FINDING A CRYSTAL STAIR:

EXPLORING THE TURN-AROUND PHENOMENON EXPERIENCED
BY
AFRICAN AMERICAN URBAN MALE ADOLESCENTS
IN
HIGH SCHOOL

by

Jacquelyn Lynnette Boddie

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FINDING A CRYSTAL STAIR:

Exploring the Turn-Around Phenomenon Experienced by African American Urban Male Adolescents in High School

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(ABSTRACT)

The educational disenfranchisement of many urban, African American male adolescents aggravates the complex social and economic issues which America must reconcile. Two significant behaviors resulting from young Black men's disaffection are school failure and violence against the community. The sense of futility in these youth can nullify the possibility of their positive contributions to society. Many of the social structures that were once in place to provide support for the African American community were weakened during the sixties; and the need for structure and support is as critical today among young Black men as it has ever been.

This study sought to understand the perspectives of these young African Americans when they modified their at-risk behaviors to become academically successful in high school. It was based on one school's example of supportive systems and behaviors designed to intervene and encourage their transformation. A qualitative case study research design was selected because it allowed the researcher to examine and holistically interpret the complexities of achievement-related issues at school, at home and in the community, during the process of their transformation. Based on the recommendations of administrators and teachers, a sample pool of 10 young men was developed; each was interviewed. Two young men were selected for in-depth interview, observation, and document analysis.

The study found that the young men became successful by (a) responding to the school's specialized organic and institutional care systems; (b) responding to the reconfiguration of the anti-academic fictive kinship culture; (c) bonding with culturally synchronous sensitive role models; (d) benefiting from the school's staff development initiative; (e) responding to their parents' school involvement; and (f) experiencing these accentuated dynamics in a smaller annex building.

Data analysis was based on the tenets of grounded theory developed by Glaser and Strauss. This research fills part of the gap in the literature which explores the dynamics of transformation in anti-academic, African American male adolescents, as they become academically successful. Insights evolving from this study will also help to fill the vacuum that exists in developing high school programs that effectively change their attitudes towards learning and promote their success.

Dedication

This work is dedicated in loving memory
To My Beloved Father and Mother

Fred Abraham Boddie, whose abiding love taught me always to have faith and gave me the gifts of
compassion, strength, fortitude, and grace

and

Emma Parson Boddie, whose unconditional love, determination, and strong will
sustain me to this day

I hope, in some small way, this work honors their lives.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Introduction

Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor--
Bare.
But all the time
I'se been a-climbin' on,
And reachin' landin's,
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.
So boy, don't you turn back.
Don't you set down on the steps
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.
Don't you fall now--
For I'se still goin', honey,
I'se still climbin',
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

Langston Hughes (1994)

Background

> As early as 1819, the valedictorian of an African Free School in
> New York remarked: 'Why should I strive hard and acquire all
> the constituents of a man, if the prevailing genius of the land admit
> me not as such or but in an inferior degree! Pardon me if I feel
> insignificant and weak....What are my prospects? To what shall I
> turn my hand? Shall I be a Mechanic? No one will employ me,
> white boys won't work with me. Shall I be a merchant? No one
> will have me in his office; white clerks won't associate with me.
> Drudgery and servitude then, are my prospective portion. Can
> you be surprised at my discouragement?'[1]

Generations of African American students have experienced similar conditions and have declared these sentiments as well. During the fifty year period from 1880 to 1930, Black schooling in the South was nearly brought to a complete stop through underfunding and neglect. At the turn of the century, the Washington-Dubois debates over industrial vs. higher education were at their height in the educational community. During World War I, Intelligence testing was used to reinforce theories of White genetic intellectual superiority. Patterns of de facto segregation in the North were established. The rise of Jim Crow racism and the acceptance of separate and unequal education clarified an agenda for the nation that was formalized in restrictive covenants which forced Blacks into ghettos and separate school boundaries. The disparities in resources and

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[1]   Leon Litwack, North of Slavery, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 153-154.

conditions in this environment imposed limitations that were used to confuse the issue of African American native intelligence to justify a system of blocked opportunities for Black youth. Although African Americans have made significant status gains in the years since <u>Brown v. Board of Education</u>[2] outlawing separate but equal education, the disparities of racial inequity still define and limit the realization of racial parity in education, income, and employment. There appears to be little inclination in the public mind to acknowledge the effects of racism and discrimination on Black student achievement in schools (Hale-Benson, 1986; Ogbu, 1974).

<u>Introduction</u>

The social structures of family, school, and church that were once in place to provide support and inter-generational community continuity and that served to sustain the Black community against racism and economic hardship, have been greatly weakened through the Black middle class exodus toward suburbia which began in the sixties. Marian Wright Edelman (1987) recalls that as a middle-class youth she and her peers were constantly reminded, not only that they could make it, but that they had a responsibility to achieve and to share that achievement with the less fortunate in the Black community who attended the same churches and shared the same classrooms. The hostilities from the outside world which told Black children that they were not worth as much as other children were countered in the community. Middle class friends, family members and mentors affirmed their worth and challenged them to make America a better place for all to live.

The educational failures of many poor adolescents exacerbate the complex social and economic issues which America must reconcile. The violence which young Black males who are poor and powerless direct mainly against the Black community, against relatives and friends, and against themselves poses a danger to social peace. Among many of these youth, there is a sense of futility, disaffection and social disengagement from and resistance to formal mainstream institutions, such as school and church. The need for guidance, structure, support and affirmation among Black youths is pervasive, particularly in the community of young African American urban males in the central cities of the United States (Taylor, R., 1991). Since the Civil Rights legislation of the sixties, disadvantaged Black youth have benefited least from the undeniable social progress experienced by the nation's majority groups. Their plight is highlighted by high rates of youth unemployment, delinquency, crime, substance abuse, unwed teenage pregnancies, and suicide. Disadvantaged young Black men have made the least progress (Gibbs, 1988).

Inner city African American youths are constantly subjected to daily affronts and reminders of their status as the disadvantaged American. A teacher may call a young African American man stupid; a cab driver may bypass him on the street corner or refuse to take him to a "Black" neighborhood; a White stranger gets up and walks away when he sits next to him on a crowded subway; or a police officer may stop him for questioning as the youngster drives through an all White neighborhood. A growing number of Black youth do not have the motivation or ego-strength to build psychological buffer zones against these ego assaults. In reaction, many of them lack a vision for their future and exhibit a low value for human life, the primary victims of Black juvenile crime being the juveniles themselves and their own communities (Gibbs, 1988). The psychological theories of homicide proposed by Black psychiatrists Poussaint (1983), Grier and Cobbs (1968) and Pierce (1970) stress the chronicity and severity of frustrations Black males experience in American society. These frustrations engender feelings of rage which are displaced on targets in their immediate environments. The high incidence of Black-on-Black homicide reflects displacement by these youth who presumably have low levels of self-esteem, high levels of

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[2]   347 U. S. 483 (1954).

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hostility and underdeveloped mechanisms for coping with their impulses of anger. This combination and the easy availability of guns and drugs create potentially violent conditions for countless Black youth who are ready to explode. According to Gibbs (1988), if they react, they may react with uncontrolled aggression which may precipitate counter-violence from those who covertly, overtly, or inadvertently initiate insult. If they do not react, they internalize the rage and develop hypertension, or drown their frustration in apathy, drugs, or alcohol.

Regardless, these daily affronts are literally driving many African American youth to the brink of madness. A growing subculture of social disengagement involves poor White and Hispanic youth as well. They are separated from the social escalators of society: school, work, and family; and consequently they are increasingly engaged in activities of social de-escalation: crime, delinquency, gangs, drugs and violence. Wherever the connections among family, education and economic institutions are weak disengagement persists and is spreading. The ravages of disengagement, however, are taking a most deleterious toll on the communities of African American adolescent males. An alarming number are at risk of failure and of being trapped in debilitating dependency. Studies focusing on major metropolitan areas such as Baltimore, Washington, D. C., and San Francisco show that thirty to sixty percent of young Black men are involved in the criminal justice system (Fry and Schiraldi, 1992; Miller, 1992; Reuter, MacCoun and Murphy 1990). Black juvenile arrest rates for drug abuse rose 158.6 percent between 1980 and 1990. Arrest rates for murder and aggravated assault grew by 145 and 89 percent, respectively (Mincy, 1994). Those who have low self-esteem and very little self-confidence have internalized low appraisals and low expectations externally ascribed to them by those who are plagued with the same maladaptive responses, or by those whose hostilities are defined by bias. Families have been unable to provide the material and emotional sustenance required for wholesome development, and the well-documented failure of the public school to meet social and academic requirements for these youth is glaring (Anderson, 1990; Taylor, C. 1990; Wilson, W. J. 1987). Studies by Comer (1988;1989) and the many models for effective elementary school programs developed by Ronald Edmonds (1979;1982) in the culture of poverty studies, have contributed to the research on the social and academic development of very young children. Comer suggests that children begin to comprehend by third grade whether or not they are part of the American mainstream. If they see that they belong on the margin, their academic performance declines immediately. By early adolescence, most students in this situation stop trying to bond with school and with teachers. Inner-city students are confronted with a complexity of barriers to learning and achievement in high schools. School failure for lower income and minority students has reached epidemic proportions, especially failure at the secondary level. Statistics have indicated that 21% of all eighteen and nineteen year olds and 25% of all twenty and twenty-one year olds in the African American population had neither completed nor were they presently enrolled in high school (U.S. Census Bureau Report 1985). Generally, Black students do not do as well academically as other ethnic groups. Based on total high school graduates, Black students received proportionately fewer A averages and more D or F averages in various subject matter areas (Gibbs, 1988). The educational dilemma of Black students is that they are expected to work as hard as White students in school for fewer ultimate rewards from society. Because this represents a group problem, a high proportion of school failure has evolved as a group solution to perceived structural hypocrisy. Efforts adjusted downward match the perceived expected societal rewards for education (Ogbu, 1974).

In spite of these phenomena, Sowell (1974) notes that millions of African Americans developed from the chasms of slavery acquired work skills, and the whole complex of knowledge required to achieve in modern society. Their educational advancement is not extensively documented. He describes the patterns of excellence in eight segregated all-Black schools before the impact of the 1954 Supreme Court decision, <u>Brown v. Board of Education</u>**.**

Sowell (1976) describes how these schools contributed to Black American achievement in the face of the strongest opposition confronting any American ethnic group in America's history as a story largely untold. He discredits the "cream rising to the top" theory of individual phenomenon. Rather, Jones (1981), Siddle-Walker (1993) and Sowell (1976; 1974) conclude that there was a social process at work. In each of the "good" segregated schools studied by these researchers, interviews revealed that former students remember these settings as "one's home away from home where students were taught, nurtured, supported, corrected, encouraged, and punished."[3] They were places where the commitment and educational levels of the teachers and principals were high and rigid academic and behavioral standards of high expectation were collaboratively supported by school and community for the collective aspiration of racial equality. Twenty-nine years after the desegregation process designed to achieve racial equality through educational achievement, the prescriptions of desegregation have produced what Irvine and Irvine (1983) call iatrogensis: an unintended and unanticipated ailment worse than the original disease for which treatment was sought in the first instance.

Merton (1957) states that a society regulates its goals to reduce conflicts and frustrations among its members and to ensure that people will use legitimate means to reach these goals. He further argues that if people are unable to reach these goals through the methods prescribed by a society, they are likely to develop anomie or social detachment. Neither forcing society to change discriminatory practices nor expecting more for hard work has proven to be a realistic modus operandi in a competitive system beset with the imbalance of unfairly rewarded accomplishments. Many inner-city African American students have chosen subconsciously to stop working hard in school. They have adjusted their efforts downward, in order to reduce the painful anxiety of having to work hard for little.

Statement of the Problem

The focus of this study was on what worked to facilitate an academic turn-around phenomenon in those youth severely at risk of failure, some of whom have been perceived as alien and uneducable. It is an accepted truism that our schools do a fairly decent job of educating students who come to school prepared for the styles of instructional delivery grounded in European culture that were used to acculturate immigrant students in the early twentieth century. But because schools have particularly failed to resolve the urban, African American male adolescent's developmental, psychological, sociological issues that many of them bring to public school settings, this study explored the sources and causes of change in the subjects' attitudes toward school which inspired positive turn-arounds in their effort, grade point averages, state test scores, school behavior and attendance. The subjects' development of attitudes toward a more positive self-valuation were also scrutinized and discussed. This investigator also discussed the perspectives of people at home, at school and in the community who influenced their turn-around.

Although the educational statistics indicate a ten point reduction in high school drop-out rates among Black males from 1973 (25.8%) to 1991 (15.6%), the educational level of African Americans continues to lag behind that of Whites (National Urban League, 1993). In some central city schools Black dropout rates approach and sometimes exceed 50% (Comer, 1988).

Clearly missing from the research are the success stories that document effectively educating poor, adolescent, African American males concentrated in urban areas, who lack a

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3   F. Jones, A Traditional Model of Excellence, (Washington, D. C.: Howard University Press, 1981), p. 2.

vision of their future. Therefore, the focus of this study is on what works to meet their needs for academic success. A number of recent quantitative studies have described developmental programs for youth. Not only do they evaluate the academic impact of manhood training programs, they also measure the impact of role model and mentoring programs on the achievement of African American male adolescents. (Jones, B. 1994; Tomlin, 1994; Barnett, 1991; Smith, R. 1994; Smith, B. 1993) Generally, these studies concluded that (1) quality time spent with the subjects made them feel a sense of affirmation and belonging; (2) intervention strategies in the form of supportive group counseling made a major difference in the way these students perceived school and themselves; (3) modeling influences can be conveyed through the sharing of self-regulation strategies and dialogue; and finally (4) urban, Black, male adolescents will select personal support from in-school persons who were culturally synchronous males with easy going, relaxed personality types.

Two recent studies, compare the academic and social behaviors of high and low achieving African American students as they face the dilemmas and constraints of blocked opportunity (Fordham, 1987; Jackson, J., 1993). Fordham develops an extensive ethnographic study that includes the impact of family structure and parenting styles while Jackson presents a quantitative work which examines the culturally synchronous choices of support young Black men prefer, as they select significant people with whom to interact inside and outside of school. In both studies the impact of young male role models proves to be significantly important to these students as they pursue academic success.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how two urban, male, African American teenagers with histories of at-risk behavior and poor school performance experienced the turn-around phenomenon of academic success in a high school setting. What promoted and sustained their school success through a maze of negative stressors such as racism, substance abuse in families; criminality in families; incarceration; violence in families and neighborhoods; family disintegration; poverty or financial strain; parental abandonment and/or parental unemployment? The high school from which these students were chosen is one that established structurally supportive intervention and interaction strategies designed to enable student effort and enhance achievement. There were structured tutorials, social skill development and mentoring programs, conflict management and peer counseling components which served to offer enrichment, encouragement, guidance, inspiration and support. The interventions were coupled with frequent, systematic monitoring procedures that assessed and evaluated both student and teacher performance. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What interactive processes within the school, home, and community facilitated the turn-around phenomenon associated with each student's success, positive social growth, and development?

2. How did each young man conceptualize the systems of school, family, and community during his transformation?

3. How did these conceptualizations reflect his situation within each system during the process of change?

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Basic Assumptions

John Ogbu (1981) recommends asking students questions to ascertain how they acquire knowledge, perceptions, orientations and behaviors, and how these acquisitions influence their schooling experience. This study was guided by this recommendation and by the following assumptions:

1. The complexities in the linkage between the culture of promise in schools and the culture of poverty in low-income learner communities very often cause negative behaviors in students.

2. The interactive structural effects that replicate institutional and interpersonal caring in at-risk school cultures nurture and develop learners' persistence in the belief of school worth, despite high risk experiences.

Significance and Justification for the Study

This study is significant in that it examines in detail some of the situations, processes and procedures which turn around the academic performance of at-risk minority learners. These factors change poor school performance into academic success and subsequently reduce negative behaviors which render them at-risk of failure. The study is based on a concrete school example embodying the intensive use of supportive systems, materials, and behaviors which can be documented. What follows is largely a description of the school environment and students' accounts of the impact of these support intervention systems. This information will have implications for those school personnel who work daily with these students in schools where so many of them fail or drop out mentally and physically to pursue lives of crime in the "irregular economy," as their fear of societal consequences virtually ceases to exist. A goal of this project is to alter discriminatory educational practices towards the African American male teenager. It is also hoped that this study will count as one that empowers the marginalized African American male teenager to gain control over his experiences, as he analyzes and scrutinizes them in the process. Cloward and Ohlin (1960) suggest that delinquent subcultures represent solutions which are collective adaptations to disparities between what lower class youth are led to want and what is actually available to them.

The maladaptations to limited opportunity that become manifested in the form of suspension, expulsion, failure, truancy, dropout rates, violence in school and community have all been studied. The research is replete with studies that indicate what needs to be done at the elementary school level, in order to avert failure. There is a dearth of relevant research that explores how to ensure facilitative school environments at the high school level that strengthen the bond of poor, urban, African American male adolescents to the school as a mainstream institution, in order to promote their academic success. This study scrutinized and explored the significant influences within a high school setting that counteracted these maladaptations and resulted in the turn-around phenomenon. It examined those influences that significantly promoted changes in their attitudes toward academic success.

Limitations of the Study

The selection of participants for this study was narrowed to a sample pool of ten, and two students from the pool were selected for in-depth case studies. All participants from the original pool of ten students were from one high school and all demonstrated a belief in the persistence of

school worth, despite high risk experiences. This was not a representative sample and traditional generalizations were not possible. The two in-depth studies represent information-rich cases which explored the intense manifestations of the phenomenon of interest. Theory-building analyses evolving from the study of these cases identified generic processes associated with turn-around. Therefore, generalizations were not to all at-risk, African American, urban, male adolescents in high school but to theories of how the phenomenon of turn-around developed. This study provides new insights and avenues for future research in this area.

Definitions

Turn-around Phenomenon: The student's attitude towards learning changes from one that is anti-academic and negative to one that is positive towards learning. The student experiences academic success and strives to maintain at least a 2.0 G.P.A. and regular attendance. He also strives to maintain a record of acceptable school behaviors.

Success: In this context, success refers to improved academic performance as measured by a 2.0 or better G.P.A.; improved daily attendance; reduction in the number of suspensions and behavioral referrals; grade promotion.

At-risk: Used in this study, at-risk means that the youth must meet at least two of the following characteristics: grade retention (non-promotion); grade point average of less than 2.0; chronic absenteeism; suspension; expulsion; disruptive behaviors; drug or alcohol use or abuse and economic disadvantage. They will exhibit tendencies toward progressive disengagement from the norms and values of mainstream society; this disengagement will be manifested in the expression of their values, dress, and codes of conduct. Its impact is reflected in gang or criminal activity, activities associated with violence, school failure, use, abuse or involvement in drugs.

Organization of the Study

The main body of this project is organized into five chapters. Chapter I contains the background and introduction of the study. Statements of the problem and the purpose were introduced. Research questions and assumptions that guided the study were identified. The justification and significance were presented. Limitations were specified and terms were defined. In Chapter II, topics that provided the background for the study were presented in a literature review.

An account of the research design, the study sample, and the method procedures were presented in Chapter III. Chapter IV provided the findings of the study based upon the analysis of the data. The analysis was summarized and discussed in Chapter V, where conclusions concerning the research topic were developed, implications for practice were recommended and questions for further consideration were presented.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

I am an invisible man....
I am invisible, understand, simply
because people refuse to see me....
When they approach me, they see only
my surroundings, themselves, or figments
of their imagination--indeed, everything
and anything except me.

Ralph Ellison (1972)

A review of the literature examines the socio-historical context of Black education in American society and its impact on several dynamics associated with African American attitudes toward school and achievement. It includes a discussion of the socio-economic forces that the African American male encounters and how they influence the behaviors, attitudes, and skills related to his adolescent identity formation. It relates these behavioral patterns to the disaffected, urban, African American adolescent male's school experience and ends with an examination of specialized care in schools.

Socio-historical Context

Because school factors have worked historically to subvert minority children's achievement, school performance and adjustment, it is important to relate their cumulative effect on the attitudes toward achievement and school developed by many African Americans (Montgomery, 1993). The import of their effect cannot be ignored. The framers of The U.S. Constitution sanctioned the separate and unequal treatment of Blacks and Indians (Hirschorn, 1976). Before emancipation, free Blacks were provided an inferior education and what the slave masters permitted was training, not education. Separate manual and vocational training schools were provided to free Negroes of the North. When the education of Blacks began to pave the way for the dissemination of literature about their ideas of liberty and equality, violent resistance intended to destroy the institution of slavery escalated. Intelligent Blacks adopted the bloody tactics of the French Revolution and Touissant L'Ouverture, Nat Turner, General Gabriel, with other enlightened Blacks, and the abolitionists led more than two hundred servile insurrections during the early part of the nineteenth century. The reaction in the South was legislation that closed colored schools and made it a criminal offense for Negroes to teach their own children. Education for Negroes was made impossible; it was considered inconsistent with the institution of slavery. Legislation prohibiting the formal instruction of Blacks was enacted in all the slave states between 1740 and 1847 (Bond, 1969; Bullock, 1970), and the credo of the South toward Black education emerged:

> The more you cultivate the minds of slaves the more unserviceable you make them; you give them a higher relish for those privileges which they cannot attain and turn what you intend for a blessing into a curse. If they are to remain in slavery they should be kept in the lowest state of ignorance and degradation, and the nearer you bring them to the condition of brutes the

better chance they have to retain their apathy.[4]

However, Woodson (1919) reports that with emancipation in 1865 the need for training and education in citizenship of freedmen was compelling. Separate schools emerged for the newly freed bondsmen, some offering a liberal arts degree; other schools offered vocational education in the industrial movement.

The South established pariah status by law and by custom (van den Berghe, 1967) for all freed slaves and other Blacks, in order to prevent free and equal competition between Blacks and Whites. Carter G. Woodson (1919) wrote that even when Blacks took on the doctrine of higher education, free African Americans began to realize that their preparation did not afford them equal opportunities. Woodson and Ogbu (1978) agree that it was never the intent of the American system to educate Blacks to compete with Whites for equitable social or economic status.

The evidential effect of providing blacks inferior education for generations, if not centuries, has proven to be progressively deleterious on the attitude of many, both Black and White, towards the achievement potential and school performance of African American youth. Particular injuriousness has been perpetrated against the self-evaluation of Black students' self-concepts. Clark (1983), Poussaint and Atkinson (1972) all support the conclusion that self-concept and achievement are directly linked. Banks (1972) believes that the self-concept of the Black child is a socio-cultural phenomenon determined by the White majority's devaluation of blackness. He suggests that it is seen in school environments, teacher attitudes, mass media, courts, government, churches, and parental attitudes. These negative forces, combined with poverty, form self concepts in children which engender school behaviors that result in egregious disadvantage.

Ogbu (1978) believes that over the generations many Blacks, because of spurious rationality, have developed an attitude of low performance and educational attainment in school that is functionally adaptive to their ascribed inferior social and occupational positions in adult life (i.e., apathy). Harrell (1979) identifies apathy as one of six coping styles through which Blacks may acknowledge the damaging effects of racism but demonstrate few strategies for responding to it. And, although John Blassingame (1972) proved slavery to be a complex, textured, layered period in history, during which the average slave managed to salvage a great degree of humanity and dignity and ambition, Woodson (1919) concludes that Blacks, having been reduced to the plane of beasts for generations, were systematically taught bad traits and attitudes removable only with great difficulty.

As Woodson and Ogbu perceived, the racial burdens of the past have had on-going consequences that continue to be race-based. The negative momentum of these influences is reflected in the complexities of the unequal power relationship that still exists between the majority and the minority. Notwithstanding Professor Blassingame's identification of positive and protected aspects of the ante-bellum Black community, Woodson's analysis of the ravages that occurred is still valid. This explanation does not presume to trivialize the complexity of both historical, socio-cultural and individual differences that are involved in the academic withdrawal of many urban, African American students. It does, however, suggest a subcultural factor that contributes to attitudes related to underachievement in non-nurturing school environments. It continues to manifest itself in the form of behaviors and attitudes that negate academic advancement by many African American students, especially those subjected to schools in isolated urban pockets of poverty where their premises are no longer consistently challenged, relentlessly countered and

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[4]   Carter G. Woodson, The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861. (New York: A&B Books, 1919), p. 9.

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constantly replaced with positive self-talk vehicles for youth to adopt. Jenkins (1982) asserts that in the face of pressures toward negative assessments of self, consistent positive self-evaluations will emerge alongside the negative ones when persistent mental alternatives are posed to those presented by some aspects of the racist culture. And because the education of caste like minorities provides for those who receive better than an average education for their groups, leaders emerge who are destined to perform similar roles within their own groups. A duplication of these roles from which they have been excluded in the wider societal mainstream resulted in their own schools, churches, hospitals, and businesses. Ogbu refers to these individuals as the well-educated minority elites. During the era of school segregation Black educators contributed significantly to the advancement of African American youth. They used the imposed circumstances of racial isolation to build a functional educational system controlled by the community of Black professionals and working class adults: a Black principal and a Black staff who addressed not only the academic needs of youth but the deeper psychological and sociological needs of their clientele in the complex organization of the Black school, which worked collaboratively with its community of parents. The first Black public high school in the United States, Dunbar High School in Washington, D.C., scored higher on city-wide tests than any of the White high schools in the District of Columbia, as early as 1899. Staffed by highly educated Blacks who could not find college level teaching positions, Dunbar produced the first Black General (Benjamin O. Davis, Sr.); the first Black federal judge (William H. Hastie); the discoverer of blood plasma (Dr. Charles R. Drew); the first Black Senator since Reconstruction (Edward W. Brooke); a score of Majors in the U.S. Army of World War II; nine Colonels and Lieutenant Colonels and one Brigadier General.

In most Black communities before the Black middle class exodus of the sixties and seventies to the suburbs, institutions led by Black professionals (doctors, lawyers, teachers, social workers, etc.) and the working class were strong. Family, school, and church not only shared the same dreams and goals but kept their children guarded from the hostilities of the world outside (Edelman, 1987). Wilson (1987) alludes to the stability provided to inner-city segregated neighborhoods by the Black middle and working classes when they, too, were confined, in earlier years, by the restrictive covenants of separation. These enclaves of segregated schools had fewer adequate facilities and materials than White schools, but they had parents, teachers and mentoring adults who struggled to instill self-esteem and social responsibility in their children (Siddle-Walker, 1993). Siddle-Walker (1993) found that not every African American segregated school was inferior to White school settings and researchers are now calling for a careful re-examination of the practices used in segregated schools that successfully educated the African American child (Montgomery, 1993). Efforts to ensure equal opportunity for all Black children and to desegregate schools with an increased emphasis on sensitizing staff to the complex educational issues that relate to shades of diversity in student characteristics must continue.

Socio-economics and Black Male Identity Formation

In the community of African Americans today, the focus must shift to the Black man; for it is he who is failing in schools and losing ground in the labor market to women, both Black and White. And it is he who is filling our prisons and dying of drugs, alcohol, violence and adventurism more than any other group in society (Staples,1987; Gibbs,1988). It is his dyadic relationship with the Black woman that is unequivocally at risk; unless the dyad is repaired the traditional institution of the Black family will be neither served nor saved. According to Staples (1987), the crisis of the Black family is indisputably the crisis of the Black male and his inability to carry out those responsibilities associated with being husband and father in the nuclear family. Staples believes that the disintegration is only a symptom of the larger problem of the institutional decimation of the Black male. He links this decimation with the historical legacy of institutional

racism. As early as 1940, E. Franklin Frazier (1940) believed that many Black men failed to provide for their families because they could not; not because they did not want to. Those who fled to the urban North found more subtle forms of discrimination where they had hoped to find stable and dignified work. Conditions of inconsistent employment, underemployment, seasonal employment, low pay, and being the last hired and first fired subverted their attempts to provide with reliability. Martin Luther King wrote that it is murder psychologically in America to deprive a man of a job or an income because the nature of the deprivation represents the equivalency of saying to a man that he has no right to exist.[5] These same economic vexations persist today.

A shift in the development of technologies for private industry's pre-eminence in the world economic market led to the expansion of communication and computer technologies and an accelerated move toward information processing and service industries. The economic restructuring of the Reagan administration resulted in massive Black male unemployment and left most urban Blacks in the throes of poverty and joblessness. Some analysts argue that this shift to higher technology, along with globalization, had a tremendous negative effect on the untrained and unskilled. Middle income and working class Blacks had by the eighties reaped the economic benefits of the civil rights protest movements of the sixties and seventies and had moved to neighborhoods in the suburbs. Wilson (1987) concluded that with their departure the reinforcement and perpetuation of mainstream patterns of norms and behavior followed, leaving urban, inner-city Blacks more isolated from the mainstream. He reasoned further that the presence of Black middle-class professionals (doctors, teachers, lawyers, social workers, ministers) and stable working-class Blacks had provided a stability to inner-city neighborhoods that was lost during their exodus of these two decades.

During the sixties, the American Dream was finally a dream for Black youth that the Johnson and Kennedy administrations had created in a political climate where equality and social change with increased opportunities for minorities were more than passing fancies. However, removing some of the racial barriers during this period only served to create maximum opportunities for the better-trained, talented, most educated segments of the Black population. It advanced least those crippled most by disenfranchisement under the burden of past discriminations. And by the time the Reagan tide of conservative ideology had arrived in the mid-1980s, millions of ghetto Blacks were left in the undertow of three succeeding decades of socio-economic regression and the problems that poverty provokes (Wilson, 1987). It left Black youth in a worse economic and social situation than they had experienced before the Kennedy administration. In 1960, Black youth unemployment was 12.1%; in 1983, it rose to 48.3% (Duster, 1988). By 1988, the unemployment rate for Black teenagers 16 - 19 years old was 53% (Edelman & Ladner, 1991).

The 1996 U.S. Census Statistical Abstract of the United States reported that in 1995, 71.4% of Black youth aged 16 - 19 were unemployed; 37.1% were Black male adolescents. Whereas, 15.6% of White male teenagers were unemployed and 25.3% of Hispanic male teenagers, aged 1116 - 19 were not in the Labor force. Wilson (1987) cites the structural bases for the unemployment problem of Black youth: movement of capital from the cities to the suburbs; from Northern cities to areas of the Sunbelt and to foreign soil; the decline of manufacturing; the increase in service-sector occupations where the bulk of the Black population lives and the relocation of substantial segments of the business community in areas where Black youth cannot be employed. Duster (1988) reports that from 1953-1978, approximately 15,000 shopping malls were built in suburban America. From 1960-1977, Whites increased by in the suburbs and Blacks increased by one-half million, while increasing by six million in the cities. All of these elements

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[5]   Marian W. Edelman, Families in Peril, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 67.

have contributed to the wave of unemployment and crime that dominates the crises in America's central cities. When he describes the subsequent rise of a Black underclass in America's cities and its rising tide of disaffected urban youth, Wilson (1987) emphasizes the connections among impoverished urban households headed by females, hustling, crime, and welfare dependency. In 1991, 45.9% of Black children were poor compared with 16.1% of White children and 39.8% of Hispanic children (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1992). The at-risk relationships of the urban Black man and woman that have evolved from these conditions of economic despair and isolation have also resulted in unprecedented numbers of female-headed households (Wilson, 1987; Edelman, 1987). The increase of three to four million in this group comes from two major sources: never-married teenage mothers and divorced or widowed women who have lower remarriage rates than White women. Half of all Black female-headed households are below the poverty line (Gibbs, 1988). In 1991, 54% of Black children were in mother-only households, compared with 16.5% of White children and 26.6% of Hispanic children (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1992). The increase in female-headed households is tied to the feminization of poverty. And although Moynihan (1965) called attention to the problems of Black families in central cities during the sixties, his research was critically rejected by African American scholars of note: Rainwater, Yancey, and Staples. Moynihan shifted the burden of cause and responsibility of Black deprivation onto the Black family structure when his research found that the key contributing factor to Black familial deprivation was the core of the American sociological structure. Consequently, the deprivation has become significantly more entrenched in the socio-economic structure, since his findings. Staples (1987) foresaw large numbers of Black male children rising out of poor families headed by single mothers and following in the sociological footsteps of their biological fathers to early graves, prisons, crime and unemployment.

Children from single-parent poor households are at greater risk. They are more often exposed to verbal and physical abuse by inner-city teenage mothers and liberal parental supervision of boys in female-headed families may predispose young Black males to violent behavior, association with negative street peer groups, and disciplinary problems in school (Sampson, 1987; Anderson, 1993). Parents of poor children often experience the stress of illness, housing problems, and the death of friends or family.

Jenkins (1982) notes, however, that in the female-headed households that do provide the kind of stability that is critically important for the development of a child's positive self-concept, there is a considerable effort made to use the extended kinship and nonkin networks to support balance in the function of the family unit. He defines a stable family as one where one or two adults, a grandmother or a relative, are consistently available and working to provide for members' basic physical and emotional needs. For a young Black adolescent male to struggle with his identity and place in society, and at the same time, survive in the midst of poverty, alienation, isolation and familial instability, without the support and protection of a father or a successful male mainstream role model, eventually spells disaster for many. Some make it, but for some others the chance of forming a positive identity among their Black male adolescent peers is substantially diminished. It is not likely that they will try to make it without bucking the system and establishing their own norms which the system will eventually destroy (Gaston, 1986; Malcolm X, 1964)**.** The lack of confidence and trust of low income, inner-city, African American, adolescent males in their social environment, as well as their perception or experience of restricted opportunities for assuming responsible adult role membership in mainstream society can be partially attributed to the paucity of significant role model identification (Taylor, R., 1991)**.** The numerous studies done on the effect of mentoring for this population have found them to be beneficial to these youngsters.

In their study of Black rage, Grier and Cobbs (1968) view each critical stage of development as one at which the Black boy is told to hold back, subvert and camouflage his

normal masculinity: to avert rather than to assert. Keil (1966) indicates that, having been denied a natural development of his sense of manliness, he must constantly prove to himself that he is a man. Oliver (1984) maintains that compulsive masculinity, or machismo, is a widely adopted alternative to traditional definitions of manhood in the culture of the streets among the urban poor. It compensates for feelings of shame, powerlessness and frustration. Manhood is redefined in terms that lead to the destruction of self and others, and staying cool ensures the palatability of destruction (Majors and Billson, 1992). The adolescent Black male is victimized by discouragement at school, hostility by society and by an opposition to his development that is relentless and uncompromising (Gibbs, 1988).

The findings of Mead (1934) and Cooley (1956) suggest that one's concept of self is a part of how others see him, and how others tell him he should be seen. The collective attitudes of others to which Mead alludes are identified as the "generalized other." This "generalized other" gives the individual unity of self. Poussaint and Atkinson (1972) present the dilemma of "the generalized other" for Black youth in White American society to which Mead makes reference. If the Black male adolescent assumes the attitude of this "generalized other," he will assume that he is inferior because he is Black and his self-image is then defined and evaluated by a "generalized other" that is warped by racism. Naturally his self-concept becomes a negatively esteemed one. Forging a healthy identity in the face of rejection, systemic exclusion, and political and economic exploitation is no small challenge. Gaston (1986), Grier and Cobb (1968) define this struggle for the Black man as one that is essentially unique, particularly during the turbulence of adolescence. In their view, attaining any portion of Black manhood is an active process; they believe that feeling this manhood to be one's own is an inimitable struggle.

Glasgow (1980), Grier and Cobb (1968) and Majors and Billson (1992) pay particular attention to the Black man's unique expression of individuality and aggressiveness in "playing it cool." They describe this as a stylized, institutionalized posture of camouflage that mystifies the White man but poses no threat to him. In the tradition of Yoruba, the African custom of coolness is equated with character; character objectifies custom. To exhibit grace under pressure and to find the confidence to cope with all kinds of situations is itutu, mystic coolness (Thompson, R.F., 1983). Majors and Billson call it "Cool Pose" in their study and argue that it helps Black men counter stress caused by social oppression, rejection and racism. They also contend that it furnishes the Black male with a sense of control, strength, confidence and stability and helps him deal with the closed doors and negative messages of the "generalized other." They also believe that attaining Black manhood is filled with pitfalls of discrimination, negative self-image, guilt, shame and fear. Schools place him in lower academic groups; teachers reject and are intimidated by him; and economists label him disadvantaged.

Adolescent Black male teenagers who are also poor experience great difficulty negotiating this transition to adulthood. They must reconcile the contradictions in the values, expectations and demands of their environment and their attempts to do so often drive them toward anti-social behaviors associated with the social and economic underground for refuge and positive self-definition. For Black males locked out of the social and economic mainstream, fortuitous violence can be a form of social achievement. Toughness, violence and a disregard for death and danger become the hallmark of survival in a world that does not respond to his efforts to belong and achieve. "Being cool" removes the sting of failure and gives the Black male his greatest sense of pride and masculinity (Majors and Billson, 1992; McCall, 1993).

One of Glasgow's (1980) conclusions in his Watts study of what can happen to young people who are trapped in poverty and hopelessness when society turns a deaf ear was that these young inner-city men used fire to bring a the nation to attention, forcing it to examine their

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condition. This symptom of anomie is expressed in Merton's (1957) theory of individual adaptations: socially deviant behavior results for certain groups because, while they share the society's basic goals, they do not share the means for achieving them. Between desire and reality are social, economic and political barriers that seem impervious to reasonable everyday effort. He argues that differential access to the opportunity structure encourages certain individuals to function deviantly in order to obtain rewards of a material nature. Rebellion is a popular strategy. Much of the anger in the youth that Glasgow studied arose from contact with mainstream institutions which rejected, maimed and broke them; they were denied their individuality and their integrity. For most, school represented the first contact with mainstream rejection and marked the beginning of a downwardly spiraling cycle of failure.

African American Males and the School Experience

Cornbeth and Korth (1980), in their study of teacher-student interaction in integrated classrooms, point out that teachers favored the behavior of White females over that of White males, Black females and Black males. The students they identified as having the least potential as learners were Black males. The behaviors they valued least--those of Black males--were the direct opposites of the behaviors they valued most--those of White females, because, according to Banks (1972), the American educational delivery system has been designed for the youngsters of the White middle-class sectors of America. Hale-Benson, having done extensive studies on the influence of West African tradition on Black American culture, submits that culture shapes cognition and that there are two distinct cognitive styles: analytical, which is European American, and relational, which is African American. Some aspects of a school based on the analytical cognitive style would emphasize rules, things, standardization, conformity, regularity, rigid order, difference as deficit, logic, deduction, and egocentrism. Whereas, a school based on the relational cognitive style would focus on flexibility, people, uniqueness, freedom, variation, creativity, affect, induction, and sociocentrism. Relational learners value personal examples, learning related to their own experiences and student-centered, personal environments. Analytical learners enjoy learning isolated information, hypothesis testing approaches, and teacher-centered impersonal environments. She maintains that the educational system ignores these needs in African American children and fails to acknowledge that the cultural characteristics of physical precocity, movement and the dominance of affective and nonverbal communication are disregarded as well. A child who is unable to satisfy his need for approval through legitimate channels may turn to delinquent subcultures for support and encouragement.

There is a well-documented gap between aspirations of African American male high school students and success. The function of schools is to teach them how to be a successful part of the culture. It should provide them with the knowledge they need to deal with the social environment, help them find out what roles are available, what society expects and how to achieve the legitimate goals in society. Glasgow (1980) found that the young, urban men in his study related that teachers and the educational materials expected them to follow a path to success which had no meaning and little association with their daily lives. They found the experience of school to be unnatural, another society: the White world. The positive relevance of their lives as Black students had been totally excluded from the experience of schooling. The ravages of spirit-murder in the classrooms of lower-class, African American youth across the nation have created drop-out learners who have committed some of society's most menacing crimes. The young men who fail and drop out of school are the same young men who die and murder in the cities of America. This is a true correlation for all youngsters, but particularly for young Black men who perform more poorly in school than any other segment of the population and are, therefore, more likely to be victims or victimizers of homicide.

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The future of most children--especially the poor--depends on their academic performance. By the time many urban minority youth who have chosen not to drop out reach high school, they cannot read or do math. Kozol's study (1991) documents the inequities of the nation's urban educational settings. One high school on Chicago's south side graduated 170 of the 800 entering freshman in that year's class. Children who succeed at school are at less risk for violence and crime than their non-successful peers, and the school's primary role is one of socialization for success.

The Importance of Care in School

Kozol finds that at the secondary level in schools for poor Black and Hispanic children in America's urban centers, the sense of human ruin is conspicuous and the mood of desolation glaring and pervasive. Noddings (1992) speaks to Kozol's findings:

> Poor children lack safe and decent school facilities, encounter
> watered down curricula, and receive inadequate instruction.
> To give poor children something close to what wealthier children
> receive, well-to-do Americans would have to share their resources....
> Apparently, they are unwilling to do so. This state of affairs
> suggests strongly that there is something radically wrong with the
> education that produced these citizens.[6]

Noddings (1992) proposes institutional reparation through reform designed to create school centers of care where students are cared for and encouraged to care for themselves and one another. One of Noddings' objectives is for society to take institutional responsibility for meeting caring needs in a "home away from home" environment. She identifies the anachronism of the family and its inability to resolve this crisis-in-care in an age when the rapidity of social change in society's work patterns, sexual habits, language, manners, residential stability and family arrangements have also challenged schools to develop academic programs that are not incongruous with students' need for care and stability. She advocates institutional caring through emphases on continuity of school residence, as well as continuity of purpose, people and curriculum.

A continuity of purpose establishes the primary focus of the school as a center of care that does not trivialize the importance of academic, occupational, or recreational pursuits, but one that maximizes the compatibility of care and other school-related purposes. To create stability and provide the sense of belonging which is missing in many students' lives, Noddings recommends that they stay in one school building long enough to settle in and participate in a community of care that takes responsibility for the physical surroundings of a school building. Within this schema, teachers are allowed to take full responsibility, at the secondary level, for the entire development of students in one content area; and the opportunity for many students to find special confidantes is enhanced. Finally, she proposes that the curriculum be organized around themes of care which are already connected to the personal experiences of students: care for self, care for intimate others, care for strangers, care for animals, care for the living environment, care for objects, and care for ideas. She stipulates that this kind of curriculum, when proffered with viable options and guidance, shows care and respect for the full range of human capacities.

Emile Siddle-Walker (1993) discusses the dynamics of care in schools as they specifically relate to African American achievement. She notes that specialized, non-segregation studies which have demonstrated the importance of caring teachers on student achievement, have neglected to

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[6]   Nel Noddings, <u>The Challenge to Care in Schools</u>, (New York: Teachers' College Press, 1992), p. 43.

explore the significance of interpersonal caring on the successful schooling of African American students. She makes a clear distinction between <u>institutional caring</u> which she perceives in school policies and procedures that focus on the good of the group, and <u>interpersonal caring</u> which focuses on the development of the individual through direct care provided by another individual. She explains the kinds of psychological, sociological, and academic attention provided students by recounting their descriptions of daily interactions with and responses to interpersonal caring they received within a segregated school environment of the fifties era. A principal is quoted:

> If you can't care about the children, then you don't need to be here ....What you have to remember is that your sole concern is for our boys and girls. Let them know that you care. This is the basis of good teaching: concern and caring for a child regardless of who he is. If that child knows that you love him and that you are giving him that attention, regardless of the socio-economic condition he comes out of, he will rise [above] that.[7]

Siddle-Walker found little disunity between this principal and teacher beliefs about the importance of making each student feel special. Their unity of commitment to care sent a powerful psychological message of well-being and self-esteem to students. Students reported no feelings of isolation; even the quiet students believed that they were not lost or alone. They were motivated to excel because they did not want to disappoint their teachers and administrators whom they believed were working hard to ensure their success. Students fondly remembered the principal, in this school of over 800 students, who knew his students well:

> We really loved him because he was a person who was really interested in you. And it was amazing, of all the students, he could call you by name. He knew us. That made you feel very special. Very special.[8]

More frequent, vehement mention was made about the degree to which the students remembered feeling cared about through interpersonal relationships with teachers and staff than about pedagogical methods used by teachers in their classes.

Of course, the experiences in this particular school did not represent the experiences of all African American students forced to attend segregated schools; nor is this a call by Siddle-Walker for any measure of <u>de jure</u> re-segregation of schools. It does, however, identify the "good" in this segregated school to remind current educators not only of the significance of building self-esteem and being willing to provide interpersonal care and individual attention to students, but also of the importance of placing high expectations on students. Her concern is that historically the relationship between caring and the academic, psychological, and social achievement of African American students has rarely been considered in the educational community as a very relevant piece of the school reform data.

This study combined an examination of the relationship between caring and the achievement of African American students identified by Siddle-Walker as an interpersonal one and the caring reform identified by Noddings as institutionally focused. It sought to analyze the impact

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[7]   Emile Siddle-Walker, "Interpersonal Caring in the 'Good' Segregated Schooling of African American Children: Evidence from the Case of Caswell County Training School," <u>Urban Review</u>, 25 (l993), pp. 66-67.

[8]   <u>Ibid</u>., p. 74.

of these two types of care on the turn-around phenomenon experienced by reluctant, African American, adolescent male learners. It examined the subjective experiences of these adolescents to listen very carefully to what they had to say as they moved toward success. It also examined the school-based structures that influenced their move toward successful academic experiences in high school. How did they, initially victimized by the odds, become influenced to achieve against them? This research will fill the gap left by the omission of literature about the impact of these combined areas of care on reluctant African American learners' achievement and the gap left by the omission of literature that documents the process and the perspectives of these young victims during the phenomenon of their academic turn-around. Erik Erikson (1963) postulates that having a future gives a teenager reasons for trying and reasons for valuing his life. Their young voices will finally be heard; it is a humane, constructive thing to do.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Hold fast to dreams,
for if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
that cannot fly.

Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams go
Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow.

Langston Hughes (1994)

This chapter describes the research methods used to explore the research questions that examined the interactive processes associated with the turn-around phenomenon in a select group of urban, male, African American high school teenagers. Lincoln and Guba (1985) make a major distinction between conventional studies in which the inquirer must contrive contexts that influence behavior and the naturalistic studies in which every variable of interest and all factors of influence must be monitored, if a difference is to be made. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), conventional studies that create contexts which influence behavior produce responses that will never be found in a natural setting. These authors indicate that this kind of study shows how respondents may behave but almost never shows how respondents do behave in normal situations.

One of the primary objectives of this study was the examination of viewpoints of the participants in their natural setting of school: their thoughts, concerns, convictions, feelings and decisions concerning their pursuit of academic success. Comer (1980) suggests that case study research, clinical, naturalistic and systems analyses offer benefits not actualized in nomological/deductive theories that lead to hypothesis testing. He believes that school and achievement-related issues are comprised of complex factors that cannot be totally explained through quantitative research. Because this study sought holistic description and explanation, a qualitative case study approach was used to focus on insight, discovery, and interpretation based on information gathered, meanings derived and conclusions induced, as opposed to using an hypothesis testing methodology. It was guided by the following questions:

1. What interactive processes within the school, home, and community facilitate the turn-around phenomenon associated with each student's success, positive social growth and development?

2. How does each young man conceptualize the systems of school, family and community during his transformation?

3. How does each of these conceptualizations reflect his situation within each system during the process of change?

Naturalistic inquiry focuses on meaning in context and requires a data collection instrument sensitive to underlying meaning when gathering and interpreting data. Humans are best suited for this task when using methods that make use of sensibilities such as interviewing, observing, and

analyzing (Merriam, 1988). The inquiry takes the form of successive iterations of four elements: (1) purposive sampling; (2) inductive analysis of the data obtained from the sample; (3) development of grounded theory based on the inductive analysis; (4) and projection of the next steps in a constantly emergent design (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

The goal of qualitative research is to better understand human behavior and experience through objective study of the subjects' subjective states: their feelings, thoughts, and desires. This must be observed by interacting in a natural, unobtrusive and nonthreatening way. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1992), a good researcher is aware of her theoretical base and uses it to help collect and to analyze data. Two of the most commonly used theoretical paradigms in qualitative study are phenomenology and symbolic interaction. This study draws from these theoretical bases. Borrowing from the precepts of phenomenology requires a suspension (i.e., bracketing) of any inquirer preconceptions about what things mean to the people studied. The focus instead, is not only on how people construct meaning around the events in their daily lives but on exactly what meanings they construct. It is the meaning of our experiences that constitute reality (Greene, 1978). Examining the kind of social framework subjects use to meaningfully interpret their thoughts, feelings and actions also drove the process of data collection. The school of symbolic interactionism requires that the individual be acknowledged as the creator of his mental world; human experience is moderated by interpretation and meaning is conferred. Several constructs that are relevant to understanding behavior include: internal drives, unconscious motives, role obligations, personality traits and socio-economic status. These constructs define the process of understanding the behavior of the subjects studied. The symbolic interactionists believe that the self is the definition people create (through interacting with others) of who they are. People come to see themselves in part as others see them (Blumer, 1969). Ogbu (1981) says that formal schooling is linked in important ways with other factors in society which affect school behavior and that the behavior of participants is influenced by their perceptions of those forces and their models of social reality. The experience of race and economic opportunity has implications for school success.

Denizen (1989) also indicates that because problems result from studies that rely on one single theory, one single method, one single set of data or one single investigation, a method of triangulation which diversifies investigative methods, not only provides flexibility in field research, but enhances cross-validation of data, theoretical relevance, and reliability. Triangulation, the use of multiple methods, was used; for it raises researchers above the personal biases that result from focusing the study on one method. This process combines participant observation, interviewing, document analysis and life history. Between-method triangulation can take many forms; according to Denizen (1989), the basic feature was the combination of two or more different research strategies in the study of the same empirical units. The flaws of one method are often the strengths of another; triangulating can achieve the best of each and overcome deficiencies which may be unique to either.

The case study approach, used here, attempted to understand the circumstances of these young men's lives that they were responsible for creating at school. It searched to understand and communicate faithfully what it meant to be in these settings, what went on for these youngsters, and what those meanings were during the changes they experienced; their voices were pre-eminent. The subjects' definition of the situation took precedence over the objective situation. Denizen (1989) argues that research which stresses the "subjective" side of social experience demands a methodology that explicitly focuses on such data. Life history methodology permits the researcher to balance the "objectivism" of the experiment, analysis and participant observation with the internal, covert, and reflective elements of social behavior and experience.

<u>Permission</u> and <u>Access</u>

Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify four initial items that are required for the naturalistic inquirer: (1) making initial contact and gaining entry to the site; (2) negotiating consent; (3) building and maintaining trust; and (4) identifying and using informants. The idea of studying several young men at the Academy came out of several discussions with the principal, who expressed interest in the topic. The researcher's position as vice principal facilitated entry and initial negotiation of consent to conduct this study at the Academy; the principal was the primary gatekeeper, and the <u>quid pro quo</u> for each side had been spelled out. Since that time, the researcher's role has been changed from vice principal to a position in the central office as an instructional specialist. This new role did not require the direct, consistent, forceful, disciplinarian-type behaviors when interfacing with students, so the role of participant observer was made easier. A letter requesting permission to proceed (Appendix A) was sent to the Superintendent of Public Schools and approved through the Office of Research and Evaluation.

Telephone calls were made to the principal of the feeder middle school involved. Each school official received written confirmation from the Office of Research and Evaluation that the research project had been approved. The specific information regarding consent and participation suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) was used:

1. intent to maintain confidentiality and anonymity;

2. measures taken to prevent raw or processed data from being linked with a specific informant;

3. measures taken to limit access to data on a need-to-know basis;

4. reservation by the respondent of the right to withdraw from the study at any time;

5. notice that anonymity cannot be absolutely guaranteed since inquiry records have no privileged status under the law; and

6. notice that participation is entirely voluntary.

<u>Confidentiality</u>

A confidentiality statement (see Appendix E) was provided for each participant in which he or she acknowledged having read and agreed to its stipulations. A space for the date was included on each statement. To insure their anonymity, students were assigned pseudonyms and no staff member was identified; all counselors, mentors, central office and support staff were referred to as administrators or were assigned pseudonyms.

<u>Participants</u>

Stage One: Selecting the Respondents

Teachers and grade level administrators were solicited to recommend young African American men who had exemplified two or more of the attributes related to students at-risk of failing or dropping out of school, but who had shown improvement in their academic and social behaviors related to school success. Time was designated to observe student interactions and

study data, in order to identify students who had moved from at-risk behaviors to behaviors associated with success. The research project was discussed informally with several of these students to tell them about a plan to write a book (dissertation) and to ask them if they would be interested in participating in the study.

A list of 15 students from observation and from teacher and administrator recommendations was compiled. All who seemed to be interested were given an initial questionnaire (Appendix B) to fill out and return. After the questionnaires were reviewed, 10 students were interviewed, based on their written responses. The initial interview and the questionnaires were used to determine which students were working to maintain a 2.0 G.P.A. or better; which were the most willing to share their experiences, values, preferences, and attitudes; and which students were willing to have their family and friends, not in school, involved in the process of inquiry. A letter for each young man interested in pursuing the study was sent home to parents and guardians asking permission for their sons to participate in the project (Appendix C). Two respondents were selected to study in-depth. The first student was selected because he was the student who had made the most dramatic improvement of any students in the sample. The second selection for in-depth study was guided by the desire, on the part of the researcher, to generate a wider range of categories to further the development of themes and patterns that were emerging as significant, and this decision was based on the evolving potential of theoretical relevance.

Because naturalistic investigations are so intimately involved with contextual factors, the purpose of sampling was to include as much information as possible. Therefore, a case study design based on in-depth interviews, document analysis, observation, and introspection was used. A second purpose was to generate the information upon which the emergent design and grounded theory could be based. Glaser and Strauss (1967) recommend "theoretical" sampling or "purposeful sampling" because it is designed to be applied in the process of ongoing collection and analysis associated with the generation of theory. The criteria of sampling are, therefore, continually tailored to fit the data and are applied at the right point in the analysis.

Each young man was advised to feel free about leaving notes or requests to talk at anytime in the office mailbox of the researcher. Students, parents and teachers were asked to participate in the interview process. All participants were regarded as very important. Each student participant was specially designated to help make schools better for students his age, gender, and cultural derivation; therefore, subsequently, better for all students.

Stage Two: Student Profiles

Based on all recommendations and interviews, an initial pool of ten young men was developed. Narrative summaries on each participant were written to describe their profiles before enrollment at the Academy. Archival histories of their academic performance records were included in the narrative summaries for each member of the sample. These profiles included their G.P.A.'s, attendance records, suspension records, behavioral and grade retention records and psychological assessments from elementary through middle school. A description of each student's grade 9 performance after enrollment in the Academy is also presented.

Participant Observation

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) define participant observation as a field study that combines document analysis, interviewing of respondents and informants, direct participation, observation, and introspection. This study relied on each data gathering technique. Respondents typically did not answer any more questions than asked, or bring any special unsolicited information to the

investigation. Nonverbal cues, as well as unobtrusive measures also provided data necessary for analysis. Serving in the roles of former grade-level administrator and researcher required a plan of low-keyed, persistent observation in designated sites to facilitate the process. Other staff members had taken over the responsibility of disciplining all students to be interviewed for participation. Relationships with these students focused on the presence of rapport, trust, confidentiality and mutual respect in a working partnership.

Some observation, by necessity, was covert; and every effort was made to achieve and maintain unobtrusiveness throughout the process. The investigator's African American cultural derivation in a predominately African American student body eased the process of entry and participation. But it also introduced the possibility of inquirer co-optation, which was guarded against during the process of inquiry, and mandated a careful examination of personal and contextual values in the situation of observation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). According to Whyte and Whyte (1984), all of us face the problem of maintaining perspective in any situation in which we participate intimately over a considerable period of time. The possibility of being taken in, duped, or lied to is ever-present, as is the potential for thinking that one fully understands the problem. Therefore, the participant observer must periodically question the dynamics of behaviors taken for granted. A reflexive journal was kept by the researcher, in order to record thoughts, reactions, ideas, activities, and the ongoing experiences of those observed. Excerpts from the journal were transcribed and coded as part of the data analysis process. Lincoln and Guba (1985) substitute credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability for the naturalist's equivalents of the conventional terms internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity. Each will be discussed briefly to establish trustworthiness in this study.

To establish credibility, three major techniques were used: prolonged engagement on site, persistent observation, and triangulation. Transferability was aided by providing the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer. It is the naturalist's responsibility to provide the data base that makes transferability judgments possible. Triangulation provided the overlap method to establish validity and confirmability. Finally students were asked to keep a reflexive journal.

Interviewing

Kuhn (1962), Benny and Hughes (1956) designate the interview as the favorite "digging" tool of the sociologist. Interview topics were selected, and students were chosen based on their responses to the initial questionnaire given to students recommended by staff. A major instrument used for data collection in this study was the nonscheduled standardized interview. This format was used in order to gather certain types of information from all respondents and at the same time rephrase and reorder questions to fit the characteristics of each individual. Douglas (1985) indicates that interviewing is like conversing. It is organized talk, however, that gives the interviewer greater control over the respondent. The interviewer, together with the respondent, decided on the location. Because the interview was unstructured, normative responses were not sought. It was anticipated that the problem(s) of interest would arise from the respondent's reaction to the broad issues raised by the inquirer (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Because students' voices, opinions, thoughts and feelings were the focus of the inquiry, their definitions of the situation, their accounts and their notions of what was relevant were relied upon (Dexter, 1970). During the process of conducting the interviews (see Appendix D), six criteria for evaluating interview format were used formatively and summatively: (1) conveying meaning, (2) securing respondents' interest, (3) ensuring the interviewer's clarity, (4) making intentions precise, (5) relating each question to overall intent; (6) and handling the problem of fabrication (Denizen, 1989).

Group discussions and interviews were scheduled as well:

> A small group of individuals, brought together as a discussion or resource group, is more valuable many times over than a representative sample. Such a group, discussing collectively their sphere of life and probing into it as they meet one another's disagreements, will do more to lift veils covering the sphere of life than any other device that I know of.[9]

Pilot Study

Two pilot interviews were conducted. One took place in April 1995; the other in October 1995. These interviews were conducted to refine the interview process, and they lasted about three hours each. As a result of the pilot interviews, some of the questions were rephrased to preclude establishing a tone of intrusiveness. Much of the interview was modified to interject questions when the participants' responses indicated that a comfort level of trust had been established to broach specific subjects. The researcher's sensitivity to participants' comfort with sharing specific information was critical. Some questions were never asked of some participants. The process of theoretical sampling also guided the information sampled during the second in-depth-interview of each subject.

Document Analysis

Three types of documents were collected. The first type was the internal document:

• Official Transcripts
• Attendance Reports, 1993-1995
• Suspensions, 1993-1995
• Teacher Discipline Referrals
• Report Cards
• Listing of Students Eligible For Free and Reduced Lunch
• Parent Academic Background Information Sheet
• Grade Point Average Report, 1995
• Eligibility List for Extra Curricula Activities
• Middle States Accreditation/Evaluation Report, 1993-1994
• School-Based Instructional Management Decision-Making Team Data/Reports

The second type was the external document:

• Course Descriptions and Offerings
• Maryland School Performance Program Reports
• Student Code of Conduct
• School and Public Newspaper Articles.

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[9]   Herbert Blumer, "The Methodological Position of Symbolic Interactionism," in Symbolic Interactionism. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1969), p. 41.

The final type of document was the personal record. Each respondent was asked to keep a journal of "uncensored outpourings" about his school experiences and those that contributed to his being successful. They were asked to explore the feelings and temptations they experienced in returning to those patterns of behavior that caused them to fail. Participants used the reflexive log on occasion to record the events of their day through their symbolic world. Only Simeon kept the reflexive journal with regularity. Colin's journal consisted of sporadic, abbreviated entries that described some days, events and feelings he experienced in his life. The other young men described various situations that reflected their thoughts and feelings about the positive and negative events of their school day. There was not a lot of regularity in recording their journal entries.

Coding and Analysis

According to Marshall and Rossman (1989), the five modes of data analysis include (1) organizing the data; (2) generating categories, themes and patterns; (3) testing the emergent hypotheses against the data; (4) searching for alternative explanations of the data; (5) and writing the report.

> It is not to see something first, but to establish solid
> connections between the previously known and the
> hitherto unknown that constitutes the essence of specific
> discovery.[10]

Open and axial coding were used to analyze the data. The focus of the project was on anchoring biographical processes in action and interaction, past and present. The aim of open coding was not only to discover, name, and categorize phenomena; but also to develop categories, in terms of their properties and dimensions (see Appendix F). Later axial coding was used to relate more specifically the categories and subcategories uncovered during open sampling and open coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

The researcher used transcribed information, field notes, archival records, journal entries and a computer software program, Ethnograph, (Seidel, Kjolseth, Seymour, 1988) to organize data. Data were coded and analyzed throughout the process of data collection. The researcher reviewed and transcribed all interviews from audiotapes. All transcriptions were reviewed prior to coding in order to correct typing errors. This kind of familiarity with the data facilitated the coding phase of data analysis. The length of the initial interviews with the entire sample varied from one hour and 45 minutes to one hour. Two in-depth interviews, ranging from two-five hours each, were completed for both subjects. Interviews with significant family members of each subject lasted approximately two hours each. Each family member participant was interviewed once. The average time spent in each interview with professional staff ranged from one and one-half to two and one-half hours. The interview data collected resulted in about 700 pages of transcription. Data were named and placed in categories; categories were related to each other to develop constructs grounded in data. Theoretical insights that emerged during the processes of coding, interviewing and examining archival information were recorded. This record was kept as part of the reflexive log of insights into the data and the interrelationships between the codes, categories and emergent themes. Finally, in order to move from case specific explanations to the reinforcement of constructs, a cross-case analysis was done to examine the significant variables found to have significance across both cases and to identify and account for the particularities in each case (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

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[10]   Hans Selye, The Stress of Life, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1956), p. 6.