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An Examination of Significant Factors Distinguishing Successful, On-Time High School Graduation Rates Among Black Males at a Large South Carolina High School

Sherry Mitchell Eppelsheimer
University of South Carolina

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AN EXAMINATION OF SIGNIFICANT FACTORS DISTINGUISHING
SUCCESSFUL, ON-TIME HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES AMONG BLACK
MALES AT A LARGE SOUTH CAROLINA HIGH SCHOOL

by

Sherry M. Eppelsheimer

Bachelor of Arts
Lander University, 1982

Master of Arts
Clemson University, 1995

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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Accepted by:

Rhonda Jeffries, Major Professor

Diane Harwell, Committee Member

Joshua Gold, Committee Member

Tambra Jackson, Committee Member

Lacy Ford, Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

Gaining a doctoral degree has been my life-long dream; therefore, this work is dedicated to my family, especially to my husband John Eppelsheimer (Thank you for believing in me!), my children Meredith and Win French (I love you both so very much), and my mom and dad, Frankie and Henry Mitchell (No more school!). You have all been my supporters throughout my entire life and educational career. Without your encouragement, patience, love and constant support, I could not have made this difficult journey. I wish to also credit my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Through my faith, the Scriptures, and His blessings, I can say I have completed this program.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine what students see as significant factors that impact their successful high school on-time graduation rates, particularly among Black males in a large South Carolina high school with respect to *No Child Left Behind* requirements. Through a comparative case study, qualitative research methods were used to identify significant factors, supports and/or barriers to Black male success and achievement of on-time graduation. Through individual interviews and observations of a subgroup of 7 Black males between the ages of 17 to 19, commonalities emerged that led to high school graduation. A comparison using a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1997) and case study method (Glesne, 2010) were used for analysis. By examining their own experiences, both intrinsic and extrinsic, their authentic voices have shed light on what they see as what is needed to achieve on-time graduation. Their perspectives will help to identify a clearer picture of what high schools might do to improve graduation rates. The study found that there are common factors that enable Black male students to accomplish successful, on-time graduation.

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CHAPTER 1

A Look Back

With the decision of *Brown vs. the Board of Education* in 1954, the federal

government directed schools across the nation, especially in the South, to provide

equality in educational experiences for all children. This effort set the stage for

desegregation and the equity and equality of public schooling. For the past four decades,

there have been changes within the American public educational system. In the United

States, educational policies have moved toward standards, assessment, accountability,

and school wide reform (Kuo, 2010). Prior eras focused on assimilating migrants into

urban centers undergoing industrialization, assimilating large influxes of immigrants, and

providing equitable access to schools as a civil right.   Recently, the movement has

highlighted establishing standards, aligning assessments with those standards, and

holding schools accountable for the increase and improvement of student performance.

Previous federal interventions have included granting states monies and resources in

order to better educate low achieving students attending schools serving low income

areas. In 1965 the federal government passed the Elementary and Secondary Education

Act (ESEA); the cornerstone of which was Title I. Title I grants were designed to

"improve the academic achievement of disadvantaged students, reduce performance gaps,

and assist students in meeting high academic standards. This Act was a major milestone

in the federal government's involvement and interest in addressing inequities in education" (Kuo, 2010).

Further in 1994 under the Clinton administration, Congress decided to change the focus of Title I through the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA). Doing so reauthorized ESEA. In accepting these federal funds, schools had to adhere to certain provisions such as setting high standards, assessing students by these standards, reporting the results to the public, and making instructional and structural changes, ensuring all students have opportunities to reach the standards. The shift was an effort to give disadvantaged students more than basic skills by providing them with advanced content and expectations for better performance.

Later governmental changes increased federal over-sight of school reform. Congress answered the nation's growing concern that larger high schools should be sub-sectioned in order to prevent any student from becoming lost within the educational system. Between 2000 and 2004, more than 500 million dollars was granted to high schools in order to authorize "Smaller Learning Communities" (SLC) programs (SREB). From this effort, career academies, schools-within-schools, and transitional academies were developed.

Importance of On-time Graduation Rates

The *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Act of 2001 reflects the nation's current emphasis on assessment, accountability, and time-limited improvement. According to the NCLB Act, parameters were set for improved performance of schools within a given amount of time. NCLB legislated that after five years, public elementary or secondary schools that consecutively failed to meet their statewide established Adequate Yearly

Progress (AYP) would be subject to restructuring by the government. For high schools, graduation rates were chosen as the best indicator of a school's success toward educating its students. The "on-time" graduation rate refers to a student's entering high school in grade nine and graduating four years later.

The *NCLB* era has marked the beginning of focused local, state, and national attention on graduation rates. At the heart of the race for the nation to increase graduation rates is a clear examination of the economic issues that impact graduation success. Throughout recent decades, students have been considered successful and have more opportunities to be productive adults if they finish high school requirements, receive a diploma, and move on to a job, the military, or engage in higher education. The on-time graduation rate is the main indicator of students' success used at present.

The Responsibility of Accountability as Linked to Graduation Rates

The *No Child Left Behind Act* seems to be the center of the blame or the appreciation generated upon the unpleasant discovery of the nation's low high school graduation rates (Swanson 2001). Educators and local, state, and federal policymakers throughout the country are currently turning their attention to high school completion rates with good reason (Hampden-Thompson, 2009, p. 1). Current national estimates suggest that each year, approximately one-third of public high school students fail to graduate from high school and "about three-fourths of white students graduate from high school, but only half of African-American and Hispanic students do" (Lawrence &Joydeep, 2006, p. 3). Putting this into further perspective, it is estimated that one high school student drops out of school every nine seconds (Anthes, 2008). Since the establishment of *No Child Left Behind* as federal law in 2001 and the report in 1986, *A*

Nation at Risk, public high schools have been under scrutiny unlike any other time in America's educational history. It is no secret that *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* has brought tighter and more stringent accountability for how all K-12 schools across the United States now view success.

Accountability and measurement of school performance has changed. Schools are now judged according to various achievement/assessment measures among sub-groups. High stakes test scores/assessment within and among groups of students based on race, gender, and socioeconomics are used to formulate the final yearly accountability of states, districts and schools (*NCLB, SCEOC*). Whether good or bad, accountability rests within the boundaries of NCLB (Berliner, 2009; Bennet 2009). Presently, the one measure gaining the most attention at the local, state, or national level is state and national graduation ratings. The *NCLB* Act of 2002 includes on time graduation as a primary objective (Lawrence &Joydeep, p. 2).

For the purposes of this study, the quality of a school, particularly the largest high school in South Carolina, is measured according to various categories as defined in *NCLB* (South Carolina Department of Education; SREB; Alliance for Excellent Education; The Graduation Project 2007). The school receives various rating components on its yearly school report card. Schools receive an "Absolute Rating" and a "Growth Rating." Additionally, "each school and district receives an indicator of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) based on the requirements of the federal *NCLB* Legislation" (SCEOC, p. 3). The school receives other ratings relating to End of Course (EOC) testing, High School Performance Assessment (HSAP) assessments, as well as other percentages regarding teacher and student attendance, retention rates, teacher education, and parent, student, and

faculty satisfaction with the school environment. These ratings and percentages are published in the school report card (published and distributed locally, state-wide, and nation-wide). These ratings can be "Excellent," "Good," "Average," and "Below Average."

If a school is found to be "Below Average" and does not make adequate improvement in certain areas, students/parents are given the opportunity to request to move to another school within the district that is "Average" or better. This effort grants students and parents the opportunity for an equitable educational experience. Parents write a letter of request to the school and/or school board, and if granted, the student(s) attend the new school at the school district's transportation and resource expense.

The significant measure used in this study is a school's high school on-time graduation rate. Graduation rates are most important; "Given the strength of the relationship between high school graduation and students' life prospects, graduation rates are at least as important as test scores in assessing the performance of our school system. Yet graduation rates have not received nearly as much attention as national test scores" (Greene, 2001, p. 5).   This happens because of the confusing, inconsistent and sometimes misleading ways in which the rate of high school completion is measured. Until 2012 the federal government *(NCLB)* has given individual states the autonomy to come up with their own system of calculating graduation rates; therefore, the national rate which is reportedly 71% (*National Education Center for Statistics)* may be significantly skewed. However, in 2012 all states must use the same calculation formula based on "the averaged freshman graduation rate" (SCEOC, 2009, p. 2). This measure will place all states on "the same playing field."

At present South Carolina ranks 45th in the nation in relation to graduation rates. This data is grim; only a surprising 61% of our high school students are reported to graduate in the "on-time" category (Lenard & Lord, 2009, p. 7). Even more alarming is that minority groups, especially Blacks and Hispanics, graduate at even lower rates in South Carolina (The Civil Rights Project). These rates are now reported as being as low as 51% for Black students and 46% for Hispanic students (South Carolina Department of Education, n.d.). The disparities between Black male students and their White male counterparts are most alarming. High school diplomas and graduation rates as they apply to "on-time graduates" are important points of concern for South Carolinians, as well as for all other Americans for real economic and social reasons. Without the assurance of high school graduation, students face a dark future of poverty and uncertainty.

Additionally, a student who falls behind his or her peers in attaining high school credits is more likely to drop out. The economic and earning power effects of a student's dropping out of high school show he or she will only have work opportunities in lower paid positions. The salary gap, sometimes as much as $10,000 per year, between drop outs and graduates is significant. The individuals who do not complete high school experience more criminal activity, have increased health deficits, and depend more on government subsidies (Antes, 2008). According to research, the commonality among Black males who are incarcerated, unemployed or victims of homicides appears to be a lack of education. Not only is this an individual's problem, but it also becomes a local, state, and national problem. Economically, the effects of students' not attaining a high school diploma and eventually dropping out of school are devastating at all levels.

What does "on time graduation" mean exactly? According to *NCLB* this means those students who begin their first year of high school in the ninth grade must acquire the proper and prescribed credits mandated for a diploma within a given state by the end of four school years. Simply stated, from the time a student enters grade nine in high school, he must graduate "on-time" in four years. In terms of accountability, those students who fail to finish on-time or those who drop-out figure into the percentages against a school's accountability. Any student who transfers to another state or district without proper forwarding documentation of where he or she is going to attend another school will be considered a drop out. Additionally, a student who leaves school to earn a Graduate Exam Diploma (GED) also counts against a school's graduation rate.

Presently in South Carolina, the graduation rate is one of the fourth lowest in the nation (Associated Press, 2008). In looking further into the problem, there is a definite achievement gap among groups of students, especially Caucasian students and minority students, with African-American and Hispanic students lagging even farther behind. Still there are students within all these groups who do succeed in on-time graduation. Certain factors are significant in contributing to that success.

<div align="center">Statement of the Problem</div>

"Students who fail to graduate from high school face a very bleak future. Because the basic skills conveyed in high school and higher education are essential for success in today's economy, students who do not receive these skills are likely to suffer with significantly reduced earnings and employment prospects" (Greene, 2001, p. 4). As dismal as the state graduation rate is in South Carolina, it is even worse for minority students. Though South Carolina has no specific data to date, (accurate data were not

kept until 2006) graduation rates as reported on state high school report cards show a gap between White and Black on-time graduates (South Carolina State Department of Education, n.d.). One important issue remains; "It is clear that there are shortcomings in the educational system that are particular to minority students" (Greene, 2001, p. 10). Whether these shortcomings are cultural, opportunistic, environmental, or personal remains inconsistent; the findings of this study will examine and bring these to light.

Problems arise in identifying those significant factors that impact successful on time graduation and making sure these students have opportunities to fair and equitable educational experiences that will further enable them to better prepare for stronger financial futures and better lives. Research shows that students in strong schools with proper resources, positive experiences, and good teachers do perform well (Darling-Hammond, 2009, Perry, Steele, Hilliard III, 2003). Clearly, minority students are falling behind, and it is the duty of public schools to impose comprehensive programs to help these students (Graham,n.d). This study will be significant in light of the large body of research about the lower graduation rates among minority males, specifically Black males.

Nature of the Study

This was a qualitative case study using individual interviews and video observations of seven, 17 to 19 year old Black male students, who classify as seniors, within a large high school in the lower east coast area of South Carolina. Of these students, several are behind at present for on-time graduation, but they still have the opportunity to recover lost credits and graduate on-time. Because the data are somewhat inconsistent as to what works in what situation (setting and time), giving an authentic

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voice to these students' experiences is most relevant to this study. The outcome is intended to examine and discover those significant factors that attribute to on-time graduation rates for Black male students in a large high school. This qualitative research method will be best because of the homogenous subgroup to be studied and will allow for individual student participants to give candid, personal feedback on their high school educational experiences.

Past research reveals that there are various cultural and environmental factors related to the reasons minorities begin their educational careers at a disadvantage. According to Jencks and Phillips (1998) as cited in "Achievement Gap in the United States," "[B]lack parents may not encourage early education in toddlers because they do not see the personal benefits of having exceptional academic skills…as a result of cultural differences, Black students tend to begin school with smaller vocabularies than their white classmates" (Wikipedia, p. 2).If this is true, Black students begin school already behind. Additionally, some Black students see education and being smart as "acting white" (Downey, 2008, Lee, 2002; C. Swinton, personal communication, February 15, 2010; Lee &Burkam, 2003, Ogbu as cited in Foley, 2004). By not trying to do well, they are consciously rejecting "the system" (Ogbu, as cited in Foley, 2004; Downey, 2008; Bireda, 2011) of American education which as Spring (2008) states is geared "to ensure the domination of a Protestant Anglo-American culture in the United States" (p. 4). Some theorists see the problem negatively as being a lack of self-esteem, self-identity, or even oppositional defiance (Ogbu as cited in Foley, 2004; Downey 2008; Foley 2004).

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Other factors that seem to impact success for this subgroup are varied. Resources such as after-school tutoring sessions, remedial programs, and credit recovery programs allow students to "recover credits they have lost so that they can move on to the next grade level and ultimately graduation" (Dessoff, 2009, p. 1). Additionally, supportive systems, attitudes of teachers and administration and smaller class environments also impact success (Brussow, 2007, Abstract). Still, understanding the qualities and existing commonalities of students who succeed in the same settings as those who do not is imperative. According to Barnes (1992), there is a certain profile for Black students who remain on track that includes"…their personal traits, family, school and environment (p.93). Because there is no one solution, through this study, on-time graduating students can give their authentic voices of what works within their high school to keep them on track. Likewise, those students who may not be currently on track can also offer information that can help improve graduation rates; therefore, using qualitative data collection methods such as interviews and video observations to consider common factors among students that impact staying on track for graduation is appropriate.

Research Questions

Major Research Question

What are significant factors distinguishing on time graduation among Black males?

Additional Sub-questions

What do students see as factors contributing to on time graduation? With that question in the forefront, the next question follows: What factors hinder students' success in graduating on time?

These questions relate to prior knowledge of the overall issue. There is an achievement gap, but for the purposes of this study, a graduation gap, and it is past time to direct attention to high school graduation rates, specifically within sub-groups such as Black males. Traditionally, these students show the poorest performance toward graduation rates even though the intention of the *No Child Left Behind* legislation was to target those sub-groups of underserved students by allowing them choice and affording them better opportunities.

Schools are now held accountable for student performance. The graduation rate is just one of the factors affecting high school Adequate Yearly Progress and Growth rates, but the graduation rate of a high school has an influential impact on how the school is viewed; therefore, the questions to be probed are relevant to this study. Some students attend this high school where the study will take place by "choice." These students come here by choice because the high school to which they were originally assigned or zoned was identified as a failing school. Many of these students come here for better educational opportunities. The expectations for these students are no different than those for any regularly assigned students, yet some succeed in graduating on time while others do not. The prior research on this subject reinforces the quantitative evidence that these students, Black males, continue to lag behind. But, what about those students who do succeed? What significant factors influence their successes? What are the barriers? What are the supports? The goal of this study is to uncover these factors and use the information and research to aid and impact more minority students through further study.

Because it is already known that this particular sub-group is behind, the task is to find out what supports or commonalities help students graduate on time. Another way of

addressing the problem is identifying the barriers, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, that might help or hinder this group in achieving on-time graduation. The problem is well known. It is time to address it and provide students with whatever resources are needed so that they can succeed in on time high school graduation.

The following questions helped the researcher determine the level of involvement of Black males in various programs in order to afford them on-time graduation.

1. In which courses were students most engaged?

2. What subjects/courses yield the most failures for these students?

3. What attributes and behaviors of teachers or their teaching styles did students find most favorable for learning?

4. In which grade levels and/or courses did students first experience difficulty?

5. What proportions of students participate in alternative programs designed to recover credits in order to catch up to grade level?

6. What is the cumulative high school graduation rate and poverty level for high schools within Charleston County School District?

7. What is the high school graduation rate for students?

Purpose of the Study

A study and examination of graduation rates at a larger high school based on gender, ethnicity, curriculum, and school environment suggest populations that have been traditionally underserved. Many prior studies regarding the problem have concentrated solely on qualitative analysis. However, this study aims to examine those factors that attribute or hinder to on-time graduation from students' perspectives. In understanding

their true experiences and allowing them to voice their stories, more information can be gleaned, and the findings of this study will provide keys for high schools, school administrators, and teachers to establish target populations for further support and/or alternate interventions in order to assist schools in improving the graduation rate among Black males.

<div align="center">Conceptual Framework</div>

Current literature from various sources ground this research study. Swanson (2001) stated that, "We are just now coming to an uncomfortable realization – the nation appears to be facing a crisis in high school completion" (Abstract). Other studies reveal that graduation rates are lower than previously thought because of the problems in calculating the graduation rate across the nation. Additionally, other researchers have recognized the importance of graduation rates. Balfanz and West (2006) reported that beginning about 2001, the nation began to realize that graduation rates were not as high as believed. Further, Mischel and Joydeep (2006) also suggested that graduation rates were inconsistent and oftentimes overstated because of varying measures and calculations. States were not consistent with graduation data. Various calculations have been used to determine graduation rates; therefore, the measures of the rates are inconsistent and frequently lower than reported.

Using a qualitative approach, Brussow (2007) also studied organizational characteristics and school culture to involve students from an alternative high school in a western state who graduated and received their high school diplomas. She gathered research through interviews and member checks in order to distinguish what alternative high school graduates saw as being important in high school culture and arriving at high

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school graduation. Some of the participants in the study were not on-time graduates, but Brussow (2007) did find that in analyzing the information, a "distinct pattern emerged showing the size of the school and classes, the structure of the school, and the attitudes of the teachers, administrators, and staff were the factors that most clearly defined these students' alternative school experience" (Abstract). The students saw smaller learning environments both within the school and in classes as important to their success in this setting. Additionally, Brussow reported that "the positive, helping attitude of the administration, teachers, and staff was a part of the culture that these students in this alternative setting recognized and valued most" (Abstract). With this information in mind, this proposed study was developed. Though this study is not within the setting of an alternative program, some of the same distinguishing factors for on time graduation rates among Black male students have come to light.

In a National Bureau of Economic Research paper published in 2007, Heckman and Lafontaine investigated the decline of graduation rates. They reported that depending upon definitions, methods, calculations, and/or data used, the U.S. graduation rate has been reported as being as low as 66% and as high as 88% which is quite a wide range. More alarming is the estimated rates for minorities, which are "even greater, from 50 to 85 percent." Their study focused on using "cleaner data, better methods, and a wide variety of data sources to estimate US graduation rates" (p. 1, para. 5). Lenard and Lord (2009) further confirm that high school graduation rates in the US "dipped four years in a row in the early 1990's and almost no one noticed for quite a while" (p. 1). No one noticed because there were no good, consistent ways to measure rates. The Alliance for Excellent Education report (2009) further confirmed that graduation rates are

unacceptably low, particularly among poor and minority students. These students are

succeeding at little more than a fifty percent graduation rate. Again, because of

inaccurate data, misleading official graduation calculations, and inadequate

accountability systems at state and national levels, these rates are likely skewed. Clearly,

there is a definite problem with graduation rate calculations, but as noted in

aforementioned studies and reports, the problem is more pronounced among minorities,

especially Black males and Hispanic males.

<div align="center">Theoretical Base</div>

For the purposes of this study, the research involved a comparative case study in

interpretism, through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT) using grounded theory

methodology. The philosophical assumption of case studies emphasizes that certain

features such as culture and language are related more specifically to particular

disciplines like sociology, anthropology, or psychology, and tend to rely upon select

methods like in-depth interviews and cross-case analysis (Glesne, 2010). Through this

approach, I sought to understand and describe social phenomenon from perspectives of

those most important, the participants.

> In qualitative inquiry, case study research refers to the intensive study of a case, but what a "case" means can vary, from one person to a village or from an event to a set of procedures such as the implementation of a particular program. The common denominator is that each – the person, he village, the event, the program – is a *bounded* integrated system with working parts (Stake, as cited in Glesne, 2010, p.17).

The researcher, in this case, decides what is included in the boundaries. This

comparative case study involved in-depth examination with data gathered through

participant interviews, observations, collection, and analysis.

According to Stake (as cited in Glesne, 2010, p. 22), there are three types of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. This research involved an instrumental study regarding significant factors that influence on-time graduation rates among Black males to "provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization." But, as Schram (as cited in Glesne, 2010, p.22) reminds us, "Whether you consider case study as a way of conceptualizing human social behavior or merely as a way of encapsulating it, its strategic value lies in its ability to draw attention to what can be learned from a single case." The focus is "on the complexity within the case, on its uniqueness, and its linkages to the social context of which it is part "(Glesne, 22).

Through the lens of CRT, a reflection of a history of oppression among Black males emerged. According to Leonardo (2004), CRT begins with a several basic insights. One is that racism is normal not abnormal in American society. Racism seems to be ingrained in the American landscape; it seems normal and natural to persons of the culture. According to Leonardo (2004), "Formal, equal opportunity – rules and laws that insist on treating blacks and whites [for example! alike – can thus remedy only the more extreme and shocking forms of injustice, the ones that do stand out. It can do little about the business-as-usual forms of racism that people of color confront every day and account for much misery, alienation and despair" (p. 12).

With CRT, however, emancipation is the goal, and non-acceptance of the "status quo" is foremost. Challenging social conditions and bringing to light the oppression of people of color, women, and others (gay, lesbian) can only allow for diversity and create a more diverse and relevant society. Thus, through theory, attempts are made to describe, explain, and analyze conditions within society and individual's lives (Leonardo, 2004).

Within the American society, as recognized even by states because of the way states report School Report Card data and achievement, there are differences among student achievement within groups and subgroups. Sadly, these reports bring out the very weaknesses of subgroups as measured next to the dominant, White culture. Schools must address the oppression and eventual emancipation of other sub-groups.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) addresses the marginally oppressed races. For the purposes of this discussion, the racial group of Black males is addressed. Critical Race Theory focuses on ways in which racism is so embedded in society that it appears "normal" for many, and portrays race as a socially constructed means to both identify and categorize people. As referenced in Glesne (2010), according to Madison (2005) and Schram (2006) CRT sees how both social and political forms of power work to include AND exclude people of color. Some Sociologists see public schooling as a means to maintain the existing social class structure which only benefits the dominant culture. However, by allowing students to confront racism, various goals are accomplished: readiness for the workplace (ability to work with others), learning from diverse perspectives, and an appreciation for one's own self-identity can be accomplished. If only one culture is reinforced through the curriculum, how are students to be prepared for a diverse society? Critical race theory allows marginalized people of color to have a voice.

<center>Operational Definitions</center>

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined.

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1. *Absolute performance*: The rating a school will receive based on the percentage of students meeting standard on the state's standards-based assessment (HSAP) (SCEOC, 2009, p. 6).

2. *Absolute rating:* The level of a school's academic performance on achievement measures for the current school year (SCEOC, 2009, p. 3).

3. *Academic identity:* For the purposes of this study, academic identity refers to how a student views himself as related to his or her skills in core content areas as compared to other students.

4. *Achievement Gap:* The disparity between white and minority students' state and national test scores, graduation rates, or other cumulative measures (SCEOC, 2009, p. 45).

5. *Adequate Yearly Progress* (AYP): In addition to state accountability system ratings, each school receives an indicator of Adequate Yearly Progress based on the requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. AYP specifies annual targets for the testing and achievement of all students and of specific demographic subgroups (SCEOC, 2009, p. 3).

6. *Alternative School Programs*: This refers to any educational program through direct or indirect, tutorial, credit recovery or remedial instruction geared toward helping students achieve. Additional alternative school programs may also include taking students out of the normal school population because of disciplinary issues and placing them in smaller classrooms and providing them with counseling and character education services. Alternative programs may

include computer software programs or direct instruction from certified

teachers (SC Dept. of Education website).

7. *A Nation at Risk:* A document/report published in 1983, by the U.S.

Department of Education's National Commission on Excellence in Education.

This document is often cited as the origin of current reform efforts. Issues

included in the document are strengthened graduation requirements, a call for

schools and colleges to adopt higher and measurable standards for academic

performance, increased amount of time students spend engaged in learning,

and requirements for higher standards for teachers through better preparation

and professional growth.

8. *Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR):* This rate, reported by NCES,

is based on enrollments and graduation counts. The calculation divides the

number of diploma recipients by the estimated first-time, ninth-grade class

size from four years earlier. By averaging 8th, 9th, and 10th grade

enrollments, the AFGR accounts for the "ninth-grade bulge" (an increase in

ninth-grade enrollment caused by high levels of failure in the ninth grade)

and, thereby, estimates the number of first-time ninth graders (Lenard & Lord,

2009, p. 4).

Note: According to the National Governor's Association by 2012, all states

will be required to use the AFGR calculation for graduation rates.

9. *"Choice" School:* According to NCLB and South Carolina Department of

Education, choice schools are those whose ratings are higher than schools that

have an "unsatisfactory" rating. A choice school is one that has "average" to

"excellent" ratings. Parents and students have the right to choose a school in order to receive a more quality education.

10. *"Choice" Students:* These students are those who have the opportunity to choose a different district school that has a more satisfactory rating. These students have the opportunity to attend a choice school at district expense.

11. *Cultural identity:* For the purposes of this study, cultural identity refers to how a student sees himself in relationship to his ethnicity in terms of traditional, cultural, and racial environment.

12. *Growth rating:* This rating refers to the level of growth in academic performance when comparing current performance to the previous year's performance (based on longitudinally matched student data and on differences between cohorts of students when longitudinal data are not available). Growth ratings also reflect reductions in achievement gaps between majority groups and historically underachieving groups of students as well as sustained high levels of school or district achievement (SCEOC, 2009, p. 3).

13. *HSAP:* This is a test or "exit exam" for first time 10th grade high school students. The South Carolina Department of Education defines HSAP as the High School Assessment Program, which tests students in the areas of writing, reading, and mathematics. Students in South Carolina must pass all three areas in order to receive a high school diploma (SC Dept. of Education website).

14. *Self-identity:* Fixed personal factors that are impossible or difficult to change and include attributes such as skin color, gender, age, size, physical disability, etc. Also referred to as *identity categories* (Glesne, 2011, p. 280).

15. *No Child Left Behind (NCLB):* Federal accountability law imposed is a U.S. Act of Congress Law that was proposed by the George W. Bush administration June 8, 2002.

16. *School identity:* For the purposes of this study, school identity refers to how a student sees himself both academically and culturally as related to other students within the school environment.

NCLB is the latest federal legislation that enacts the theories of standards-based education which is based on the belief that setting high standards and establishing measurable goals can improve individual outcomes in education. The Act requires states to develop assessments in basic skills to be given to all students in certain grades if those states are to receive federal funding for schools. The Act does not assert a national achievement standard; standards are set by each individual state.

The "Four Pillars" of NCLB are 1) stronger accountability, 2) more freedom for states and communities, 3) proven education methods, and 4) more choice for parents (Ed.gov, 2004).

17. *On time Graduation rate:* This rate is the percentage of all students (including students with disabilities) enrolled for the first time in grade nine four years prior to the year of the report card who earn a standard high school diploma (not GED), adjusted for transfers in and out of the school. Adjustments for students transferring out of the school or district cannot be

made for those students for whom there is no evidence of enrollment in another state diploma granting program (for example, requests for transcripts from another state diploma granting program, placement in juvenile or criminal justice system, etc.). Data from students who meet the state diploma requirements as a result of attending summer school and/or successfully passing HSAP in the summer following their senior year will be included in the calculation of the on-time graduation rate (SCEOC, 2009, p. 18).

18. *School Report Card:* This is the *y*early report according to individual school, district, and state presenting absolute ratings, growth ratings, AYP status, and NCLB Improvement status (SC Dept. of Education, 2009).

19. *Underserved students:* Traditionally, these students are those within groups of minority students such as African-American, Hispanic, or Native-American who are falling behind in the public school system (SC Dept. of Education website 2009).

Limitations

The researcher identifies the following limitations of this study:

1. The study is limited to one large South Carolina high school.

2. The demographic variables are few and may not recognize other probable factors that might influence high school graduation rates.

3. The data used in this study were obtained from Power School, interviews, and observations which were specific to this particular group of students.

Some of the limitations of this study have to do with the researcher's own subjectivity, positionality, and conviction. These may be limited by the fact that the researcher is

somewhat of an outsider to this school and is not Black. As the researcher, I am not even within their generation, and I have not experienced what these students have experienced. I do see, however, that these students have had more opportunities today than they would have had when I was in high school. I should hope that they will feel comfortable enough to share their high school experiences with me. Hopefully, they will see me as an interviewer and not an administrator. Also, I do not wish for them to try to please me by feeling they have to participate in this study. Some of these students who will be involved are not particularly "model" students and have had disciplinary or attendance problems. I must allow them to speak candidly and truthfully without passing any kind of judgment on them.

<div align="center">Significance of the Study</div>

This study is important for several reasons. Not only are graduation rates important to the school, school district, state, and nation, but they are also important to the individual students. The calculations used in South Carolina for high school graduation rates must be consistent with those used in other states in order to "level the playing field." Likewise, the data supplied by high schools must be truthful and accurate. Additionally, when common, significant factors influencing the success of on time Black male students surface, it would behoove the schools to target these various groups who are falling behind and better prepare them by giving them the skills, opportunities, support, and resources needed to bring them back to grade level and thus have them ready to graduate with their peers.

For the first time in years, schools are now held accountable thanks (or not) to *NCLB* (Chung, 2006, p. 2). Graduation rates are important; therefore, all schools,

districts, and states must work on this issue. Additionally, there are underserved groups who must receive the same educational opportunities as their white counterparts. If public schools are to thrive, professional educators must give attention to the rates at which students graduate, as well as providing all students with the skills and knowledge they will need to be successful in going into a job, career path, or college. There is now an urgency to increase on time graduation rates among all students due to accountability issues, but most importantly for the economic future of students and society. Not only will improving the graduation rates and readiness of students improve South Carolina both economically and socially, but it will also improve the quality of life for future generations of minorities.

Transition and Summary of Key Points

This study will examine, identify, and analyze some of the significant factors, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, affecting the graduation rate in South Carolina according to minority students. Through individual interviews with these Black male students, video observations and analysis, themes will emerge as students within this subgroup candidly discuss what they believe to be true and needed to improve graduation rates for them. Accountability has pushed states and the nation to raise the bar on education; therefore, schools and districts are looking for ways to increase student success. The real scope of this study is not only to raise graduation rates or to have schools achieve AYP, but it also seeks to find answers and further provide optimal, equitable educational experiences for all students, giving them paths that will enhance personal, social, and career possibilities.

In the next chapter, Chapter 2, a review of the literature used to support this study is exhibited. Graduation rates have changed over time and are now one of the most

significant indicators of school and student success; therefore, past studies and research

will be presented.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study examined significant factors impacting South Carolina on-time high school graduation rates among Black male students within a large high school. The literature review sought to examine the current crisis of on time high school graduation rates across the nation and specifically in South Carolina as related to Black male students. The study used data from the years 2001 to 2012 and information gathered from various websites, books, booklets, articles, and journals through the use of ERIC and EBSCOhost, Key words for the search were "high school graduation rates," "high school reform," "Black males and graduation rates," "South Carolina education and graduation rates," and "Disparities among Black males." Additional sources were South Carolina Department of Education, SC Education Oversight Committee, Southern Regional Board of Education and various studies and dissertations regarding high school graduation rates and calculations, problems in educating Black males, an individual school, and its Black male students.

Organization of the Review

The literature review for this chapter will begin with the history and evolution of equality and equity in the public school system and the importance of graduation rates. The review has been divided into the following subheadings: The Call for Equity and Equality in Public Education-Federal Requirements for Accountability in Public High

Schools (with respect to assessment and accountability), Additional South Carolina Requirements, Graduation Rate Calculation Discrepancies, Graduation Rates in South Carolina, Literature Related to Methods Used in This Study, Disparities Among Black Males, Intrinsic Factors and Extrinsic Factors.

The Call for Equity and Equality

Federal Requirements for Public High Schools

During the Reagan administration, the then Secretary of Education, Terrell Bell, created the National Commission on Excellence in Education August 26, 1981. The overall purpose of the Commission was to examine the quality of education and schooling in the United States and specifically, to give a report to the nation on the state of education. As cited in "Nation at Risk" Terrell's main concern was with "the widespread public perception that something was seriously remiss in our educational system" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 167). Simply stated, education and the entire school system should have had an important role in the economic success of the country at that time. It was also during this time that the Japanese economy's growth in the automotive industry placed potential alarm with political and economic leaders; therefore, they sought to examine the school's role in the US economy (p.167).

Thus began the attention to school performance and accountability. The report, *A Nation at Risk,* was "the result of 18 months of study" geared toward generating reform of the educational system (National Commission on Excellence in Education, p.167). The US was at risk because of various factors such as the low achievement of American students on various tests such as the SAT, the high percentage of American adults who

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were functionally illiterate, the inability of high school students to have and be able to use "higher order" thinking skills, college, business and military leaders' complaints about their having to spend millions on costly remedial programs in basic skills and numerous others (p 168). Additionally, the report presented recommendations for reform such as: "…strengthened state and local high school graduation requirements, more rigorous and measurable standards and higher expectations for academic performance, improved teacher education, teacher, and accountability for states, schools, educators, and political leaders" (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, pp.168-171).

The nation continued to follow some of the steps and recommendations of *A Nation at Risk* even three decades later with the onset of the Bush Administration's *No Child Left Behind* federal law. Accountability became more apparent, but states, local districts, and individual schools would be held to higher standards in the areas of student growth in assessment/achievement and graduation rates. Because of accountability, graduation rates became a tell-all sign of how well a high school was performing.

Additional South Carolina Requirements

In South Carolina, assessment and accountability went a little farther. Beginning with the November 2009 school report cards, various state assessments were used to calculate school and district ratings (SC Education Oversight Committee, 2008). Students in grades 3 through 8 were tested with the state exam, Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test, which changed to PASS this past year and first time ninth grade students were tested with End of Course exams and HSAP tests for first time 10th grade students.(South Carolina Department of Education). "First attempt HSAP results, longitudinal HSAP results, percentages of end-of-course test scores or 70 or higher and

on-time graduation rates were used in the calculation of school ratings in South Carolina

SCEOC, 2008, p. 4.). Assessment was now one of the two main factors figuring into a

school, district, or state's educational performance.

The South Carolina Education Oversight Committee also gave its attention to the

next important variable figuring into the rating of high success and performance - the

graduation rates of individual high schools and the overall, the state. Federal law now

required the reporting of these two components – assessment and graduation rates - into

accountability ratings.

<div align="center">Graduation Rate Calculation Discrepancies</div>

Because graduation rates are now significant in measuring performance, an

important factor is how graduation rates are actually measured. States have calculated

graduation rates in different ways: therefore, there is inconsistent, sometimes misleading

data on states, districts, and schools' performance. But perhaps the most disturbing factor

is the true graduation rate across subgroups. True, real, valid graduation rates must be

reported in order to solve problems with various groups such as Blacks and Hispanics.

Though some studies reviewed used varying aspects of quantitative measures and

mixed methods, previous studies are relevant to this study based on the information

presented on graduation rates within the past decade. Swanson (2001) analyzed

graduation rates in terms of using a calculation called "Cumulative Promotion Index" (p.

2, para. 3). This method went along with the definition of the high school rate as

specified by NCLB, so it could be used for federal accountability. "Cumulative

Promotion Index estimates graduation rates by measuring the cumulative progression of

student from the ninth through the 12th grade, including seniors who graduate. It is

particularly useful because of its rates for various groups within the general cohort, including racial and ethnic groups, and males and females (SREB, p. 3). In using this quantitative method, he reported that "the findings of this report do not paint an encouraging portrait of high school graduation for public schools in the United States. Nationwide, the overall graduation rate for the class of 2001 was estimated at 68 percent" (p. 3, para. 3). Further he found that in breaking down results by race and ethnicity, more than 75 percent of White and Asian students completed high school with a diploma. By stark contrast "... graduation rates for Black, American Indian, and Hispanic students were 50, 51, and 53 percent respectively" (p. 3, para.3). Swanson (2001) also found that males' graduation rates were lower than females, and interestingly graduation rates were also much lower for students who were educated in highly segregated, poorer, urban schools (p.3. para.3). There was a strong indication that there were regional differences as well as variations in performance among individual states. This study provides clear evidence that there is a need for graduation rate improvement not only in South Carolina, but also in other states.

Other researchers recognized the importance of graduation rates. Balfanz and West (2006) reported that beginning about 2001, the nation began to realize that graduation rates were not as high as believed. It was not until 2005 that there was a call to "implement a common method for measuring graduation rates." The National Governors Association agreed to mandate that all high school use the same method to measure graduation rates. This would be finalized by 2011. The method, "average freshmen graduation rate" was found to be one estimate that closely approximated a cohort graduation rate. It was found by dividing the total number of regular diplomas

awarded in the cohort's on-time graduation year by an average of the 8th grade, 9th grade, and 10th grade enrollments of that cohort. So, for the Class of 2006, the number of diplomas awarded in that year was compared to the total number of students enrolled in grade 8 in 2001-02, grade 9 in 2002-03, and grade 10 in 2003-04 (p. 4). In using this method, all states could have accurate data on graduation rates. Clearly, a uniform method was needed.

Lawrence and Joydeep (2006) also suggested that graduation rates were inconsistent and sometimes overstated because of varying measures. By using a studying survey about "what is known, and not known about high school completion rates – both their current levels and historical trends," researchers could gain more clear findings. A range of data sources was used including school records, household surveys, and longitudinal tracking of students.   Although this study used different measures, it did find that "there remain substantial race/ethnic gaps in graduation rates with regular diplomas." Though this study differs in methodology from this proposed study, the findings reveal problems with graduation rates and calculations.

In a National Bureau of Economic Research paper published in 2007, Heckman and Lafontaine investigated the decline of graduation rates. They report that depending upon definitions, methods, calculations, and/or data used, the US graduation rate has been reported as being a low as 66% and as high as 88% - quite a wide range, but more alarming is the estimated minority rates, which are "even greater – from 50 to 85 percent, but their study focused on using "cleaner data, better methods, and a wide variety of data sources to estimate US graduation rates" (p. 1, para. 5). They agreed that using "comparable measures used on comparable samples" a consensus could be reached

across all data sources (p. 1, para. 5). Heckman and Lafontaine (2007) did conclude that

graduation rates are lower for males than females, but particularly alarming were their

comparisons in graduation rates between minorities and whites. Their "estimated

graduation rate is 15 percentage points higher than the 50 percent rate reported in some

recent studies, but it is also 15 points lower than the NCES status completion rate (p. 2,

para. 12). They too called for a consistent measure for graduation rates if the US is to

solve its graduation rate problem. The methodology used in this study differs from that

of the qualitative nature of this proposed study, the information further validates a need

for more attention to unacceptable graduation rates.

Lenard and Lord (2009) confirm that high school graduation rates in the US

"dipped four years in a row in the early 1990's and almost no one noticed for quite a

while." (p. 1). No one noticed because there were no good, consistent ways to measure

rates. But because of new ways to monitor the progress of each graduating class, there

are tools to evaluate states' status. Through a reform effort created by the Southern

Regional Education Board (SREB), and in the last major SREB report on graduation rates

in 2005, rates were low across the SREB region and in many states but seemed to be on

the downward trend (p. 1). Lenard and Lord report that this trend is reversing because of

the attention being given to information on student progress. Although they report that

more work is needed, especially in the region's most troubled high schools, states now

can focus on problems. Certainly, more attention must be given to Black and Hispanic

students and to the region's males.

Though the studies and reports reviewed in this section may differ according to

methods and calculations of the high school graduation rate across the United States,

several indications are clear among all. Graduation rates must be calculated the same way state by state, school district by district, and high school by school. But there are differing factors that impact graduation rates. All information reviewed exhibited central messages: graduation rates are not where they should be and will not make requirements of 90 percent by 2011; the educational system is still not meeting the needs of minority students and attention must be given to them; therefore, research and study is needed regarding significant factors distinguishing on time graduation rates among Black male students.

The Alliance for Excellent Education report (2009) further confirmed that graduation rates are unacceptably low, particularly among poor and minority students. These students are at little more than 50 percent graduation rate. Again, because of inaccurate data, misleading official graduation calculations, and inadequate accountability systems at state and national levels, these rates are likely skewed. This report calls for federal law (*NCLB)* to demand certain changes in the components of the graduation rate policy. Among these are uniform definitions of graduation rates, graduation rate accountability, and like data. If these changes in policy were enacted, South Carolina's graduation rate would be affected. As of this study, only 66 percent of all students in South Carolina graduated with a regular diploma in four years. Studies show that if South Carolina improved its graduation rates among students of color, by just graduating them at the same rate as white students, $2.6 billion would be added to the SC economy by 2020. Not only would students benefit economically but the state would also.

Lenard and Lord (2009) also reported that South Carolina ranks 45th in the nation in relation to graduation rates. The state ranks even lower, 48th, in SAT scores. A surprising 61% of SC high school students were reported to graduate in the "on-time" category (p. 7). Even more alarming was that minority groups, especially Blacks and Hispanics, who graduate at even lower rates in South Carolina. Without question, these are shocking realizations. The study confirmed that high school diplomas and graduation rates as they applied to "on-time graduates" are important points of concern for South Carolina as well as for all other Americans educationally, economically and socially.

<div align="center">Literature Related to the Methods Used in This Study</div>

Several studies did align with the method to be used in this study (Brussow, 2007 and Beaumont, 2009). Brussow (2007) studied organizational characteristics and school culture to involve students from an alternative high school in a western state who had graduated and received their high school diploma. Like this study, she gathered research using the qualitative methods of interviewing and member checking to examine what alternative high school graduates see as being important in high school culture. Though the students interviewed were not necessarily on-time graduates, Brussow (2007) did find that in analyzing the information, a "distinct pattern emerged showing the size of the school and classes, the structure of the school, and the attitudes of the teachers, administrators, and staff were the factors that most clearly defined these students' alternative school experience." (Abstract). The students saw smaller learning environments – school and class – as important to their success in this setting. Additionally, Brussow (2007) reported that "The positive, helping attitude of the

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administration, teachers, and staff was a part of the culture that these students in this alternative setting recognized and valued most" (Abstract).

Additionally, Beaumont (2009) did a qualitative exploratory study similar to this study involving "…factors and processes associated with high school graduation among Black males in high urban contexts" (Abstract). She used older participants from a broader base, "…who had graduated from high schools in some of New Jersey's poorest and dejected urban districts. Through an analysis of multiple interviews with these participants, she used a case study method to uncover factors and processes that contributed to these Black males' success to graduation in an area where 65% fail to graduate at all.

<div align="center">Disparities among Black Males</div>

Among the overlying factors previously discussed (inaccurate ratings, misleading, inconsistent calculations, and demographic differences), one theme is particularly prevalent when researching graduation rates, and that is race. Studies, reports, briefs, and research confirm what is already known in South Carolina and across the nation. Minorities, in particularly one of the largest in the nation, Black males, continually fall behind in achievement and graduation rates.

A large body of research attempts to address and explain the problem of who finishes high school with a diploma in the allotted four years and who does not. Also, much has been done on the negative social and economic impact of economic non-graduates to themselves and society (Prevatt& Kelly, 2003). Additional studies and research have been conducted on the impact of school intervention programs and support

systems (e.g. Groth; Matthews and Swan, 1999), but there is little empirical evidence in the effectiveness of these programs (Prevatt& Kelly, 2003).

Many past studies focus attention on why Black males do not persist in staying on track for graduation; less attention has been given to how to help them stay on track. Still, little is known about how to support students' decisions to stay on course to graduation (Chritenson, Sinclair, Lehr, &Godber, 2001), but most of the discussion focuses on things other than students' having the choice to attend a high performing school. Some factors influencing Black males' success to on-time graduation include intrinsic themes such self-identity, motivation, cultural attitudes, and a lack of understanding of their history as a race, while extrinsic factors include sub-standard schools, poor resources, family background, peer influence, and the roles of teachers and parents (Darling-Hammond, 2009, Travis, Jr. &Ausbrooks, 2012, Hillard as cited in "Given Half a Chance" Kafele, 2010). Additional extrinsic factors may also include socioeconomics, caste, racist stereo-types, and low teacher expectations (Ogbu, Perry, Lee, 2002). The problem is two sided; there are relevant causes for persistent gaps in graduation rates and educational opportunities which show society and schools on one side, and the Black community on the other (Lee, 2002).

Intrinsic Factors

Black male students experience intrinsic problems with self-identity and self-esteem (Pollard, 1993, Kafele, 2010). Pollard (1993) reports, "African American adolescent male students have poor self-evaluation regarding their academic abilities (691). They lack motivation to perform and achieve because they believe that their teachers do not expect much of them and do not care. Black adolescent males are

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repeatedly denied access to adequate education, are subjected to low teacher expectations and often placed in special education classes (Pollard, 1993). Kafele (2010) further states, "To close the achievement gap, the education of Black male students must provide a foundation of self-identity…Students must acquire "self-knowledge" in who they are "Na-'Im Akbar, Know Thy Self" (p. 76).

> The missing component is the "crisis of self."
>
> There is a large disconnect in the Black community between the past and present that results in children not understanding who they are in a historical and cultural context. Students are out of touch with their history and culture because of the absence of a sustained exposure to their history in their classrooms, an absence that has roots all the way back to slavery. Who am I (self-identity)? How do I see myself (self-image)? How do I feel about myself (self-esteem)? Do I bring honor to myself (self-respect)? And, what am I doing to reach my potential (self-actualization)? (Kafele, 2010, p.77).

Black males must address this "crisis of self" and educators must present instruction that is culturally relevant, culturally appropriate, and culturally responsive to all students.

Further, various theorists believe in certain causes for Black male student disengagement and lagging achievement. Ogbu (2003) and Bireda (2011) both see intrinsic problems such as oppositional cultural identity and being reared in a caste minority system. Ogbu (2003) explained that Black males have developed oppositional cultural identity, where they have, because of their internal discrimination, developed their own culture. They show this oppositional culture in music (rapp, hip-hop, jazz), clothes (baggy, low rise, loose fitting), and even speech. These students long for equal educational opportunity, but that equality has not been attained. For this is where the concept of "acting white" was invented and used as a coping mechanism. Historically, Blacks were not asked to assimilate to white culture; they were not asked to incorporate white speech or the same behaviors, but with emancipation, Civil Rights, and

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desegregation came other requirements. Being equal meant they were required to act, speak, and behave according to white norms (Ogbu, 1998). These issues have brought about problems with racial identity. From his study of Black American students in an affluent suburb, Ogbu further states that "[I]t is Black students' own cultural attitudes that are a serious problem that is often neglected (cited in Lee, 2002). "No matter how you reform schools, it's not going to solve the problem. There are two parts – society and schools on one hand and the Black community on the other (Ogbu, 2003). Berida (2011) sees the issue as being a "caste minority system" where the Black race has been marginalized and underserved by the public school system for so long that they have become oppressed and this oppression now seems to be ingrained.

Extrinsic Factors

Darling-Hammond (2007) sees the extrinsic factors of opportunity and the inequality of schools. This is further emphasized in The Schott Report (2008) where researchers found that, "In reality, Black students in good schools do well. Good schools are fully resourced with talented, caring teachers, well-trained and numerous support staff, and protective and supportive administrators; poorly performing schools are not. Good schools have challenging curricula, high expectations for all students, and an expectation of success. Poor schools do not. Good schools have libraries and an adequate supply of textbooks and computers, art, and music programs, and science labs" (pp.3-4). Most schools with majority Black enrollments do not have these necessary resources (Schott Report, 2008). At the same time, White, non-Hispanic students who attend schools where most of the students are Black and their graduation rates are low do poorly as well (p. 3).

Dalton (2009) reported other outside factors such as high rates of suspension, high rates of expulsion, over-representation of Black males in special education, and under-representation in Advanced Placement courses (Dissertation Abstract summary). As cited in "Black Children Still Left Behind, Hall says "If you're behind two or three years in reading because you weren't taught the basics in third grade, [and you're supposed to be an independent reader, [then] you're labeled as "learning disabled". You're told you're a dummy. You get angry about that. And then you're labeled a behavior disorder" (2010, p. 28). Noguera and Akum (2000) agree that for years minorities have lagged behind on standardized tests, but the gap is ever present in graduation and dropout rates (p.29). They blame outside influences such as stereotypes, dysfunctional families, lazy unmotivated students, and the "culture of poverty" as causes of the gaps.

There is an urgent need to close the graduation gap. According to John Jackson in *The Urgency of Now* (2012), *The Schott 50 State Report on Education and Black Males*, many American high schools have become "drop-out" factories for minority males (p. 4). These drop-out are high schools where less than 50% of Black males drop out of high school or do not meet the graduation rate within four years. For nearly a decade, "the data indicate nationally the gap between the Black and White male graduation rate had only decreased three percentage points" (p. 4). At this slow rate, it would take 50 years of large scale intervention to close the graduation gap between Black and White males (p. 4).

Whatever the factors, intrinsic or extrinsic, the issues remain. Black male students with an inner, positive sense of self and motivation in good schools with proper resources can overcome obstacles. With the outside support of involved parents, caring

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teachers with high expectations for all students, and good schools equipped with the proper resources and curriculum, Black male students can achieve and reach on-time graduation.

<div align="center">Transition and Summary of Key Points</div>

The studies and research reviewed in this chapter strongly validate and confirm the inequality of graduation rates across the nation in terms of how rates are calculated. More importantly, the major disparities among Black males and their counterparts have been discussed whether these are intrinsic factors or extrinsic factors. The next chapter, Chapter 3, will present the Research Design and Methodology.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

As I now approach my 23rd year in education, various experiences have given me a number of perceptions related to the topic of on-time graduation. Concepts that have informed my research include:

- High school graduation is important to all students' self-worth as individuals.

- Like all other students, Black males do value education and graduation.

- All educators have the professional and moral responsibility to provide every student with the resources and support, qualified teaching staff, school environment, and curriculum for the direct path to graduation.

- Students know what they need in terms of reaching successful graduation.

These beliefs have helped guide me in my professional decisions and my choice of this topic.

This chapter discusses the methods used to conduct the research. The purpose of this study was to determine significant factors distinguishing successful, on-time high school graduation rates among Black males in South Carolina in a large high school on the lower eastern coast. Using a case study approach, it examined and analyzed the participants' perceptions and perspectives of their own lived experiences of how self-identity, motivational focus, family, peer influence, teacher-student relationships, school environment, and curriculum contribute to overall successful graduation rates. Seven

Black male 17 to 19 year old students from grade twelve were interviewed through audio-taping; observations of students within their classes were conducted. Of the students, five will graduate in the "on-time" category while one will definitely need further course work, and at present, the other participant's outcome is unsure. This study will contribute to the literature on students and high school on-time graduation rates among Black males in South Carolina. This chapter addresses the study design, the role of the researcher, questions, context of the study, measures for ethical protection, participation criterion, data collection, trustworthiness, and data analysis.

Qualitative research uses the researcher as the primary instrument of exploration into the study of a certain phenomenon. Glesne (2010) suggests that qualitative research has at its base the belief that an individual socially constructs reality based on his own experiences; however, this is changeable through social interaction. As related to this study, the researcher sought to study the "lived experiences of the participants" involved (Heppner & Heppner, 2004, p. 137). The researcher as both observer and interpreter interviewed, observed, analyzed, coded and compared transcripts and field notes to make sense of how these participants view their high school experiences as related to successful on-time high school graduation or what they see as impediments to that end. Glesne (2010) also says that qualitative research is interpretive and should be conducted in a natural setting. Through the study, the researcher interpreted and gained a better understanding of what these students see; therefore, qualitative methods were more important in this study to further envelope the students' individual points of view through personal interviews (Heppner & Heppner, 2004). The primary goal was to discover their own distinguishing factors on what leads to on-time graduation. It was practical as well

as advantageous to use a qualitative study to discover the authentic factors distinguishing on-time graduation rates among Black males as they see them.

<div align="center">Qualitative Design: Comparative Case Study</div>

Quantitative studies on graduation rates abound, but the fact remains that these are "numbers" and/or representations of students' successful or unsuccessful on-time graduation rates. Though this information is valuable and much needed in order to know where problems are as related to graduation rates and among groups and subgroups of students, I as researcher, sought to gather information from the students themselves in order to draw a clearer understanding of the problems and solutions among this subgroup. I desired to determine which significant factors distinguish on-time graduation; therefore, my decision of using a comparative case study based upon grounded theory was justified. Case studies deeply address a fewer number of participants, and interviews and observations of a smaller number of students gained, as Merriman (1998) described, "an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning of those involved" (p. 19). Further, Merriman saw the case study as being inter-related and specific to what it reveals about some phenomenon on which it focuses. The final product should be richly descriptive thus leading to a greater understanding of the problem. When delving into a single phenomenon or case, "the researcher aims to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon" (Merriman, 1998, p. 29).

Because this study examined and interpreted the perceptions of what Blackmale students/participants themselves see as factors regarding their successful on-time graduation rates**,** or what they see as impediments**,** a qualitative study in grounded theory approach was used. Through the process of data collection, analysis, and comparisons

from interviews and observations with students among this subgroup, graduation rates were studied and determinations of theory emerged. Those determining factors were findings arrived at not by statistics or quantifications that see this problem of graduation rates as being more about numbers; consequently, they were collections of data gathered through rich descriptions of the participants' experiences, as they see them, within their natural high school setting. Through personal interviews, observations and rich descriptions of these experiences, themes were identified, coded, and analyzed to seek grounded theory in understanding the critical need for improving the high school graduation rates among this subgroup of students in this particular school in South Carolina. Their personal views allowed me, the researcher, to interpret and discover more meaningful information into the problem and thus direct others to possible interventions or additional help.

The study used information from SASI (South Carolina Department of Education Data Base) and Power School to identify seven 17 to 19 old, 12th grade Black male students. After students were identified and invited to participate, data was gathered through open-ended interviews at the school within the natural high school setting.

<center>Role of the Researcher in Data Collection</center>

For this study, the researcher was the primary instrument for data collection, interpretation, and analysis. The researcher as this human instrument mediated the data rather than having used inventories, questionnaires, or surveys to arrive at grounded theory (Creswell, 1994, p. 1). Through personal interviews and observations, discussions surrounding the major research question of significant factors distinguishing on-time graduation rates emerged.

The interview questions were developed by the researcher based on information from the literature on state and federal guidelines andgraduation rates (gender, ethnicity) across the nation and in particularly, South Carolina. Additionally, other pertinent information from previous research and similar studies guided the study. The purpose of the interviews was to gather information and draw meaningful discussion from the students' perspectives in identifying significant factors that contribute to on-time graduation rates among Black males.

Questions

To understand the significant factors distinguishing successful, on-time high school graduation rates among Black male students, the researcher used the following questions to guide the focus of study:

1. Tell me about your high school experience thus far in terms of school curriculum, school climate, teacher – student relationships, or any other distinguishing factors that may contribute your high school success.

2. Why is graduation important to you?

3. Where are you on your path to graduation?

Because of the varied school experiences of the students and the discussionary nature of the questions, students were interviewed individually. In past studies, there are various factors recognized that contribute to success in high school. These factors range from caring teachers, school atmosphere, administrators, smaller learning communities, and resources; however, through the interviews, the researcher gathered authentic data and identify common traits and factors among successful Black male students as well as common traits and factors among Black male students who may be farther behind and

will not achieve on-time graduation. It was the intent of the researcher to speak with the students in a comfortable environment within the school setting. Observations were also conducted to see the students in a natural classroom setting by seeing their reactions and behaviors among their peers and teachers.

<center>Context of the Study</center>

The researcher began the data collection through the use of the South Carolina Department of Education data base, SASI and Power School. Student information such as addresses, phone numbers, social security numbers, emergency contacts, parent/sibling information, and free and reduced lunch status are housed here, along with grades, class rank, GPA, grade classification, entrance dates, and discipline information. A query was conducted to identify twelve to fifteen Black male student, aged 17 or thereof to participate.

At the time of this research, the student population was 3,554. To begin the data collection, an introductory letter of informed consent was sent to approximately 15 identified Black males explaining the purpose of the study, the interview with the researcher, the nature of the study, and the guarantee of confidentiality (Appendix A). If students were 17 years old, they were required to return the informed consent letter with parental signature. Parents were also contacted by phone to make sure permission had been granted. Of the 15 students, it was intended that perhaps 8 to 10 would respond and agree to come for interviews. The researcher developed eight open-ended questions for the interview. It was the intent of the researcher to invite discussion based on the focus of the questions.

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After students were identified, the researcher met with students for a brief introduction and asked them for interviews and permission to observe them. Interviews were later conducted and transcribed by the use of a tape recorder. With regard to the research questions listed earlier, the following questions were asked during interview sessions with students:

1. Tell me about your school background.

2. What school characteristics do you see as being important for student success?

3. What behaviors of teachers allow students the most favorable learning environment?

4. What is a good teacher-student relationship?

5. Why is this important?

6. How have this school, the curriculum and the teachers been in helping you achieve success toward graduation?

7. Why do you think on-time graduation important?

8. What is the most important factor contributing to successful, on-time high school graduation?

Responses to interview questions were audio taped and transcribed, coded, and analyzed. Observations were then conducted and field notes were composed regarding student interactions in classrooms with peers, behaviors, and teacher-student relationships.

<center>Measures for Ethical Protection</center>

To insure confidentiality, an introductory/permission letter was sent out to fifteen students identified during their advisory period at school (Appendix). Of those who responded, approximately six to eight were asked to come for the interviews bringing

with them permission from parents/guardians if they were seventeen years of age and wished to participate. Participation was voluntary. Participants were advised that they were free to refuse to answer any interview question at any time; they were assured that they could also withdraw from participating in the study at any time. The researcher assured students of anonymity. Excerpts from the interviews may be part of the final research report, but under no circumstances were names or identifying characteristics other than gender and ethnicity, to be included in the analysis.

The data from interviews will be held secure through various means. Before and during interviews, students were reminded of confidentially and directed to try as much as possible not to mention particular names, but to use phrases such as "my English teacher," or my "2nd block class, etc. – remaining as inconspicuous as possible. When transcribed, names and identifiable information were omitted. After audio taped interviews were transcribed and coded not by student name, but by number, the tapes were housed in a secure location/file within the researcher's office. These tapes will be destroyed after a period of several years. Permission letters will also be housed in the same secure file.

<div align="center">Criteria for Selecting Participants</div>

As shown in the literature, because on-time graduation rates are crucial to South Carolina's public school system accountability as well as across the nation, students within a certain minority group, specifically Black males, were chosen for the study. This sub-group has been recognized through previous data and studies as being traditionally behind their White counterparts in achievement and graduation rates. As one of the basic features of grounded theory and within this particular study, the

beginning sample comprised, "a select sample of individuals to study based on their contribution to the development of the theory" (Heppner & Heppner, 2004, p. 154). This sample, though homogeneous at first, changed as the data collected from interviews emerge. Among the group, there were those who are bound for on-time graduation and those who may be farther behind. Significant factors did emerge.

In order to address the original problem of on-time graduation, factors were identified as distinguishing themes for on-time graduation rates among this group. Participants ranged from being on-track for on-time graduation to being one semester to a year behind. At the time of the study, the school boasted an "Excellent" Absolute Rating. Among the some 3,550 students, approximately 1,000 students live at or below the poverty level. The school demographics involve a population of 20% minority and 79% White. This school is most successful in that students enjoy a range of over 250 course offerings. There are a variety of clubs and organizations for students. The success revels from the high expectations of teachers, numerous choices for students, excellent sports teams and opportunities in the arts.

Through the participation of seven Black male students, a small sampling of this subgroup was studied and themes emerged. These seven students will have had the opportunity to attend a high school with an excellent rating; therefore, it is imperative to examine factors they perceive as getting them to on-time graduation. With the one-on-one interviews, students could be honest as they discussed their reasons for success and/or failure. The observations also provided needed student behavioral interaction.

This purposeful sample population involved seven Black male 12th grade students in a large South Carolina high school located on the lower eastern coast. Students were

selected based on grade classification (12th grade) gender, ethnicity, and potential for on-time graduation. Though members of this participation group bear some of the same demographic features, going back to the original research question of distinguishing factors influencing graduation rates, differences emerged in relation to what the students perceive as successful high school completion, thus the theory emerged.

This study was important in identifying significant factors distinguishing Black male, on-time graduates. Students were selected based availability and access for interviews and observations within the school setting. Their class schedules were extracted from Power School, and they were asked to come from elective classes to interview during the school day. The students were also observed and videoed in various class settings in order to recognize characteristics of their school interactions. Since most of these students ride buses to the school, there was little time before or after school for interviews. Some students were situated in English and math classes within close proximity of the researcher's office; therefore, there was already a familiarity established among the participants and the researcher. The researcher had had interactions with most of the students in prior instances, so there was a comfortable rapport.

Data Collection

Information from the school's 2011 and 2012 South Carolina report card was collected from the South Carolina State Department of Education so that the researcher had current graduation data from the past two years. Though the sample/participant students will not be the same students recognized in these report cards, the data allowed the researcher to view previous graduation trends among this sub-group at this school. After students were identified through the SASI and Power School extraction/query,

theintroductory/permission letter was sent to 15 Black male students during their

advisory period (Appendix). They were asked to return the letters to their teachers the

following week if they were interested in participating in the study. As the teachers

collected the letters, they sent them to the researcher, who is also housed at the school.

As letters were collected, the researcher began to meet with students at the school for

interviews. The interviews followed an in-depth, unstructured format where discussion

was welcomed and encouraged. The interviews were audio tape recorded and

transcribed, and there was ongoing analysis throughout the study. Also, each of the

seven students was observed and video-taped in two different class settings to compare

classroom interaction and participation. Field notes were used to compare student

observations.

   After the interviews and observations concluded, were noted and transcribed, the

students were asked to return to the researcher for a "member-check" to review the

transcripts for additions or corrections. Through this process, credibility of the data was

also enhanced (Heppner & Heppner, 2004, p. 166).

<center>Trustworthiness</center>

   Since the researcher is the primary instrument of the study as stated previously, to

produce and maintain trustworthiness of this study, I was attentive to the actions and

reactions of the students during interviews and in observations. Appropriate and

sufficient time was spent with each student during individual interviews and during

member checks so that there was an environment of trust established between the

researcher and the students. Through this prolonged engagement and within a regular

school setting, a level of comfort was maintained. Though I am an administrator in

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charge of discipline of 10th-12th grade students in the alphabet of Gl-Kl (last names), none

of the seven participants were within my disciplinary range; thus, I did not know any of

these students prior to the study. I continuously developed a rapport with the

student/participants not only through interviews, but also through daily interactions in the

school hallways. Important to the outcome of this study was gaining the trust of the

participants so that personal opinions and experiences regarding their thoughts and

feelings about distinguishing factors impacting on-time graduation rates would be

discovered.

<center>How and When Data Analysis Was Analyzed</center>

Informational data was transcribed from the interviews and compared and

organized on the basis of common answers and factors students deem important to on-

time graduation rates. The researcher identified specific factors among the participants'

responses during the interviews and followed up member checks in order to develop a

system of coding. Through this coding process, the researcher labeled and grouped

factors distinguishing on-time graduation rates among this subgroup as stated by

participants from the interviews, discussions, and follow-up member checks.

Additionally, through field notes of observations, classroom interactions and participation

were analyzed. Data analysis was on-going throughout the study. Themes emerged as

the data was analyzed. If discrepancies of data analysis arose, the researcher included

this information in the research study, and recommendations for further study will be

suggested. The researcher sought to validate relationships in the model and develop the

grounded theory behind the phenomenon of graduation rates among this subgroup. It was

the intent of the researcher that there would be distinguishing factors discovered for on-

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time graduation rates among Black males and most probably factors that may even discourage on-time graduation rates among this subgroup. The theory arose from the analysis and interpretations of students' perceptions of those distinguishing factors among on-time graduation rates and those factors among students' not graduating on-time.

Transition and Summary of Key Points

This chapter described the grounded theory design and methodology used to identify significant factors distinguishing on-time graduation rates among Black male students. The interviews and observations were transcribed, and common themes developed. Student interactions within natural classroom settings revealed significant factors to improve graduation rates among this subgroup. The next chapter, Chapter 4, will describe the process of obtaining, gathering, and recording data. Through the student interviews and observations, patterns, relationships, and themes were described and emerged as the findings supported the data.

CHAPTER 4

PROCESS BY WHICH DATA WERE GENERATED, GATHERED, AND
RECORDED

The purpose of this comparative case study was to use qualitative research

methods to examine significant factors distinguishing successful high school graduation

rates among Black males. By using the genuine voices of these seven young men, the

findings revealed that there were reasons why some students made it to on-time

graduation as well as reasons as to why some did not. At the school level, knowledge

about the barriers and support systems students reported can be significant in informing

high school leaders, guidance counselors, and teachers about how to gage assistance for

Black male students and providing needed support and avenues to success. More

importantly, this knowledge can aid in narrowing the opportunity gap, achievement gap,

and finally, the graduation gap between White and Black students.

The following specific research questions helped the researcher determine the

level of involvement of Black males in various programs in order to afford them "on-

time" graduation:

1. What courses were students most engaged in?

2. What subjects/courses yield the most failures for these students?

3. What attributes and behaviors of teachers (teaching styles) did students find

most favorable for learning?

4. What grade levels and/or courses did students first experience difficulty?

5. What proportions of students participate in alternate programs designed to recover credits in order to catch up to grade level?

6. What is the cumulative high school graduation rate and poverty level for high schools within Charleston County School District?

7. What is the high school graduation rate for Black male students at this high school?

To understand the significant factors distinguishing successful, on-time high school graduation rates among Black male students, I used the following questions to guide the focus of study:

1. Tell me about your high school experience so far in terms of school curriculum, school environment, teacher – student relationships, or any other distinguishing factors that may contribute to your high school success.

2.   Where are you on your path to graduation?

Specifically aimed at reasons some Black high school male students reach on-time graduation while others do not, the goal of this study is to give educators a greater knowledge that can lead to change in providing necessary support for all students.

The study was conducted over the course of several semesters during the years 2011 and 2012 at the largest high school in South Carolina. The make-up this school is 79% White, 19% Black and 1% other. Although this school is well-known across the state and nation for providing students with an excellent educational experience through its some 250 course and curricular opportunities, state recognized sports teams, and high standardized test scores, the graduation rate is 85.3%. Approximately 75% of seniors graduate with 28 credits rather than the minimally required 24 credits in South Carolina.

While these percentages are reputable, it is the hope that ALL students will reach on-time graduation. As supported by the literature, (Lenard & Lloyd, et. al.), the highest percentage of students failing to meet the on-time graduation requirements are minority students. A significant number of Black male students still fall behind sometime during their high school career and therefore do not reach on-time graduation. This study included interviews and observations with seven, seventeen to 17 to 19 year old Black male students and an examination of the barriers and supports these students reported as responsible elements in their high school journeys.

Throughout the study, interviews were audio taped and transcribed, and observation/field notes were coded and used to analyze common themes. This constant comparative analysis allowed the emergence of common themes. Two intrinsic themes emerged. These were self-identity and motivation while five extrinsic themes emerged. Extrinsic themes included opportunities for extended curriculum, encouragement and expectations of teachers, strong student-teacher relationships, school involvement, and peer pressure.Clearly, each of the themes represented some barrier or a support for the students. The findings of the research and conclusions emerged through a comparison of these various themes among, between, and beyond the individual student cases that envelope the larger case study.

The research questions stated earlier guided the organization of this chapter. In Section 1, individual cases are presented.Each participant presents his story and high school educational experience in reaching on-time graduation. In drawing upon these stories, Section 2 then probes the common intrinsic and extrinsic factorsthat contribute to each student's success. Section 3 discusses how understanding the students may provide

contextual understandings of these successes or failures, which may then supply greater knowledge to improve the on-time graduation rate among this group.

<center>Section 1 – Case Studies and Observations</center>

Case Study: Kafar

Out-going, rambunctious, and sometimes unfocused, 19 year old Kafar is a high school senior, who is classified as "learning disabled." Kafar is the middle child living in a single-parent home with his mother and older sister. His sister has a 2 year old toddler who also resides in the home. He has a younger sister who is in middle school. Though they do not own the home, they have lived in the "North Area" neighborhood for seven years. His father is non-participatory and has been absent from Kafar's life since his early childhood. Kafar qualifies for free lunch, but he manages a part time job approximately 20 hours a week at the local Wal-Mart. At present, he has a 1.95 grade point average (GPA) of which he is quite proud because he is within sight of a 2.0 GPA and eventual graduation. He will be the first in his family to graduate from high school with a diploma, whether on time or not.

As the middle of two siblings and the only male, he displays some characteristics common among middle children. He is eager to please and maintains what he calls, "the balance" among his siblings. Kafar feels he has struggled throughout his educational career, but the opportunities at this high school have provided him with the support he has needed. He has received special education services since 2nd grade through a pull-out resource program. Kafar was "held back" in grade two. According to him, "I think this is where it all started…I mean when I got behind…I was tested by the school system, and they said I had some reading trouble." He repeated the second grade. Special

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education services were a part of his educational experience throughout elementary, middle, and high school. Kafar also lagged behind in the number of credits after his 9th grade year, so he began his second year of high school as a third semester freshman. As previously presented, research indicates that the larger percentage of students who fall behind do so the freshman year (Lenard & Lord, Brussow, SREB).

Kafar is most proud of his ability to as he phrases it "[to]…finally pass the reading portion of HSAP! It took me three years, but I did it!" Although he will need additional time and course work after regular June graduation, he will in fact graduate in August. He credits help from all the intervention opportunities, the teachers at the high school, especially Ms. G., for his being able to accomplish his goal of graduation. At this point, he plans to graduate, work for a while and attend the local technical school. He appears to be comfortable with his present situation, but he is well aware of his reading struggles as he says, "You know, I know I got some disabilities, but I think I might be okay. I just don't read very good…Ms. G says that might come easier for me if I'd just read! Problem is, I don't want to! I don't like it...I've always had trouble." He further stated that Ms. G provided other avenues to gain his interest in reading and understanding as he puts it, "She [Ms. G] had us read some poems, ya know? Some dude from the 60's who sang…like poetry. Then she showed me how rap is like poetry. I want to rap and make money like my friend. I think I can do it…just gotta get this diploma thing out of the way."

Regarding how he feels about the importance of graduating, Kafar recognizes that he has had a good opportunity by coming to this school by "choice." His "home" school was labeled "failing"; therefore, he was afforded the opportunity to come to this

successful school. He stated, "It's kind of a right. Ya know what I'm sayin? My mama says I had a good opportunity by being able to come here [this high school]. Again, it's just, I really don't like to read. I got big plans, but everybody tell me I gotta get me some education. Ma don't like me talking about rappin,...she say, I just gotta get that diploma and go to work, but it's rappin is my dream."

Kafar also shared what personal characteristics he sees as being important for his success, he replied, "First off, you gotta be yourself…at all times; that's just what's most important. Something else yagotta do is be honest and just gotta be focused…yea, focused on what you are trying to do." In regard to necessary school environmental characteristics, Kafar said it was important to have some focus, like "Walking the Warrior Way." Kafar referenced receiving a "Golden Warrior Award" on several occasions. The "Golden Warrior Award" program was developed by the teachers and administration at this school to recognize students who might not be recognized for academics, sports, or other accolades. Teachers, administrators, or any other staff member may recognize one student per month as a "Golden Warrior" through observing simple acts such as students' being respectful, punctual, polite, and helpful to others. Further, he replied, "[You] Gotta be respectable of teachers, staff folks, and people you hang with...and yourself...being responsible...get to class on time…get your work done, and turned in on time. More like… Um, being organized. Yea, you gotta be organized just to survive in high school...being focused and having the determination and the will to graduate."

Kafar has had some disciplinary issues at school, ranging from simple infractions such as tardiness and class cuts, to having been in several physical altercations. He was

arrested last year because of a fight at school stemming from a neighborhood dispute. Even with this past trouble, he seems to like the school. Although Kafar comes here as a "choice" student, this school is quite large. When asked about the school and large size, he recognizes the pros and cons of the size, he said, "It's very good... it's positive because you meet people every day that you never seen before in your whole four years here. Like I mean, I've been here for three years, and every day I meet somebody different. I get to learn about different cultures and different styles, different personalities, all at once, so it's good...I mean, instead of seeing the same faces every day." Referencing class size, his preference, and being in smaller classes, he said, "They [his classes] are big and small, well, some are really big and then you have some that are really small... I feel like it's better if the class is smaller... really better because you get more attention from teachers...they can help you more... the bad thing is being in classes with people you know too good. You know what I'm sayin? I get in trouble when I'm with too many of them."

Kafar commented on the kinds of behaviors of the teachers that have allowed him the most favorable learning environment. He confided that he liked, teachers who care and take time with their students. Further he commented on teachers who put extra effort into helping students learn. He shared that, "It takes me a little longer with my reading and all so sometimes instead of us writing down notes, some teachers actually take the time to print out the notes, have it where we can fill in the blanks so that we can understand it better." Kafar also recognizes and values a good teacher-student relationship. He stated,

> A good teacher-student relationship…ah.. I say like um, understanding on both
> ends? It's like knowing each other's boundaries, so certain stuff won't get

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crossed. Or, a positive relationship where you know, you can like be able to criticize on both sides and either side doesn't take it personally or take it as a negative…everybody needs criticism. Um, ones who focus more on both sides… who pushes both… teacher and student push each other to do better. Cuz, cuz, it's a lot that teachers can learn from us, and us students, we can learn from our teachers, so…I think it's important because, um, a lot of situations…certain people will get looked down upon? And, if you have that right teacher-student bond you have at least someone, who, who is positive in your corner.

As shown in the literature(Berita, Kafele, Ogbu, Perry et.al) Kafar disclosed some barriers that get in the way. He named peer pressure as a hindrance. He explained that students have many different struggles, and sometimes he feels that the only people who listen and truly understand what he's going through at certain times are his peers, but he does recognize that sometimes these same peers have steered him in the wrong direction. This is why he credits good teacher-student relationships as being important. He stated, "You have someone [a teacher] you can go to and you can go talk to them…open up and get someone who can help you…That's a big plus in your corner because that's even…even helping us graduate… I'd say, 8 out of 10 teachers I've had out my whole three years here, I've had great relationships with, so that's given me the edge to move forward and actually graduate…Half the trouble I got into here was cause of "friends." I shoulda known better."

Other barriers he discussed were being in special education classes and not being able to take advantage of such a large curriculum and some of the elective course he would have had. He said, "Being in a pull out resource class all three years here has been good and bad…I know it has helped me, but I missed out on taking some fun classes like steel drums and gaming and animation…I do have the reading disability thing, and I got the help I needed, but just having more time in my schedule would've been cool...I really had a fair amount of stuff I could take though. This school offers a lot of cool choices."

Kafar also said stereotypes of Black males and being labeled were barriers. When questioned about stereotypes of Black males, Kafar was candid in replying that he believes Black males do get labeled at some point. He said,

> When you see the news and see actual stats, it's like we [Black males] have the lowest high school graduation rate, so it's like if more people that dropped out hadn't been called lazy, dumb, just a bad kid, they wouldn't have ever dropped out – like me. I had plans to drop out my sophomore year. And, cause of the fact that you and other folk here at school, teachers who I had good relationships with, that changed my mind. You expected me to graduate. I saw I had people in my corner who actually on the other side. So, that made all the difference!

Further, Kafar feels graduation is important as being a representation of "rite of passage" of sorts. Clearly, he is looking forward to this moment.

> It's [graduation] important because everybody wants to graduate! Everybody, everybody starts out with a certain group of friends and you been through so much with all those people...Friends from kindergarten, to pre-school, to elementary, to middle, and finally high school. It's just so wonderful to go through so much with your friends and learn life lessons and to be able to graduate on time with that same group of friends you met back at 'cookie time' or nap time or whatever, you know it's just really, really important…It's hugely important and it's a big success! It's just important – it puts a smile on my face just to see myself graduating with people I grew up with…It's just soooo important! Because it's so many jobs that's not taking people without a high school diploma – even if you have a GED – that's just not even good enough! And, a high school diploma is just barely hittin the door in getting a job. Even some places like McDonalds want you to have a high school diploma. So if you have a diploma, you are least getting a foot in the door, so you have a chance to receive a chance.

Of all the things Kafar discussed, he said the significant factor that has helped him to graduation even though not on-time is his help and support from teachers.

> The most important thing that has helped me is my relationships with my teachers, principals, staff members, even janitors. Everybody that works at this school is…positive … you have a place… a real place…relationships …these are what help you… in your step to graduation… they help you learn to get there.

Because, you can always learn something from SOMEBODY! And it's just amazing to me to have those kinds of relationships with the adults here at [this school] because without that, half of us wouldn't even be graduating. That's the biggest thing, me being behind and catchin up –being a Black male – we really need someone like this in our lives because we mostly get looked down upon. It's like a lot of stuff, I don't know? that bond… it's just a wonderful feeling…that encouragement…like you know, when I get here in the morning, I can always find somebody, some adult I can go to if I have something wrong. If one adult is busy, I can find someone else I can go to. And basically, that's what I needed to help me graduate.

Observations

Kafar was observed on several occasions. The first observation was in his math, probability and stats class. The class was taught by a male teacher and was particularly large having twenty-eight students, but there was an inclusion teacher in the classroom along with the regular education math teacher. The inclusion teacher was female. Though his learning disability is in reading and written expression, the presence of the inclusion teacher seemed to help Kafar and all the other students. Unlike his usual, rambunctious self, Kafar was more quiet and reserved in this class. There was almost a sense of timidity in his demeanor when speaking to the regular math teacher. He seemed to understand the concepts of mean, median, and mode, but he was also a bit hesitant to ask questions aloud in class. Quietly, he would raise his hand and motion for the inclusion teacher to come to him to help him with a problem.

In his senior seminar class, he was somewhat inattentive at first, but he also seemed to enjoy entertaining his fellow classmates. This was obviously an environment where he was most comfortable. He seemed to know everyone. This class had only twelve students, eight of whom were Black males. The class is an elective and is structured to aid students who are struggling in reading and writing across all subjects.

These students have had help and various interventions over their past three years of high school, yet they still need help. This is the last chance for them to gain the skills to pass HSAP, pass their core subjects, and graduate in June. All of the students in this class are behind in gaining credits to graduate with their on-time peers.

Upon entering, the students came in the room somewhat rowdy. Obviously, they knew each other well. After approximately ten minutes, Kafar was still particularly loud and had trouble getting started on his assignment even after the teacher redirected him several times. She moved him to the front of the room near her desk, away from other students. After this, Kafar was more focused and stayed on task. He did ask pertinent questions and seemed to enjoy the atmosphere of this smaller classroom. Students were receiving individual instruction through the differentiation of their needs; the teacher was individually attentive to each one. Kafar had struggled with reading; therefore, his assignments were geared toward building his skills in reading comprehension.

The teacher in this class was extremely caring and compassionate to the students. She used proximity and a quiet, subtle voice throughout the entire classroom. The class was made up of students who were all at the same level with each student having struggled through English in every grade; each needed help in passing the writing or reading portion of the HSAP test. Observed were a close teacher-student relationship, a comfortable setting, and there was a sense of ease not only among Kafar, but also among all the students in the classroom. The hesitance and timidity identified earlier in his math class was not a factor in this observation.

In speaking with Kafar regarding the two observations, and the differences in his demeanor within the two classes, he shared this information:

I really like math, and I get it…you know what I'm saying? It makes sense to me. I like Coach [the math teacher], but he kinda makes me feel like I should know stuff. I mean, I do know it, but sometimes, I just need a little more help. Ms. K, that's the inclusion lady, is just cool. She makes things fun…she kinda gives you the real world picture and uses real things to explain it more clear. Coach [math teacher] is cool…don't get me wrong, but he'll write you up in a second if you don't behave yourself! I just don't want cross him in that big ole class. I mean, you know what I'm saying? He never really came down on me, but man, he expect you to do your work and be quiet.

Ms. G.…[senior seminar teacher] is the best…she tell us she gave up teaching them AP kids just cause we need her more. She gives us space… you know what I'm saying? She allow us to be us…yea, we get loud sometimes, but she always able to calm us down. When we get in trouble and maybe have to go to ISS [in school suspension] or worse, she always try to help us out and at least get the assistant principals to allow us to come to her so we can get our work done. Coach is good…but ain't like Ms. G.

Case Study: Geremy

As an 18 year old senior, Geremy shows his self-confidence and assurance of one who knows who his is, where he is going, and he definitely has a plan to get there. He will graduate on time with a 3.25 GPA and will attend a major out-of-state university in the fall on a full football scholarship.

Geremy is an only child living with both parents. His parentsown their home in a nice neighborhood, specifically purchased in this locale because of the educational opportunities in the area. Both parents are college educated; his mother is a teacher and his father is the owner of a small, successful business. Though his father is as he states, "I guess not, I mean [he's] not really my real dad you know…I guess if you mean it biologically…[I] guess he's my step-dad in reality, but he's the only dad I've ever known. He married Mom when I was 6 months old, so he's my dad." Their expectations for Geremy are as he says, "They [expectations] were never optional you know? It never

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was like never "if" you go to college…it was when and where you are going to college. I never had a choice about whether or not I'd go." His parents moved to the area when he entered middle school. As Geremy says,

> My dad always said we moved here away from the North Area so I could excel in school [academically] and in sports. He's [Dad] had me involved in sports, on some type of team, since I was old enough to hold a ball in my hand! One of the high school coaches saw me in middle school playing rec [recreational] football. He asked my dad where we lived. When he [Dad] told him where, he [high school coach] was like, Man, that's a shame! Wish we had him over here! At that point, my folks sold the house, and we moved here…just because of this high school and the opportunities for sports and school! I thought like, wow! My folks love me! So here we are, and I'm going to school on a full ride…pretty awesome, nice pay back for my folks and what they sacrificed for me. High school graduation's gonna be great cause I gotta a plan!

Geremy credited factors affecting his on- time graduation success and overall achievement mainly to the teachers, being focused on passing classes and making good grades. When discussing teachers and favorable classrooms, he said, "I guess, [teachers] they make it fun to learn. Um, just like helping you out when you need help, not showing favoritism to anybody….Ms. P...she helped me out a lot in DIT, and basically my freshman year…all my freshman classes…I forgot my English teacher's name, but the freshmen academy was great. It made a big school a lot smaller for us." He further credited good student-teacher relationships as being positive reinforcements.Geremy shared,

> "The teachers here, they're just easier to get along with…I guess they understand us; in our shoes now, and I guess with everybody's background …If students like their teachers, they can go there to try to learn …nobody's picking on them if they're having trouble. Even the bad kids…It might be hard for them to stay focused or just to do the right thing. They need that teacher that actually can help them and…like keep them on track…keep on pushing them and make sure they are on track…I mean they know they bad, but these teachers can still work with them cause they have patience and care. All the teachers that I've had helped me

to achieve, they keep me focused, keep me on my tip toes telling me I gotta keep pushin cause I gotta go to college. They push me to do well...especially all my English teachers…They help write and fix all the papers…They keep on helping with my English papers and all that, so that I can be top notch for college.

Though Geremy has had a stable two-parent home environment, when asked about barriers or hindrances getting in the way of success for Black male students, Geremy discussed the major problems as coming from students' home environments and self-motivation. He explained,

I think there's a lot of issues coming from their [Black males'] homes too. And a lot of them kids…they got a lot of stuff. They say, 'I gotta do this for my family…I gotta work, help out. A lot of them don't have time for school, but some, they still try to do what they can do, but most of 'em, they just skip class and just walk around the halls…Why? I don't know! Instead of really actually trying to get an education to really help their family out in a positive way, they choose the negative way and get in trouble and going to jail and something like that, but I think they should just go to class mostly…I mean, instead of skipping school, going to hang out, doing bad, wrong things and getting caught instead of being in school. They just need to try to do the right thing.

Regarding self-motivation, Geremy said,

Actually, it's just up to d'em really! Some of em just wanna be cool and try to show people they cool, but actually inside, at home, they act, well, they ain't that kind of person anyway. It's a front in front of their peers. Like some 'em… some people here are just like that…I don't know why they try to be cool and try to fit in with the wrong people and they know good and well that they parents don't play that with them. My parents, just say, Ahh…DO THE RIGHT THING OR YOU WILL GET KICKED OUT!

Further, he discussed adults, other than his teachers and parents, who have influenced his motivation to succeed. He praised his athletic coaches.

Yea, all the coaches help me too [at this school] and when I was at M [middle school]. Actually I went to L [another middle school] for one year, but I couldn't take it! It was too much for me, and then I came to M [middle school]. I went to M for two years; then I came here for high school. So I was [here, this area] for

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6 years. Hey, I got a supportive family, good coaches, good teachers. I've a great opportunity, but so do all these other kids. Sometimes, I just don't get it.

Coach makes you go to tutoring with anything less than a C. They have tutoring every Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. When you gotta do that, you missing out on practice, and you don't play. So, you want to make sure your grades are up on top. That's why I say, males should play sports. If you look at our school, it [our school] could be one of the top schools in the nation in sports. But we got kids that can't play because of academics. We got a lot of good athletes in the school, I mean…you know… Black kids who could really be good athletes…but they can't play because of grades. They just want to play around and do the wrong thing.

When asked about the importance of on-time graduation, Geremy, like Kafar, referenced a sense of pride and a right by replying,

So you can get that diploma! I really think it's to walk across that stage. Yea, cause that's the most important, exciting thing! You there with 700 students who you've been with at least 3 or 4 years! And we gonna graduate! The room is packed! All your friends and folks are there! I think that's important…The major thing! That's what's makin me work! I gotta get that! I'm gone walk across that stage with a bunch of people…my family will see me, I did it!

Further, Geremy discussed what he thought was most important. First, he recommended that students must work all four years instead of just two or one. He said this is most important in case something really does happen in the students' senior year, so that "They [students] work all four years, so if you do slip up your senior year, you got enough to get you through. You still have something to fall back on."

He went on to discuss the curriculum by stating that the courses he took, core courses as well as electives, have broadened his perspectives about what he is going to do in college. When asked what advice he might give to 9th grade Black males, he replied,

I'll tell 'em. First, don't do nothing retarded! Go play sports or something like that. Get involved.   Go do something and spend your time wanting to learn and something like that so you can actually wanna like be…Oh yea! If I

don't do this, I can't play sports. That's how I did it. I got involved in sports. If I don't play, well, if I don't do my work and keep my grades, I can't play sports. I don't wanna just get by…I want to make B's and A's. You don't want to have D…That will make you have to go to tutoring every Monday.

Geremy further stated that in offering support and help, the teachers and coaches need to motivate students and encourage them. He shared,

> Just keep on pushin 'em! They [Kids] make excuses; they say we don't have the right teachers and coaches, but that's not true. The teacher and coaches give them chances, but they just like don't want to commit. They not dumb, but it makes them, well…they think it makes them look cool. They just don't want to work hard. Other things Black kids need are good parents, good friends – I mean good friends who stay away from trouble – keepin up grades for me most of all, but for my teachers, my coaches, my parents…everybody.

Observations:

Geremy was observed in two classes, chemistry and animation and gaming. His actions and demeanor were similar in both settings. He comes in to class well-prepared with materials and his required work. He seems to fit in well in any situation or classroom. In chemistry during labs, he is focused and works well with his peers. He is proactive in asking questions of the teacher as needed. He is witty, and his teachers like him. Animation and gaming is obviously another class he enjoys. The class is project-based and self-paced. He meets deadlines and does well in school both socially and academically. He credits his success to studying hard, getting help from his teachers as needed, and making the grade. To date, Geremy has had no disciplinary referrals his entire four years at this school.

Case Study: Derique

Though Derique came to this high school for his second year of high school, which should have been his sophomore year, he found that he did not have the proper

amount of credits to be classified as a sophomore. He is the youngest of three children, and he lives with his grandmother, mother and older sister. Derique says,

> I'm a pretty good basketball player if I do say so myself. I just got blasted away when the guidance lady told me I just didn't have the credits to be in 10th grade, and I'd be a freshman again for a semester. I didn't really want to move away from my old school. I mean, my mom and sister, we kind of had to move because my step-dad left. We moved in with Gamma [Grandma] so she could help us, and we could help her out. It did end up bein a good thing though. Coach told me I couldn't play varsity ball till I was a junior anyway, so I just sucked it up and played JV ball that first year. At the time, that was the most important thing to me. Then, Mr. E [guidance counselor] got involved with me. He was real cool. And there was this teacher assistant who helped coach basketball too, Mr. S. They kinda got me focused on getting my credits so I could definitely play basketball my junior year. Yea, that was cool. They worked with me, and Ms. L [Assistant principal for curriculum] helped so I could catch up. Man, it was really cool! They got me on track for on-time graduation. Now, I see that college is important, and I gotta make the grade to get to play basketball.

Derique is somewhatdependent upon his mom and sister for guidance and is not as self-confident as others his age. Though he came in to this high school deficient and lacking credits, those here worked with him and gave him the support and opportunities to forge him ahead and get him on track for graduation. Depending upon his passing all of his subjects this semester, he will graduate on-time in June, but at present, he is not passing two of his four courses needed. After graduation, he plans to further his education via basketball scholarship at a small, private, out of state college.

Observations

During the two observations of Derique in his PE class and English class, he exhibited the same types of behaviors. In PE, he is active and focused on the tasks at hand. This particular day, the class was divided into pairs for one-on-one basketball. Because he excels in basketball and loves the sport, he was eager to participate.

In English, students were placed in groups to read a play and compose a character analysis of their assigned characters. He listened attentively and readily asked questions during the discussion with his peers. When asked to present to the whole class, Derique quietly declined and asked another student to do it.

Case Study Willy:

Willy is a 17 year old, well-adjusted young man. He is the younger of two siblings, he has a sister who is six years older, and he describes himself as, "I'm kind of an only child…She [sister] is a good bit older…That's good and bad. She's real the smart one, and I have to live up to those expectations, but I'm also a pretty good student with athletic ability." At present, Willy has a GPA of 3.3 and has been accepted into a small state college on a basketball scholarship.

When asked about barriers to successful on-time graduation,

> Willy responded, "It depends…it depends more on you…I mean yourself. Kids have to have that focus…Kinda like self-confidence...Ya know? It's so easy for kids…I mean anybody…Black or White…to head down the wrong path. Yea, it's something with yourself. But I do think there are things that helped me. Like…Um I think having a good relationship with all the folks at the school helps. And um, you know, not pressuring kids a lot. Another thing is…Um, I think I had a good amount of choices, but some things could be better. A little more different stuff we could do…Probably like more music stuff…like drums and dance.

Willy further described teachers from which he particularly learned better. He said, "Um…probably a calm teacher…one that's cool and collective not like always pushing stuff on kids like giving a lot of work and making it due the next day. Those that give you time. I like teachers who…Um…Not yelling I think! I like to be able to talk to my teacher and they're not yelling at me or anybody else." He continued,

> "Cause I've had some really good relationships with all my teachers. Good teachers, Um…Not one that's always joking around. You can't always be like

buddy- buddy with your teachers cause at some point, you gotta get down to business. So I guess, not friend-like, you know, like a real teacher…Kinda like a mentor, ya know? Someone I can joke with. Okay, Mr. S [chemistry teacher] is one of my favorites because I can always talk to him. He can…always teach stuff in a way that I could learn. Chemistry is hard, but he really helps me understand it. He kinda like breaks things down and slows things down. So when I go to him for extra help, he teaches it to me in a different way...Slows it down…Shows me what to do. He takes time, you know? It's important to him that I do…And all the other kids do well. I keep a B! I can almost exempt! I'm so close! I got a 91. He always brags on me. It's a good feeling. Yea! He's a great teacher who cares about us.

When asked, why a good teacher-student relationship is important Willy explained,

Because he [Mr. S] would um…If you don't have a good relationship with your teacher, if they tell you something to do and you don't want to…Like I'm sayin 'I'm not gone do what he's tellin me to do because I don't like him. If you're mature, you know you only hurtin yourself, but you know…If you like him, you'll work harder. Does that make sense? Like for example, some of my teachers…I'd already heard they weren't good…Before I ever walked in the class, I heard bad things about them at first, but I was like…Oh!!! This class is gonna be terrible! Like I had English 2 and I'd heard about my teacher before. And the kids were like..,'He's a terrible teacher! You not gone have fun.' So I came into the class already decided that this class gone be boring and I'm not gonna have a good situation with this teacher. But turned out, we did have a good relationship. He was pretty cool.   I think it's what you, yourself make it, but the teacher's gottawanta help.

When asked about various interventions, help, and tutoring, Willy replied,

"They've [teachers] helped me a lot! Um, Mr. K was probably one of the biggest helps

with me because he helped me through Algebra 2 and Algebra 3 AND Geometry. He

would help me a lot. He was my engineering teacher. And everybody helped me...Like

Ms. S...all y'all gave me advice…good advice."

As for barriers that get in the way of on-time graduation, Willy described students

getting in with the wrong kinds of people, "Um...that's easy. Following the wrong

crowd, hanging with the wrong people. The wrong crowd is made up of folks, people

that get in trouble; they don't stay in class and tell you, 'come on let's skip class – stuff like that. I just never hung around people like that…Because my parents always instilled the importance of school in me. Yea, my folks expect a lot of me."

Overall, Willy explained the importance of on-time graduation as, "I think it's important because the people you've been and grown up with during your four years in high school…if you don't graduate on time, then you stuck with younger classes. And basically, it's a self-esteem, pride thing. You wanta graduate…I mean I just can't imagine not graduating with my class."

He sees, the most significant factor contributing to on time graduation as,

> I think it's parents because they gotta push you…make sure you get your work done. My mom...I'd be watchin TV, and my would be like…You need to stop watching TV...You need to put down that game control…You need to study…I'd say, I don't have anything I need to study now. She'd say, then, get a book…Read! My dad was like that too. He basically helped me through math and stuff and he would tell me, well, he'd push college on me…Like early in school. My sister is six years ahead of me, so he had some big expectations of me too.

> Another thing that's important that always helped me is sports, especially. My mom…actually, my sophomore year I think it was…I started to slip a little and my mom was almost like…If I don't get these grades, I'm not gone be able to play sports anymore. That got my attention! Sports is a big part of me… It was like, If I can't play sports, high school isn't going to be fun. If I don't play sports, it just won't be fun. My parents have pushed me to get A's and B's. Also, sports helped me discipline wise. It really did! I think if I didn't play sports, I probably wouldn't have done that good in school.

Observations

During the two classroom observations, Willy exhibited the same types of behaviors. He came into class sat and got right down to work. In his prob and stats class, he was eager to answer questions, and he frequently raised his hand to be called upon, so much so that the teacher said, "Okay, can someone other than Willy please answer!" The

teacher was also a former coach, so there was evidence of a good, sound, teacher-student bond. In his chemistry class, he worked well in labs with his peers. The teacher was as Willy had described, helpful and explained and re-explained the material until all students understood.

Willy was also observed in his Art class. This class was obviously one he did not particularly care for. Although he was engaged and listened attentively, he had trouble with drawing and eagerly asked for help from the teacher in order to "concentrate, draw the focal point" on this assignment. He was frustrated at times, but he kept trying and eventually satisfied the teacher. After the observation, he shared, "I don't like art! I just gotta have it for college…I'm never gonna draw anything after I get out of here! It's just one class I have to have."

Case Study: Jervey

Jervey is somewhat of an anomaly in this study. He is an 18 year old, "Gifted and Talented" fourth-year senior, who is presently finishing up his sixth AP class. With a 3.97 GPA, Jervey is headed to a top, state university on a full academic scholarship. He was classified as "gifted" in grade 3 because of his mathematics abilities. Throughout middle school, he participated in a gifted program, which he described as somewhat like a pull out program, where he and other students of his similar abilities, were "pulled out" of regular classes and given individualized, more rigorous activities, in order to enhance their higher levels of academics. He explained that he always felt, "Special and really smart…I was one of a few Black kids in the group…Sure, I got jeers from my Black peers, but it was okay…I didn't really hang with them anyway…I just hung with the kids in my classes."

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Jervey's mother is a college professor, and his father is an attorney. He is one of two children, the youngest. His older sister is in college. The family lives in an affluent neighborhood in the area. Until his middle school 6th grade year, Jervey was in a private school within the area. Because his parents wished for him to receive a broader educational experience, he began attending public school. When asked about feelings of his giftedness, Jervey explained:

> You know, I kind of always knew. I mean, I realized I was always one of a few Black kids in my classes. When I asked my parents, they said it was because I was in a private school, and that's just the way it was. But, when I got into middle school, that's when I really noticed; there were still fewer minority kids in my classes. I didn't really know a lot of the Black kids outside of my classes. Today, I still hang with the same kids I did in middle school. The Black kids outside of my classes sometimes call me 'The white, Black boy.' It just doesn't bother me because I'm not around those people, and in a sense, I guess we are different. I don't wear my pants around my thighs, and I don't get high, wear clothes with the tags still on, or listen to rap. I guess I just kind of get along better with the kids in my classes, whether they are Black, white, or orange. I want to be an attorney like my dad. Maybe I can help Black kids later. I've also got aspirations of politics. I mean, look at Obama and Tim Scott! If anything, they are the Black American dream. I just wish Black kids, I mean guys, and even everybody could look beyond color and see the opportunities out there.

He went on to explain his relationships with his teachers and the opportunities he had had at this school.

> This school is amazing…I mean…I guess that's what I don't get about kids…not just Black kids not taking the initiative to really dig in and get into it, but all the kids. I got tired of being called names by some of the Black kids, but it's all about opportunity. Like the Principal says, we have over 250 course offerings…There's definitely something for everybody!... I'm on the lacrosse team, I take AP classes, my folks aren't going to have to pay a dime for my first year of college cause I'm going in with 27 hours' credit if all my AP courses transfer. I mean, how great is that?...My teachers have been top notch…You know, they have to have the right training to teach kids like me, but they all have the highest expectations because I've always been in upper level courses…It is what it is…My folks are involved…they have those same high expectations of

me…They have taught me to go the extra mile, do what it takes, and overcome all this stuff that other kids see as important...I mean, I listen to some music, but not rap stuff….That's nonsense…Talk about teaching the wrong values!

Jervey sees the barriers to students' not graduating on-time as self-motivation and self-identity. He explained,

> Some kids…Black, White, whatever…They just can't find themselves I guess. It doesn't matter what color you are; what matters is knowing who you are and what you want. You'll never hear me say I'm gonna be a professional athlete. Let's face it…How many professional athletes come out of this school or state? You gotta be realistic. Some of the Black kids around here…They say they're gonna be professional basketball players and they don't even play on the school team…Or, they are gonna be professional rappers! Com'on! Really! My folks are educated…That's the real difference I think...Sadly, some kids just don't have that back home. My dad says he grew up being called a Huxtable Kid…You know, the Cosby Show? I just don't get why kids can't get away from the Black stigma. We are just as bright as anyone else…We just gotta move past it and grab opportunities.

Regarding the importance of on-time graduation, Jervey stated,

> Graduating from high school on time has never been an issue with me. I always knew I'd breeze through it. I can't imagine it being your senior year, and you aren't sure you'll make it. That's sad. But, I know there are kids in this situation…I just gotta say, it's their own fault…The opportunities are here for them…I mean with National Honor Society offering free tutoring, teachers' office hours, academic Saturdays, credit recovery, and intervention…I just don't see any reason for any kid to be behind…It's all about self-motivation, I think.

Observations

Within each of the two classroom observations, Jervey radiates a self-confident, academically gifted student. He speaks up in class and frequently volunteers to answer and participate. In his AP Stats class, he is the only Black male, but this does in no way seem deter his confidence. Obviously he enjoys the class and maintains a good rapport with his teacher and his peers.

In his engineering class, he, along with all his peer classmates, enter ready to go to work. This class was aerospace engineering and displayed a hands-on learning delivery. From the minute students came in, they all quickly began to get into their groups and work on their projects. Jervey was conversational with his group members, but the focus was definitely on completing their work. Never hesitant in sharing his perceptions of the topic at hand, Jervey is the epitome of the AP student. He is focused and serious. His teacher specifically commented on his group's work throughout the observation.

Case Study: Renaldo

Renaldo is an 18 year old vibrant, self-confident on-time graduating senior. He is well-liked among his peers and teachers. The only child of a single mom, Renaldo seems to be comfortable around all students. As he puts it,

> I can pretty much adjust myself to any situation. I kinda adapt myself to the situation. Because I'm interested in science and math, I'm around a bunch of pretty smart kids. I've never taken any AP courses, but I've got some honors level and dual credit courses I'm working on. School is all about what you want to get out of it. I mean it's kinda like a computer; you get out what you put in. My mom wants the best for me, and I want to go to college and make something of myself. I just ain't got time for junk. See, I can adapt. I have some Black friends, but my closest friends and my girlfriends are a combination of white and Black kids. We just all have the same kind of plans.

Renaldo has been in public schools all his educational life. His mother began college, got pregnant, had him, and then went to work. As he says, "She's always intended on going back, but she just never could." Her wishes are for him to finish high school with college credits from his dual credit courses and to continue on to a college or university and finish. Though he has not taken as many upper level courses, he has been accepted into college and will graduate in June. Having a GPA of 3.10, Renaldo will be able to

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continue after high school with the help of the LIFE scholarship. He says this will be most helpful for his family because his mother is not prepared to pay for his college.

Regarding what characteristics Renaldo sees as being important for students' success, he replied,

> Um…I think you have to be able to pay attention and actually study! And…not…well, just being able to take directions and act on them…You have some kids in class that don't want to ask questions just because of the size of some of the classes. Some people learn better in smaller classes. But like me, I can go with either large or small. I have friends who do learn better in smaller classes.

He feels he learns best from certain teachers,

> I like the ones who are hands on… I love history…And the classes we get to discuss things in…And, my French class…Ahhh! Madam M! It was…Well, let's just say she made it easy to learn. Instead of just writing something on the board or lecturing, she would actually call us up to her desk…sit down with us individually…she'd do whatever it took. She was patient. She'd explain something so many times for you until you got it. We just had the best relationship! I feel like…the teacher just being available... Talking, discussing, real conversations…Another thing I've found is that the teachers are here for us…They make time…Yea, that's really helpful. But really, that one-on-one instruction. That means a lot when a teacher will do that. You don't feel intimidated…Because I mean, if a teacher and student don't have a good relationship, the student might be more hesitant to go to the teacher or the teacher might think the student doesn't really care about his grade or the class. When a teacher takes the time to re-explain, that lets you know she cares.

As far as opportunity within the curriculum, Renaldo said,

> It's great! I like how they broke it up into clusters, majors, and schools of study. I like that! I'm in the School of Health, Human and Public Service. I'll get a cord and everything at graduation because I will have my four courses in that area. I've had Rhetoric of Law….Mock Trial…Oh…I can't remember right now. Oh yea! Speech! There are so many opportunities! Like with Mock Trial and Rhetoric of Law…basically showing how the legal system works…how the court system works.

He commented on the teachers from whom he learns best as, "Oh yea! Ms. W! Yea, she was great…Just like Ms. M. She explained stuff. You knew when you walked in that she really wanted you to do good in there. I was lucky! I had her for both English and Law, so I got a double dose. But oh man…it was so much fun!

Following graduation, Renaldo says he is going to college to study history. He is thinking of a smaller state college or a technical college for the first two years and then transferring to a four year college to finish his bachelor's degree. He felt that significant factors that have attributed to his success to graduating on time have been,

> Well, I've worked with my guidance counselor…mapping out the classes I take and all that…going to College Day…the um…application day…financial aid night…But most important has been my mom…My mom, especially…she keeps up with Parent Portal and knows what's due…she's like every night, "Did you do your work? Did you write that essay for this scholarship? That scholarship? Are you applying for this? That?' She's just on it...Also, the folks in my neighborhood…They've been supportive…A lot of my neighbors. I have uncles. They all went to St. Augustine. I've gone there with them for alumni meetings. They really showed me the school and exposed me to college. That's one of the schools I applied to. The exposure. You know? I know I have to work hard when I get there, but this is…kind of a rite of passage for me?

When asked how Renaldo felt about the dim graduation rate for Black males, he replied,

> Let's face it. We [Black males] have the lowest graduation rates…that's why you are doing this research, right? We have been given a stereotype that in a way, WE created. It's up to us now to change it. One person can change things. I'm hoping people and some of my friends will look at me and see that I did make something of myself by taking advantage of school and getting an education...I know some kids I started out with aren't gonna be sitting beside me at graduation, but really, it's them.

Renaldo expressed what he sees as barriers to on-time graduation as being,

"Really? Um…Them! It's them not really caring. I know people who just act out in

class…They don't care. They don't show up; don't do work. And just expect stuff to be given to them."

When asked what schools can do better, he replied,

> Honestly? I don't think there's anything wrong with the school. I think it's just like… It's them! Like I know, I hear people, kids talking about things they need... I just don't think there's anything else the school can actually do more of. There's so many opportunities! Like I have APEX for credit recovery; I failed a class with a 67, and I mean…most students in there are African-American males. A lot of them…so many just don't take advantage of what we have…like APEX, A +, that new thing E20-20…we have good, caring teachers, counselors. Um, people sign up then just don't show up. They just don't do what they need to do. The school has a lot of things you [students] can do. You can even take classes online, credit recovery, virtual school. They offer a lot. It's just people don't take the necessary steps…It's the culture.

> Renaldo explained the importance of on-time graduation as being a kind of rite of

passage or reward, "It's what you work for…all those years. You start school when

you're like 5, and you always want to graduate with those kids you started out with…be

together…walk across the stage. It's just a part of…it's like a paycheck. You've been

working, getting your final four years, and that's the paycheck…getting that high school

diploma." He went on to describe his feeling among the regular population of students as

being inclusive. He also credited self-motivation and not giving in to peer pressure and

surrounding himself with the right kinds of people. Most of all, he credits his mom.

> Oh no. You get out of it what you put into it. I know a lot kids have to go to other schools, not as good as this one. Some schools like G [another school]…they offer programs that you go into right after high schools. My mom calls them vo-tech schools. These kids…they aren't looking to go on to college. They just want to get out of school…sad…just no plan…I think, honestly, it has a lot to do with the people I surround myself with…I want to be around people like me… Positive people, who all have plans. I don't really have many friends who don't care. All of my friends have plans after high school. Other kids, like those kids who get to come here because their home school isn't good, well, they get

the biggest opportunity…They get over here, they've been brought from other places, and they are mixing with the students here, but they're causing problems. It's like a neighborhood thing. We don't think like that here. They just kind of clash. The community supports the kids here. Where they come from there is no support from the neighborhood. They help the culture here and hurt it. We are a bit more diverse, but you got kids like I[mani]. She's one of the smartest kids I know, and she's from NC. Then you got some who just come over here, but they don't care. It comes from home. Seems like most of those kids don't have the support at home.

But as far as my biggest influence…Definitely my mom…she always pushed me and told me to do better than she did. She went to W. She graduated. She got accepted into college, but she went a semester. She was telling me, you got accepted…you go further than I did. Finish. She didn't. She always told me to go further. She wants more for me.

Though Renaldo has been successful in getting to on-time graduation, he confided that he has experienced some difficulties along the way. He explained that he has taken advantage of some of the extra help and interventions at this school. He said, "Hey…Don't get me wrong…It hasn't all been so easy for me! The expectations here are high…I mean for all kids….Yea! I went to the National Honor Society tutoring, and a couple of those Academic Saturday schools. It helped. But all in all, it's been up to me. I've had great opportunities…It's been great. I'm ready to get out, but I'm going to miss it."

Observations

Renaldo was observed in his environmental science class and his math/prob and stats class. During both observations, he asked questions, answered questions and participated in the discussions. He was most involved in his math class. One could see that he enjoyed the class, the content, teacher, and fellow classmates. In his environmental science class, his teacher frequently asked him questions when no other students would speak up to answer. This class was more hands on and discussion.

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Renaldo was confident and comfortable in both situations. He was an integral part of the class.

Case Study: Mitchum

Mitchum, an 18 year old senior is very much a social magnet. Always dressed to perfection, he stands out among the entire student body. Full of school spirit, positive, and always ready to get involved for any good cause, Mitchum is definitely a standout among his peers. Mitchum lives with his mother and grandmother. There is no father in the immediate home, but he maintains a positive relationship with his uncle, whom he credits as being the most positive male role model around him. He is also a standout in JROTC. Though his mother is not a college graduate, she does have some college work. Mitchum says he will go into the Air Force Reserves just after graduation and continue his studies at the local technical school. He will then transfer to a four year university. As Mitchum puts it,

> I might not have had it good all the way. I mean, I gotta say, I did mess up my freshman and part of my sophomore year, but I'm just at a great place right now, you know?   I got some D's and I even failed a couple of classes. I mean, I have great folks at home and school. I've got real friends. I know I'm gonna graduate on time. I got options. I can help my mom and grandma out by them not having to pay for my school. I'm doing that by being helped on the money end. I mean cause the teachers and counselors here, they get you squared, you know!

Though his GPA is a mere 2.5, he has a plan for how he will accomplish his goals. His self-confidence is hypnotic, and all around him feel his assurance. Mitchum sees self-motivation as being important for student success. He shared,

> I really see that being motivated and having the drive really. You just gotta always put in work. First of all, procrastination is one of the big things that everyone struggles with, but one of those things like that that will help you with procrastination you know, just turn your work in on time! Whenever the teacher gives you something just don't do it the night before. You know? Just get it

done…So I think just working on procrastination and just having the mindset that yes, I'm gonna do this, I'm wanna do this! I guess that's really what helped me.

I know that um…my drive and just me wanting to graduate and also me just being out-going. That helps along with graduating instead of being like you know, shy. And just really getting to know everybody. That helps out too. It just makes you feel comfortable.

Further, he credits his school involvement with JROTC, he stated, "Yea, that helped out a lot with discipline. Discipline is another characteristic that you need to have. So yea…discipline. Regarding teachers and those whom he learns from best, he explained,

> Teachers that are really open to questions and willing to always help. Like help you know…After school you know…Any way the teacher can help the student like they show you and say, 'This is my office hours um this is when you can come in and do make up work or you know, you need to get this done and teachers that stay on you.' They have…Reminders on the board and things like that that you need to get your stuff done…All of my teachers have been good about it. They do. They do. So far I've just really had good ones.

He continued on to explain the importance of good teacher-student relationships.

> I make sure I get to know my teachers. Like this year, I've really done that with all of my teachers um cause I was named the student of the week last week for Ms. K. Me and her relationship is just like…I don't know. I participate in class whenever she asks questions. I'm comfortable, you know? When we have to get our journals, I'll say "everybody, just sit down, I'll get the journals; I'll pass out the journals. I just like to help out and help her to make her job easier. And you know, she'll then make our lives easier too.

> It [teacher-student relationship] helps class to be easier. You know the work will be less stressful…Like if you didn't have a good teacher…Not having a good teacher would be stressful because you may not understand something and then whenever you go to them then they try to…brush you off and things like that. You also brush them off because you don't want to be a part of that. Student-teacher relationships…that's like wow…it's really amazing when it really happens and comes together. It's good. It makes things so much better…When you get to know the teacher and know what they're about and know – I mean really get to know about them. And, they get to know about you, and then…

There's a bond and it's just amazing like the way the teacher and the student can both help each other.

Regarding teacher expectations, he shared,

She [the teacher] knows…she expects the same, but she knows there are some slackers in our class and what not. She can try everything she can, but I mean we're seniors now and you gotta have that drive for yourself and there's no game about it. The teachers…they you been on our butts since freshman year and taught us the way that we need to be and by senior year, it should've already kicked in and you should know what you have to get

When asked about the curriculum and opportunities at the school and whether

these factors have helped with on-time graduation success, Mitchum said,

Yes! Out of all the schools in Charleston County and all other schools, W [this school] is like a very good school when it comes to curriculum, activities, and different things like that because like, it's …there are a bunch of different programs that you can get into. There's so much more variety and better opportunities than all the other schools. Here, there's something for everybody. No one needs to feel left out.

He also shared the barriers to success for some Black males as being,

What I've seen so far in getting in the way of success is getting a girl pregnant...That's like the number one thing right now…And drugs. Like that's another thing. Those guys are like, Oh no, I don't wanna do this; I don't want to do that…I just want to smoke and party and stuff like that. Um, I see like you can still party or have a good time…What you need is balance. That's what my mom taught me. She said you just have to have a balance with what you do. Like me...I'm focused on track right now and my education so I don't really have time for all that. But yea...it's really like them just not having the drive. Like I said earlier. Drive is like a big thing. You really gotta have it. Some don't believe in themselves…that they can really do it. And, I mean Martin Luther King and Barack Obama and all of them have shown us, "Yes we can do it!" And yea (smiling) those are my role models!

In keeping family, school and culture, in mind, Mitchum said that all situations are

varied. He explained,

Everybody has a different situation. You can never just be like, Oh, they're not interested in school. You just don't know their situation. But at the same time, if

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you want to better yourself, you gotta finish up school. You know, you gotta make something out of yourself. Without a high school diploma you sure won't get any kind of job much less a good job.

He also shared that he felt the most significant factor to his on-time graduation success is

his mother. Mitchum shared,

> Oh! My mom's a big influence! Her being a single parent just makes me wanna…just do more for her and the house. So last summer that's why I got a job and I didn't play AAU travel basketball because I just wanted to make some money so I could take care of myself. I didn't want Mom to have to give me money. I wanted to grow up and be able to take care of myself and be able to buy my own things instead of her having to give me money. I hate having to ask her for it.

Mitchum continued by explaining how important his on-time graduation was going to be

to his mom, he reported,

> [Graduation] Very important because she's gonna…well, so she can see that I'm gonna make something out of myself. She sees my high school graduation as just the beginning. She knows that I have a good head on my shoulders and I listened to her. She did a good job raising me even though she didn't have help…. Getting out on time…It shows colleges that you are really about your business, and you're not about playing around. Just that you want to make something of yourself. You're graduating on time; it shows you and them that you can do it and you aren't another statistic. It's not just somebody had to push you to do it. You did it. You made that decision yourself…I'm gonna graduate on time. Also, it's a pride thing to me too. You don't want somebody that you were going to school with...like they go off to college or whatever, and you're still hanging at the same school. You want to graduate with your friends…the ones you started out with. Come on! You want to be with everybody and enjoy that moment with everyone. At the same time, you hate to see some of your friends left back…behind.

Mitchum reiterated that the single most important intrinsic factor to successful on-time

graduation is self-motivation. He shared,

> I would have to say…it's [most important factor] inside you…What you do for yourself. Because it's a self thing. No one's going to…Like the old saying..."You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink." Yes…that's how I see it. You know. Everybody can push you, but you actually

have to push yourself to do it. I've had trouble…don't get me wrong. I've had trouble through…like last year…I struggled, but I'm still here. I thank God that I'm still here striving just to finish this off and go off to college and make myself...show myself…do it for me. And, of course, give credit to my mom…give her kudos.

When asked to respond to what the school, teachers, administration and/or staff could do better to help Black males achieve successful on-time graduation, Mitchum responded,

To tell you the truth … [this school] is an amazing school with amazing staff, amazing teachers. It's just a mind thing. Some kids just come in and…actually when I'm in my classes, the white kids, some of them are more lazy than I am, but at the same time, you can't just follow the crowd. You gotta be your own person and you gotta just be…you know what? I gotta go on, get this done. I'm bout to really show myself that I can do it…I can be something in life.

Observations:

Mitchum was observed twice. On the first occasion, he was in his JROTC class. He exhibited self-confidence, discipline, and attentiveness. As the commanding leader of the group, Mitchum was in charge of group training that day. His group showed him respect and poise as he guided them in practicing the presentation of colors. He was also observed in his wildlife biology class. He and his classmates came into class and were aware of the regular routine. Mitchum instantly took over as a leader in getting the folders out it each student for the beginning of class bell-work. He participated much of the class as well as assisted other students during lab work. His leadership qualities from JROTC carry over in his other subjects.

Section 2 – Intrinsic and Extrinsic Themes

By comparing, merging and integrating students' genuine voices, the seven participants' data has been incorporated into individual cases through their candid answering of interview questions and reviewing of field notes of observations of each student within his own classroom settings. A cross-case analysis produced seventhemes.

Each of these themes signaled a barrier or support, depending upon each student and the extenuating circumstances he brings to the table. Two intrinsic themes arose as being significant: self-identity and motivational focus were apparent. Extrinsic themes such as parental influence, peer influence,opportunities forextended curriculum and school involvement, and strong student-teacher relationships.

Intrinsic Themes

In reference to this study are intrinsic themes, which shall be described as those themes that involve internal influences within the student. These influences are somewhat involuntary and may not be within his control. It is apparent that several intrinsic factors influence Black male students' perceptions of what they feel works for them for on- time graduation. Self-identity and motivational focus/pride emerged as significant factors attributing to on time graduation. According to the literature presented earlier, "Self-identity is most important for Black males in their finding a place among their peers and in and among their own environments. Self-Identity reflects how each student sees himself in any given situation" (Kafele, 2010, p. 2).

Self-Identity

In my opinion as the researcher, five of the seven participants are confident and comfortable with their own self-identity through a strong sense of self. This is evident by the comments regarding the introductory interviews held with each participant. Geremy, Willy, Jervey, Renaldo, and Mitchum seem to have a good grasp of their own self-identity. All see themselves in situations where some have had barriers getting in the way of on-time graduation, but they have individually overcome them with the help of outside influences.

Geremy has had the self-confidence and identity instilled in him through his parents and their support as well as the confidence and encouragement from his athletic coaches. Through athletics and encouragement, he has succeeded. He understands expectations both on the athletic field and in the classroom; he rises to the challenge. Willy has also had the ability and self-assurance instilled by counselors, coaches, and teachers. Mitchum's self-confidence is apparent within his own internal makeup. He is comfortable in any situation. Jervey has had the background of a somewhat privileged situation as he was chosen as "gifted and talented" which has led him to a solid intuition of a strong self-identity due to academics. He is the academic standout among the seven participants and is obviously well aware of his opportunities and willing to go after them. Renaldo is self-confident enough to feel comfortable in his own skin as well as being able to adapt to any situation. These students have a clear idea of what they have within themselves to achieve what they wish. All have had to overcome some type of obstacle along the way whether it be a stereotype, getting behind in subjects, or just fitting in. On the other hand, Kafar, possibly because of his lack of confidence in his reading abilities and the learning disability itself, seems to be less self-assured. Though he is cognizant of his learning disability, he seems not to be willing to work on it to improve it. His dreams of being a rapper seem to dampen and deter his realization of having a true plan for life after graduation. Likewise, Derique is not as self-confident perhaps because of his having fallen behind.

Motivational Focus

One factor all participants seem to have in common is motivational focus. For purposes of this study, motivational focus refers determination and pride in reaching a

goal. Although the differences among them range from a high confidence level in athletic ability, to academic ability, the end result among them all is that they all have the self-determination and motivational focus to follow through and achieve graduation. A commonality these young men share is that they see graduation as a sort of "rite of passage." There are indeed differences in how each will get there, but all recognize the importance. Geremy, Derique, Jervey, Renaldo, Willy, and Mitchum all see graduation not as the end of their educational career but as a means to the next step; however, Kafar sees graduation as simply necessary. It is the opinion of the observer that Kafar will continue to try to aim for his dream of being a rapper. Because of the post high school plans they have shared, on-time high school graduation is not only important but it also a pathway to the next step for them. These students do see graduation as a natural step to further possibilities.

ExtrinsicThemes

In reference to this study, extrinsic themes will recognize those influences that arise outside the students. Though some environmental themes may be out of the students' control, they involve the outside forces that may contribute to each student's success to on-time graduation.

Parental Influence

In each of the seven cases, there was a sense of strong parental influence involved in the successful achievement of high school graduation. Though Geremy, Jervey and Willy were the only students reared in a two-parent home, it was evident that graduation was an expectation of all the parents. Kafar, Derique, Renaldo, and Mitchum have been

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reared by a single parent, all understand the indisputable importance of graduation that has been instilled in them by their mothers.

Peer Influence

For this study, peer influence refers to the importance each participant may or may not devote to his own peer group. Because of the strong self-identities exhibited in Geremy, Mitchum, Renaldo, Jervey, and Willy, peer influence does not seem phase their decisions about what paths to follow or giving in to peer pressure. These students have definite plans and tend to migrate to friends and peers who share those same types of plans. Geremy is an exceptional athlete; Derique and Willy are reasonable athletes, and each realizes he must exercise a certain sense of control regarding grades and discipline. If not, they will be unable to participate in sports. Mitchum credits his refusal to "follow the crowd" with his participation in JROTC as a student leader. Renaldo and Jervey also exhibit strong self-discipline in that they expressed that they hang around students who value the same things. Jervey is academically driven while Renaldo is socially apt.

Derique has been at this school for the shortest amount of time, but he has admits to having experienced the negative effects of peer pressure. He said it was not until he got back in to basketball, that he learned with what group he needed to surround himself. He replied, "Hey, if you want to find the wrong crowd, believe me, they're there. Even here at this school where everybody thinks everybody's good. The bad stuff is out there. You gotta turn your back on that and do what you need to if you want play sports. They don't put up with that stuff. I mean, the coaches got certain things they expect us to do. You don't, you out. No questions."

Kafar also seems to have at least learned to prioritize. He has had his share of troubles such as discipline and falling behind in credits, but he now sees the value of getting his school work done first before anything else. He said, "I just wish I knew then what I know now. If I'd just done what I was supposed to, I'd be graduating with my group and not later in the summer."

Extended Curricular Opportunities

All participants agreed that the school offered enough curricular choices and extended curricular opportunities. Renaldo and Mitchum, shared that they both had taken advantage of credit recovery, academic Saturdays, and tutoring at some point thus far in order to catch up and graduate on time; they agreed that this had been an avenue to catch them up. Geremy had used the tutoring services, and Jervey actually tutors other students for service hours for the National Honor Society. Only Derique and Kafar admitted to having limited themselves because of falling behind in credits due to failures in various courses. Kafar stated,

> I've kind of had to learn the hard way. Since I got behind, and I had to retake some courses, and also with my resource classes, I didn't get to have as many electives as I would have if I'd been on track. But the stuff was there. I mean, I got to do the INSYNC competition after school, and I could've done my work the first time and had more opportunities like that, but I'm okay. I also got caught up with the wrong crowd. My 10th grade year, I did like they did. I cut classes and tried to be kind of a thug. Well, it caught up with me."

Teacher-Student Relationships

Throughout the course of this study, the theme of strong teacher-student relationships continued to emerge and manifest as the most important. All participants expressed the value of these relationships as being relevant to their high school journey to successful graduation. Geremy noted several teachers and coaches whom he praised as

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being exceptional. His choice of adjectives included, "caring, attentive, aware, and understanding." Likewise, Jervey, Mitchum, Renaldo, Derique, Willy, and Kafar named specific teachers and characteristics they favored in providing strong academics, high expectations for all, and strong relationships. Ironically, Jervey andKafar shared one particular teacher who had taught both students. She taught Kafar in senior seminar and Jervey in AP English. Although these two students are at polar opposites regarding academics, they explained her teaching style as being "structured but comfortable." Kafar described her, "She's one of those teachers who knows you. I mean she really knows you. She'll help you with anything. She came over here on Saturday. She picked me up from my house and brought me here [to the school] so I could finish my project." Jervey described the same teacher,

> She is the same no matter what. She brought some of the senior seminar kids to our AP English class. They were reading *Native Son* just like us. We had a discussion with them about the title of the book. It was incredible! They understood some of the stuff we didn't. They had lived some of this. This was one of the most meaningful classes I had. She took us – the AP kids, out of our comfort zone. She did the same with the senior seminar kids. We discussed race and class and taboo issues. But you knew at the end of the day, we all got it. They even got it. She expects us, all of us to learn. Now that's a teacher!

Time and again, the students used the word "relationship" to describe the best learning experiences they had encountered throughout high school.

Section 3 - Patterns, Relationships, and Themes as Related to Findings

Section 1 presented case studies including each student's reactions to the questions posed at the interviews and their behaviors during classroom observations. Section 2 revealed common intrinsic and extrinsic themes as recognized from coding data gleaned from interviews and behaviors. These were recognized, presented and discussed

as a means to establish possible patterns or relationships among the students. As shown in previous literature, Black students do well in good schools (Darling-Hammond 2006). The school site where this study took place is recognized locally, state, and nationwide for its curricular programs, successful sports teams, high test scores, and national ranking. The teachers here are highly qualified with 42% of the teachers holding National Board Certification and 75% holding masters degrees. The Career and Technology Educational Programs are nationally recognized sites.

These students have various commonalities but each is different in his own way. They are all Black male high school seniors who are 17 to 19 years old. Several of the students will not achieve on-time graduation as described by the formula – they will not finish "on-time" after four years of high school but may require more time to complete coursework. Two of the students are "choice" students who have come to this school for better opportunities. Five of the students have plans as to how they will accomplish their after-high school goals.

Intrinsic factors such as self-Identity and motivation are two factors that students themselves must address, but not without the help of the extrinsic factors aforementioned in this study. With self-identity comes security in one's own situations. All students recognized the importance of graduation; graduation is their motivation to taking the next step. As each participant responded to the question regarding the importance of graduation, he beamed with smiles and pride.

Of the extrinsic factors, parental influence, student-teacher relationships and school involvement opportunities seem to be what students see as the most important. As the researcher, I was afraid that the size of the school would arise as a barrier to students'

feeling overwhelmed, but as the students revealed, though this school is large, all students recognized that with its large size comes opportunities from academics, to sports to extended curricular opportunities. Geremy mentioned the Freshman Academy and how important it was when he came to this large school. As an administrator here, I recognize the Academy as a place of nurture for ninth grade students, but he recognized the importance of providing a transitional year before going out among the upperclassmen. Several other students recognized certain teachers with various attributes who had been responsible for their success. The teachers at this school are highly reputable, there are abundant resources and the community is most supportive of this school and its program. As stated earlier in the literature, students do well in good schools (Darling-Hammond, 2009, The Schott Report, 2010, Green, 2011, et. al.)

The students' responses also concurred on several other points, such as parental influence, peer pressure and school involvement, but they valued good teacher-student relationships most. Each discussed in detail how getting to know the teacher assures students of feeling comfortable enough to ask questions and actually enjoy learning. These relationships not only allow the students and teachers mutual respect, but they also provide much needed support for the struggling student as well as the AP student.

<div align="center">Transition and Summary of Key Points</div>

Chapter 4 provided processes by which the data were gathered, and recorded how the design was developed, and a discussion of patterns and themes that emerged. Chapter 5 will provide an overview of the study, the findings, and implications as well as recommendations for further study. According to the findings from this study, we must continue to provide Black male students with some sense of self-identity and

determination as well as providing various extended curriculum opportunities for involvement, a caring environment, qualified teachers with high expectations, and good teacher-student relationships. Through these continued efforts and support, students can achieve on-time graduation.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Chapter 5 presents a summary of the study and important conclusions gleaned from

the data previously presented in Chapter 4. To understand the significant factors

distinguishing successful, on-time high school graduation rates among Black male

students, the researcher used the following questions to guide the focus of study:

1. Tell me about your high school experience thus far in terms of school curriculum,

    school climate, teacher – student relationships, or any other distinguishing factors

    that may contribute your high school success.

2. Why is graduation important to you?

3. Where are you on your path to graduation?

This chapter then offers a summary of the results and relates them to prior research

literature, discusses the implications for practice, and offers recommendations for further

research.

Summary of the Study

At present South Carolina ranks 45th in the nation in relation to graduation rates.

This data is grim; only a surprising 61% of our high school students are reported to

graduate in the "on-time" category (Lenard & Lord, 2009, p. 7). Even more alarming is

that minority groups, especially Blacks and Hispanics, graduate at even lower rates in

South Carolina (The Civil Rights Project). These rates are now reported as being as low

as 51% for Black students and 46% for Hispanic students (South Carolina Department of

Education).The disparities between Black male students and their White male counterparts are most alarming. High school diplomas and graduation rates as they apply to "on-time graduates" are important points of concern for South Carolinians, as well as for all other Americans for real economic and social reasons. Without the assurance of high school graduation, students face a dark future of poverty and uncertainty.

The primary goal of this study was to examine significant factors distinguishing on-time high school graduation among Black males. The study was significant in light of the large body of research regarding the low graduation rates among minorities, specifically Black males (Green &Winters, 2006, Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2008, Travis Jr. &Ausbrooks, 2012, Maxwell, 2012). The problem has far reaching implications. For example, the economic and earning power effects of a student's dropping out of high school show he or she will only have work opportunities in lower paid positions. The salary gap, sometimes as much as $10,000 per year, between drop outs and graduates is significant. The individuals who do not complete high school experience more criminal activity, have increased health deficits, and depend more on government subsidies (Antes, 2008). According to research, the commonality among Black males who are incarcerated, unemployed or victims of homicides appears to be a lack of education. Not only is this an individual's problem, but it also becomes a local, state, and national problem. Economically, the effects of students' not attaining a high school diploma and eventually dropping out of school are devastating at all levels. Other research from Greene (2001), The National Urban League (2007), Brooks-Gunn, Guao and Furstentberg (1993), posit that Black males are more likely to be incarcerated,

live in impoverished conditions, have poor academic preparedness. Clearly, graduation rates among this sub-group have utmost importance.

Further research discusses various disparities between Black males and their White counterparts. The research attempts to address and explain the problem of who finishes high school with a diploma in the allotted four years and who does not. Also, much has been done on the negative social and economic impact of economic non-graduates to themselves and society (Prevatt& Kelly, 2003). Additional studies and research have been conducted on the impact of school intervention programs and support systems (e.g. Groth; Matthews and Swan, 1999), but there is little empirical evidence in the effectiveness of these programs (Prevatt& Kelly, 2003).

Many past studies focus attention on why Black males do not persist in staying on track for graduation; less attention has been given to how to help them stay on track. Still, little is known about how to support students' decisions to stay on course to graduation (Chritenson, Sinclair, Lehr, &Godber, 2001), but most of the discussion focuses on things other than students' having the choice to attend a high performing school. Some factors influencing Black males' success to on-time graduation include intrinsic themes such self-identity, motivation, cultural attitudes, and a lack of understanding of their history as a race, while extrinsic factors include sub-standard schools, poor resources, family background, peer influence, and the roles of teachers and parents (Darling-Hammond, 2009, Travis, Jr. &Ausbrooks, 2012, Hillard as cited in "Given Half a Chance" Kafele, 2010). Additional extrinsic factors may also include socioeconomics, caste, racist stereo-types, and low teacher expectations (Ogbu, Perry, Lee, 2002). The problem is two sided; there are relevant causes for persistent gaps in

graduation rates and educational opportunities which show society and schools on one side, and the Black community on the other (Lee, 2002).

I desired to determine which significant factors distinguish on-time graduation; therefore, I used a comparative case study based upon grounded theory. Through the process of data collection, analysis, coding, comparisons from semi-structured interviews and observations with students among this subgroup, graduation rates were studied and determinations of theory emerged. Those determining factors were findings arrived at not by statistics or quantifications that see this problem of graduation rates as being more about numbers; consequently, they were collections of data gathered through rich descriptions of the participants' experiences, as they see them, within their natural high school setting. Through personal interviews, observations and rich descriptions of these experiences, themes were identified, coded, and analyzed to seek grounded theory in understanding the critical need for improving the high school graduation rates among this subgroup of students in this particular school in South Carolina. Their personal views allowed me, the researcher, to interpret and discover more meaningful information into the problem and thus direct others to possible interventions or additional help.

In taking a qualitative approach in this comparative case study, I intended to give authentic voices to the seven, Black male participants in order to find commonalities associated with on-time graduation. What helped these young men reach successful graduation? In interviewing these participants, their responses indicated several intrinsic factors and five extrinsic factors. Through examining the cases of seven 17 to 19 year old Black males then allowing those smaller cases to inform the larger case, common

themes emerged. The site of this study was the largest high school in South Carolina located on the lower eastern coast.

Within the research findings, I presented each participant's individual case from the responses to the interview questions and also the observations. I then discussed the common intrinsic and extrinsic themes that emerged as themes in supporting on-time graduation.

Interpretation of Findings

Too many Black males are falling behind in terms of achievement and on-time graduation rates. This research study uncovered relevant conclusions regarding what these participants believe to be supportive and helpful and/or hindering to their on-time educational experiences. Regarding the previous research questions, the findings reveal significant factors as being supports. When asked about their high school experiences so far, each participant regarded extrinsic factors such as school curriculum and being involved, but most importantly, they regarded their strong relationships with their teachers and coaches as being most valuable. All participants were able to recognize at least one teacher as an important support within the school. Particularly evident was that each student told about an incident where a certain teacher was most supportive. They cited caring, compassionate, qualified, and structured teachers as being strong supports. When asked for recommendations for teachers, all participants stressed the teachers' being able to "relate to them," "understand their backgrounds," and most importantly, "create a safe place and maintain mutual respect." In relation to the literature previously presented, some of these conclusions coincide with this study (Bireda, 2010, Brussow, 2007, Kafele, 2009, 2012, Darling-Hammond 2007, 2009, The Schott Report, 2012). It is

plausible that further study is needed on the Black male self-concept and identity. Other factors included a strong curriculum with various choices to match students' interests.

Intrinsically, the participants referenced their own self-identity and motivation. Though not asked specifically about their own self concepts, through the process of the interviews and observations, I gained a clear understanding of how self-confident they were or were not. Some of the participants referred to peers who were unsuccessful as being less self-knowledgeable and getting hung up with the "wrong crowd." The theme of motivation was brought up by all the participants. Phrases such as "I always knew…Whether I went to college was never an option… I knew I would graduate." They all recognize internally that graduation is, in fact, important. Each cited peer pressure as a hindrance if allowed, but this is connected with a strong inner sense of self; the participants have all managed to overcome the negative influences of peers. They have the personal qualities and skills to navigate to more positive peers who hold their same values.

Consequently, also according to the literature (Ogbu 2003, Berita, 2010, Schott Foundation, 2008, Kafele, 2012), Black male students may suffer because of a lack of knowledge regarding a history of their race. Until students can gain a clear understanding of their own identity, where they have come from, and where they are going, they cannot accept their places in the system. These researchers posit that the plight of Black males is not a problem where they cannot achieve; the problem lies in the disconnection among their community and culture within the school context. Schooling must be relevant to their individual needs, interests, and goals. The missing component may be this lack of understanding of self. Hillard (1998) wrote, "We do not know who

we are, cannot explain how we got here, and have no sense of our destiny beyond mere survival" (p.3). In order to address their self-crises thus closing gaps in achievement, Black males must be able to, study, learn and understand who they are in the context of their history and culture, see and understand relevant models in Black history, bring this into their own present context then apply this knowledge to their own selves (Kafele, 2011). Consequently, the findings of this study did not seem to coincide with the literature just referenced. The five students who have achieved on-time graduation exhibit a strong sense of self. Each participant credited having ability to be adaptable to his own situation; however, the two students who will not graduate on-time have in fact needed more support perhaps stemming from a lack of knowledge of self. Further study would be needed to uncover the reasons behind these needs.

Extrinsically, as well, the seven participants' own determination stems largely from the motivation to graduate from high school and please parents. Each regarded graduation as a "rite of passage" to the next step. This motivation seems to have stemmed from parental influence. Four of the seven participants have been reared in single family homes. As referenced in the literature, the strength of family is important to Black males (as cited in Beaumont, 2009, Murray &Naranjo, 2008). Each participant referenced his family as being most supportive, particularly, mothers were influential. It was strongly evident that each participant's family expected him to graduate. The importance of graduation was never in question among the participants or their families.

<center>Implications for Social Change</center>

This study was important for several reasons. Graduation rates are important to the school, school district, state, and nation, but more importantly, they are also important

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to the individual students. The calculations used in South Carolina for high school graduation rates must be consistent with those used in other states in order to "level the playing field." Likewise, the data supplied by high schools must be truthful and accurate. Additionally, when common, significant factors influencing the success of on time Black male students surface, it would behoove the schools to target these various groups who are falling behind and better prepare them by giving them the skills, opportunities, support, and resources needed to bring them back to grade level and thus have them ready to graduate with their peers.

As discussed earlier in the study, intrinsic factors/themes arose from these participants' authentic voices. Black male students must have a strong sense of self/self-identity and an ample amount of motivational focus to succeed. These participants from this study are well aware of the importance of graduation in relation to their future steps. Extrinsic factors/themes arose as well. The importance of parental influence, peer pressure, school curriculum/environment, and above all strong teacher-student relationships were important to these participants' success to graduation.

Because the seven student participants valued the student-teacher relationship most positively, I strongly believe there are reasons for the success of this school and the foundations of those student-teacher relationships. Four years ago, the principal of this school, Wando High, was named "National High School Principal of the Year. She came across a finalist candidate the following year as she interviewed the upcoming winner. This principal had been the principal of a failing school in West Virginia with a high poverty and drop-out rate in earlier years. Consequently, he turned the school around with three years. When asked about his success, he credited the change from a 45%

graduation rate to an 85% graduation to a professional development workshop called "Capturing Kids' Hearts" by the Flippen Group out of Texas. Their motto is "When you capture a kids' heart, you capture his mind" (Flippen, n.d.). The program was all about building relationships with students and establishing mutual respect between teacher and student. Another assistant principal and I were chosen to attend the three day workshop. Reluctantly, we went. To our surprise, this was the most meaningful professional development either of us had ever attended. We brought this back to our large, "successful" high school and have trained 75% of our faculty. Teachers who use the tenants of this program are without doubt, the best educators who know their students and maintain rapport, mutual respect, and last relationships. Students learn and achieve because of their high expectations.

Recommendations for Action

We recognize the problem and from this and previous studies, there are answers. How each high school arrives at the proper solutions to the problem of on-time graduation must be at the forefront of educational reform. According the Schott Foundation report, *The Urgency of Now,* it was estimated by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2011, "for the first time in history, the majority of babies born in the U.S. are babies of color. Thus, in the not too-distant future, the viability of our country's communities, labor force and democracy will largely be shaped and predicated on the opportunities we provide for those children" (p. 6). Our failure to put supports in place to aid Black males with a substantial opportunity for success has reached a dire state. We must address the problem now.

This study has yielded a number of factors that can support Black males. Though not an issue at this high school, barriers are present for all students who do not have the opportunity to attend a good school with quality teachers who care and a curriculum that affords students enough flexibility to find their own interests. Schools must have these resources. The added factor is the Capturing Kids' Hearts initiative. Additionally, we must provide Black male students with a self-identity stemming from a self-knowledge of their history and culture. Then the task is to connect this history and culture to the present environment of the schools.

<center>Recommendations for Further Study</center>

This study examined the significant factors distinguishing on-time graduation for Black males in a large, choice, high school. There have been few qualitative studies examining the true, lived experiences of those students who have been successful. Much of the studies focus on the quantitative problem of on-time graduation among this sub-group and the high number of drop-outs, but they offer few proven solutions. There is a dire need to examine and uncover the varying experiences of Black males. Because there is no one solution, there are further quantitative and qualitative needs to continue delving into the problem. Larger studies are needed to infuse present information and discover more supports. A larger study involving focus groups may supply greater information for more generalizations among this group.

Other future studies might be a comparison of Black male students reared in single parent homes versus two-parent homes. Additionally, it would be most helpful to do further studies in areas where high numbers of Black male students are being successful in relation to lower socioeconomics.

In addition to this study, a follow-up study on these same participants would be interesting in providing information on what the students do later in life, beyond high school. This would yield more information regarding how relevant their high school experience was in relation to their adult lives. Further study is definitely needed regarding this sub-group. We face a disheartening problem and we must address this or face an even greater problem within future generations.

Further study would involve professional development in implementing initiatives like Capturing Kids' Hearts. It would be most interesting to choose a failing school, review the graduation rate and/or achievement gap among minority students, provide strong teacher-students relationships and revisit the school to analyze achievement data three-five years later.

Reflection of the Research Experience

As a high school administrator, I was appalled by the national and state percentages of Black male students' graduation rates. Though I had always known there was a problem, I had not faced it very well. As the researcher, I was not aware of the crisis among "self" that the Black male participants may or may not have felt. Presently, I see that though the curriculum where this study took place is very much opportunistic, I am not so sure that there is enough historical attention given to African-American culture. My preconceived ideas about reasons why this sub-group had fallen behind were, as the research revealed, "stereo-types" of certain students who just seemed not to care or want to care. These students do indeed care. Nevertheless, it was absolutely rewarding to have them eagerly give their opinions and voices to this situation. These seven were genuinely proud to express their thoughts and feelings. Sadly, it was not until the

realization that several may not make graduation on-time that they wish they would have better applied themselves. Also, though this high school provides numerous avenues such as computer based learning, credit recovery, and academic intervention, I am not comfortable in saying that we are preparing some students, particularly Black males, with the skills they will need to establish themselves in society with a good job and future promise. The message is clear. We must do something for this group now or face greater economic and social repercussions in the future. However, I feel strongly that getting to know students and building relationships of mutual respect is key to the success of all students.

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APPENDIX A - INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH PROJECT

Dear Potential Participant:

My name is Sherry Eppelsheimer. I am an assistant principal at Wando High School, and in partial completion of fulfilling requirements for my Ed. D. in Curriculum and Instruction through the University of South Carolina, I am conducting a research study on the distinguishing factors impacting on-time high school graduation rates among Black males. The study will examine student experiences and perceptions regarding successful on-time graduation.

Your participation in this study will provide useful information on this topic. You qualify for participation if you are 17 years of age. Your parents/guardians will also be informed of your agreement to participate. You will be asked to attend an open-ended interview session during the school day with me that may take up to 90 minutes. At this interview, I will audio tape record the session and transcribe it. Additionally, you will be observed and video-taped within one or more classroom settings. If you wish to participate, please sign the form.

Please note that participation in this study is strictly voluntary. You may withdraw from participation in the study at any time. Participation is in no way associated with a class grade or any type of penalty. All data from this study are confidential and will be used for research purposes only. Data from the interviews and observations will remain anonymous. No identifying characteristics such as individual names will be used.

Although there are no foreseeable risks to participants, any questions posed during the interview unanswerable by the participants for any reason will be omitted. You may also decline from participation.

Please return this form to Ms. Eppelsheimer in room H135 within the next week if you agree to participate. A follow-up letter will be sent as a reminder.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sherry M. Eppelsheimer
Assistant Principal, Wando High School

I agree to participate in this study:

_____   _____   _____
Name   Signature of Student   Date

I do not wish to participate:

_____   _____
Name   Date