that there is a need for positive parental involvement in schooling.

**Parental Involvement and Social Class**

Hill, Castellino, Lansford, Nowlin, Dodge, and Pettit (2004) assert that “school behavior, achievement, career aspirations, and parents’ roles in shaping these factors do not occur in isolation (p. 1493). The authors contend, socioeconomic status can affect student
achievement outcomes. Researchers (Albert and Luzzo, 1999; Jencks and Phillips, 1998; McLoyd, 1990, 1998; Reynolds, Mavrogenes, Bezrucko, & Hagemann, 1996) have found that minority students from lower socio economic status are at “risk for lower economic performance, completing few years of schooling, and lower career aspirations” (Hill, et al., p. 1493). According to Reynolds (1991) parents of low income socio-economic status experience barriers such as lack of financial resources and social support (Hill, et al. 2004). In contrast, parents from higher socio-economic backgrounds view themselves as collaborators with schools and believe they have more rights, which in return, entitles their involvement, Hill, et al, 2004; Lareau, 1996, 2003; Lichter, 1996; Yonezawa, 2000).

Fries-Britt (2002) posits, “the role of family and the extended black community is important as a source of motivation and achievement because many high achievers recognize that their achievements reflect the extended black community” (p. 8). This study seeks to not only examine parental involvement but also the extended network of support within high achieving African American students despite parental resources.

**Summary and Gaps in Literature**

This chapter established the theoretical foundation for this study and reviewed literature related to high achieving African American students, their school experience and parental involvement. As noted in the literature presented, the experiences of high achieving African Americans and their parents are somewhat missing from current literature. Ogbu’s Theory of Cultural Ecological Theory and Oppositional Culture present two controversial
frameworks for examining high achieving student academic performance. A. Wade Boykin’s Triple Quandary posits negotiating three realms simultaneously can create emotional distress.

Both Boykin’s Triple Quandary Theory and Ogbu’s Cultural Ecological Theory present useful frameworks for educating and counseling African American adolescents. Much has been written about both theories with critical analysis offering alternative viewpoints of the framework, constructs, and models set forth in each theory. My research interest is situated around the academic experiences of high achieving African American adolescents and their parents. Both theories discuss the effects of schooling, mainstream values, and being a member of a minority group has on African American adolescents. In addition, both theories are similar in that they recognize the cultural forces that interplay in the schooling of African Americans. Both theories purport coping strategies that African Americans develop in order to buffer the effects of racism and being a member of an oppressed group.

Epstein’s model of family-school involvement is important when examining parent involvement, in particular African American parents and their level of identification with their child’s school and subsequent achievement or underachievement. I will seek to understand the experience of high achieving African American students and their parents in a comprehensive way that has not been reported in literature before. This study utilized phenomenological qualitative approach and narrative analysis to better understand how African American students view academic success.
CHAPTER THREE:  

METHOD

The main goals of this research study were to understand the experiences of high achieving African American students and their parents. Most of the research that has been conducted and published about African American students focuses on the achievement gap and the underachievement of African American students. This study sought to fill a void that exists amongst the scholarly articles that have been published about African American students and their parents. By focusing primarily on the experiences of high achieving African American students and their parents, this research sought to not only include the voices of this group in current literature, but to also inform teachers, counselors, administrators, and other school personnel as to how best meet the needs of this population.

This research study utilized a qualitative approach and this chapter is dedicated to describing the procedures and steps that were taken to conduct this research. This research study will examine the following research questions:

1. What are the social and academic experiences of high achieving African American adolescents?

2. How do high achieving African American students visually construct academic achievement?

3. How do the parents of high achieving African American adolescents support and encourage the personal, social, and academic development of their child (ren)?
4. How do schools and school employees (teachers, principals, staff, etc) contribute to the overall experiences of high achieving African American adolescents and their parents?

**Research Design**

In order to best describe the experiences of high achieving African American students and the parents of high achieving African American students, a phenomenological approach was utilized. A phenomenological approach fits best with this research because the goals of this research were to understand and describe the lived experiences of high achieving African American students and their parents. According to Lopez and Willis (2004) the phenomenological method examines subjective human experience and produces a “narrative account by the participants of his or her knowledge and experiences” (p. 727). The data and research was collected without any preconceived notions about what type of data would be collected. The data that has been reported came directly from the lived experiences of research participants. Due to this research, study involving two sets of research participants, different data collection methods were used for each group.

For the high achieving students, three types of data collection methods were utilized in this study. The first being semi-structured interviews. The next type of data collected utilized a Narrative method of visual representations and member checking. For the parents, data were collected using a demographic form, semi-structured interviews, and member checking. The use of multiple forms of data collection served to increase the internal validity of the data collected and to conduct member checks with research participants. As stated by
Merriam (2009), triangulation is the process of cross checking and comparing multiple forms of data. Utilizing triangulation not only increases internal validity, it also increases the trustworthiness of data collected.

The first forms of data that were collected from both the students and parents were demographic forms. Background and demographic questions are considered relevant to all interviews (Merriam, 2009). The demographic forms varied slightly for the students and the parents, with the students demographic forms focusing primarily on their current year in school, age, grade point average, classes, and extracurricular activities. The demographic questions for the parents contained information pertinent to the parent or parent’s age, educational background, occupation, income, number of children, and marital status (See Appendix A). The second form of data collected for the both the parents and students were semi-structured interviews. The interviews for both the students and parents differed as reflected in the research questions. Student research questions were based on the researcher’s review of current literature, in particular the research conducted by Carter (2005; See Appendix B). Member checks were conducted as a follow up. The third type of data collected from the students involved a narrative research method of Visual Analysis- Making the Selves, Painting the Selves (Luttrell, 2003) where students were instructed to draw or create an image of themselves using a variety of provided materials ( i.e. markers, crayons, colored paper, magazine/newspaper clippings, etc). Third and final data collection for parents included a follow up interview to conduct a member check and reflection. All data were
collected to allow participants to freely share their experiences in a safe and confidential manner.

Participants

The participants for this study were recruited using convenience sampling as well as purposeful sampling. Participants were parent-adolescent dyads. Also, student participants were enrolled in a local high school and in grades 9-12. The researcher asked for volunteers to participate in study as well as sent flyers and emails to parents. Potential students were contacted through their parents and the researcher received permission to interview students. During the screening before the interviews were conducted, the parents of student participants were asked to identify their race and/or ethnicity and their current grade point averages to determine suitability for the study. Students were asked to continue to participate in the study if they identified as African American and if they had a grade point average of at least 3.5 on a 4.0 scale. Every effort was made to diversify research participants in terms of grade level.

Parent participants were recruited by convenient sample as well as purposeful sampling. Parents in the study had children currently enrolled in a local high school and in grades 9-12. Parents were given an opportunity to sign up to participate in the study and potential participants were screened by researcher.

Researcher as Interviewer

My interest in this topic is a reflection of my own experiences as a high achieving African American female student. In elementary school, I was identified as a talented/gifted
student and I was given the opportunity to participate in testing programs and advanced classes throughout junior high school and high school. My parents have always been actively involved in my education. I cannot remember a time when I did not like school or learning. Both of my parents were educators and they encouraged my brothers, sisters, and I to achieve and always do our best. They provided us with supplemental educational and enrichment experiences. Throughout my formal education during my undergraduate and graduate studies, I became increasingly interested in the experiences of my peers, other high achieving African Americans, and African American achievement. When I began my career as a school counselor, I became even more interested in the experiences of African American students and their parents based on my interactions with faculty, staff, colleagues, parents, and students.

My status as an insider presents both an advantage and disadvantage. I am privileged to have access to this group not only because I identify as an African American, but also that I am a relatively young African American female. In addition, I have experience as a school counselor and I am able to draw from my training and experiences with other students and parents at any given moment. A disadvantage to being an insider is a generational one with both students and parents. Participants may perceive my race and status as an African American woman, and expect me to know what they are thinking and understand their perspective. To combat this potential, I sought clarification via probing when necessary and when conducting follow up interviews with parents, I made sure I recorded their statements exactly as stated.
Because of my background, interest, and the extensive review of research I’ve conducted concerning high achieving African Americans and their parents, I acknowledge that I bring certain preconceived beliefs and attitudes to this research. For instance, I was raised in a loving two parent household. Both of my parents were college educated and were actively involved in both professional and civic organizations. Because of my background, I acknowledge a preconceived notion that parents should be involved in their communities to encourage greater awareness within their children (i.e. racism, classism, sexism, etc). Also, as a school counselor, I have often believed that more studying would produce better academic achievement.

Whereas my attitudes and beliefs reflect my own ideas and experiences, I made every effort to be aware of my beliefs and attitudes in order to cultivate open, respectful, trustworthy, and non-judgmental my relationship with potential research participants. To assist with this goal, I kept a journal through the data collection to reflect upon my own feelings and observations.

Instrumentation and Procedures

Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic forms were given to both the students and parents participating in this study. The purpose of each demographic questionnaire was to gather background information about the students and parents participating in this study. The student demographic questionnaire sought to collect information about students in reference to their current year in school, age, grade point average, classes, and extracurricular activities. The parent
demographic questionnaire contained information pertinent to the parent or parent’s age, educational background, occupation, income, number of children, and marital status. For both students and parents, the demographic questionnaire was given at the beginning of the study. A copy of the demographic questionnaires are found in Appendix A.

**Semi Structured Interview – Students**

After students were screened and met the requirements for the research study, the individual interviews were scheduled with parent permission. Interview questions were formed after a review of literature and from previous research conducted by Carter (2005). In an effort to understand the experiences of high achieving students at a predominately-white high school, Carter (2005) utilized a three-step interview process based on Seidman (1998). Interview questions were selected that were the most closely related to the research questions presented in the current study (See Appendix B). Interviews were conducted in either the home of students or at a convenient public location. Interviews were conducted in private rooms in order to ensure confidentiality. The interviews began by obtaining consent to digitally record the interview, then continued with the demographic questionnaire and interview questions. Before interviews began students were given an opportunity to either continue with the interview or refuse to participate. All participants were informed that they could discontinue the interview and/or withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Throughout the interview, the researcher frequently checked in with client to ensure their comfort and understanding of questions. A list of interview questions can be found in Appendix B.
Narrative Research Method- Visual Representations- Students

Throughout history, there have been many forms of narrative methods. Narratives can take a variety of forms. Not only do they involve storytelling where there is a speaker and audience, but also a variety of other forms of telling a story. Representing experiences visually enable observers to “see as participants see and feel” (Merriam, 2009, p. 142). Consequently, after semi-structured interviews have been conducted, students were given an opportunity to create their visual representations to provide a visual representation of themselves, their life, their family, their schooling, their friends, and their future. Construction of images were modeled after Luttrell’s (2003) study in which she sought to understand how pregnant teens saw themselves and experience “teenage pregnancy.” Luttrell’s (2003) ethnographic study “showcases teens’ visual self-representation in collages, which are interpreted alongside girls’ written and spoken texts about their art” Riessman, p.165). It should be noted that Luttrell utilized visual, written, and observational data. Typically researchers that venture into the visual domain use “found” images or initiate photovoice projects” (Riessman, 2008). Luttrell’s methodology served as the model for this portion of data collection because it allowed students to express multiple truths in the way they view themselves, the world around them, and their collective experiences. Students were given ample materials to choose from to represent their “selves”. Students were given unlimited time to complete their visual representations. After each student completed their representation, they were asked to describe their visual representation and what the meaning
of their visual representation in terms of their schooling, experiences, and future. See Appendix C for instructions for the visual representations activity.

**Semi Structured Interview – Parents**

After parents were screened and met the requirements for the research study, the individual semi-structured interviews were scheduled. Interviews were conducted in either the home of parents or at a convenient public location. Interviews were based on questions from a previous study conducted by Huff, Houskamp, Watkins, Stanton, and Tavegia (2005; See Appendix B for parent interview questions.). In their study, Huff et al. (2005) sought to document the experiences of parents raising African American children who have been identified as gifted with emphasis on issues surrounding academic and social experiences, interactions with school, family, and community. The questions were selected for this current research because of the open-ended questions and the structure that allowed parents to speak freely. Interviews were conducted in private room in order to ensure confidentiality. The interviews began by obtaining consent to digitally record the interview, then continued with the demographic questionnaire and interview questions. Before interviews began, parents were given an opportunity to either continue with the interview or refuse to participate. All participants were informed that they could discontinue the interview and/or withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Throughout the interview, the researcher frequently checked in with parents to ensure their comfort and understanding of questions. A list of interview questions can be found in Appendix B.
In order to ensure accurate data collection and to collect additional data that may have been missed, member checks were conducted as a third data collection.

**Data Analysis**

Analysis of data were completed using multiple qualitative data analysis methods, including deductive analysis. Patton (2003) describes deductive data analysis as analyzing data according to an existing framework. My theoretical frameworks and models serve as the foundation for collecting and analyzing data collected during this research. The first step in analyzing the data was transcribing the interviews from both the students and parents. Interviews were transcribed by the researcher. Once the interviews were transcribed, the researcher developed codes and subsequent themes of relevant data using a team of two coders. Visual representations and transcribed interviews were coded using open coding and thematic analysis as stated by Creswell (2007), which is a simplified version of the Moustakas (1994) method. This study used emic coding, which are codes that emerge from the data after reviewing data for patterns and themes (Patton, 1980). Throughout the coding process coding checks were conducted and inter-rater reliability was deduced using kappa. Kappa scores were determined for each coder separately for each interview and results are reported in the table below. Overall Kappa scores for the six interviews are above 0.91.

During the coding process checks were made. In addition, the researcher kept a journal (both audio and written) which was used for researcher reflexivity and contributed to validity.

Data was interpreted using a phenomenological approach and deductive analysis. Bogden and Biklen (1998) describe a phenomenological approach as an approach that seeks
to understand the meaning of ordinary people in particular situations. Phenomenologist’s do not attempt nor assume they know what things mean to people they are studying (Bogden & Biklen, 2007, Douglas, 1976). A combination of post positivist/constructive and critical paradigms (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) were also used to interpret the data collected. This phenomenological approach is influenced by the work of philosophers Edmund Husserl and Alfred Schutz where the emphasis is on the aspect of human behavior and how participants make meaning of events in their lives (Bogden & Biklen, 1998).

Finally, this study explored the narrative research method of visual analysis for the visual representations provided by the students. Analyzing visual images requires “reading an image closely and responding to details” (Riessman, 2008, p. 144). Consequently, analysis of the self-portraits were analyzed using a modified version of the three sites of visual analysis as developed by Gillian Rose (2001). The three sites include “the story of the production of the image, the image itself, and how it is read by different audiences” (Riessman, 2008, p. 144). The three sites of visual analysis fit well with this research study because it allowed the participants to construct meaning of their experiences, which is a central tenet of phenomenological research.

**Coding and Themes**

Coding and subsequent thematic analysis was utilized to categorize data that was collected throughout this study. Coding systems were created to organize data using a multiple step process. Bogden and Biklen (1998) describe the process as several steps in which the researcher reviews data for words, phrases, and patterns as recorded by
participants. In addition, the researcher searches for regularities of topics present in data. Significant and common words and phrases were categorized from codes and later formed into themes. There are a variety of coding styles, however, emic coding or the process of allowing codes to emerge from data was used in this research project. Two coders and one auditor analyzed the demographic forms from both parent and student research participants, semi-structured interviews, and student self-portraits. Responses were tagged and coded by two coders. Codes were determined using a thematic coding process to find recurring themes. After each coder individually coded the data, the coding team met and created a master code list which consisted of individual codes and subsequent themes. The master code list consisted of 30 codes and definitions (See Appendix A).

Throughout the coding process coding checks were conducted and inter-rater reliability was deduced using kappa. Kappa scores were determined for each coder separately for each interview (six in total) and results are reported in the table below (See Table 1). Kappa was calculated following the Intercoder Agreement formula of \((\Sigma \text{Agreements}) \times \text{(# coders)}/ \text{total coding instances}\) (Miles and Humberman, 1994). The Kappa coefficient measures the amount of agreement between two coders (communication, Dr. P. Martin, 2009). Overall Kappa scores for the six interviews are above 0.91.
Table 1. Kappa Score Results

<table>
<thead>
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<th>1</th>
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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<td>694/762</td>
<td>0.91 or 91%</td>
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<td></td>
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</table>
Validity

When conducting research, qualitative researchers need to ensure their research is credible (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Techniques designed to ensure validity include member checking, triangulation, thick descriptions, peer reviews and external audits (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Triangulation was used as a form of qualitative type validity in this study. Triangulation is defined as the use of multiple sources of information to form themes or categories in a study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). For the purpose of this research, the multiple forms of data that were collected from participants were demographic forms, semi-structured interviews, narrative self-portraits and member checking. In addition, the researcher collaborated with student participants when describing self-portraits and multiple coders were used as an attempt to further improve validity. Before coding began, coders were trained and instructed to code for common themes or recurring images.

When writing to establish rich, thick descriptors, it is important for the researcher to include as many details as possible (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Credibility was established in data collected by establishing thick, rich descriptors in participant narratives as well as the researcher utilizing researcher reflexivity. Researcher reflexivity involves self-disclosing personal beliefs, assumptions, and biases (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Throughout the entire process of data collection, the researcher maintained a journal to discover any preconceived biases before interviews began as well as throughout the data collection process. Other qualitative research methods such as prolonged engagement or saturation and disconfirming
evidence were used as well. Prolonged engagement or saturation is the process in which researchers conduct multiple observations to build trust with participants, establish rapport with participants to ensure comfort when disclosing information (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Disconfirming evidence is “the process where investigators first establish themes or categories in a study and then search through the data for evidence that is consistent with or disconfirms these themes (Creswell & Miller, 200; p. 127). In other words, disconfirming evidence involves looking for outliers within data.

Also, member checking was used to further establish credibility as the data collected is taken back to the participants to confirm what has been reported (Creswell & Miller, 2000).
Figure 2. Visual Representation of Qualitative Methodology

- Ogbo's Cultural Ecological Theory
- Ogbo's Oppositional Framework
- Boykin’s Triple Quandary
- Epstein's level of Parent Involvement

- What are the social and academic experiences of high achieving African American adolescents?
- How do students construct their academic identity?
- How do the parents of high achieving African American adolescents support and encourage the personal, social, and academic development of their child (ren)?
- How do schools and school employees (teachers, principals, staff, etc) contribute to the overall experiences of high achieving African American adolescents and their parents?

- Demographic Form--Parents - Use Marital Status and Income ad Predictors
- Demographic Form--Student
- Semi Structured Interview- Parents
- Semi Structured Interview- Students
- Narrative Method- Students- Construct Visual Representation of Academic Achievement

- Validity Procedures
- Reseracher Reflexivity - Parents and Students
- Triangulation-Parents and Students
- Member Checking - Parents and Students
- Discomfirmity
- Prolong Engagment
- Rich and Thick disccriptors
Summary

This chapter examined the methodology, participants, procedures and data collection and analysis procedures that were used in this research study. Further, this chapter examined the role of the researcher as the interviewer and steps that were taken to reduce researcher bias. A story format was used to present the data that was collected to aid in readability and to clearly represent the experiences of participants.
CHAPTER FOUR:
RESULTS

This chapter includes the data analysis of the responses to the semi-structured interviews from the six research participants which formed three parent/student dyads as well as an analysis of demographic forms and student self portraits. The following four research questions were used as a framework for analysis:

Research Question One: What are the social and academic experiences of high achieving African American adolescents?

Research Question Two: How do high achieving African American students visually construct academic achievement?

Research Question Three: How do the parents of high achieving African American adolescents support and encourage the personal, social, and academic development of their child(ren)?

Research Question Four: How do schools and school employees (teachers, principals, staff, etc) contribute to the overall experiences of high achieving African American adolescents and their parents?

This chapter will begin with an overview of data analysis procedures, overview of descriptive statistics, and a review of the four research questions. Research questions one and two apply to experiences of high achieving African American student research participants. Research question three reflects the experiences of the parent(s) of high achieving African American students in the study. Finally, research question four applies to
the experiences of both student and parent research participants and their interaction with school officials.

**Descriptive Statistics**

The participants for this study were six students and six parents which created and six parent/student dyads. Participants were recruited using convenience sampling as well as purposeful sampling. Participants were enrolled in high school and in grades 9-12. Two students attended large public high schools (2,300 student enrollment) located in a large city. Four students attended a small public high school (900 or less) located in a rural town. The schools were not identified as magnet or International Baccalaureate. All participants identified themselves as African American and ranged in age from 15-18. Parent participants ranged in age from 36-52 and income level ranged from 0-25,000 to 95,000+. Students reported their weighted GPAs and ranged from 3.7-4.5. Also, students were enrolled in two or more AP of honors classes.

**Student/Parent Dyads**

To protect the identity of student and parent research participants, pseudonyms were used. In addition, the names of teachers and high schools were changed to further protect the identities of research participants.

*Shannon and Paul Morgan.* Mr. Paul Morgan, 48, and his daughter Shannon, 15, both identified as African American and live in a large city in North Carolina. Mr. Morgan is married to Shannon’s mother and is a college graduate. Mr. Morgan and his wife’s combined
income is between $85,000-$95,000. They have two other children, a younger son and older daughter.

Shannon presented as a happy and lively student. She is in the tenth grade and lives with her mom, dad, and younger brother. Shannon listed her courses as Honors English, Honors Civics and Economics, Honors Algebra II, Honors Chemistry, and AP Human Geography. Shannon’s current weighted GPA is a 4.0 and her favorite subject as English. In addition to her classes, Shannon is actively involved in extracurricular activities such as the pre college program- Math Science Education/Engineering Network (MSEN) and tennis. Shannon’s goal is to graduate from high school, attended college and become an attorney.

**Miranda and Carrie Dale.** Carrie Dale, 52, and her daughter Miranda Dale, 16, both identified as African American and live in a small, rural town in North Carolina. Mrs. Dale is a college graduate and married to Miranda’s father. Mrs. Dale and husband’s income is over $95,000 and they have another child, an older son.

Miranda presented as a very confident and happy teenager. She is in the eleventh grade and lives with her mother and father. Miranda listed her courses as Honors Spanish, Pre Calculus, Anatomy and Physiology, Weightlifting, AP U.S. History, and AP Environmental Science. Her current weighted GPA is a 4.5 and stated her favorite class is AP US History because “I like learning the stuff I didn’t know about in the past and kind of seeing how they say history repeats itself.” Miranda is active in school athletics. She is on both the basketball and volleyball teams. Also, her extracurricular activities include being a
member of the Beta Club, an academic honors club. Miranda wants to attend a four-year college/university; however she is unsure as to what she wants to study.

**Elyse and Stephanie Grady.** Mrs. Stephanie Grady, 47, and her daughter Elyse, 16, both describe themselves as African American and live in a large city in North Carolina. Mrs. Grady has an undergraduate and Master’s degree and is married to Elyse’s father. Mrs. Grady and her husband’s combined income is between $85,000-$95,000. Mr. and Mrs. Grady also have an older son.

Elyse presented as friendly and social. She is in the eleventh grade and lives with her mother and father. Elyse listed her courses as Honors English, Honors U.S. History, Honors Biology, Sociology, and Psychology. Her current GPA is a 3.8. She stated her favorite class as English “because I like to write.” Elyse is also actively involved in extracurricular activities. She is a member of the soccer team, an athletic trainer for the football team, and Student Government representative for her homeroom. When describing her extracurricular involvement Elyse stated, “some sociable stuff and smart people stuff.” Elyse wants to attend High Point University and study to become a physical therapist.

**Billy and Susan Strong.** Ms. Susan Strong, 39, and her son Billy, 17, both identified as African American and live in a small town in North Carolina. Ms. Strong has an Associate’s degree and is single. Ms. Strong has an income between $0-$25,000. She does not have any other children.

Billy presented as a self confident and determined young man. He is in the twelfth grade and lives with his mother. Billy listed his courses as AP Biology, AP English, Honors
Advance Functioning and Modeling, Honors Civics and Economics, and Weightlifting. His current weighted GPA is a 4.0. He lists his favorite class as math because he “does pretty well with numbers.” Billy is actively involved in athletics and extracurricular activities at school. He is on the football and wrestling teams and is a member of the National Honor Society. Billy has aspirations to attend a four-year college or university on a football scholarship and study business.

**Millie and Vivian Williams.** Mrs. Vivian Williams, 36, and her daughter Millie, 18, both identified as African American and live in a small town in North Carolina. Mrs. Williams has a Bachelor’s degree and is currently working on her Master’s degree. Mrs. Williams is married and with her husband has a combined income between $45,000-$55,000. They also have two other children, Vivian’s twin brother and a younger son.

Millie presented as a self-confident young woman. Millie is currently enrolled in an Early College program and is completing requirements for both her high school diploma and Associate’s Degree. Millie describes all of her courses as being Advanced Placement/Honors because they are classes taught at a community college. She is currently enrolled in Advanced English and Computer Programming classes, college level Algebra/Trigonometry and Environment Physics. Millie’s weighed is a 3.7. Millie lists her favorite class as Math because “I can calculate things really fast in my head.” Millie is also involved in extracurricular activities inside and outside of school. She is very active in her church, student government, and plays basketball and soccer. Millie also works part time at a local
fast food restaurant. Millie’s career aspirations include going to beauty school to become a
cosmetologist and enrolling in a four-year college/university to study nursing.

**Michael and Rachel White.** Mrs. Rachel White, 51, Aunt and guardian, and her
nephew, Michael, 16, both identified as African American. They live in a small town in North
Carolina. Mrs. White has an Associate’s Degree. Mrs. White and her husband have a
combined income of $0-$25,000. Mrs. White has older children in addition to her nephew
Michael.

Michael presented as a respectful and determined young man. He is currently in the
eleventh grade. Michael listed his classes as Honors Chemistry, AP English, Honors
Geometry, Honors Pre Calculus, AP Government and Politics, Spanish I and II. Michael’s
weighted GPA is a 4.3. Michael listed his favorite class as Math because “It’s always been
my strength and I like dealing with numbers.” Michael is actively involved in school. He is a
member of the football team and is involved in Student Government and Skills USA, a
computer and digital media club. Michael wants to become a professional football player and
join the NFL. He wants to attend a four year college or university on a football scholarship.
Table 2. Student/Parent Profiles

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Student Name</th>
<th>Parent Name</th>
<th>Student Grade Level</th>
<th>Student Age</th>
<th>Parent Age</th>
<th>Student GPA</th>
<th>Parent Income</th>
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<td>Paul Morgan</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>Stephanie Grady</td>
<td>11&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Billy Strong</td>
<td>Susan Strong</td>
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<td>39</td>
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<tr>
<td>Millie Williams</td>
<td>Vivian Williams</td>
<td>12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>36</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Rachel White</td>
<td>11&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>0-25,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Emergent Themes

The purpose of this research study was to examine the experiences of high achieving African students and their parents. After analyzing the demographic information provided by participants, semi-structured interviews and student self-portraits, clear themes emerged from parent interviews and student interviews. In addition to parent and student group themes, overlapping themes were determined as well. Significant themes, codes, and supporting data are presented from the parents, students, and common themes amongst both groups. Themes and codes are organized as they relate to the four research questions as well:

5. What are the social and academic experiences of high achieving African American adolescents?

6. How do high achieving African American students visually construct academic achievement?

7. How do the parents of high achieving African American adolescents support and encourage the personal, social, and academic development of their child (ren)?

8. How do schools and school employees (teachers, principals, staff, etc) contribute to the overall experiences of high achieving African American adolescents and their parents?
Student Themes and Codes

The major themes that resulted from student demographic forms, semi-structured interviews, and self-portraits were the following three major themes. Student themes – Three major themes: *Student Experience*- the experiences of students inside and outside the classroom or academic setting, *Endogenous Factors*- factors that influence education that are outside intrinsic motivation, and lastly, *Scholastic Achievement*- measurable and personal academic achievements.

In addition the three major themes, twenty codes were originally found. After analysis and review with coding team, nine codes proved to be the most relevant and are defined as follows: *Student Challenges*- Student challenges to maintain academic achievement, *Opportunity*- Advantage other students may not have to improve academic achievement, *Diversity*- racial atmosphere, interaction with other races, ethnic backgrounds and/or social status, *Teacher/Counselor Involvement*- Student and parent interaction with teachers and counselors , *Friendship Influence*- friend impact on student social and academic experience. *Self-Perception/Identity*- student identification of self with school, academics, achievements, and learning. *Motivation*- Self-motivation, drive, motivation by parents, friends, or teacher. *Dedication to Work*- Going above and beyond normal expectations to complete school work, attending tutoring sessions, staying after school hours to complete work. *Goals for Future*- Future and long-term or short-term career or educational goals of the student.
Table 3. Student Themes and Codes

<table>
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<th>Students</th>
<th>Codes</th>
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<td>Student Challenges</td>
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<td>Diversity</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Opportunity</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friendship Influence</td>
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<td>Dedication to Work</td>
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<td>Goals for Future</td>
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</table>

Research Question One Findings

Research question one asked what were the social and academic experiences of high achieving African American adolescents. In order to answer research question one, semi-structured interviews were conducted and the major theme of Student Experience emerged. In addition, the following five codes emerged: Student challenges, diversity, opportunity, friendship influences, and teacher/counselor involvement.

Student Experience

The purpose of this research was to determine experiences of high achieving African American students, including their academic, personal, social experiences. The first theme of student experience explores the experiences of students within and outside the classroom.
When considering student experiences, it is important to also consider any challenges students experience.

**Student Challenges.** When discussing challenges, many students referred to the challenging or more rigorous courses and the outcomes from taking such challenging courses. For example, Billy referred to his Advanced Placement and Honors classes as challenging because, “Well, AP…they…they’ll make you earn your credits…yeah the classes are rigorous and it’s a challenge.”

In addition, Michael welcomed the challenges of AP and Honors classes. Michael stated, “Well I take honors and AP classes and the reason why I want to take those classes is to better challenge myself, to push myself to be the best of the best in what I do.”

**Diversity.** In addition to challenges, students experienced diversity in a number of ways. As stated before, diversity is the racial atmosphere or a student’s perception of race at school, interaction with others of different races, ethnic backgrounds, and/or social class. All of the students experienced diversity differently, however they did not see this as being a major influence on their experience. The students welcomed friends from a wide variety of backgrounds, however in some social situations students tended to identify with certain groups. For example, Shannon stated, “My friends are African-American and we usually only talk to each other at lunch so during the day it’s just that we are in class and I guess I don’t make a lot of new friends all of the time, but I like to be cool with everyone.”

According to Elyse:
“Students tend to migrate to particular groups in the hall…I don’t know when you see
a bunch of Caucasians in the hall it’s kinda awkward cause it’s just like you never
see them unless they’re like in AP classes or something like that.”

Also, Elyse stated, “I do have some classes where it’s mostly minority and then like my
Honors classes are mostly mixed in with black and white and stuff like that…well no
Hispanics but black and white.”

Some participants noticed the diverse or lack of diverse grouping in the hallway,
however according to Billy, “The group that I pretty much grew up with was the same Honor
students from middle school. We have mixed racial class; I mean it’s white, Mexican and
black…we have a diverse class of…I have friends of each race.”

Millie also commented on the racial makeup of her classes as being less diverse, She
states, “Class black/white? No, I would say maybe 30% of it is black and it’s more white
people than it is black.”

Michael enjoys diversity within school and stated, “Well, the things I like about
school are that I get to interact with people from different races and use their ideas about how
things [are] and like learn education, it’s just like knowledge is the key to power in today’s
society, without knowledge you can’t do anything.”

Study participants described their friends as being diverse. Millie described her
friends, “Most of them are white.” However, she has “an Asian friend, I have a Chinese
friend, I have all kinds of friends because I don’t just surround myself around only black
people because we all one…God made us all the same.” Millie further described the
diversity of her friends as important, “because not only will you have to rely on black people you also have to rely on white people because everywhere it’s all kinda different races so it’s not just one race…it’s more than one.”

For study participant Shannon, her friends are African-American and “We usually only talk to each other at lunch so during the day it’s just that we are in class and I guess I don’t make a lot of new friends all the time, but I like to be cool with everyone.” However, Shannon goes on to say, “It’s not important to me to have a particular racial group but what I usually am around is African-American but I’m friends with other races too.”

According to Miranda, being from a small town influences her interaction with friends and diversity. When asked if it matters to have friends from particular racial group, she stated, “I wouldn’t think so because where we’re from it’s not as much of a mixture but I like to think that it is not no problem.” Miranda “Likes being African-American” and stated it is good to have somebody to relate with some of the stuff that you are going through so, it’s good to have friends like you and also like not like you.”

Opportunity. Opportunity is defined as the advantage other students may not have to improve academic achievement. Opportunities can take the form of both material things and a way of thinking that influenced the educational and personal experiences of participants. For instance, Millie and Miranda both described enjoying the use of an Apple computer to assist them with their school work. Further, both students were allowed to use computers issued by the school in order to have access to computer software. For instance, Billy stated,
“school gives students the opportunity that most of them take for granted, to give me the opportunity to go places in life and see other things outside of their home pretty much”. Billy also believed there are opportunities waiting for him outside high school.

In addition, Michael described the opportunities available to him from his school experiences, “Well, the purpose of school would be to better educate everyone in America because as we know in school….school is a privilege…you don’t have to come to school but it should be…like school is a good choice…this is something that you should choose to do.”

**Friendship influences.** According to study participants, friends and your selected social group can directly influence your experiences inside and outside the classroom. As stated by study participant Miranda, her friends influence her positively in the classroom because

“[in] my English class everyone participates. I’m in there with a lot of my friends and we have had classes together since freshmen year. It’s a family environment.”

According to Miranda, her friends are like family and they help each other when needed. Elyse also describes similar upbringing and the positive influence it has had on her life as:

Like….. friends that have been brought up in the same way you have because you know it will help keep you on the right track and help remind you that you know like…you’re not supposed to be doing that you’re supposed to be doing this. Like I have one friend like…I can always count on her to like tell me the right thing straightforward like…no, you don’t need to go there you need to be doing your work. And I have some friends that are just like, you know, some of my friends, you know
they really don’t care…they just you know…I go to school, I go home. While some people like go to school who care.

Study participant Millie expanded upon positive friendship influences. For instance she described the close bond she has with her friends as, “we all stick together and we all get our work done …..we all like helping each other so we can all get our degree and go on to our university and our separate ways.” Both students describe a very congenial and positive influence friends have had on their experiences.

**Research Question Two Findings**

Research question two asked how high achieving African American students visually construct academic achievement. Participants were asked to draw a self-portrait of how they see themselves as high achieving students and their future goals. Each participant selected from a variety of markers, crayons, pens, pencils, and magazines to construct their self portrait.

**Billy**

When asked to complete a visual representation of himself as a high achieving student and his future goals, Billy explored the materials before him and confidently chose one crayon. He quietly drew his picture.
When describing the meaning of his illustration Billy stated “I see a big house and money. I plan on using my education to get lots of money so I can get…have a big house and a comfortable lifestyle.” When asked what he was thinking or feeling during the construction of portrait, he stated “Motivation…motivation, motivated to get out of Benton County pretty much just to try to find a better lifestyle.”

Elyse

When asked to complete her visual representation of herself as a high achieving student and her future goals, Elyse carefully examined the materials before her and selected a
wide variety of colors. Her mother commented that she “loved to draw.” Elyse did not ask any clarifying questions as she drew her picture.

When describing the meaning of her illustration Elyse stated “Well it’s like a table/chair that you sit on at the physical therapy office or rehab facility. And there’s this little old lady holding her hip saying ‘I just had a hip replacement, and then I’m standing there wearing my graduation cap and my t-shirt that says High Point University and then I’m saying I can help you…and I wear my scrubs and I put class of 2017 cause that’s when I will graduate college. When asked “What were you thinking or feeling? What was on your mind?” Elyse replied-“Saying like I’m going to get there one day.”
Shannon

When asked to complete a visual representation of herself as a high achieving student, Shannon examined the materials before her and selected several markers. She asked if she had to “draw” anything and I replied “no, you can construct your image as you see fit.” In doing so, Shannon created more of a linear goal directed timeline.

When describing the meaning of his illustration Shannon stated “they’re my goals for high school and beginning college. Shannon, described each year as it was all Honors and A’s and B’s and I wanted to make sure I had a 3.5 GPA and up trying to go past a 3.5 and that year was just getting me to high school and what it was like. And in tenth grade I wanted to do all Honors and some AP and I wanted a 4.0 or up and I wanted to make sure that I made an A in Algebra II. And to get more involved with clubs and like extracurricular
activities. And for junior year I wanted to do all Honors again but more AP and try to have a weighted 4.5 GPA and make sure I made an A in pre-Calculus and visit more college campuses. And in my senior year, still all Honors and AP and do good in Calculus. Apply to LSU and I wanted to job shadow a lawyer because that is what I want to be after college and law school and I want to graduate sort of in the top twenty of my class I guess.” [Goals for the Future]

**Miranda**

When asked to complete a visual representation of herself as a high achieving student and her future goals, Miranda selected several colored markers, pens, and pencils.

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 6.** Miranda’s visual representation of the question- “How do you visualize yourself as high achieving student and your future goals?” Image was created using crayons and markers on a sheet of 8.5x11 white paper

When describing the meaning of her illustration Miranda stated:
Well I picture myself graduating from the school or from college with a book in my hand and a basketball in the other. It’s supposed to be like a joyous time while I’m graduating, I’m smiling, I’ve got music notes all around. When asked what she was thinking or feeling, Miranda replied- “I was thinking that how whenever this time does come I’m going to be very happy for it.

Millie

When asked to complete her self-portrait happily participated in the activity. She carefully picked out a variety of makers and quickly started to create her illustration.

Figure 7. Millie’s visual representation of the question- “How do you visualize yourself as high achieving student and your future goals?” Image was created using markers on a sheet of 8.5x11 white paper
When describing the meaning of her illustration Millie stated:

First of all, I complete my program that I’m in now then I go to beauty school then I get my license and I go straight to the University and I get my dream car as I go to the hospital to work and then I get big money. I am in the middle…after I get my license and then once I get my license I go to the hospital so I need to draw myself right here too.

When asked what she was thinking or feeling as she drew the portrait, she stated:

I was thinking about all of the things that I’m gonna have to go through…all the processes…and all the hard work that I’m going to have to put in to become successful so I can get that dream car that I want.

Michael

When asked to complete a visual representation of himself as a high achieving student and future goals, Michael approach was very similar to Billy’s. Michael completed his portrait quickly and with great confidence.

Figure 8. Visual representation of “How do you visualize yourself as high achieving and your future goals?” Image was created using a crayon on a sheet of 8.5x11 white paper.
When describing the meaning of his illustration Michael stated:

    Well, what I see is on the title is says Benton High Class of 2013 which is the year that I graduate and I see that…I’m walking across the stage and I’m getting my diploma and these three chairs represent the three chairs of the people that will be there with me and my friends and I have a college, one of the colleges that I may want to go to, the University of Chapel Hill and I have the name of the football team that I want to play with when I go to the NFL which is the Atlanta Falcons. The guy that’s handing me the diploma in this piece, I feel that he is proud of me that I did…that I was one of them that made it to graduation and that is graduating and that he sees that I’m one of the top students in the school that will go on and change things in America.

    When asked what he was thinking or feeling while completing the self portrait Michael stated, “Well what was on my mind when I made this piece was that I feel that in due time when I do graduate and make it to college, someday I will be in the NFL.”

    The two main themes that emerged from research question two and present in student visual drawings were Endogenous Factors and Scholastic Achievement. Endogenous Factors are defined as factors those that are internal and unique to each participant. Participants may not have drawn a representation of endogenous factors that influence their visual representation as a high achieving student, however they expressed it through probing and additional questioning when describing each portrait. Scholastic achievement is defined as measurable personable and academic achievements.
The following nine codes correspond with the aforementioned themes: Weakness, Self/Perception, Motivation, Dedication to Work, Goals for Future, Grades, Educational Courses, and Discipline.

**Endogenous Factors**

As stated above endogenous factors are those that are more personal and unique to each individual. All of the participants have their own motivation for achieving academic success. Some participants expressed more of a personal desire to achieve and overcome personal barriers. The nine codes resulted from student descriptions and further probing of visual representations.

**Self-Perception/Identity.** Several participants expressed how they perceived themselves and their identity as a high achieving student through their visual representation. Many participants considered themselves to be good students and they were very proud of their accomplishments. As stated by Michael, “I believe that I’m a good student because I try my best at following the rules and whether I’m in class or out of class I try my best to help others also.” Millie defined a good student as “getting your work done on time.” She goes on to say:

I consider myself being a smart person because I mean I’m not perfect, I might make some mistakes but I know how to correct them and so then a smart person means that if you make a mistake you’re going to correct it no matter how bad it is….you don’t continue to make the same mistake, you always correct it.
Scholastic Achievement

Achievement was expressed the most often by participants. In all of the visual representations, each student presented success differently. The drive for scholastic achievement for most participants included the motivation to learn. Elyse described her motivation to learn as,

…there are always those people who are like ‘Why are you always going to get help?’ like other people that you know….but I don’t think it’s hard to be a high achieving student, you just have to put your mind to it and if you do that you’ll be okay. It’s not like you go to school to sleep all day it’s like…I came to school to actually learn something, communicate with other people and stuff like that.

Motivation. Motivation for scholastic achievement moves beyond personal achievements to help and encourage others. Participants viewed themselves as leaders. Michael believed:

If I take the lead then others may follow and that…cause with me I’ve always wanted to be a leader and that by me leading others follow and they try to do as I do and be the best at what they do also by looking at me.

Millie also felt a great responsibility to help others. She states, “if you got done on time you got the responsibility of helping others…you don’t just think about yourself and you know being a good student means that you take time and you think about others and not just yourself.”
Participants consider themselves to be natural leaders and helping others is part of their education.

**Dedication to work.** All of the participants expressed great dedication to their studies in order to achieve academic achievement. As noted by Shannon, “I think it is to work your absolute hardest and to make sure you understand everything being taught and as long as you are working your hardest you are as smart as you can be.”

In addition, many participants go beyond what is expected from them. They demonstrated their dedication by taking extra classes, participation in tutoring sessions, and becoming independent learners. Millie stated, “I took extra classes and so I don’t have that many…I don’t have like that many high school classes…well I don’t have any high school classes and my college classes are online, so I only physically attend school one day.” Also, Miranda goes beyond what she learns in the classroom to learn a new concept, for example, “Because I like to participate. I’m always raising my hand and I always…if I don’t understand…the teacher doesn’t seem like she can help me….I like to go out and figure it out on my own.”

**Goals for future.** Scholastic achievement ultimately leads to goals for the future for each participant. Participants expressed their goals in their visual representations. Further, when describing her visual representation, Shannon states, “And in my senior year, still all Honors and AP and do good in Calculus. Apply to LSU and I wanted to job shadow a lawyer because that is what I want to be after college and law school and I want to graduate sort of in the top twenty of my class I guess.”
As stated by Michael, “Well, I’m on the stage and I’m walking to get my diploma….well uh in this picture it’s basically showing each step that I must take in order to achieve what I get to in order to make it to the NFL, first I must achieve and make graduation, then I must go to college, and then I must make my way on to the NFL.”

During probing of her self portrait, Millie stated:

Because like society can’t help me get where I wanna be, it’s gonna be me whose gonna go to beauty school, get my license, whose going to go to the university, make good grades and become successful, whose going to take me to the hospital to get my license and be an RN that I’ve always dreamed of, whose gonna give me the car, they’re not gonna pay my bills, so that’s why I’m by myself because they’re not going to help me do all that. They can give me advice but they can’t help me.

According to Millie, she is responsible for accomplishing her goals and overcoming any difficulties.

**Research Question Three Findings**

Research question three asks how do the parents of high achieving African American adolescents support and encourage the personal, social, and academic development of their child. In order to answer research question three semi-structured interviews were conducted and two themes, *Parent Impact or External Influences* emerged from parent interviews.
**Parent Themes and Codes**

The two major themes that resulted from parent demographic forms and semi-structured interviews were *Parent Involvement* and *External Influences*. Parental Involvement is defined as parent interaction and communication with their child and with school officials. External influences are defined as influences that impact parent involvement from resources or factors beyond the control of parents.

In addition to the two major themes, eleven codes were found and are defined as follows: *Parent Involvement*- Parent interaction with school and with child outside of school, *Parent Challenges*- parent challenges with school, *Motivation*- self motivation, drive, motivation from parents, friends and/or teachers, *Gender Roles*- following and not following expected societal gender roles, *Opportunity*- advantage some students may have to improve academic achievement, *Religious Influence*- church involvement and influence on self and others, *Diversity*- interaction with others of different races, ethnic backgrounds, and/or social status, *Educational Family Time*- family trips to increase learning, *Role Models*- someone the student looks to for guidance/help, *College Prep*- opportunities helpful for obtaining higher education.
The following five codes correspond to the theme of parent impact: parent involvement, parent challenges, motivation, gender roles, opportunity. The code of parent involvement will be discussed in research question four because it directly pertains to research question four on parent interaction with teachers.

**Parent challenges.** Some of the parent participants expressed challenges when interacting with their child’s school and keeping their child on track. About his daughter, Mr. Morgan declared, “her experience in middle school- I say overall positive, I think it started off as more of a challenge but Shannon really took off and she turned her abilities on and started to want to do the things that we wanted her to do.” Mr. Morgan remarked:
I mean we had to push to get her into algebra in elementary school because of the issues in the sixth grade and she promised that she would spend extra time every day and that really helped turn her entire performance around.

Mrs. Grady describes an interaction with one of Elyse’s guidance counselors as:

I think that Elyse is a very good student and she does well...I haven’t had any real issues with her as far as program planning, her classes. I did have a misunderstanding with the guidance counselor… I wanted…I asked her about AP classes for Elyse and I thought what she told me was that Elyse had to take a test in order to take the class and that the test was getting ready to be given. I thought she was saying and so I was like…oh…well I guess I’ll have to try next year or something…but that was a misunderstanding because you don’t have to take a test to take AP, you just have to either have recommendation or waiver or something so I was little bit upset about that because I wanted to look into it although Elyse always has taken Honors classes so I figured that’s still good but someone told me that if your school offers AP and you don’t take any then that’s something that colleges say…well, why didn’t you take any?

**Motivation.** Another very important construct that developed from parent semi-structured interviews was parent observation of student motivation and parent encouragement. Mr. Morgan describes Shannon’s “light bulb” moment as:

She turned her abilities on and started to want to do the things that we wanted her to do. She wasn’t getting good grades and one day the light came on and she just said, I
can do better and she has been doing better. I think that was one of the things that kind of motivated her to be a high achieving student.

Parents also encouraged and supported their child’s involvement in school activities. Mrs. Williams stated:

Well I worked hard…very hard…but then as far as her going to …cultural trips and stuff I encourage her to get in as many clubs and teams as possible so she can just see different aspects of life and not just try to focus on just the center point.

**Opportunity.** Taking advantage of opportunities was expressed by many parent participants. Many parents participated in educational activities related to both them and their children via school and other sources. Mrs. Dale recalls living in a small town and the challenge with “limited resources.” However, she recognizes and takes advantage of opportunities. She stated, “I know this is a very poor county but with being a poor county we have a superintendent here that has brought in very nice resources, educational resources because every child practically at the high school has a laptop.”

Mrs. Grady has taken advantage of opportunities available through her job. She states:

Well I work at IBM and they do make available some college planning assistance and they have these like Webinars you can listen in to or whatever. And there is a person you can call and get a personal…you know like maybe a hour with this called, personal coach or something.

Mr. Morgan reflects on the opportunities available to his daughter in terms of their past experiences in a lesser performing school system in a different state. He recalls:
Well just I mean coming here from Akron, Ohio has been in terms of the school system a massive upgrade. People are fighting and complaining about the structure of the school and they really have no idea what a bad system looks, feels, and tastes like. Parents sought out and took advantage of opportunities and recognized what they had available to not only them, but also their children. Mr. Morgan states the following:

Well, um, I think one of the reasons why we want her to get involved with the MSEN programs is I think a lot of times, I don’t know why, I don’t know if it’s me or society or whatever but girls, women, young women, don’t…oftentimes don’t seem to gravitate toward technical careers and we wanted her to taste it even if she doesn’t select that to just make sure that she understands it is an option for her.

The second theme of external factors are factors that external and more personal and unique to each individual. The following five codes correspond to the external factors theme: 

religious influence, diversity, educational family time, role models, and college preparation.

Religious influence. Religious influence includes church involvement and influence on self and others. Mrs. Williams expressed her daughter’s involvement in church and her academics as:

We actually have tutoring at our church and she helps with the younger kids and then we have older kids that tutor but the older kids tutor the smaller kids and then we have adults that can help with the older kids.
Millie’s involvement in church is an extension of her helping others through tutoring. Also, Mrs. White described Michael as “loving the lord” and doing “what is right” as a motivator for his success.

**Diversity.** Similar to the experiences expressed from the student participants, the parents also found diversity to be a very important factor in their child’s education. When describing their child’s interaction with students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, parents expressed similar experiences. For example, Mrs. Dale description of Miranda:

I think she interacts very well with children from all levels. She’s got children that are very affluent and she’s able to be in the group and respond well and then she has students that are a little bit academic and economic below her and she does well. You look on Facebook you see her with this one, that one and yeah all races and economic levels. She does very well.

Mrs. Sweeney also noted Elsy’s ability to get along with students from different backgrounds. As noted, “I think Elyse is very sociable so she makes friends very easily and so she does have several friends that are of the same background but she has friends that aren’t.” Mrs. Grady goes on to describe Elyse’s interaction with students from different racial groups while participating in sport activities:

She plays soccer so on that team. There is a mix of different cultures and students on that team … and she [gets] along very well with them. In her personal time [she] will pick the ones that you know she decides to interact with on a more personal basis but in general, she is very sociable and that is not…it’s not an issue for her to interact
with students from a different background. As a matter of fact, this year she met a young lady from Nigeria.

In addition, Mrs. White noticed Michael’s ability to interact with all children from a very early age. She states:

I’d say it was his background because he grew up with a lot of kids and he interacted well with them, especially when he was going to the daycare that I worked at, he interacted real well with those and he got along good with them.

**Educational family time.** According to Mr. Morgan, recalled the benefits of having his daughter enrolled in academic enrichment programs as,

…going through that program and those series of programs has really kind of led to college visits and led to meeting people from other schools who were also high achievers and we thought all that is very positive. There is some more driving and kind of thing, but I mean it’s the fraction of what our parents did for us. It is just expected. It’s part of what you should be doing. How I define parenting.

Also, he mentions traveling to see “young family members graduate from college” as a positive and rewarding family trip.

Mrs. Dale also recalled attending cultural and educational trips with her children. For example:

We went to New York and we take in the cultural things and we saw *The Color Purple* when it was live up there and we were able to go to the ballpark and they see things and when we go they have something lined up culturally for us to do.
In addition, Mrs. Grady incorporates educational experiences in family trips. She described a recent family trip as, “Last summer we did had an opportunity to go and visit some colleges just to you know see what they were like and walk around, tour the campus and things.” Mr. Williams and her family attended Chapel Hill recently to expose Michael to not only the campus, but also the surrounding area.

Both Mrs. White and Mrs. Williams described family vacations and field trips. According to Mrs. Williams, “I take her out…I mean we go different places…we take family vacations and when we go, we go to aquarium, museums and stuff so she can see the other things outside Benton County.” Mrs. White expressed similar family outings such as, “Yes, we go on field trips to Raleigh we went to the zoo one year.”

As stated by parent participants, family time is not just for bonding, but also an opportunity to expose children to colleges, universities, museums, and other valuable educational experiences.

**Role models and college preparation.** The final codes of role models and college preparation emerged from semi-structured interviews with parents. Parents participating in this research study recalled the importance of having positive role models and providing or encouraging their high achieving child to participate in college preparation activities. Mr. Morgan describes the benefit of having a successful older sibling as a positive role model. He stated:
One of the major advantages she has is she has an older sister who is a high achiever, who is an extremely hard worker and she has really sort of embraced and modeled what her sister has done in that regard.

He went on to say:

We wanted for our kids was for them to never have a moment where they did not expect to go on to college and we’ve tried to foster that attitude and I think once those expectations are there and they can see cousins graduating…and…it’s a lot easier for someone who doesn’t really have a way to model that through.

Mrs. Dale and Mrs. Grady seek out college preparatory opportunities for their high achieving student. Mrs. Dale stated her daughter takes SAT Prep online because, “this area is kind of limited to some of the academic programs so we have to look at other places like online and stuff like that for her”. Mrs. Grady takes advantage of college preparatory financial aid websites to guide her as she helps her daughter. She recalled:

They tell you the FAFSA…the college foundational website is out there you should go out there and play around with it. You need to have that completed I think by the end of your sophomore year so that your junior year you’re really just kind of like…okay now what classes can really expose you to that interest to make sure that you really are interested in it.
Mrs. Williams recalled her daughter as tutoring she actually did some tutoring this summer, she tutored juniors and sophomores with some classes they were struggling with and then she attended Project Uplift (a summer pre-college program for high school juniors) that summer.

**Research Question Four**

Research Question Four asked, “How do schools and school employees (teachers, principals, staff, etc.) contribute to the overall experiences of high achieving African American adolescents and their parents?” The findings for question four are an extension of participant responses to the theme Parental Involvement and External Factors that were addressed in research question two.

**Student Involvement**

In addition to Parental Involvement and External Factors such as friendship influence and diversity, study participants also described positive and influential school employees. Several participants mentioned teachers, coaches, or counselors that positively influenced their experiences. For example, Millie described her teachers as a key factor to not only her success, but also other students in her class, “We are very small and our teachers are always helping us and we work together…we are like one big happy family because when one is hurting we all hurt. So we all stick together no matter how things are.” Millie did not mention a particular teacher, however Elyse recalled a teacher having an influence on her course selection, “Ms. H. suggested if you like Psychology. To take AP Psychology next
year if you like it.” Elyse plans on enrolling in AP Psychology. The positive encouragement from her teacher helped her with her course selection.

Also, coaches proved to influence student experiences as well. For instance, Billy recalled Coach Bell’s support as “He’s stood up for me in high school…he pretty much work well with all students…help keep ‘em out of trouble and if you need anything he would be right there for you.” In addition to coaches, Michael’s school counselor, Ms. Davis, has been a positive influence. He states, “My counselor Ms. Davis, she has helped me with like choosing my classes and stuff…which ones that would better prepare me for college.”

**Parental Involvement**

Parent involvement can take many meanings for many people and it can change over time. For example, Mr. Morgan explains his level of involvement with his daughter’s school as:

Yes, we’ve attended the teacher conferences in elementary schools, self-led conferences in middle school, in high school not as much interaction with teachers directly other than SPAN and working with to direct, for her to create direct relationships with teachers. Therefore, when she’s going to need to create those relationships with professors, so not as much in high school.

Mrs. Williams is also very involved as noted by her statement, “I’m very active with teachers, I’ll call them, talk to them and I’ll drop in every now and then just to check and make sure they are on the right track.” Whereas, both Mr. Morgan and Mrs. Williams expressed active involvement in their child’s schooling, Mrs. Grady feels like her
involvement is more one sided. She explained "It seems like you’re having to go and search for information yourself and it’s not coming necessarily from the school as you would think it would come.” Instead of letting the lack of information deter her from her child’s schooling, Mrs. Grady creates opportunities for herself by taking advantage of educational seminars at her job and networking with other parents.

In contrast, Mrs. Strong and Mrs. White vary in their parental involvement. According to Mrs. Strong, she does not interact with school personnel as much because Billy is such a good student. Mrs. Strong stated,

I don’t necessarily go out and meet the teachers as much as I should because really I don’t feel like I need to, ya know, ‘cause he really is a grounded student. He’s very, very involved in his activities and schoolwork and everything… I always told him how important school is. Education is everything.

Also Mrs. White expressed, “Billy had tutoring sessions when he needed it.”

Each parent determined what level of involvement they wanted to have and how to communicate with school employees. As recorded in participant responses, some are more involved than others.

**Parent and Student Common Themes/Codes**

After careful analysis of student participant semi-structured interviews, student self-portraits, and parent semi-structured interviews, four common themes/codes were discovered. Common themes/codes also reflect triangulation of research data for the semi-structured interviews, student portraits, demographic forms, and member checking. The common
themes/codes were *diversity, motivation, opportunity,* and *friendship influence.* A majority of the students referenced the themes when discussing their own experiences and goals for the future. Students revealed overall positive experiences with diverse groups, positive motivation to succeed as depicted in student self-portraits, the need to take advantage of opportunities as high achieving students to continue to find success in life, and positive friendship influences.

**Table 5. Parent and Student Themes**

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<td>Diversity</td>
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Parents also recalled positive interactions with diverse groups from their high achieving student, motivation to help their child succeed, the importance of taking advantage of opportunities made available to them from school and other organizations, and positive friendship influences of their children. It is important to highlight the common themes/codes as they reflect the experiences of both student and parent. Parents often communicate to their student certain expectations and the common themes/codes reflect the expectations, goals, and desires in which both parent and student share.
Summary

This chapter presented descriptive information of high achieving student and parent participants, as well as findings from high achieving student semi-structured interviews and student self-portraits. In addition, parent semi-structured interview findings were presented. Findings were organized by major themes and subsequent codes. Data were reported according to each of the four research questions.

True to a phenomenological qualitative design, the lived experiences of study participants were reflected in their own language and un-altered self-portraits as reported to the researcher. The use of participant language and un-altered original self-portraits captures the true essence of experiences and captures participant’s feelings, thoughts, and behaviors as reported during original interview. Chapter 5 will discuss findings from semi-structured interviews from students and parents, student self-portraits, and common themes/codes in greater detail.
CHAPTER FIVE:

DISCUSSION

Study Purpose

The purpose of this research study was to explore the experiences of high achieving African American Students and their parents. A discussion of the following four research questions will be discussed in this chapter. The questions are:

Research Question One: What are the social and academic experiences of high achieving African American adolescents?

Research Question Two: How do high achieving African American students visually construct academic achievement?

Research Question Three: How do the parents of high achieving African American adolescents support and encourage the personal, social, and academic development of their child(ren)?

Research Question Four: How do schools and school employees (teachers, counselors, principals, staff, etc.) contribute to the overall experiences of high achieving African American adolescents and their parents?

To achieve the goals of this research study and answer the four research questions, a phenomenological qualitative research study was conducted. Also, a narrative analysis was performed on student self-portraits. Both parent and student research participants were recruited and asked to complete demographic questionnaires and participant in semi-structured interviews. In addition, student participants were asked to complete self-portraits
with materials provided by researcher. Data were collected from twelve participants or six parent/student dyads and analyzed by a team of two coders and one auditor. Validity was determined utilizing Kappa, researcher reflexivity, and member checks. In addition, this chapter will discuss implications for parents, implications for school personnel, study limitations and recommendations for future research will also be discussed.

**Discussion of Findings**

**Research Question One**

Research question one asked what were the social and academic experiences of high achieving African American adolescents. To answer this question student participants participated in semi-structured interviews. Interviews were recorded and analyzed by a team of two coders and one auditor. Student participants were sent transcribed copies of interviews to conduct member checks.

After analyzing data from research question one, the major theme of Student Experience and subsequent codes of student challenges, diversity, opportunity, friendship influences, and teacher/counselor involvement emerged. The research team found the emergent themes to be consistent with research question one because research question sought to understand the experiences of each individual student. Student experiences are comprised of multiple factors which include challenges students may encounter, recognizing diversity, seeking and taking advantage of opportunities, friendship influences, and school personnel involvement.
When discussing student challenges, both Michael and Billy found taking AP and Honors classes as “challenging” academically. Instead of giving up and not challenging themselves, research participants welcomed this challenge because they wanted to “push themselves to be the best.” This idea of purposefully challenging themselves goes against Ogbu (1976) assertion of Oppositional Framework that high achieving/gifted African American students shy away from challenging coursework. According to Harris (2011) “A major premise of oppositional culture theory is that blacks disinvest from academic goals because they do not believe that education will enable them to overcome barriers”(p. 30). The students participating in this research study thought the complete opposite. For many of the students, education and challenging themselves will open up many, many opportunities.

Diversity also proved to be a major tenant in student experiences. All of the research participants experienced diversity differently, however none of them found race to be a major factor in their education. Both Elyse and Billy described the racial makeup of their classes as being diverse. They did not see themselves as being in the minority or the “only person of color.” In contrast, Millie found the diversity of classes to be “30% black and more white people.” Even though students found themselves to be racial minorities in their classes, they did not feel uncomfortable and afraid to share their opinions. In fact, Billy stated he had been friends with many of the students in his classes since middle school and “grew up” together.

In previous research, Huff et al. (2005) argued that gifted or high achieving African American children experience a dissonance between school and culture because of the need to prove “investment” in the African American community. Students participating in this
research did not feel a need to “prove” themselves in order to feel invested in their community.

Opportunity is included in student experience as it resonated with many of the student research participants. Millie and Miranda decided to take full advantage of using Apple computers to assist them with school work. Billy and Michael viewed opportunities presented to them in school to help them achieve their goals. Billy not only takes advantage of opportunities in school, he also recognizes opportunities that await him beyond school. Billy views achievement as a way to advance himself and not as a hindrance. Once again, this thought of academic achievement is indifferent to Ogbu’s (1986) assertion of Oppositional Framework. In addition, Michael views school as a privilege and “something you should want to do.” Michael’s belief of school as a privilege and one that is given to him. He personally wants to take advantage of that opportunity.

Friendship Influences developed as the final major tenet from student experience. Initially, one would think friendships would play a major role in the experiences of high achieving students. Some would assume negatively, as with the case of an Oppositional Framework. All of the students noted positive friendship influences. Research participants Shannon, Millie, and Miranda all stated it’s good to have friends “like you and some not like you.” All three participants did not allow racial and ethnic differences to keep them from developing friends with people from different backgrounds. Further, research participant Miranda remarked, “she liked being African American.” She did not feel the
need to “hide” her status as an African American. Miranda, like the other student research participants, did not view race as a hindrance when developing friendships.

Research question one examined the experiences of high achieving African American adolescents. Previous research (e.g., Fordham & Ogbu, 1986) would suggest high achieving African American adolescents purposefully perform poorly at the sake of maintaining racial identity. Unlike Boykin’s assertion with his Triple Quandary (1985) and schooling stance, the research participants in this study navigate schooling and race using healthy coping skills. The coping skills they have developed appear to be positive as they appear in control of their academics, goals, and social interactions.

**Research Question Two**

Research question two asks how do high achieving African American students visually construct academic achievement. To answer research question two, student research participants were asked to draw a visual representation of how they see themselves as high achieving students and their future goal. Each student research participant was asked to select from a variety of maker, crayons, pens, and pencil, magazines to construct a visual representation after the completion of their semi-structured interview. Visual representations were analyzed by team of two coders. Each coder analyzed each visual representation individually and together as a team. The researcher served as auditor once themes and codes were developed. Inspiration for this activity came from an ethnographic study conducted by Luttrell (2003) in which she instructed pregnant teens to visually construct their experiences as a pregnant teen. This study replicated Luttrell’s (2003) methodology in which she asked
research participants probing questions after the completion of their illustrations. A visual narrative research design seemed fitting because it allowed students to create their image of themselves, their achievements, and high achievement. Polkinghorne (2007) describes narrative inquiry as the act of studying stories. This activity produced great diversity amongst the student research participants. Four of the student research participants drew a visual representation of themselves. Four student research participants constructed images of themselves at graduation and one constructed an image of herself as a physical therapist, her future career aspiration. One student research participant constructed a portrait of only two images, dollar signs and a house, and another student research participant decided to construct her image using words and not images. In four of the six images, student research participants referenced their future collegiate choice in their portrait. One research participant, Shannon, chose not to draw an image when constructing her self-portrait. Instead, she listed her previous courses, future honors, AP courses, desired GPA, and her desired college.

Two major themes emerged from student visual representations were Endogenous Factors and Scholastic achievement. Further, eight codes developed: self-perception/identity, motivation, dedication to work, goals for future, educational courses, and discipline. It is appropriate that the two major themes from student visual representations were endogenous factors, or factors that are unique and internal to each individual participant and scholastic achievement. The goal of this activity was to give student research participants freedom to express themselves without any direction. From the visual representations, student research
participants had their own ideas of their future. However, one common theme that appeared in each portrait and was the notion of success and being successful. It should be noted when probed and asked to describe their visual representations students expressed self confidence in their skills and future. Self perception/Identity resonated with all student research participants. They considered themselves to be smart, motivated to help others, dedicated to their work, and each had clear goals for their future. Students reflected this sentiment as academic achievement. Their positive stance on schooling reflects a positive attitude toward school. They expressed motivation and were dedicated to their work. Many students would spend hours outside school studying, attending tutoring sessions, or researching topics on their own. As noted by Ford, Wright, Grantham, and Harris (1998), a student’s attitude toward school can have powerful affects on behavior. Student visual representations refute previous research claim that students feel conflict, distrust, and suspicion toward school which makes it difficult to internalize goals (Voelkl, 1997; Jaynes and Williams, 1989; Ogbu, 1986). In comparison, students not only visually represented themselves as successfully academically (graduating, grades, courses, happy, etc.), but also in college and future career aspirations. Representations of graduation and college readiness was evident and should be noted that students already envision themselves as successful.

**Research Question Three**

Research question three asked how do the parents of high achieving African American adolescents support and encourage the personal, social, and academic development of their child(ren). As stated earlier in the review of literature, parents can strongly influence
their child’s academic achievement (Ford, et al, 1998). To answer this question parent research participants were asked semi-structured interview questions. Semi structured interview questions allowed parents to freely express themselves and share their genuine experiences. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed by the coding team.

After analyzing data from research question three, Parent Impact and External Factors emerged as major themes. The research team found the themes consistent with research question three because it reflects parent experiences. Furthermore, parent research participants reflected upon parent challenges and external factors in terms of motivation, opportunity, religious influence, diversity, educational family time, and role models/college prep.

Challenges faced by parents of high achieving students emerged as an obstacle for some parent research participants. Some parents expressed challenges with school, in particular, with communication with school officials and course selection. In order to overcome challenges, parents advocated for their child and according to Mr. Morgan “push” to get his daughter in advanced level math courses in middle school. After successfully placing his daughter in advanced courses and her commitment to her studies, “turned her entire performance around.” In addition, Mrs. Grady advocated for her daughter to take Advanced Placement courses in high school. After clearing up a misunderstanding about AP classes, she was able to take advanced level courses. It should be noted that both parents advocated for their child and their children wanted to take advanced level courses. Their
initial challenges to get their children enrolled in advanced courses did not deter their child’s dedication to work hard and succeed. In fact, they went above and beyond the challenge.

In addition, parent participants motivated their children to do well. They did not force them, but served as their cheerleaders. Parents recognized the things that motivated their children and supported their efforts. With the positive support, parents soon noticed “the light bulb coming on” and their children grades began to reflect their hard work. Also, parents encouraged their children to participate in sports, clubs, summer programs, etc. As noted by Mrs. Williams, she “worked hard, very hard and encouraged her child to see different aspects of life.” As stated by Fries-Britt (2002), the role of the family is an important source of motivation because the achievements of high achieving youth is a reflection of family and community. Positive reinforcement and support motivated student research participants to seek opportunities and strive for academic success.

Parent participants also sought out opportunities for their high achieving children. Parents sought out opportunities not only from school, but also from their place of employment and community. Despite living in an area when opportunities are scarce and “limited” resources, Mrs. Dale appreciated the support from her local school system. Her ability to take advantage of resources provided by her local school system supports the idea that school systems should provide opportunities for students. Mr. Morgan found opportunities made available through enrichment programs such as MSEN as valuable. Not only did Mr. Morgan see programs such as MSEN rewarding, but positive influences to
encourage and motivate his daughter to pursue a career in a STEM (science, technology, engineering or mathematics) career.

Parent participants also acknowledged the positive influence of religion and the importance of having a strong faith as central in their high achieving child’s success. Similar to student participants, parents did not see being African American as a hindrance in their child’s social and educational experiences. In fact, parents encouraged their children to interact with students from a wide range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Parents also included educational experiences in activities such as trips, family vacations, etc. Parent participants sought out opportunities to expose children to new cultural and educational experiences when possible. According to Mr. Morgan, investing time in his daughter Shannon “is expected” as a parent. Expectations to encourage their children were echoed by all parent participants. Parents found having older successful siblings or relatives served as an added benefit to help encourage and motivate their high achieving students. Subsequently, successful siblings, relatives, or friends encouraged parent participants and students to investigate college options and prepare for college.

**Research Question Four**

Research question four asked, how do schools and school employees (teachers, principals, staff, etc) contribute to the overall experiences of high achieving African American adolescents and their parents. Parent and student participants were asked semi-structured interview questions. Student participants noted several teachers, counselors and teachers who have had a positive impact on their overall schooling. For example, student
participant Millie, described her teachers and school as “one big family.” Millie assertion that they” work together” and when “one hurt, we all hurt” is an example of the supportive environment high achieving African American students can develop at schools. In addition, students also recalled teachers, counselors, and coaches in a positive light. School officials helped students select classes, “stay out of trouble”, and “stand up for them.” Student participant responses support observations that student sense of belonging as associated with levels of engagement and academic motivation (Goodenow & Grady ,1993).

Parent level of involvement appeared to change over time. Parents reported communicating more with schools when their children were in elementary and middle school. For example, Mr. Morgan stated being more involved, but encouraged his daughter to create more “direct relationships with her teachers.” He also used technology such as a student/parent grade reporting website to learn more about Shannon’s grades. Other parents, such as Mrs. Williams, liked to drop in and to see teachers and leave notes to inquire about their child’s status and make sure “everything is on track.” Mr. Morgan’s and Mrs. Williams’ level of school involvement reflect an assertion made by Clark (1983) in which families of achieving Black children were assertive in parent involvement efforts, set realistic and high expectations for their children, established role boundaries, and maintained positive parent-child relations.

Whereas some parents actively communicated with school officials, others expressed a different level of involvement. For instance, Mrs. Grady felt as if her communication was “one-sided” and felt as if she had “to search for information.” As a result, Mrs. Grady has
learned to create opportunities for her child herself. Her apathy toward lack of school communication reflects a lack of parent communication as recommended by Epstein (1995). Epstein proposed six levels of parent-school communication as parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating. The six parent participants experienced one or more of the six strategies to promote communication. One parent preferred using technology and encouraging his child to become more “actively involved in creating personal relationships.” Others found school involvement to be more challenging. It is believed that schools can build lasting relationships with parents as students proceed through schools (Epstein, 1986, 1995). In order to meet this goal, schools should communicate with parents using a variety of mediums. The parents in this research study varied on their thoughts and attitudes toward school communication and involvement.

**Integration of Meaning of Findings**

Limitations are inherent when conducting research. It is impossible to reach every possible research participant and control every aspect of a research study. By design, this study was a descriptive, phenomenological qualitative research study and sought to capture the true experiences of participants. Efforts were made to increase internal validity of results by way of researcher reflexivity, triangulation, member checking, and rich thick descriptors. Possible limitations to this study include gender and location of research participants. Twelve individuals created six parent/student dyads. A larger participant pool could have produced more diversity amongst responses. Another limitation to this study is the location of participants. Four participants lived in a small, rural town with limited access to resources.
Two of the participants lived in a much larger city with access to many resources and colleges and universities. Although the participants were able to share their experiences, the participants were from different cities and therefore their experiences varied due to their location. Therefore, there is somewhat limited generalizability of this study to greater populations of high achieving African American students and their parents.

Gender plays a role in the limitations as well because four female student research participants and five female mother research participants and one male father research participant. Including more males would provide greater diversity of experiences and parenting styles. In regard to student self-portraits, some student research participants appeared slightly hesitant to draw their self portraits. To overcome this limitation, future researchers should consider giving students an option of either drawing or creating a written visual representation of themselves as high achieving students. Furthermore, future research could ask student to bring in personal pictures of family, friends, school activities, etc. that represent who they are as high achieving African American students. Another limitation to this study was the parent population. During all of the interviews, parents and students remained in the same room. More privacy and the ability to speak freely may have been achieved if parents and students were interviewed separately. The findings that resulted from this study add to an ever-growing body of literature about the experiences of high achieving African American adolescents and their parents.
Implications for Counselors and Counselor Educators

The results of this study provide both relevant and timely implications for counselors and counselor educators. Counselors, in particular, school counselors, often play a very important role in the academic and social development of students. School counselors are encouraged to develop a comprehensive program that encourages student success through advocacy, leadership, collaboration, and systemic changes to barriers that impede academic success (American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model (2005). The results of this study indicate that high achieving African American students are leaders and many of them take an active role in their education. School counselors can encourage positive identity development by taking an interest in high achieving student and their development. A school wide initiative school counselors can employ to help this identity development is to create a high achievers club where students with a GPA of 3.5 or above come together to not only socialize, but to help each other. Club members should be encouraged to visit colleges, historical museums, participate in educational workshops, and programs. Also, counselors that promote high achievement and academic success can help match high achieving students with students in need of academic support. Creating a tutoring program not only enable high achieving students to take on a leadership role within their school, but also to help others and promote achievement and success. Many of the students participating in this research study discussed the importance of support systems.
In addition, schools should form a minority parent group or create a sub group within the parent teacher association to encourage more minority parent participation. It is important to welcome membership of all parents in this group, however the sub group’s focus will be on the academic and social experiences of minority students. School counselors can help recruit parent participation and have a prominent role in such organizations.

Counselor educators are encouraged to include research about giftedness, high achievement and minorities in their curriculum. It is very important that counselors in training and counselor education programs dispel the myths of giftedness and high achievement. Further, incorporating parent involvement models such as Epstein’s (1995) offer a model for counselors in training to refer to when consulting parents and other educators. As more and more research becomes readily available, counselor educators should seek such research to promote academic achievement and positive development amongst minority students.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This research study only adds to the ever growing research about the experiences of high achieving African American students and their parents. The parents and student research participants had overall positive experiences in school. The students participating in this research study were motivated to do well and took advantage of opportunities presented before them. Future researchers can replicate this study by having a larger participant pool to gather more diverse results. In addition, future research can separate out genders and explore the experiences of high achieving African American boys as opposed to African American
girls. Future research can determine if high achieving African American girls or boys experience pressure to succeed or perform.

Also, future research could also focus more on the interaction of school personnel. Parent and student research participants both mentioned involvement with school counselors, teachers, and coaches. It would be worthwhile to gather the thoughts of attitudes of school personnel in positions where they counsel/advise students. The participants in this current study expressed some interaction with school personnel but it was limited. Future studies can focus primarily on communication with school counselors. School counselors often assist families and students throughout their high school career. Counselors can play a major role in providing academic and emotional support, class recommendations, and notifying students and parents about opportunities. Further, counselors should include African American and minority parents in seminar presentations about college readiness to strengthen connections.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this research study was to capture the experiences of high achieving African American students and their parents. This study found that high achieving African American student participants shared unique student experiences, experienced endogenous factors that were personal to their unique goals, and were motivated to pursue high scholastic achievement. Parents participating in this research study shared the challenges they encounter as they provide support for their children. For many of the parent research participants, the impact of their presence motivated them to assist their children and find additional opportunities. In addition, parents recognized external influences such as diversity,
educational family time, role models and college as playing a central role in their child’s education.

High achieving African American adolescents receive achievement themes from a variety of sources. As noted by the results of this study, three of the main sources of support came from parents, role models, and religious institutions. Ultimately, this research study found that high achieving African American students want to achieve and do well. They do not feel the need to hide who they are. The student research participants were motivated and excited about learning. Parents of students participating supported their children and wanted the best for them. They had a strong desire and will to achieve and should serve as leaders/role models to their peers.
REFERENCES


Tatum, B. D. (2003). "Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?: And other conversations about race* Basic Books.


Demographic Form- Students

Gender (Please circle one): Male  Female
Age__________
Grade (Please Circle one):  9   10   11   12
Race (Please write in your race) ___________________
Who do you live with? _________________________
Were you born in the US?_____________________
List all Honors and/or Advanced Placement courses you have completed, currently in enrolled in this semester, and plan to take next semester.
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
Thank You!
Demographic Form - Parents

Gender (Please circle one): Male  Female

Age__________

Race (Please write in your race) ______________________

Age of High Achieving Student

Marital Status_____________________

Highest Educational Attainment (Please circle one)

- High School Diploma
- Some College
- Associate's Degree
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Professional Degree
- Doctoral Degree

Combine Income of Level of Parents (Please Circle One)

- 0-25,000
- 25,000-35,000
- 35,000-45,000
- 45,000-55,000
- 55,000-65,000
- 65,000-75,000
- 75,000-85,000
- 85,000-95,000
- 95,000+
APPENDIX B: Semi Structured Interview Questions- Parents and Students

Semi Structured Interview Questions- Parents

1. Please describe your experience of academic programming with your child.
   **Probe:** Examples include course selection, advising, Recommendations, teacher interactions

2. Please describe your experience of your child’s interaction with other students.
   **Probe:** Interaction with students from similar cultural/ethnic background, Similar interests, hobbies

3. How do you provide resources for your high achieving student?
   **Probe:** Academic enrichment programs, tutorial programs, cultural trips, etc

4. Are there any other concerns/observations you would like to share?
Semi Structured Interview Questions - Students

School
1. What do you like about School?
2. What type of classes do you take? Can you list the names of them?
3. What’s your favorite class? Why?
4. What kind of grades do you make in school? What is your current GPA?
5. Do you participate in any extracurricular activities? If so, which ones?
   1. Probes: Sports, academic clubs, social club
6. Do you believe it is important to do well in school?
7. Walk me through a typical day for you once you leave home?
8. How would you describe your behaviors in classes?
   1. Probes: Speech, peers you associate with, the way you interact with different people from different groups.
9. What would you like to do once you graduate from high school?
10. Do you think race has been a factor in your school experience? Why?

Peers
11. Can you tell me a little bit about your friends?
   1. Probes: It if doesn’t emerge: What is the racial/ethnic group do your friends identify with?
12. Is it important to have friends of a particular racial or ethnic group? Why?

Beliefs
13. What do you think is the purpose of school?
14. What do you think it means to be smart?
   1. Do you see yourself as a smart person
15. What do you think it means to be a good student?
   1. Do you consider yourself to be a good student? Why?

Wrap Up
16. Is there anything else that I didn’t ask that you would like to add?
17. Do you have any questions for me?

(Carter-Andrews, 2009)
APPENDIX C: Multiple Selves- Self Portrait Activity- Students

Instructions:

Thank you for participating in the interview. Now we will transition to an activity that will allow you to represent your experiences visually. Before you, you will find a wide variety of craft products (makers, construction paper, magazine, colored pencils, stickers, etc). I would like you to create a self-portrait of how you see yourself as a high achieving student and your future goals.


1. What do you see? List the people, objects, images, and places.
2. What is going on in this piece?
3. Where are you in this piece?
4. What were you thinking or feeling (what was on your mind) as you made this piece? What's going on with others in this pieces? (what are they thinking or feeling).
5. What would you change about this piece it you were to do it again?
APPENDIX D: Code List

Initial Code List
AOP- age of parent
AOS- age of student
R/E- race/ethnic group
MS- marital status
HLE- highest level of education
PI- parental involvement - Parent interaction with school and child outside school
PCH- challenges- Parent challenges with school
SCHH- challenges- Student to maintain academic achievement
M- motivation: self motivation; drive; motivated by parents, friends or/and teachers
DTW- dedication to work: going above and beyond the call to complete school work, attending tutoring sessions, extra time after school doing work
DS- discipline: how student acts in class, at home; participation level in class, seating arrangement in class
FI- friendship influences- Friend impact on Student social and academic experience
D- diversity: racial atmosphere; interaction with others of different races, ethnic backgrounds and/or social status
GR- Gender Roles- Following and not following expected societal gender roles
EA- extracurricular activities: sports, clubs, volunteer, etc.
RI- Religious Influence- church involvement and influence on self and others
RM- role model: someone the student looks to for guidance/help- Coaches, teachers, siblings, and outside influences
O- Opportunity- Advantage other students may not have to improve academic achievement
EC- educational courses - Student list of courses completed, currently enrolled, or will take.
G- grades: GPA; grades; class ranks
G4F- goal for future: potential career goals; where the student may want to apply for college, short term goals, long term goals
MI- Monetary Influence- Student desire to earn income, salary expectations, etc
W- Weaknesses- Pride; appearance of “not knowing”
EFT- Educational Family Time - Family trips- to increase learning (museums, Broadway plays, Raleigh, college/university visits)
TIC- Teacher Involvement/ Counselors- Student and parent interaction with teachers and counselors
CP - College Prep- Opportunities helpful for obtaining higher education i.e. PSAT, SAT Prep, Summer enrichment programs (i.e. project Uplift), Early College
SELF-P Self Perception/Identity- student identification of self with school, academics, achievement, and learning
SES- Socioeconomic status
SE-Student Emotions (wide variety of student emotions related to achievement)