DRESS AND SELF-EFFICACY AS THEY RELATE TO THE
ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND FUTURE GOALS OF
INNER-CITY, AFRICAN AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS

A dissertation submitted to the
Kent State University College and Graduate School
of Education, Health, and Human Services
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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August 2011
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The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the association between dress, self-efficacy, and academic achievement for inner-city, African American high school girls. Three research questions informed this study: (1) How do inner-city, African American adolescent females obtain their level of self-efficacy? To what extent, if at all, does their self-efficacy level relate to their way of dress, academic achievement, and future goals? (2) To what extent, if at all, do inner-city, African American adolescent females think that their way of dress relates to the way that peers, the community, the society, and their teachers perceive them? (3) To what extent, if at all, does being a member in the Upward Bound Program relate to the participants’ self-efficacy level, way of dress, current academics, and future goals?

The sample involved seven focus group participants; three of which were chosen for further study and analysis in multiple-case study research. The data collection process consisted of a triangulation approach including: (a) the *Dress, Self-Efficacy, and Academic Achievement* (DSA) questionnaire; (b) focus groups; and (c) a multiple-case study with in-depth individual interviews.

The analysis of the data revealed that all multiple-case study participants demonstrated high levels of self-efficacy regarding their academic endeavors. One
participant appeared to have the highest level of self-efficacy because she was physically working toward her goal. Level of support systems was a main factor in acquiring self-efficacy. Two of the three participants reported that dressing in a “professional” manner made them feel more important; therefore their way of dress enhanced their self-efficacy levels. “Comfortable” dress also raised the self-efficacy levels; it made the participants feel more capable of doing school work. All participants felt that their family approved of their way of dress; however, they felt that society—teachers and peers included—misjudged them and assumed that inner-city, African American girls dress provocatively like the girls seen on music videos. Additionally, the data revealed that the Upward Bound (UB) program—a form of support for many—raised two of the three participants’ levels of self-efficacy regarding going to college.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost my doctoral journey would not have been possible without my strong and faithful relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Today, I understand that “suffering produces endurance, and endurance, character, and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint” (Romans 5:3-5).

I would like to say asante to my mentor and dissertation director, Dr. Teresa Rishel. She allowed me to see the light when I was muddled in the dissertation darkness. Thank you for keeping me realistic in my goals and for not allowing me to overwhelm myself in this process. God bless you for the time and energy you spent going through the editing process.

I would also like to send a warm thank you to the remainder of my committee, Dr. Andrew Gilbert, Dr. Steven Turner, and Dr. Rochelle Brock. Dr. Gilbert, thank you for sustaining your position through the long haul of this process, as well as your expertise of critical race theory research. Dr. Steven Turner and Dr. Rochelle Brock, I want to convey my gratitude to you both for taking on this project later in the process. Thanks for your immediate feedback and insightful comments.

During the course of my time here at Kent State University, I met three wonderful professors who touched my life and gave me a reason to continue on through the doctoral process. Dr. James Henderson, thank you for showing me the creative side of curriculum studies and helping me to see that my background in fashion could be incorporated into my current line of inquiry. Dr. Joanne Kilgour-Dowdy gave me a strength that she probably does not even know about. Thank you for being my friend, spiritual,
academic counselor. Dr. Elizabeth Rhodes, thank you for believing in me when I was just a poor inner-city girl looking for a way to make my mark as a student in the school of fashion. Thank you for supporting me throughout my entire college journey. Rest in peace, you will be missed.

To my dissertation tag team buddies, Crystal Green and Maria Boyarko. Crystal, if it had not been for you talking about your experiences in the Curriculum and Instruction program, I probably would not even be here today. Maria, thank you for listening to me as I bounced ideas off you; and employed you as a second pair of eyes throughout my comprehensive exams and through the development of my dissertation.

Last but not least, to my family, I love you for your support, continued encouragement, and understanding. To my husband, Dr. Aaron Ellington, thank you for believing in me when I did not think I could get through this process. You were my study buddy, companion, and among other things, my love. To my step-son, Little Aaron, thanks for getting my mind off of school with the fun art and sewing projects we did together. To my first born son, Xavier, thank you for your beautiful smile and energy. To my mother-in-law, Dr. Emily Ellington, thank you for the printer and loads of academic and teaching advice. To my mother, Pamela Ferguson, thank you for your continued support and maternal guidance. This Ph.D. is not just for me; it is for the entire Ferguson Family. I pray that others in our family will continue my educational legacy and help break our familial pattern of living in poverty.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Growing up as an inner-city, African American girl, in a community where most did not finish high school, I fought to overcome the persona society projected upon me. In my neighborhood going to college was an anomaly, which meant that continuing on toward graduate school was even more uncommon. My lived experiences in an environment filled with a lack of expectations ultimately provided my successes, as well as my failures. The failures allowed me the tools to learn how to fine tune my resourcefulness and persevere regardless of my life’s circumstances. The successes on the other hand allowed me the tools to explore and pursue through research the opportunity to learn where I have been and who I am. Consequently, one of the greatest benefits is to be given the chance to present the voice of the participants—inner-city, African American girls who remind me of how I felt (as a girl) when I had none. This research interest was drawn first from the African American inner-city community, then women, and finally from the female students in inner-city schools.

For the purposes of this study, inner-city is defined as the central part of the city that inhabits uneducated, predominately minority populations. Knowing firsthand the struggles of inner-city, African American girls and many times the lack of emotional, financial, and educational support available during high school years is what prompted the interest to work with this particular sampling of participants. Ladson-Billings (2000) is drawn upon to define where I stand as a researcher: “my research is a part of my life.
and my life is a part of my research” (p. 268). Thus this study sought to examine how three specific concepts, which were closely tied to lived experiences, relate to the inner-city, African American, adolescent girl: dress, education, and self-efficacy. These concepts were, are, and will continue to be, molded by society. In an attempt to understand more specifically how these concepts impacted the participants’ lives, the following describes the social aspects of dress, education, and self-efficacy.

**Dress**

As a social entity, dress defines who we are as individuals, as cultural groups, or as communities. For example, people of the Sudanese culture wrap themselves in long fabric as an indication of social stratification (Countries and Their Cultures, 2010). Dress also defines who we are as a nation at certain periods in time or history (Brannon, 2006). For example, the 1960s and 1970s brought about a unique and specific style of dress, which was derived mainly from the political situations of the Vietnam War and Civil Rights Movements (Tortora & Eubanks, 1995). During this era, jeans became fashionable, dashikis were made popular among African Americans in the United States, and gypsy-like clothing was adopted by the young hippie population (Tortora & Eubanks, 1995).

Dress—a component of appearance—plays a major role in the lives of many adolescent girls and is often influenced from self-perceived feelings that they have to look good for peers in order to be accepted (MacGillivray & Wilson, 1997). MacGillivray and Wilson found that girls suffer from a feeling of being on stage and that others are watching them. Research shows that African American girls, however, are
even more concerned with their appearance (way of dress particularly) than girls of any other race (Franklin, 2001; Lauer & Lauer, 1981; Steele, 2005). According to Franklin, African American women “constitute a considerable niche in the fashion and beauty retail market and spend a greater percentage of their income per capita on such goods than other racial and ethnic groups” (p. 138). Similarly, Lauer and Lauer found that “blacks are more likely than whites to be concerned with the social advantages of particular clothes” (p. 9). As a result of this, African Americans will adopt mainstream culture way of dress; however, their style, including choices of color in clothing and accessories, often sets them apart from others (Steele, 2005).

African American girls dress very differently than their White counterparts (Behling, 1995; Holloman, LaPoint, Alleyne, Palmer, & Sanders-Phillips, 1996); therefore, it is important to look at the social impact of dress on communities. In examining the cultural differentiation, an African American girl may wear a hip-hop clothing brand called Baby Phat®, owned and operated by African Americans; her White counterpart may wear Tommy Hilfiger®, owned and operated by Whites. This is not to say that Baby Phat® or Tommy Hilfiger® does not or has not crossed racial lines, but that hip-hop apparel—also referred to as urban street wear—has been known for catering to the African American culture. A continually successful urban street wear apparel brand headed by a team of African American designers titles its company with the acronym FUBU®, meaning For Us By Us (FUBU®, 2011).

One of the theories that shape the concept of dress is called the Trickle-Down Effect (Barber & Lobel, 1957), in which wealthy people are the fashion leaders who
guide fashion trends. These trends over time “trickle down” into the majority of the population, which again demonstrate dress as a means of social stratification. Once this “trickling” happens, different cultural groups will then take the trends and interpret them for their particular clientele base, such as Baby Phat® or Tommy Hilfiger®. Just as with dress, social aspects of education play a role in the quality of learning an inner-city raised African American girl can obtain in comparison to her White suburban raised counterparts (Howard, 2003; Ogbu, 1990; Wilson, 1996).

**Education—Academic Achievement**

The structural hierarchy of society regulates public education and its institutions; public school students are required by law to take and pass exams in order to be promoted to the next grade level or graduate. Furthermore, schools risk losing money if their students’ performance on standardized testing does not meet the required numbers set by the *2001 No Child Left Behind Act* (U.S. Department of Education, 2008a). In working towards keeping student promotion and graduation numbers at a certain level, teachers and administrators are often forced to adapt their curriculum and teach to the test (Brighouse, 2000; Walker & Soltis, 2004), as noted by Brighouse in the following:

> When both the school and the student expect to be judged by exam performance, they will devote considerable resources and effort to good performance. This will lead schools to teach to the exam, neglecting those aspects of the curriculum that are not going to be tested. (p. 187)

Many times inner-city, African American girls are students at the schools which do not meet testing standards of the No Child Left Behind Act (Howard, 2003; Nieto, 2003;
Reed, 2003). As a result, they are excluded from the much needed funding in order to provide necessary educational materials and programming (Howard, 2003; Nieto, 2003; Reed, 2003).

Academic achievement as it relates to the current study participants has been operationalized as the drive and capability to finish high school and pursue future goals. Academic achievement, including passing standardized tests, in turn affects who people are as a society (Chapell & Overton, 2002). Consequently, societal structure requires certain levels of education in order to obtain certain levels of jobs. Higher degrees of education equal better jobs and means for a better life. When African Americans receive less educational opportunities as a result of poor and underfunded schools, they are subjected to continuing the dogma that plagues their culture. Through cultural enhancement, inner-city, African American girls are given the educational tools to allow this. Goals in this study have been defined as whatever self-betterment aspiration(s) the participants may want to accomplish after graduating from high school.

**Self-Efficacy**

The third social concept, self-efficacy, falls under the discipline of psychological sociology. According to House (1977), “psychological sociology is analogous to what others term social structure and personality” (p. 168). The discipline of psychological sociology studies the way in which human beings adapt to and act in the social structure of their society (Fine, 1991). Social structure is the connection between individuals, groups of individuals, and institutions with which they are involved. The stratification of
government, schools, businesses, family, and individuals falls along the social structure hierarchy.

Within the foundations of psychological sociology, this study addresses self-efficacy as it relates to dress and education. Self-efficacy is the way in which one perceives his or her ability to face life’s circumstances as well as influences his or her choice of behaviors during a given situation. Simply put, self-efficacy is what one individually feels he or she can accomplish physically and or mentally in order to attain certain goals. Self-efficacy helps determine the magnitude and the strength of motivation levels (Bandura, 1977), such as motivation to do well in school and motivation to dress more with confidence and less dictated by societal typecasts.

**Statement of the Problem**

The overarching goal of the research was to determine if there was a connection between dress, education, and self-efficacy of inner-city, African American girls. The problem originates with the fact that many African American girls and poor people are being overlooked, misrepresented, and misunderstood (American Association of University Women [AAUW] Educational Foundation, 1992; Fordham, 1996; Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Wilson, 1980, 1987, 1996). Though many inner-city, African American girls lack a proper support network, and at times, face other disadvantages, some find the strength and resilience to persevere—unfortunately, others do not.

When one thinks of the inner-city within various parts of the United States, what typically comes to mind is the poor African American community (Howard, 2003). The
negative perception is a problem for it carries over into schools. Inner-city, African American girls succumb to the self-fulfilling prophecies projected on them at school by their teachers (Al-Fadhli & Singh, 2006; J. N. Hughes, Gleason, & Zhang, 2005). Race, socioeconomic status (SES), and gender are three of the major variables affecting self-fulfilling prophecies for inner-city, African American girls (Al-Fadhli & Singh, 2006; Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004; J. N. Hughes et al., 2005). These self-fulfilling prophecies, also known as the “Rosenthal Effect” (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968), result from teachers’ admonitions that a certain student will not do well. The student is in turn affected by the comments and begins to believe what his or her teacher has professed. Therefore, the student may think himself or herself less capable, which results in the prophecy being fulfilled and the student actually not being capable (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968).

As a result of negative feedback, a downtrodden self-fulfilling prophecy becomes the norm for inner-city, African American girls as is evident in the United States educational attainment statistics. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2007), out of adults 25 years of age and older, 17.3% of African Americans have Bachelor degrees or higher as compared to 29.1% of White Americans (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2007). These figures show that there are still significantly more White Americans obtaining a four-year degree than African Americans. Part of the problem lies in the fact that the rate of single parent homes in the United States continues to rise and the majority of those are headed by African American adolescent girls and women. Many single mothers are also uneducated mothers (Wilson, 1980, 1987, 1996). The fact is that not enough African
Americans are completing high school and going on to complete college, trade school, or other career endeavors (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2007). According to Wilson (1996) academic and career goals are not being met because of African Americans’ low level of self-efficacy. Many are getting stuck in dead-end jobs and continuing the ill-written legacy that still hangs over the head of the African American culture today.

Another problem fueling the under educated fire involves the fact that many African American girls make it a main priority to look stylish and become trapped in their materialized worlds doing anything to maintain covetousness, including sacrificing their own academic achievements and goals (Holloman et al., 1996). They spend more per capita on clothing and beauty products than any other race of females (Franklin, 2001). The seemingly preoccupation that many African American girls have with materialism also needs to change; the value in a high-quality education must take priority.

Historically, as a result of the effects of slavery, control and power were stripped from the grasps of the African American community (Winant, 2000). Owning possessions has been a means of gaining back some of that power and control. Many African Americans feel that having materials (including clothing) gives them a sense of control (Holloman et al., 1996), power (O’Neal, 1999), and even status (Lauer & Lauer, 1981) that they previously lost. Unfortunately, some girls commit criminal acts in order to obtain desired material goods (Holloman et al., 1996). The consequences of these criminal acts such as having a criminal record and/or going to jail can result in the girls not being allowed to fulfill their educational endeavors.
In order to encourage African American girls from giving in to this legacy and negative influence, the public perception of the inner-city and these girls needs to change. Bell (2005), one of the pioneers of critical race theory (CRT), believed that by emphasizing the marginality of inner-city, African American girls, the hope is to aim for a more egalitarian world and to strive toward perspective building and advocacy on behalf of those oppressed as a result of their race, gender, and economic class. CRT asserts that racism is a social-structural phenomenon and not just an individual prejudice that could be easily erased. Its main goal is to revolutionize the negative societal views of the African American culture along with uplifting the race. In accord with the CRT philosophy, once society’s perspective of these girls changes, this could lead to more opportunities becoming within reach, which means that the inner-city, African American girls’ belief in their capability will be uplifted.

As part of my lived experiences as an African American adolescent female, battling the negative societal stereotypes of an undereducated inner-city community, the *Upward Bound Program* (UB) provided a means of encouragement and academic support. With being involved in UB, I was allowed to see that life had more to offer than what my neighborhood provided. When selecting participants for the current study, I specifically included those involved with UB. UB’s goal is to help increase its students’ efficacy through showing them that a college education *is* obtainable. UB allows inner-city students the opportunity to see that college is within their reach by having many of their meetings at local college campuses in order to get students comfortable visiting a college campus. The participants’ involvement with UB was essential to the study
because it allowed for the possibility of acquiring participants who were academically focused. Educational programs are a step in the right direction but they are not the exclusive solution to this ongoing problem of undereducated inner-city, African American females.

**Purpose of the Study**

Taking into consideration the problems facing inner-city, African American girls, and reflecting on my personal lived experience within and among these problems, the research suggests that there is a need for a more in-depth knowledge of this population. As explained earlier, dress, education, and self-efficacy are all affected by society as well as the three concepts being closely tied to the lives of inner-city, African American girls in one way or another. Therefore, it became important to research the underlying reasons or processes that result in many of the decisions that these girls make regarding these concepts.

This study was designed to explore dress, education, and self-efficacy within the social structural connection of a select group of inner-city, African American girls. The purpose was to obtain a better understanding of the self-efficacy levels of the study participants, as well as to ascertain if they felt their way of dress related to academic achievement, efficacy levels, and how peers, the community, society, and schools view them. The current study sought to determine how others’ perceptions influenced participants’ thoughts about their academic capabilities and way of dress. Since self
-efficacy can move a girl to dress in a particular manner and/or do well in school, depending on how she views her chances and opportunities for the future, my main goal was to explore these aspects with the participants.

Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, and Pastorelli (1996) asserted “efficacy beliefs shape career aspirations” (p. 1206). Further, they stated:

The stronger the student’s belief in their efficacy, the more occupational options they consider possible, the greater the interest they show in them, the better they prepare themselves educationally for different career purists, and the greater their persistence and success in their academic coursework. (pp. 1206-1207)

Bandura et al. are simply stating that the more capable students feel in achieving their career goals the more they will do to obtain them. If a student does not feel she is capable of finishing high school then she probably will not. This is important to note due to the struggle many African American girls have with their levels of self-efficacy (AAUW Educational Foundation, 1992; Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach, & Rosenberg, 1995; Wilson, 1996).

**Significance of the Study**

Education is said to be one of our basic human rights (The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26, n.d.); unfortunately many African Americans do not take advantage of this right. According to the 2007 Census report, approximately 59% more Whites are furthering their education past high school as compared to African Americans (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2007). Maybe low self-efficacy is the reason; maybe the educational and economical gap between Whites and many African Americans is the
reason; or maybe it is because of the self-fulfilling prophecy that teachers bestow on African American and poor students. For these reasons poor, inner-city, African American girls were targeted for this study.

Historically, Whites had a better chance at education than that of African Americans as a result of the United States’ socialization with the business of slavery. Laws deemed it illegal to educate any African American person who was a slave. This unfortunate fate left many African Americans feeling as though Whites would always fare better in school and in society. Rosenberg (1981) noted that due to discrimination suffered by African Americans, their levels of academic self-concept are usually lower. Wilson (1996) noted a very similar situation when he stated that African American peoples’ self-efficacy is low and, therefore, in many cases they remain poverty stricken. It has been shown that students who feel that they will never get anywhere because of the oppressive hold society has on them tend not to do well in school (AAUW Educational Foundation, 1992). This societal hold claims that African Americans must remain motionless in life and education. Many inner-city, African American girls in general do not care and do not see a future due to economic and other structural limitations placed on them (Wilson, 1996). Racism and discrimination plays a major part in the academic achievement of African Americans resulting in the loss of much of their sense of control over their lives (Winant, 2000). When this occurs, their level of efficacy diminishes.

According to Wilson (1996), one of the shared problems in the African American low-employment neighborhood is a perception of a lack of self-efficacy. Alternatively, working-class and middle-class are likely to have a higher level of perceived self-efficacy
than poor people (Wilson, 1996). As a result of joblessness and the lack of education, Wilson stated that many people get discouraged and just give up on themselves. Bandura et al. (1996) stated that socioeconomic factors affect the development of children because of the impact of family, peers, and self-processes. According to the authors’ theory, an increase in socioeconomic status raises parental academic aspirations for their child along with the parents’ perceptions of their ability to promote their child’s academic achievement (Bandura et al., 1996). A low level of self-efficacy in poor, inner-city, African American girls is a structural problem that must be studied further.

Research has been done in regards to self-efficacy as it relates to academic achievement (M. Hughes & Demo, 1989; Rosenberg, Schooler, & Schoenbach, 1989; Rosenberg et al., 1995; Ross & Broh, 2000) and dress as it relates to academic achievement (Behling, 1995; Behling & Williams, 1991; Daters, 1990; Holloman et al., 1996). African American and adolescent perspectives were taken into account for some of these as well, but no studies have been done that encompasses all three components of dress, self-efficacy, and academic achievement. It has already been established that certain levels of self-efficacy need to be in place in order for a student to do well in school (Rosenberg et al., 1995; Ross & Broh, 2000). Research has also found that dress affects the academic perceptions one will receive from teachers and peers (Behling, 1995; Behling & Williams, 1991). In addition, research has been done regarding the way that students dress reflects their behavior in school, which then affects school performance (Daters, 1990; Holloman et al., 1996).
However, no research studies have been done to show the relation of dress and efficacy and how these two concepts relate to academic achievement. This study has combined all three concepts—dress, education, and self-efficacy—in order to more deeply understand self-efficacy’s connection to academic achievement, to understand the link that was found between dress and academic achievement, as well as to determine if all three concepts relate to one another and how.

**Research Questions (RQ)**

1. How do inner-city, African American adolescent females obtain their level of self-efficacy? To what extent, if at all, does their self-efficacy level relate to their way of dress, academic achievement, and future goals?

2. To what extent, if at all, do inner-city, African American adolescent females believe that their way of dress relates to the way that peers, community, society, and their teachers perceive them?

3. To what extent, if at all, does being a member in the Upward Bound (UB) Program relate to the participants’ self-efficacy level, way of dress, current academics, and future goals?

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms are important to this research and are defined below as used in this study:

*Academic achievement:* Academic achievement is the drive and capability to finish high school and follow whatever dream or goal the girl is aiming toward, whether that is a two year or four year college/university or trade school. Whether the participant
desired to go to college or trade school was not the main focus of this paper, but the degree to which the participant aspired to finish high school and seriously goes on to fulfill whatever she desires to become in life.

**Dress:** A comprehensive term that encompasses appearance such as body shape and color (i.e., skin tones, fabrications, clothing, hair, etc.) plus facial features. Clothing indicates the material enclosures that cover and protect the body and includes accessories such as jewelry, bags, shoes, hair, and makeup. Fashion—the cultural aspects of the products that forces positive and negative judgments on a person’s position in the cycle of fashion acceptance—is also considered dress (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992).

**Goals:** Just as in academic achievement, goals have been operationalized according to what the girl aspires to do in life. The goals of these girls may include going to college, becoming a cosmetologist, or working as a retail manager. The end goal, again, was not the focus of this paper.

**Inner-city:** This term has a long history informed by racism and classism. The term was first brought about because of segregation and unfair housing situations in which African Americans were forced to live (Ellis, 1965). The term was created to describe the community in which the poor and minority population lived. The term in the 1960s was “slum” (Ellis, 1965); in the 1970s was “ghetto” (Rist, 1972), and by the 1980s was “urban” or “inner-city” (Beady & Hansell, 1981). The inner-city, mostly populated with uneducated minorities, has been the result of society’s past negligent patterns of behavior (Wilson, 1980, 1987, 1996). For the purposes of this research, inner-city is
defined as the central part of a city predominately populated with minorities who are under-educated and poor.

*Self-efficacy:* A dimension of self-esteem. (a) According to Bandura (1977), the pioneer of the self-efficacy theory, “self-efficacy influences choice of behavior settings . . . efficacy expectations determine how much effort people will expend and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles and aversion experiences” (p. 194); (b) Self-efficacy may also be referred to as mastery (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978) or personal control (Ross & Broh, 2000). The concept of personal control is a synonym for self-efficacy. Research has reported that feeling a sense of self-control “increases effort, motivation and persistence in problem solving, which improves academic performance” (p. 271); (c) Efficacy-based self-esteem is likely to result from self-attributions (Cast & Burke, 2002); (d) Self-efficacy “refers to the perception or experience of oneself as a causal agent in one’s environment” (Gecas & Burke, 1995, p. 47).

**Summary**

The reason for a need to obtain a better understanding of inner-city, African American girls was introduced. The fact that many of these girls may not go on to fulfill their goals or career ambitions was also discussed. In addition, an assertion regarding a gap in the research involving the topic of dress and self-efficacy as it relates to academic achievement was established; therefore it is important to discover what the literature has found and to conduct research in order to attempt to fill the hole. The remainder of the dissertation consists of a review of the literature in Chapter 2, which supports the three concepts related to this study: dress, education, and self-efficacy. Chapter 3 explains the
research design and methodology and the study’s connection with critical race theory. Last, Chapter 4 reveals the detailed findings and Chapter 5 details the overall discussion and the implications for the study.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The African American Girl’s Place in Society and the Inner-City Community

The Effects of Slavery

Previously, when Africans were brought to the United States as slaves, it was expected that they would never be allowed to read or write, or considered treatment deserving of a human being. In explaining this phenomenon’s effect on African American, inner-city girls, Fine’s (1991) obdurate reality of tradition is employed which states that, “the past and its effect on the present are now recognized as critical in the construction of social reality. Tradition shapes behavior enacted in the present” (p. 170). Fine felt that, “this processual reality of the past becomes sedimented into a social fact. That this past has real effects in shaping behavior and is perceived as unchanging and beyond individuals’ control makes it a macrofoundation of microsociology” (p. 170). In other words, Fine believed that what happens to humans in the past (in this case, the effects of slavery) dictates our social well being, our actions, and thoughts in the future.

Therefore, through the means of a stratified society, inner-city, African American girls are still experiencing the backlash of ancestral enslavement (Collins, 2000; Darling, 2005). According to Darling, African American women are still considered by society the “underclass.” Collins noted that, “The millions of impoverished African American women ghettoized in Philadelphia, Birmingham, Oakland, Detroit, and other U.S. inner cities demonstrate the continuation of these earlier forms of Black women’s economic exploitation” (p. 4). Consequently, the structural patterns of behavior by society to
ignore the need for educating minorities and women has trickled down into African American cultural behavior norms (Fordham, 1996; Wilson, 1996). This disheartening pattern results in many people in the African American culture not valuing educational achievement because they feel that obtaining an education is not expected of them or that they believe education is out of reach for them. Further, Howard (2003) reinforced that, “the inferior education of poor and minority children was of little interest outside the communities in which they grew up because the social problems that resulted could be largely contained within the boundaries of those communities” (p. 90). Most of the uneducated stay in their own neighborhood continuing the cycle, thus the current research study aims to make these issues more visible to a wider audience.

As a result of society’s nullified attempt at educating inner-city minorities (Brighouse, 2000; Howard, 2003; Neito, 2003), the obdurate reality of tradition formed within the minds of many inner-city minorities is that education is for “others” (Fordham, 1996) and therefore undesired and unattained by many (Wilson, 1996). The American Association of University Women (AAUW) report (1992) found that children who come from a disadvantaged background have been conditioned to believe that all they will have access to is a low caste job and that they will not have the opportunity to obtain a good postsecondary education. For that reason, those children begin to see no significance of doing well in school and in some cases going to school at all (AAUW Educational Foundation, 1992).

Therefore, those uneducated and undereducated inner-city minorities become “stuck” in the mindset in which society has placed them. Most poor people living in the
inner-city cannot understand how every now and again a young inner-city, African American girl pulls herself out, becomes literate, and obtains academic success (Wilson, 1996). Outside of those inner-city minorities not seeking education, there are some that remain resilient to the “deteriorating inner-city neighborhoods” which are “vulnerable to a range of negative outcomes, including school drop out” (Jarrett, 1997, p. 218). Ironically, those that do strive for a better way of life are often unsupported not just by the broader society, but by their own community, family, and friends (Fordham, 1996; Holloman et al., 1996; Smith, 2005). Again, this has everything to do with the fact that most inner-city minorities do not see the significance in obtaining an education (AAUW Educational Foundation, 1992, Wilson, 1996).

“Acting White”

A paradoxical variable related to the fact that many inner-city minorities do not support inner-city, African American girls striving for a better way of life results from the community feeling that these girls are not being true to their African American culture. Ogbu (1990) discussed the fact that “involuntary minorities” (meaning people who were brought from their home land unwillingly) such as African Americans have learned that there is a “White way” to do things and a “Black way” of doing things. The dominant culture overwhelmingly recognizes and supports—even prefers in many ways—the “White way” of life. Many times African Americans who are striving for an education are accused of “acting White” by their own community. For example, Smith (2005) stated:
My education was indeed a double-edged sword, replete with positive and negative aspects. It differentiated me from the people in my neighborhood and from my childhood friends. I was accused by a friend from junior high school of sounding like a white girl when I returned to Brooklyn after my first year of college. (p. 198)

In the above excerpt, Smith referred to the stigma of “acting White,” which continues to plague the African American community. Researchers such as Fordham (1996) discovered that this “acting White” phenomenon has had negative effects on the community as well as the individuals in the community. Kao (2000) found that students were being accused of acting White if they were “high achieving” and “overly enthusiastic in class” (p. 413). In order to avoid being considered “acting White,” African American children begin to hide their intelligence, and suffer from low self-esteem and anxiety issues (Elder, 2007). Fordham (1996) also found that students would try “to alter their school performance and behavior” (p. 255) as a result of looking too smart which translated to others as “acting White.” One could assume that from the literature, educational attainment for these children becomes strained—not only by society and their community, but by the children themselves. The “acting White” stigma is something that has harmfully affected many educationally driven African American children (Elder, 2007; Fordham, 1996; Kao, 2000; Smith, 2005) because it makes them feel unwanted within their own community and race of people. This stigma has stifled many students from showing their true talents because being smart was not always acceptable in the African American community.
A Critical Stance for the Betterment of the African American Community

Critical race theory (CRT) serves as a theoretical framework for this study due to the need to break down the societal realities of the study participants in hopes of gaining a better understanding of their level of self-efficacy, their educational goals, and their way of dress. By using CRT, the study confronts some societal components that are taken for granted (Smyth & Shacklock, 1998), such as capitalistic views that all peoples in the United States are “free” as well as the view that minorities have the same opportunities as non-minorities. CRT is deconstructive and reconstructive by nature (Symth & Shacklock, 1998). Deconstructive is defined by hooks (1994) as a “radical critique” and reconstructive as a “radical emancipation” (p. 79). Darder and Torres (2003) compared the critique of critical theory to the “social relations and structures of capitalism and the relationship of educational practices to the rapidly changing conditions of the U.S.” (p. 250). CRT questions the social stratification in which people live to ensure equality for all no matter what rank they are classified within the societal hierarchy. This epistemology strives for the emancipation or enlightenment of the human race leading to “human freedom and historical responsibility” (Schlemm, 1997/98)—when inequity is the means by which some are held back, forgotten, or passed up—CRT is the epistemology which fights for emancipation and change.

CRT began in the mid 1970s as a reaction to the Civil Rights Movement, and has roots in law and social structure (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Parker & Lynn, 2002). The beginnings of CRT resulted from theorists who felt that the critical legal scholars (a movement in law of mostly White men) failed to address the concerns of inequality and
racism being directed at minority populations (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Parker & Lynn, 2002). After the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed, the blatant action of prohibiting people of color to do and go certain places became illegal (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, n.d.). As a result, racism became more subtle and oppressed minorities began to accept color-blind interpretations or they turned a blind eye to racism (Parker & Lynn, 2002).

According to CRT theorists, subtle forms of racism are unacceptable (just as the overt forms of racism are) and must be changed in order to increase the value of oppressed people. CRT hopes to lift the “false consciousness” (Fay, 1987) of all human kind. African Americans should understand what subtle forms of racism look like and how these forms affect their self-efficacy (Wilson, 1996). Once this is recognized, the ideology of racism can be combated in hopes of disseminating these negative impressions in the African American communities first and eventually mainstream communities. Racial discrimination must be dissolved within the respective community itself before being resolved in mainstream communities (Outlaw, 2005).

The CRT philosophy works to show how one’s self-understanding of a particular group of humans is false given the history of how these misunderstandings were started and maintained. This sociopolitical humanistic epistemology is concerned with removing the myth that racism is normal (Delgado, 1995; Gillborn, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Outlaw, 2005; Parker & Lynn, 2002). CRT is sociopolitical because it is concerned with social-structural phenomena of our world, and is humanistic because it strives to enhance human well-being and human worth.
CRT pioneers are Bell (1987), who is famous for his dream narratives, and Delgado (1995), who fought for racism to be considered a social-structural phenomenon and not just an individual prejudice that could be easily erased. With the advancement of learning for oppressed students in mind, Ladson-Billings (2000) was instrumental in bringing a CRT lens to the field of education. The key focus of these scholars was to gain a better understanding of the people and cultures they were researching in hopes of promoting a deeper understanding of those people and cultures to main stream society.

A Critical Educational Stance for African American Girls

The Rationale

According to Greene (2003), the world is in denial about its oppressive state and does little to repair what is missing and wrong. This denial is what motivated the development of critical philosophies in research. Nieto (2003) defined this structural phenomenon very accurately when she said, “Prejudice and discrimination . . . are also a manifestation of economic, political and social power” (p. 47). Researchers argued that society’s goal is to maintain its status and keep the underprivileged in their place (Apple, 1990; Walker & Soltice, 2004). Limited educational advancement for poor minorities is one of the ways society maintains their hierarchy. It was suggested that “one class of citizens is thus educated to govern, while another class of citizens—generally people of color—are schooled to be governed” (Burch, 2000, p. 4).

Morris (2004) has found that “race and racism [still] affect the schooling and lives of African American people” (p. 4). Those discriminatory ways of society instill in many educators lower academic expectations for African Americans (Bakari, 2003; Beady &
research has found many White teachers are not willing to teach African American students (Bakari, 2003; Morris, 2004). Nevertheless, some White teachers will effectively teach low-income African American students; however, research has found that there are more African American teachers who are willing to teach these students and will more likely teach these students well (Morris, 2004).

Expanding on the notion of low academic expectations, Howard (2003) discussed how these expectations or lack thereof has plagued the schools inhabited by minority students:

There is a widespread culture of disbelief in the learning capacities of many of our children, especially children of color and economically disadvantaged. Most educators, along with other Americans, have been socialized to believe that intelligence is innate fixed at birth, and unequally distributed. (p. 83)

The literature suggested that discriminatory thoughts about the academic capabilities of inner-city, African American students are one of the main reasons that many White teachers do not want to teach this population of students (Bakari, 2003). Further, Howard (2003) asserted that, “there is something else, something darker: the failure to educate so many minority children is rooted in a pernicious interaction between American beliefs and the distribution of intelligence and attitudes about race” (p. 90). Here, this author is explaining the power that society has over African American girls and their chance at achieving academic success. Social stratifications such as race, gender, and class play a
role in depicting the curriculum taught to inner-city, African American girls (Al-Fadhli & Singh, 2006; Hughes et al., 2005; Nieto, 2003).

**Hidden and Null Curriculum**

Due to the low expectations that some teachers have for students, leaving out important information in the schools’ curriculum or just not discussing certain topics becomes normality. Henderson and Gornick (2007) stated that “hidden curriculum often forms student values, attitudes, and assumptions about race, class, gender, ethnicity and disability” (p. 47) and further that:

Null curriculum is also linked to the hidden curriculum and contains elements of knowledge that are conspicuous by their absence . . . The null curriculum also may embody implicit political, spiritual and psychological ideologies.

(Henderson & Gornick, 2007, p. 48)

Both hidden and null curricula contain what is being left out during the teaching and learning transmission. Eisner (2001) revealed the connection between hidden curriculum and social structure:

“Hidden” implies a hinder—someone or some group that intentionally conceals. Concealment, in turn, suggests a form of subterfuge in order to achieve some gain. Hence, the hidden curriculum is often believed to serve the interest of the power elite that the schools, often unwittingly, is thought to serve. (p. 73)

Again the notion of capitalistic control comes into play with Eisner’s statement. Burch (2000) agreed that null and hidden curriculum consists of what the cultural capital society is afraid to or just does not care enough to deal with. Burch stated that controversial
topics were many times passed over. Of course, in many cases discussing issues such as slavery, the Holocaust, and even the true story of Christopher Columbus are tough for the dominant culture to teach to students. Even though those subjects are painful they still need to be taught truthfully and completely in order for the students to independently learn and digest for themselves.

Brighouse (2000) discussed that there are prerequisites of facilitating autonomous education. He said that, “The history citizens are taught must meet reasonable standards of completeness, and must be critical, displaying the difficulties with establishing what the facts are and of assessing the motives of historical agents and the effects of their actions” (p. 78). This author also critically stated that:

When we are considering how to design educational institutions in the world that we actually live in, one in which the most important goods distributed by social institutions are distributed very unequally, we have the duty to children to prepare them for that world, the one that they will actually inhabit, rather than for some other world which they will not inhabit. (p. 123)

Leaving important issues out of the curriculum can result in a negative impact on the educational success of the African American girl. Low teacher expectations, hidden and null curriculum can also lead to students distrusting their White teachers (Foster, 1992). Foster noted that in some instances these factors may result in resistance to learning, frustration, and resentment within students. As demonstrated in history, educational freedom has taken away from minorities in the beginning, and presently in the form of being ignored in schools; many minorities feel they do not have a right to the
same educational opportunities as their White counterparts. Being ignored prohibits dialogue and “dialogue is in itself a process of humanization. Dialogue permits students to express their own intentionality about the world, and this is one way that Greene suggests educators can begin to create a new pedagogy” (Rasheed, 2007, p. 31). Knowing their intentions for the world and that any form of success is attainable would allow for enhanced self-efficacy in inner-city, African American girls.

**Striving for Democratic Goodness**

Henderson and Kesson’s (2004) curriculum wisdom theory has the objective of constructing democratic goodness in educational settings. Democratic goodness in education is vital for inner-city, African American girls due to the many forms of discrimination they have faced and will face in school. This theory’s critical stance was derived out of Dewey’s philosophy of social interactivity in school and is connected to Maxine Greene’s educational freedom perspective. Curriculum wisdom is a decision making and problem solving paradigm that helps to encourage, facilitate, and cultivate values of the moral way of living and being (Henderson & Kesson, 2004). With democratic goodness being at the forefront, curriculum wisdom seeks to “have in mind the exercise of responsible freedom in daily educational affairs” (pp. ix-x).

In order to accomplish this, Henderson and Kesson (2004) devised a scaffold they coined 3S Understanding encompassing three dimensions—self, subject matter, and social—which serve as the key elements in the development of student learning. The current research’s connection to 3S Understanding comes from the trans-disciplinary methods that occur in both. The current research utilizes psychological sociology to
inform the behavioral functionality of inner-city, African American girls. Both 3S Understanding and psychological sociology aim to strike a balance in their respective disciplines. 3S aims to balance the responsibility of student learning in order to avoid hidden and null curriculum; and psychological sociology aims to balance the micro, meso, and macro level concepts of sociology (these are discussed later in the chapter). Please see Figure 1, an adapted version of the 3S Understanding paradigm chart created by Henderson and Kesson (2004) for the purpose of the current research.

![3S Understanding and macro, meso, micro level concepts](image)

**Figure 1.** 3S Understanding and macro, meso, micro level concepts

Henderson and Kesson (2004) also discussed the need for truly honest educators to develop a love of wisdom in order to continually seek what is good curriculum development on behalf of students and society. House (1977) proposed that research in sociology which encompasses self-image, personality, and human values is the most truthful and comprehensive and will overall strengthen the discipline. Critical pedagogy
may be a means to gain truth and enlightenment for inner-city, African American girls in education.

**Critical Pedagogy**

History must be reinterpreted and reincarnated in order to empower and free the oppressed (Greene, 2003). Regarding the education of inner-city, African American girls, this “new pedagogy” must take into account the social structural components of social class, race, and gender. The need is to understand how “education can be constructed and distributed so that it does not discriminate against major social groups” (Grant & Sleeter, 2008, p. 299). A step in the right direction in alleviating discrimination in education is an educational development which includes consideration of the above three social structural components into the curriculum.

Freire is the father of contemporary critical thought toward education and coined the term “critical pedagogy” in his 1968 text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, where he connected the need for teacher-student-society relationships to move toward praxis in educational change for the betterment of oppressed peoples. However, research in the way of what is called critical pedagogy today have been taken place since the works of W.E.B Dubois in the *Efforts for Social Betterment Among Negro Americans* (1909) and Carter G. Woodson in the *Mis-Education of the Negro* (1933) with their strides toward obtaining equal education and human rights for African Americans.
Giroux is a major contemporary contributor to this “progressive educational movement” (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003, p. 3). His focus was the democratization of the classroom in hopes of empowering all students:

Critical pedagogy is fundamentally committed to the development and evolvement of a culture of schooling that supports the empowerment of culturally marginalized and economically disenfranchised students. By doing so, this pedagogical perspective seeks to help transform those classroom structures and practices that perpetuate undemocratic life. (p. 11)

Greene (2003) was also very instrumental to the growth of critical pedagogy, and believed that “if democratized, the school could become the new central means by which the great problem of human liberty is to be worked out” (p. 104). She also felt that critical pedagogy will allow all involved to break free from their shackles of consciousness into a better world for all.

In reference to inner-city, African American girls, critical pedagogy is a helpful approach because its development was inspired by critical theory which is connected with “Diasporic philosophy—one that addresses humans’ ontological Diasporic existence” (Gur-Ze’ev, 2003, p. 8). African Americans are considered to be a part of the African Diaspora. Diaspora, Greek terminology meaning “to scatter” (Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary, 2011), is used when referring to the displacement of African people from their ancestral homeland. Critical pedagogy works in favor of a better education and life for all oppressed and marginalized students. Specifically for inner-city, African
American girls, critical pedagogy practices in schools would enhance their opportunity at academic achievement which ultimately leads to cultural betterment.

However, critical pedagogy is not the answer but instead a means to an end. Effective teaching begins with an understanding of the culture of minorities, in this case inner-city, African American girls. Schubert (2002) advised that “most curriculum development projects will find that teachers or other school personnel have not yet acquired the attitudes, understanding or skills necessary to guide some of the desirable learning experiences” (p. 57). Again, the literature notes that critical pedagogy is not the end all, but has:

Contributed more than its fair share to ongoing attempts to be relevant to political challenges, especially for marginalized and oppressed groups. This is an attempt of vital importance, especially when it is conducted in the wider context of the current crisis in the stance of humanistic-oriented knowledge and its dynamics, or within the context of historical, cultural and economic changes. (Gur-Ze’ev, 2003, p. 11)

Pinar (Personal Communication, October 23, 2007) was in agreement that critical pedagogy cannot solve all the issues within education and our society. The researcher—along with a group of other students—had the privilege of meeting Dr. William Pinar when he came to visit the local university. During his colloquium, the researcher asked about his stance on how critical pedagogy can help terminate the still racially motivated curriculum in many of our schools. He responded that, “Critical pedagogy cannot be the one thing that will disseminate racism and sexism. There needs to be many elements that
will help break it down. Racism still has much stamina and is not going anywhere” (W. Pinar, personal communication, October 23, 2007). Therefore critical pedagogy must be utilized objectively in the curriculum development for inner-city, African American girls.

Just like all curricula, critical pedagogy should not be looked at from a standardized “template” approach. All curricula must be tailored to the current children involved and so should critical pedagogy. “Greene’s attention to context reminds us that critical pedagogy is not a one-size-fit-all methodology, but rather a process that must take into account social, political, and historical conditions” (Rasheed, 2007, p. 4). According to the literature, the curriculum devised for poor inner-city, African American girls should not be the same curriculum built for affluent, African American girls. Their worlds are different so therefore their curriculum should be different. Tailoring the curriculum appropriately will create situations where youth will be able to deal with feelings of manipulation by outside forces (Greene, 1988). Only caring, effective teachers would provide such a situation for inner-city, African American girls.

Similar to Greene’s stance on the need for empowering students, Schubert (2002) created a framework that could assist in leading toward educational freedom. His scaffold was constructed with effective teachers in mind and what they can do in order to connect and promote empowerment within their students:

1. Maintain a holistic perspective on situational problem solving
2. Enjoy being with students
3. Draw insights from student experiences outside of school
4. Hold a sense of mission about the importance of teaching
5. Exhibit love and compassion for students
6. Determine ways to build on student strengths
7. Have a clear sense of meaning and direction and are in process of revising the same
8. Guide their work with a quest for that which is worthwhile and just
9. Consider the issue of developmental appropriateness as problematic in each new situation
10. Actively engage in self-education (p. 40).

This framework correlates with the practice of critical pedagogy. With this the type of environment which hopes to be produced as a result of utilization of Schubert’s guidelines, discrimination issues may hardly ever be a problem in schools. When teachers are employing this framework they must note that “critical pedagogy is a manifestation of love and a means of emancipation developed for teachers and their students” (Gur-Ze’ev, 2003, p. 12). Teachers cannot genuinely love their students and at the same time discriminate against their students because of race, gender, SES, or some other marginalizing quality they possess.

As suggested in Schubert’s (2002) framework, out-of-school experiences are a major part of students’ success in school. A “good” teacher taking into consideration a student’s out-of-school experiences can only enhance the curriculum making/practice process. Similarly discussed was the need/importance for teachers to take into consideration the extracurricular activities of students. Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman (1996) noted that “extracurricular activities are understudied” (p. 791) in the
field of education. Important to note, it was found that teachers hold higher academic expectations for students involved in extracurricular activities than students who are not involved in extracurricular activities and even those students that hold jobs after school (Van Matre, Valentine, & Cooper, 2000). As the researchers found, many inner-city students do hold jobs after school to help with their families’ household expenses, therefore they would again be placed at a disadvantage by lower level expectations held by teachers. Thus, after-school work must be taken into consideration when employing critical pedagogy for inner-city, African American girls.

The African American Girl’s Place in Education

Social Stratification

Burch (2000) suggested that academic achievement and strong career goals were never meant for African American girls to obtain because academic achievement leads to knowledge and “knowledge = danger,” as described by Burch (p. 91). Attaining knowledge is dangerous, particularly to those who want to remain in control. The wealthy dominant society wants to be in control of those whose lot in life is to be controlled (Burch, 2000; Walker & Soltis, 2004). “Education is, of course, the way out for the historically disadvantaged; the foundation for constructive employment, self-respect, and full citizenship” (Howard, 2003, p. 81). As demonstrated in the stratification of society, full citizenship was—yet again—something that was never meant for African Americans (Winant, 2000).
As a result of the hierarchy of society, academic achievement and goals have always been considered a fight, one way or another, for African American women. Also in many cases, if the woman had been born into a poverty-stricken community—suffering from an income disparity because of social inequality—her chances at academic achievement came at an even higher price and in some instances seemed impossible to obtain (Wilson, 1996). Variables contributing to the hardship of obtaining an education include being ignored in schools and low teacher expectations. As mentioned earlier, in many instances, African American girls who do not follow inner-city unwritten rules and continue to press on with their education are accused of trying to be something that they are not (Elder, 2007; Fordham, 1996; Smith, 2005). Those unwritten rules include the notion that it is acceptable or even preferred that African Americans remain ignorant. These rules were put in place by a White society and accepted as true among many African American inner-city communities. Smith discussed the fact that by speaking proper English, others accused her of “talking White.” Society claims that education is an equal good available to all, albeit the fight for academic achievement and goals has been a very challenging one for African Americans (Howard, 2003; Osborne, 1995) and continue to be truly dynamic feats for African American girls.

**Being Ignored**

The AAUW Educational Foundation (1992) reported that many girls have been ignored in schools regardless of race or ethnicity. The report detailed that, “Some of these administrators expressed the view that it is stupid or frivolous to worry about equal
opportunities for girls and boys” (p. 12) and that because of the differences and opportunities concerning sex and gender in public schools, “there is clear evidence that the educational system is not meeting girls’ needs” (p. 3). This research showed that when the government and education administration have set their goals and aims for school reform and other educational improvements, again, African American girls are oftentimes not considered. One of the main considerations that government and school administrators consider is the fact that girls may get pregnant and drop out of school, and therefore increase the number of female-headed households living in poverty (AAUW Educational Foundation, 1992). Wilson (1996) discussed the fact that adolescent African American girls and women are more frequently becoming the heads of their own households.

Howard (2003), author of *Still at Risk: The Causes and Cost of Failure to Educate Poor and Minority Children for the Twenty-First Century*, discussed the fact that society has the knowledge to adequately teach minority children; they just will not use it. Due to the long history of racism and attempting to eliminate or suppress education for the African American inner-city girl, an unfortunate “obdurate reality of tradition” (Fine, 1991) has developed. Authors such as Howard (2003) and Nieto (2003) believe that there is an indissoluble dogma about the educational capabilities of children of color and children being raised in a low SES background. Society’s thoughts presumably are the result of the obdurate reality of racism and economic inequality in the United States of America. Much research has shown that teacher expectations for African American and poor students are far fewer than teacher expectations for White and higher income
students (Brody & Good, 1970; Rist, 1972; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). “Most educators, along with other Americans, have been socialized to believe that intelligence is innate, fixed at birth, and unequally distributed” (Howard, 2003, p. 83).

Race and gender individually as well as combined are obvious examples of some of the challenges of educational achievement among African American girls. In the book *Readers of the Quilt: Essays on Being Black, Female, and Literate*, Dowdy (2005) connected a series of essays by various authors discussing Black women and literacy. One of the authors, Wisniewski (2005), discussed the fact that African American girls have been ignored in education. Wisniewski exposed how a White male educator felt about African American girls in education: “With my value of women’s learning, I situated Black women as an invisible group on the sidelines that easily can be combined with other groups [in] a convenient fiction that conceals their power and importance” (p. 74). For so long the only attention African American girls received was negative attention (e.g., as the slave master’s mistresses, and today as teen-age baby-making machines), and therefore lacking in positive attention from society.

**Academic Expectations**

It has been found that teachers’ expectations are highly influenced by a student’s race and SES and as a result, these expectations have an effect on student achievement (Al-Fadhli & Singh, 2006; Hughes et al., 2005; Nieto, 2003). Nieto examined the social structural influences of the teacher expectancy theory and stated that, “Low expectations mirror the expectations of society” (p. 59). In other words, society’s racist attitudes are negatively influencing teachers’ expectations. In accordance, Weinstein, Madison, and
Kuklinski (1995) discussed the fact that ethnic minority (African Americans and Latinos) and poor students are continually the target of low expectations. The authors argued that expectations are a psychological phenomenon inside teachers and that it is difficult to change someone’s mind. Thus, due to continued racism, low expectations held by teachers and administrators, and the many failed attempts at school reform, African American children have been not been given the proper support and attention from teachers, administrators, and society (Bakari, 2003; Hughes et al., 2005; Nieto, 2003). According to Howard (2003), school reform has not done enough to elevate the academic performance of African American children.

**Self-Fulfilling Prophecy**

Behling and Williams (1991) asserted that, “one person’s expectations for another can serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy and that teacher’s perceptions and resultant expectations for a particular child can affect the child’s behavior” (p. 1). In accordance, Jarrett (1997) stated that, “Some teachers, for example, believe that African American students are uneducable, leading to a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure” (p. 222). The self-fulfilling prophecy theory was first developed by Merton (1957) and then expanded by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) who called the theory the *Pygmalion Effect*. Self-fulfilling prophecy works in this way: If the student has a teacher who believes that a student can complete and do well in a certain assignment or course, the student will begin to notice the teacher responding positively toward him or her in that particular subject. The student then begins to believe that he or she can do well and in the end, that student does well in the course. The reverse is also true, for example: when a teacher has low
expectations for a student, that student begins to notice the negative responses the teacher has toward him or her. As a result of the teacher’s low expectations, the teacher may offer little or no support and may even ignore the student, which will eventually cause the student to believe that he or she is incapable of doing well on certain assignments and will ultimately not do well.

Due to a lack of support, many inner-city, African American girls do not believe in themselves and therefore will give up because they do not see the relevance of obtaining an education (Wilson, 1996). Unfortunately, many in this specific population are victims of the self-fulfilling prophecy of failure. The expectation for them to succeed is not present and therefore many do not fight to obtain educational success. In some cases inner-city, African American girls are too focused on other parts of their life such as gaining power, control, and in some instances respect by their way of dress. The literature shows that girls, whose lives are too centered on dress, lose focus on academic achievement (Holloman et al., 1996). Therefore, dress becomes another component that plays a role in inner-city, African American girls’ self-fulfilling prophecy of academic failure.

**Academic Expectations and Dress**

A student’s potential for academic success has been found to be influenced by the way in which he or she dresses (Behling, 1995; Behling & Williams, 1991). In addition, the academic expectations that teachers place on African American students have been shown to be related to the way in which those student dress (Behling, 1995). As a consequence of wearing certain types of apparel, African American students may be
perceived to be low achieving or troublemakers. Behling found that African American students wearing hip-hop style clothing were perceived among teachers as second to the lowest in academic potential, preceding students who wore old jeans and T-shirts and were considered poor. Students who dressed more professionally in a suit or in more of a “preppy style” (in a sweater and khakis or skirt) were perceived the highest in academic potential by teachers. Therefore, not only do race, SES, and gender play a role in the stereotypical reasons why inner-city, African American girls are the brunt of low teacher expectations, so does dress (Behling, 1995; Behling & Williams, 1991).

The African American Girl’s Relationship to Dress

Dress and Power

When African Americans were brought over as slaves in the 1600s, much of their culture and prior way of life was stripped from them. They attempted to preserve or reinvent as much of their culture as possible through their family life, dress, music, and dance. Fortunately, African Americans have been able to retain and display their culture (Holloman et al., 1996). Traditionally, African Americans have been forced to be politically and culturally powerless because of the effects of racism (Winant, 2000). O’Neal (1999) also referred to the historical lack of African American power due to a history of slavery, servitude, racism, and discrimination; therefore, as a way to retain some degree of power and control over their lives, the wearing of culture-specific hairstyles and clothing, in many cases, are used as tools and expressions of “unauthorized power” (O’Neal, 1999). The particular power O’Neal referred to is the sense of power that became necessary to survive as a people and as a culture. O’Neal’s purpose was to
explain a theory of dress (style) as power and to consider the political use of dress in establishing cultural boundaries among African Americans.

**Dress and Culture**

Many students today wear hip-hop and urban apparel as a means of “staying true” and retaining a sense of connectedness to their culture as they attempt to maneuver the “White” world, particularly in the school setting. As a result, the clothing and hairstyle preferences of African American youth typically differ from those of middle- and upper-class European American youth, whose preferences constitute the social norm (Holloman et al., 1996, p. 272). Holloman et al. discussed how the differences in clothing and hairstyles of African American students often caused “undue and disproportionate attention to be directed toward the dress-related behavior of African American youth” (p. 272). Unfortunately, many White teachers do not understand the culture and history of African Americans, and therefore do not understand the cultural significance of their way of dress. Using their “Whiteness” as a method of evaluation instead of as a means to understand their students results in teachers alienating students.

The ways in which high school students choose to dress are also greatly influenced by what they see in the media (LaPoint, Alleyne, Mitchell, & Lee, 2003). It has been found that regarding dress, “parental influence decreases with [adolescent’s] age, while peer, sibling and media influences increase with [adolescent’s] age” (MacGillivray & Wilson, 1997, p. 44). During the 1980s, this phenomenon of the influence of the media on dress became a forecasting agent in the apparel industry. Media at this time began to target teens through sources such as Music Television
(MTV), which “became a powerful tool for advertisers who saw it as a means to reach and influence teenagers” (Keller, 2003, p. 95). Holloman et al. (1996) noted that during a new era of spending among youth, society coined the 1980s as the “me” decade. Teenagers were all about themselves and how much money they could spend on their wardrobe.

By 1995, the apparel market rose to a $100 billion industry for teenagers (Holloman et al., 1996). African American teens contribute heavily to this billion dollar figure. Lauer and Lauer (1981) found this to be true as well. They argued that “blacks are more likely than whites to be concerned with the social advantages of particular clothes” (p. 9). In many cases inner-city, African Americans do not have the means to acquire the designer labels and thus will commit muggings and murders to gain these status symbols (Behling, 1995) in an attempt to gain the “unauthorized power” discussed by O’Neal (1999).

**Dress and the Individual**

Looking deeper into the emotional connection of clothing to the African American culture, many times the “internalized devaluation” of African American adolescents can result in youth using certain clothing and accessories to validate and compensate themselves (Holloman et al., 1996, p. 272). Holloman et al. explained that some African American youth, especially those from impoverished backgrounds, may embrace certain kinds of clothing because they represent possessions that they can readily obtain and control. Sproles (1985) described clothing (dress) as a means of class competition. Some African American youth feel that one of the ways they can compete
and be accepted within the mainstream population is to dress in a certain way. A CRT perspective toward the concept of dress would work to lift this false consciousness in the African American culture. Critical pedagogy research asserts that the way to societal empowerment is through education, not material goods.

Another view, though widely challenged, is that African American youth dress in loud flashy clothing because they have low self-esteem. Supposedly, dressing in a noticeable manner helps bolster their feelings about themselves (Holloman et al., 1996). Therefore, clothing plays a major role in socialization which lends to the maturation of the self (Daters, 1990). Consequently, the self-efficacy of African American girls emerges as an important component of dress and academic achievement.

Psychological Sociology: African American Girls and Self-Efficacy

Social Structure

Bronfenbrenner (1979) is the psychologist known for developing the Ecological System Theory, which encompasses the five structures of the ecological environment. The microsystem is the environment in which the individual lives. The mesosystem includes relationships among the microsystems and its direct environment. The exosystem consists of relationships among the microsystems and its indirect environment. The macrosystem is referred to as the culture/structure/stratification in which individuals live. The final component of the ecological environment is the chronosystem encompassing environmental events that happen to individuals over a lifetime. Fine (1991) built upon the elements within Bronfenbrenner’s theory in order to develop new disciplines within the field of sociology—psychological sociology being
 Psychological sociology is the study of relationships between macrosociological structures and microsociological structures and how they interact and influence one another (Fine, 1991). Basically, a sub-discipline within that of sociology, psychological sociology concerns itself with social-structural phenomena affecting or affected by the individual. Psychological sociology includes three levels: macro, meso, and micro.

For the purposes of this research the macro level (social structural) includes society and schools, and their relationship to the participants. Macrosystems are a “complex of nested, interconnected systems . . . viewed as a manifestation of overarching patterns of ideology and organization of the social institutions common to a particular culture or subculture” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 8). The micro level includes the participants of this study, “a complex of interrelations within the immediate setting” (p. 7). The middle or meso level includes the inner-city community and its relation to the macro and micro levels; “the linkages between settings, . . . those in which the developing person actually participates” (p. 7). Figure 2 illustrates a visual interpretation of the macro, meso, and micro level relationships.
The relationship between psychological sociology level structures

*Figure 2. The relationship between psychological sociology level structures*

**Dimensions of the Self**

These three levels (macro, meso, and micro level relationships) are related to self-efficacy because self-efficacy is developed within individuals, and individuals cannot exist without the social structural influences surrounding them (Fine, 1991). Self-efficacy emerged from the concept of self-esteem and determines our thoughts, feelings, motivations, and behaviors (Bandura, 1977). According to Cast and Burke (2002), self-efficacy is just one of the two dimensions of self-esteem: (a) competence (efficacy-based self-esteem) and (b) worth (worth-based self-esteem). In a broader sense, Pearlin, Menaghan, Lieberman, and Mullan (1981) discussed the two dimensions of the self: mastery and self-esteem. Mastery is defined by the authors as “the extent to which people see themselves as being in control of the forces that importantly affect their lives”
Social structural phenomena influence the degree of control one feels over her life, which will then effect the level of self-efficacy one has (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983; Fine, 1991; Rosenberg, 1981; Ross & Broh, 2000).

**Personal control.** Ross and Broh (2000) discussed the role of “personal control” in academic achievement, which is the feeling that one’s efforts shape her outcomes and that they are in control of their actions. Ross and Broh found that personal control in children is affected by structural issues such as family, SES, and race. Winant (2000) asserted that personal control was taken from African Americans as a result of racism and discrimination; therefore African Americans (especially the poor inner-city population) usually have lower levels of self-efficacy (Rosenberg, 1981; Ross & Broh, 2000; Wilson, 1996) than people in the White dominant society. Ross and Broh found that low SES African American adolescents have a lower sense of personal control as compared to White adolescents from higher SES families. Ross and Broh also discovered that African Americans with equal level SES as compared to Whites have a higher level of personal control than their White counterparts. Thus, personal control plays an important role in structuring self-efficacy. Self-efficacy as a whole is developed by one’s personal beliefs; those of which includes one’s thoughts of their capability toward academic achievement. Beliefs about one’s capability to achieve academically, contributes to one’s larger/overall sense of self-efficacy.

**Self-esteem versus self-efficacy.** Self-esteem is worth-based feelings that an individual may have, whereas self-efficacy is competency-based feelings that an individual may have about herself (Bandura, 1977; Cast & Burke, 2002). For example,
one may feel good about the way she looks, about her character, and her personality. However, that same person may feel incompetent with school work and obtaining a career. As in the case with many inner-city, African American girls, research has found that African American girls have higher levels of global self-esteem than their White counterparts (Rosenberg, 1981), yet somehow these White counterparts are more frequently excelling beyond the African American girls in regards to academics (AAUW Educational Foundation, 1992). Global self-esteem is the overall feeling one has about her self-worth (Rosenberg, 1981). According to the AAUW Educational Foundation (1992), patterns of declining self-esteem and negative body image are situations faced mostly by White adolescent girls. Ellington and Leslie (2008) discussed the fact that, “African Americans’ global self-esteem is not hindered by the prejudice and racist actions of Whites because African American self-esteem comes from familial and community relationships” (pp. 71–72). Consequently, body image and self-esteem are usually high for African American girls; however they seem to have a poor sense of their self-efficacy regarding academics. Again, history tells us that in most cases, African American girls had less control over their opportunities to succeed at education than White girls. According to Bandura (1977), this structural phenomenon has been found to be a determining factor in African American girls’ low academic self-efficacy levels.

Researchers (Gecas, 1982; Rosenberg, 1981; Rosenberg et al., 1995) stated that global self-esteem does not affect grades significantly, but self-efficacy does. Therefore, raising self-esteem (feelings of self-worth) has nothing to do with behaviors that actually affect the performance of academic achievement. Rosenberg et al. (1995) found that a
“specific” type of self-esteem (i.e., competence based self-esteem) is related to academic performance. Bandura (1977) developed this fact earlier and proposed a model that depicted the four principle sources of information from which personal efficacy comes: “personal accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological states” (p. 191). According to Bandura, a certain level of efficacy already exists in humans and helps determine their actions. This already established sense of self-efficacy is developed from influences of social structure (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983). For adolescent, inner-city, African American girls many of their actions based from their established sense of self-efficacy involve the structural influences of academic achievement and other school related activities.

**Structural Influences on Self-Efficacy**

Literature which helps to explain the structural components of self-efficacy is that of Gecas and Schwalbe (1983). The authors’ work employed three links of social structure and efficacy-based self-esteem: “(1) context of action, (2) the meaning of action, and (3) the unintended consequences of action” (p. 81).
Context of action link: Autonomy. In the context of action, Gecas and Schwalbe (1983) talked about the organization of practical activities and the social context of human functioning. The formation of self-efficacy in an individual is dependent on the degree of restriction on individual autonomy and individual control. The degree of control one feels over a given situation is an indication of her already-established sense of efficacy (Bandura, 1977). These same features can be transferred to the ideal behind dress and its relation to self-efficacy. In relation to dress, the practical activity may be an adolescent girl getting dressed in the morning for school. The degree of constraint on autonomy and control for adolescent girls involves the fact that many girls look to their peers for advice and confirmation on what to wear (MacGillivray & Wilson, 1997). Therefore, girls may feel some constraint of their autonomy to wear certain types of clothing because they want to fit into their peer group. Adolescent girls’ dependence on their friends’ opinions allows their friends some degree of control over what the girls may wear.

Context of action link: Resources. The level of autonomy and control one feels she has is often determined by the resources she has available in order to establish certain outcomes. Therefore, the formation of self-efficacy is also dependent on the resources “available to the individual for producing intending outcomes” (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983, p. 81). According to Gecas and Schwalbe, the more resources people have, the higher their level of self-efficacy. In regard to resources, this may be difficult for some inner-city, African American girls because resources may be limited, especially in obtaining the most contemporary wardrobe. Therefore their sense of control in what they
wear may be lowered and as a result, their self-efficacy may be lowered. Resources can be in the form of personal/social support as well as monetary support.

**Social support.** Wilkum, Faris, and Wheatley (2008) discussed the role that social support plays in the self-efficacy levels of Hispanic mothers. They found that mothers did not obtain much social support for themselves and their children until they enrolled in the community program. Within the first four months of being involved in the community program, the level of support that the mothers received increased and therefore the mothers’ level of self-efficacy regarding assisting their children with academic achievement also was increased (Wilkum et al., 2008). The community based program provided available resources in order for the mothers to obtain certain outcomes regarding their children’s education.

**Monetary support.** As self-efficacy is developed, structural conditions and resources such as socioeconomic status (SES) become a factor. Some researchers have found that familial stratification affects efficacy levels of children (Whitbeck et al., 1997). According to a study involving economic hardship and parent behavior, Whitbeck et al. discovered that the father’s parenting behaviors were affected by his work conditions and economic stresses, which then subsequently affected the child’s sense of self-efficacy. Bandura et al. (1996) studied the structural categories of “socioeconomic, familial, peer, and self processes” (p. 1207). They found that SES is related to student academics. According to the research, families with higher SES tend to have higher academic and occupational aspirations for their children. Therefore, the parents’ sense of
academic efficacy for their children impacts their children’s beliefs in their own capability to learn and do well in school.

**Meaning of action link: Subjective dimension.** The meaning of action links to one’s performance success and how one evaluates her own success. It is situated on the thought that self is the cause of all failures and successes. Gecas and Schwalbe (1983) asserted that the importance is not the success itself, but how society perceives the success. In the subjective dimension the meanings of action have a differential value depending on the society structure or the community structure in which one is involved. For inner-city, African American girls they personally do not always see their academic success as a positive aspect of their lives. As mentioned earlier, many times these girls are teased by their peers and their community as a result of their academic success by being accused of “acting White” as a result of doing well in school (Elder, 2007; Fordham, 1996; Kao, 2000; Ogbu, 1990; Smith, 2005). The subjective dimension here is then affecting the high level of self-efficacy the girl could have regarding her academic success.

**Meaning of action link: Objective dimension.** The meaning of action also links to social persuasion and feedback from others (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983). This feedback is based on the differential valuation of society. Teacher expectations can be seen as a form of social persuasion where a student can be programmed to believe that he or she possesses certain skills or does not possess certain skills. For example, society values high achieving versus low achieving students. As related to the study participants, structurally, African Americans have been deemed the lowest in regards to academic
achievement from teacher expectations (Al-Fadhli & Singh, 2006; Howard, 2003; Hughes et al., 2005; Nieto, 2003; Weinstein et al., 1995). Therefore, low achieving inner-city, African American girls will often remain low achieving because many of these girls receive little or no feedback/support from teachers as a result of low teacher expectations (AAUW Educational Foundation, 1992; Al-Fadhli, & Singh, 2006; Bakari, 2003; Rosenberg, 1981; Wilson, 1996). For inner-city, African American girls, this objective dimension of teacher expectations will affect the girls’ level of self-efficacy because their level of self-efficacy will depend on their teachers’ thoughts of them. Thus, the literature demonstrated that the self-fulfilling prophecy, a result of teacher expectations, becomes a structural variable determining one’s self-efficacy (Bandura et al., 1996).

**Intended and unintended consequences of action link.** According to Gecas and Schwalbe (1983), intended and unintended consequences of action also determine the formation of self-efficacy. Unintended consequences are when an individual thought that a certain situation was going to turn out in a particular way and it did not. For inner-city, African American girls, this can be a crushing experience. For example, regarding academics, unintended consequences of action could be the result of the girl studying hard for an exam and instead of doing well like she expected, she does poorly; hence her self-efficacy is maintained or changed by her accomplishments or failures (Bandura, 1977).

Intended and unintended consequences of action can also relate to way of dress. For example, an inner-city, African American girl purchases what she thinks is a
fashionable blouse or a stylish pair of shoes. She then wears this particular item to school in hopes of getting a positive reaction from her friends and other school mates. However, she gets laughed at and ostracized. This action may have a strong influence on that girl’s self-efficacy level because her attempts at dressing to fit in with her peers turned into what she may consider a major failure on her part.

**Dress and Self-Efficacy**

For the purposes of this study, the connection between self-efficacy and dress must be established. The research shows a connection between self-efficacy as it relates to education (M. Hughes & Demo, 1989; Rosenberg et al., 1989; Rosenberg et al., 1995; Ross & Broh, 2000) and dress as it relates to education (Behling, 1995; Behling & Williams, 1991; Daters, 1990; Holloman et al., 1996), but no research has been conducted to show a connection between self-efficacy and dress as it relates to academic achievement.

**Cognition of dress through modeling.** The literature shows that self-efficacy and dress may have a relationship; however, what that relationship is has yet to be determined. Stolte’s (1983) theory on self-efficacy as cognition in social learning was inspired by Bandura’s (1977) development of self-efficacy as behavior change in human beings. Bandura discussed the fact that human behavior is developed through modeling and watching others, which allows behavior to change through stimuli introduced to that particular person. This is relevant to the current research on adolescent way of dress because inner-city, African American adolescent females watch the media, peers, and their community in order to gain cognition about dress. The cognition discussed by
Stolte will result in a certain behavior for each adolescent girl: (a) to behave in a way that displays acceptance for the ways of dress she sees around her, or (b) to behave in a way that opposes the ways of dress she sees around her.

**Cognition of dress through feedback.** Stolte’s (1983) theory on self-efficacy as cognition in social learning also discussed the fact that self-efficacy is built by getting direct feedback for performance accomplishments. The social action of feedback involves a particular person and an action domain. Based on a review and specific application of the literature, one might argue that a way of dressing “in style” to fit in with a certain group of people, or even to reject mainstream elements of dress, could be considered an action domain. One could argue that in order to reject mainstream elements of dress, one’s self-efficacy regarding dress would need to be high. With that said—for adolescent girls—peer acceptance and feedback is extremely important (Alleyne, LaPoint, Lee, & Mitchell, 2003; Holloman et al., 1996; MacGillivray & Wilson, 1997), thus another indicator that the girl would have to possess a high level of self-efficacy if she wishes to reject the peer way of dress. However, the feedback one gets from others is usually positive (i.e., commending success) or negative (i.e., giving signals of failed success). Whichever type of feedback is given, the target person may have an increase or a decrease in her level of self-efficacy (Stolte, 1983).

**Dress and behavior.** Self-efficacy beliefs effect human functioning and behavior (Bandura, 1977). Research has shown that dress has been found to affect the behavior of some adolescent girls. For example, African American high school girls may want to be “somewhat different” from their friends and others and because of this “there will be
emotional and behavioral responses (changes) by the individual until moderate
differentiation is achieved” (Sproles, 1985, p. 59). This may explain why some girls
concentrate more on social aspects and dress, rather than academics. Many girls’
behaviors change as a result of their wardrobe or lack thereof. Kelley, Daigel, LaFleur,
and Wilson (1974) stated, “It appears that dress does limit participation in activities when
students judge their clothing is inappropriate for the situation” (p. 174). The research
continues with Wass and Eicher (1964) who found that more than half the girls studied
believed they behaved differently on school days designed as special dress-up days
(Daters, 1990, p. 46). From the literature one could conclude that by dressing a certain
way, one’s self-efficacy may be enhanced.

Francis (1992) was in accord with these statements. Francis affirmed that feelings
of inadequacy in amounts of clothing, the grade, or type of clothing led to a sense of
depprivation and a lack of participation in social activities. This particular situation may
result in a feeling of low self-efficacy regarding way of dress. The feeling of depravity
may extend into other aspects of a teen girl’s life. For example, choices about clothing
may cause tension between the parent and the adolescent girl. According to Holloman et
al. (1996), many teens begin to argue with their parents about dress, and parents often
feel pressured to buy clothing they deem inappropriate or too expensive, to satisfy their
child. These psychological responses within the adolescent girl may be the motivating
factor toward risky behaviors to obtain the type of dress that a particular girl desires
(Holloman et al., 1996). In this sense the girl’s self-efficacy may be enhanced if she finds
a way to obtain the intensely sought after material goods.
Summary

In this review of the literature the history and background of the inner-city, African American girl and the effects of society and the community on her educational expectations were discussed. The unsupportive inner-city community was revealed as sometimes causing and/or maintaining the stigmas placed on the African American culture. Literature regarding a critical stance on behalf of inner-city, African American girls was discussed. The importance of critical race theory in education and critical pedagogy was revealed based on the facts that these girls have been forced to endure hidden and null curriculum, have been ignored in schools, and have had the qualms of dealing with low expectancy levels from teachers where inner-city, African American girls receive little or no support from their teachers. The literature exposed the importance of dress to the African American girl where it was shown that for some, dress gives a sense of power control and allows African Americans to represent what is left of their African heritage and culture. Last, the topic of self-efficacy was discussed and its relation to inner-city, African American girls and their education. The structural influences affecting self-efficacy were broken down and how those influences relate to the academic achievement and way of dress of these girls. The following chapter discusses the research methodology including the data collection and analysis processes.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Within the context of a critical race theory lens, the participants, setting, data collection, and data analysis are described, along with the methods used to implement this research. The goal of the study was to examine the self-efficacy levels of inner-city, African American high school females, to discover to what extent they presume their manner of their dress and efficacy levels related to their academic achievement, and to learn how they feel others perceive them as a result of their way of dress. Another purpose for the study was to determine if, and to what degree, the participants felt that their involvement in the academic program Upward Bound related to their way of dress, efficacy levels, and academic achievement. These purposes are guided by the following research questions:

1. How do inner-city, African American adolescent females obtain their level of self-efficacy? To what extent, if at all, does their self-efficacy level relate to their way of dress, academic achievement, and future goals?

2. To what extent, if at all, do inner-city, African American adolescent females believe that their way of dress relates to the manner in which peers, community, society, and their teachers perceive them?

3. To what extent, if at all, does being a member in the Upward Bound (UB) Program relate to the participants’ self-efficacy level, way of dress, current academics, and future goals?
Theoretical Framework

In order to make meaning of and obtain a better understanding of the study, participants, and their life situations, a critical race theory (CRT) perspective was employed. To use a critical lens in research, whether it be critical theory, CRT, or feminist theory, means that the researcher is willing to “stand apart from the prevailing order of the world and ask how that order came about” (Smyth & Shacklock, 1998, p. 2). Following Smyth and Shacklock’s perspective, the current research study sought answers that addressed the extent to which race, gender, and SES were influential in determining the participants’ ability to navigate society, education, their way of dress, and their own personal lives. The critical lens used in this research study was from the “lived experience” (van Manen, 1990) of an inner-city, African American woman; but moreover, one that was willing to delve into the inner-city culture of high school girls in order to obtain an inside perspective of the participants’ lives. When one employs a CRT lens particularly, the researcher must focus on societal situations that have shown to be problematic and or discriminatory to certain races of people. Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) developed a framework for working with a CRT lens having those social orders in mind. Table 1 shows the five key elements of Solórzano et al.’s (2000) CRT Model, and to the right of these, are the current research study objectives. With utilizing the CRT Model, links in the present study that connected to the CRT elements were uncovered.

Race and social justice are the major aspects that must be the center of all CRT research because critical theory itself deals with various social oppositions which people face. CRT specifically includes the variable of race as a means of targeting certain
individuals who have been oppressed as a result of their race. Particularly, when utilizing a CRT framework for education one must “challenge the traditional paradigms, methods, texts, and separate discourse on race, gender, and class by showing how these social constructs intersect to impact on communities of color” (Solórzano et al., 2000, p. 63). CRT work in education also utilizes transdisciplinary knowledge as a means of deepening the understanding of the phenomena being studied. The current research employs the
disciplines of sociology, education, and fashion to allow for a deeper understanding of the participants in different variations of discrimination.

When employing any critical lens in addition to these elements needed for a CRT framework in education, the researcher must consider reflexivity. Reflexivity is a critical evaluation of oneself in order to avoid biases as much as possible in the research (Denzin, 1997; Hatch, 2002). Especially in CRT and in relationship to reflexivity, the researcher must work toward a “hermeneutical understanding” (Outlaw, 2005), which occurs between the researcher and the participants. “The process of achieving hermeneutical understanding is thus a dialogue between the interpreter and the object to be understood” (p. 9). Hermeneutical understanding occurs as the researcher and the researched become transparent in their dialogue in order to promote a full understanding of each other. Being transparent allows both persons the ease in sharing their lives’ experiences with one another because they see themselves for who they are and who they want others to know they are. In the process of being transparent and reflexive as the researcher, it was important to ascertain my perspective on certain issues, opinions, and experiences and how these could impact the study. This idea of knowing oneself is very important for researchers, and according to Outlaw (2005), this concept dates as far back as Booker T. Washington, a former slave and educator of African Americans. Knowing oneself, as a researcher and an African American, means that as the researcher, the willingness to learn about the similarities and differences of other African Americans and their racial struggles is crucial. It was important to understand the juxtaposition of how society and
my experiences molded me as an African American as well as being important in fully understanding the culture of the population in this study.

**Justification for Methodology**

For the purpose of this study, a triangulation of qualitative approaches (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2001; Patton, 1990) was used. Lincoln and Guba described triangulation as an “overlapping” of methods used to increase dependability of the participants’ responses with “the use of multiple or different sources, methods, investigators, and theories” (p. 305). With the current research study, the triangulation of methods included the use of responses from a questionnaire, focus groups, and a multiple case study of three participants. This allowed for all research questions to be answered as thoroughly as possible and to display consistencies in the participants’ comments. The overall reason for using qualitative methods with a CRT lens was to obtain a rich understanding of each girl’s situation by speaking with her individually. Utilizing a CRT lens assisted in subjectively unfolding any unjust treatment the girls faced from society, their community, teachers, family, or peers.

The study included a demographic and efficacy-based questionnaire—the *Dress, Self-Efficacy, and Academic Achievement* (DSA) questionnaire—devised specifically for the current research study (See Appendix E). The demographic portion acquired information based on the participants’ race, age, grade level, self-reported grades, and personal life which included: SES level, family structure/support, as well as school structure/support. The efficacy portion of the questionnaire was derived from Bandura’s Children Self-Efficacy Scale (2006; See Appendix F) and the Sontag and Lee Proximity
of Clothing to Self Scale (2004; See Appendix G), both of which were used in factor
analysis for survey research. Bandura’s scale includes nine sections involving domain
specific topics to measure self-efficacy in children. The self-regulated learning section of
Bandura’s scale was the most appropriate for the current study because it allowed me to
obtain data regarding how the participants felt about their own learning capabilities. The
alpha reliability coefficient for the self-efficacy scale was .88 for regulating negative
affect, .82 for managing positive effect, .88 for academic efficacy, and .86 for resistive
self-regulatory efficacy (Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Pastorelli, 2003).

Sontag and Lee’s scale (2004) was constructed of six dimensions, where each
dimension was geared toward clothing as a different component of self. For the purpose
of this study, Dimensions 4 and 5 were used. Dimension 4 centered on “Clothing in
Relation to Self-Esteem—Evaluative Process Dominant” with a construct reliability of
.87 and Dimension 5 included “Clothing in Relation to Self-Esteem—Affective Process
Dominant” also with a construct reliability of .87 (Sontag & Lee, 2004). Both
dimensions help understand self-esteem based feelings regarding the way in which one
dresses.

These specific portions of Bandura’s (Bandura et al., 2003) and Sontag and Lee’s
(2004) instruments were a valid basis for creating the DSA questionnaire because these
portions were geared toward obtaining the types of data that were relevant in answering
the research questions. The questionnaire was designed to gauge the self-efficacy levels
of the participants in the realms of academics and thoughts about dress. Understanding
the participants’ self-efficacy levels are important according to Bandura et al. (1996,
2003), because “children’s beliefs in their efficacy to regulate their own learning activities and master difficult subject matters affect their academic motivation, interests, and their scholastic achievement” (p. 1206). As indicated in Chapter 2, the participants’ self-efficacy levels may also affect their way of dress.

Along with the DSA questionnaire, group and individual interviewing were part of the triangulation process. The group interviews—or focus groups—were comprised of seven participants. The participants were recruited through the Upward Bound College Club meeting, which is explained further in the next section. There were two focus groups: the first with five participants and the second with two participants. Each focus group met once for a 90-minute session. This methodology allowed for rapport to be built as well as basic information about the participants to be collected. The goal was to help ease their anxiety in talking about their lives. The focus group data determined what questions had not been answered and provided guidance regarding which participants would be included in the case study.

Focus group responses were analyzed in order to prepare the interviewing guide for the final portion of the study, the individual interviews. Based on the focus group data, three participants were selected for the multiple case study. These participants were selected because they were more open and willing to discuss their lives and each had a different perspective to share. The selection process is explained in more detail during the Determining Which Cases to Use section of the manuscript. Using in-depth, open ended, individual interviews through a multiple case-study approach (Hays, 2003; Merriam, 2001) obtained deeper information about the participants. The individual
interview focused on the following: school and home life experiences, way of dress, how they felt about their own efficacy, and how they believe others perceived them. The triangulation of the DSA questionnaire, the focus groups, and the individual interviews enhanced the complexity of the data (Hays, 2003), providing the study with three sets of data that could be compared and contrasted to reveal themes and patterns.

Participants and Setting

Upward Bound Participants

The participants were high school girls ranging in age from 15 to 18 years old and enrolled in grades 10 through 12, all of whom lived in an inner-city environment and were involved in the academic program Upward Bound (UB). The requirements for students to be allowed into UB are listed below:

Students must have completed the 8th grade, be between the ages of 13 and 19 (except veterans), and have a need for academic support in order to pursue a program of postsecondary education. All students must be either from low-income families or be potential first-generation college students. The program requires that two-thirds of the participants in a project must be both low-income and potential first-generation college students. The remaining one-third must be either low-income or potential first-generation college students. Students are selected based on recommendations from local educators, social workers, clergy, or other interested parties. (U.S. Department of Education, 2008b)

Being a member of UB was used in the purposeful selection (Patton, 1990) of the participants because it has been found that teachers’ expectations are higher for students
involved in after-school clubs. Additionally, students who participate in after-school activities usually have higher academic achievement overall (Van Matre et al., 2000). Another reason for selecting these participants was to determine if self-efficacy levels and way of dress are at all related to their participation in UB. The study queried whether the counseling and assistance these girls received with college-preparatory materials changed the way they perceived themselves, the way they dressed, their academic achievement, and their future goals.

**Recruitment**

Recruitment of the participants took place after the University Institutional Review Board approved the study in September 2008 (see Appendix M). Participants and their parents were solicited at a UB college-club meeting at a high school in a mid-sized Midwestern city. College-club meetings are the after-school gatherings where students come together with their UB coordinator, a tutor, and all other UB students in that particular school. Various beneficial academic and social activities take place at these meetings. Attendance at one of these meetings during the month of September 2008 allowed the opportunity to introduce myself to the students and their parents and to talk to them about my research. During the meeting, a recruitment script was used specifically for the parents (see Appendix A). Packets were handed out that included a flyer (see Appendix B) which briefly detailed the study, a consent form (see Appendix C), a stamped addressed envelope, and a business card with contact information. By the end of this meeting, four students and their parents agreed to participate in the study.
A second trip to a college-club meeting was done for the second round of recruitment in November 2008. This time no parents were present, only the UB coordinator and the UB students. An explanation of the current research was given, and at the end of this meeting, the number of girls who were interested in participating in the study doubled. The same packet that was passed out during the first recruitment meeting in September was given to everyone, and each girl was individually spoken to about the importance of having her parent(s) sign the consent form and to ascertain her availability. The first focus group was scheduled and the students were told that they would receive a call reminding them closer to the date of the meeting. All interested participants were accepted into the research study; therefore, a nonrandom sample of 11 agreed to participate.

**Study Setting**

All of the participants were residents of a mid-sized Midwestern public school system and grew up in a lower- or lower-middle class inner-city community. It was imperative to find a location that was secure and would provide full confidentiality during meetings. The best solution was to hold the meetings in a private room at the high school, which allowed the participants to be comfortable sharing their thoughts.

The institution that the participants attended was a predominately African American school with approximately 750 students, with a 25:1 student–teacher ratio (this citation has not been given to secure the privacy of the school district and the participants involved). The school’s name has been given the pseudonym Rockport High School. Its
physical environment was somewhat dilapidated with dingy floors and walls as well as
lockers that appeared to be kicked in and nonfunctional.

Participants’ Identification

Participants were required to turn in a signed consent form from their parents or
guardians before attending the focus group. One participant was 18 years of age and did
not need a parent’s signature. Once they had the consent forms in, each participant was
assigned a number ranging from 01–11 based on to the chronological order in which the
student registered to be involved in the study. Assigning a number to each protected the
identity of the participants and allowed efficient tracking of participant responses. The
numbers also eased the process in the focus-group discussion because all of the
participants had their assigned number pinned to them and all referred to the others by
number in order to maintain anonymity, as required by the Human Subjects Institutional
Review Board. Pseudonyms were later given to the participants during the data analysis
stage because it helped the findings become personable instead of referring to the
participants by their number.

A total of 11 students registered to participate; and of those, 4 students declined
participation. The students that did not participate were given the identification numbers
of: #02, #03, #07, and #11. They were contacted to participate but did not respond.
Participants #04 and #09 were involved in the focus group, but could not commit to the
individual interview due to other obligations, such as an after-school job; therefore,
participants #01, #05, and #06 were selected for the study. Table 2 offers a graphic
Table 2

*Tracking Participant Involvement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID#</th>
<th>Focus group</th>
<th>Individual interview</th>
<th>Chosen for case study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#01</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#02</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#03</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>#04</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#05</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#06</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#07</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#08</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
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<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>#10</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#11</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

representation of student participation. Table 3 lists the participants and their pseudonyms.

**Data Collection**

Data-collection involved three components: (a) the DSA questionnaire, (b) two separate focus groups, and (c) 3 in-depth individual interviews for a multiple-case study. Both the focus group discussions and the interviews were digitally recorded and sent to the Kent State University Research and Evaluation Bureau for transcription. The transcriptions were used for data analysis.
Table 3

Alias Identification of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID#</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#01</td>
<td>Connie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#04</td>
<td>Shana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#05</td>
<td>Danielle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#06</td>
<td>Tanya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#08</td>
<td>Annette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#09</td>
<td>Debbie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#10</td>
<td>Cigi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dress, Self-Efficacy, and Academic Achievement (DSA) Questionnaire

When conducting a qualitative study, questionnaires or surveys assist researchers in collecting the data that show consistency or patterns within another form of interpretive data collection. However, a response on a questionnaire may be ambiguous until the participant has the opportunity to go into depth during a focus group or interview session (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Kleiber, 2003). The Dress, Self-Efficacy, and Academic Achievement (DSA) Questionnaire (see Appendix E) consisted of selection items and supply items: selection meaning questions that had an answer that must be circled or checked; supply meaning questions that required a short answer (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003).
The DSA questionnaire was comprised of three sections: (a) demographics: questions about the participants’ school life, relationships with teachers, family support, and self-reported grades; (b) dress: questions regarding the participants’ way of dress, how dress affects their school life, and what others perceive them academically because of their way of dress; and (c) self-efficacy: questions about self-efficacy as it relates to participants’ way of dress, academic achievement, and future goals. Parts (b) and (c) were situated on a five-point Likert scale (Likert, 1932). Completion of the questionnaire took 20–25 minutes.

Focus Groups

The participants were arranged into two focus groups based on availability. Reminder phone calls were made to 6 of the 11 participants inviting them to come to the first focus group 3 days prior to the meeting. The first focus group was held in mid-November and five of the six contacted participants showed up. Phone calls were made to the other five participants inviting them to come to the second focus group, which was also held in mid-November; two of the five that were contacted showed up to participate. Seven students contributed to the focus groups out of the 11 who originally signed up. Each participant was given a $20.00 incentive for their participation in the first two components (the DSA questionnaire and the focus group) of the study.

Focus groups are essential for revealing commonalities in meaning of self-efficacy and dress among this sample of African American adolescent girls; therefore, the group setting allowed for a differentiation between major and less important situations of everyday life for these participants to be discussed (Kao, 2000). The focus groups were
divided into two sessions: Group 1 included Shana, Tanya, Annette, Debbie, and Cigi; Group 2 included Connie and Danielle. Both focus group meetings were approximately 90 minutes in length. To help participants transition from an academic mode to the research setting, snacks were provided. This allowed time to engage in minor talk, which was intended to ease the participants into an informal setting with the hope of allowing for a more conversational tone.

After the participants completed the questionnaire at each particular focus group meeting, they were seated in a pre-arranged circle of chairs. Kleiber (2003) argued that sitting in a circular formation helps to make participants more comfortable and allows for ease in the conversational flow. The participants were thanked for their involvement in the research study, followed by an icebreaker activity that focused on participants sharing an amusingly embarrassing situation they may have faced. After the laughter subsided and each had the opportunity to share, the rules and guidelines of the focus group were reviewed (See Appendix D). The importance of allowing everyone to speak without interrupting was discussed. Kleiber (2003) suggested that discussing such guidelines with the participants prior to the start of a focus group is extremely helpful.

The digital voice recorder was turned on and the dialogue started with questions from the focus group questionnaire (See Appendix G). The participants were asked the questions in the order listed on the questionnaire. While doing so, notes were taken on their responses for a backup in case the digital recorder failed, as well as to allow for a quick glance at the participants’ responses. As the conversation continued, probing questions were offered in hopes of obtaining needed clarification or elaboration of
responses. At the conclusion of the focus groups, the participants filled out the exiting comments form (Appendix I). The participants were not informed regarding the final portion of the study—the individual interview—because selection could not be confirmed until after analysis of the focus group data. Brief field notes were added to the researcher’s journal about the experience as well as a to-do list for the next part of the study.

**In-Depth Interviews for Multiple Case Studies**

The third and last component of the study was to conduct in-depth interviews with the five participants, which lasted approximately 45-60 minutes each. After the focus groups concluded, an interview guide was tailored for each participant based on the first data collected (See Appendices J-L). All of the focus group participants were invited to take part in an in-depth individual interview. Five of the seven were available for the interview to discuss more deeply their ideas regarding my research questions. Each interview participant was given a $10.00 incentive for their participation in the interview component of the study. Parts 1 and 2 of the study (i.e., the DSA questionnaire and the focus group) were completed within two weeks. Part 3 of the study (i.e., the interviews) was completed by doing one or two interviews per day after school and was completed in two weeks.

The goal of the interviews in this portion of the research was to obtain “rich and thick descriptions” (van Manen, 1990, p. 152) from the participants to reveal more in-depth responses to the research questions. The interview portion of the study allowed for data to be collected on each individual case in order to extrapolate data for cross-case
comparison and analysis (Merriam, 2001; Patton, 1990). Qualitative case studies can be characterized as being particularistic—focusing on a particular situation or phenomenon, descriptive—having the end product be “rich, ‘thick’ descriptions,” and heuristic—“illuminating the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study” (Merriam, 2001, p. 193). Patton (1990) described this “cross-case analysis” as a method that researchers use to group “together answers from different people to common questions or analyzing different perspectives on central issues” (p. 376).

Hays (2003) asserted that in case studies, the researcher must be flexible regarding the questions asked, allowing for easy evolution of questions when the situation arises, while maintaining the focal point of the study. Therefore, a separate interview guide was created for and tailored to each participant based on the participants’ comments and responses from the focus group meetings. These guides allowed for (a) further elaboration on the focus-group discussion, and (b) the ability to hone in on specific comments made by the participant during her contribution to the focus-group conversation (See Appendices H through J for each customized interview guide). The research goal of the interview was to maintain an easy, conversational flow. In addition, the interview was used to elicit meaningfully layered responses from the three participants in hopes of profoundly answering the research questions.

**Data Analysis**

**Dress, Self-Efficacy, and Academic Achievement (DSA) Questionnaire**

The data from part (a), the demographic portion of the questionnaire, was coded and analyzed by placing all of the data in a chart format (See Appendix O). The DSA
questions were listed vertically on the left hand side; horizontally along the top, the participants’ numbers were listed; and below their numbers were the responses that each gave to the questions. The demographic data were analyzed for the purposes of finding majority responses among the participants as well as for noting responses that were unique. Majority responses were those that were the same or similar for at least four participants. The responses considered unique were those that came from only one or two participants.

The dress and self-efficacy related questions (parts b and c) were derived from the quantitative scales developed by Sontag and Lee (2004) and Bandura (2006). These parts of the questionnaire hoped to discern deeper meanings of the participants’ perceived self-efficacy and any meanings behind the way they dress. Parts a and b of the questionnaire were situated on a five-point Likert scale (\textit{strongly agree}, \textit{agree}, \textit{neither agree nor disagree}, \textit{disagree}, \textit{strongly disagree}) and were analyzed by the use of percentages. These parts of the DSA questionnaire were also placed on the chart in order to simplify the analyzing process. In this portion of the chart the responses were shortened to read: SA for \textit{strongly agree}, A for \textit{agree}, NAD for \textit{neither agree nor disagree}, D for \textit{disagree}, and SD for \textit{strongly disagree}. The questions and answers from the exit interview—in the same layout as the questionnaire—were also included on this chart (See Appendix M).

\textbf{Focus Groups}

The focus group discussions centered on participants’ responses to the research questions about their school and inner-city environment, the way they dress and how they feel society views them, their academic achievement, and their self-efficacy levels.
Focus group researchers Brody and Flor (1997) found that when working with African American participants, focus groups are considered non-threatening. Because many African Americans find it difficult to trust school teachers and administrators (Foster, 1992), the focus group setting allowed more ease with talking in front of a group of peers instead with only the researcher for the first session. In analyzing the data, including the exit interview responses, it was discovered from the exit interview responses that the focus group method worked well for this sample of inner-city, African American girls.

Data from the focus groups were also organized into a chart. The questions from the focus group skeleton questionnaire were listed vertically down the left hand side of the chart. Horizontally, across the top the participants’ names were listed, and below their names were the responses that each gave to the questions. The responses were so voluminous that hand writing the first sentence of what the participant said in each box aligned with its appropriate question was the best method. By doing so, a quick glance of the chart made recalling the conversation easier in order to go directly to the transcript to see the response in length. Once the responses were recorded on the chart, further analysis of the focus group data responses were highlighted and color coordinated according to its relativity to the appropriate research question.

As such, the similarities and differences in the responses were made clearer. For example, it became easy to see which participants talked more than others, and where the gaps were in the participants’ responses. Finally, the chart allowed ease of selecting the most meaningful statements in order to build a cohesive case study.
The discussions were analyzed using the Seidel (1998) model designed for finding commonalities and themes throughout the data. This model requires data analysis using a continuity approach where the researcher constantly notices, collects, and thinks about the data. The coding process incorporates objectivist and heuristic coding. Objectivist coding is where the codes represented in the data are trusted to consistently bring about the same or similar results from all portions of the data (Seidel, 1998). Heuristic coding uses words as flags or signs and is much more flexible about the meaning of each code while the researcher is working through analysis of the data (Seidel, 1998). Using this form of qualitative data analysis was necessary because of the similarities from the responses as well as the responses that were unique to each participant. It also allowed for interpretation of the data to be left open to the researcher.

For example, the topic of being African American was introduced into the focus group conversation. While studying the transcripts, the term racism was used as an objectivist code. With this code it was revealed that all participants in one way or another were affected by racism. Most felt that they would have to work harder than Whites in order to be successful. When going through the data a second time, discrimination was used as a heuristic code. It was unearthed—in the same portion of the conversation—that not only being African American affected some participants’ academic and personal lives, but so had gender and the discriminating factors that accompany being an African American adolescent girl. For the participants, responses indicated being looked at as less smart, more domestic, and less capable of completing professional tasks. With the Seidel analysis method, the similarities and the consistencies
across all participants were uncovered by using a color coordinated highlighting method without negating the uniqueness of each participant.

**Determining Which Cases to Use**

Comprehensive individual interviews were conducted with five of the seven original focus group participants. Albeit, because of time limitations and the large amount of data collected, it was suggested by my academic advisor that three cases would be an appropriate number for the research study. Thus, cases #01, #05, and #06 were analyzed and included in the study. In determining which cases to include, the research questions and goals served as a guideline. These were interesting participants who were selected for the multiple-case study based off the following criteria: (a) showed great interest in the study, (b) showed ease in communicating with the researcher, and (c) offered a unique perspective in answering the research questions for the study. The decision making for selecting which three candidates met these criteria was solely the researcher’s responsibility.

The three participants who had the most comprehensive and alluring stories to tell were chosen. Alluring stories had a layered complexity which made them interesting; moreover, these participants demonstrated drive and determination through goal-oriented discussions about their futures. All three were already working toward or inquiring about how to work toward their postsecondary plans. These selected participants were the most vocal and it was determined from their previous answers that they would be able to offer the most conversational interview without having to struggle to get them to share their
thoughts. Each participant had an important element or elements in her conversation that offered a unique perceptive and set her apart from the others.

The first case selected was one of the two participants living with both her mom and dad. As a result, it was assumed that she would have a different perspective on self-efficacy, education, and her future goals than those living in a single parent household. She was also the only teen mom, which could influence the goals she set out to accomplish. The second case selected was a participant who was known from her involvement in the Summer 2007 UB Work-study Program directed by the researcher. However, she was not selected for that reason, but because she introduced a unique variable that had not come up in the research—religion/religious faith. From this participant’s conversations it was apparent that her faith had an influence on her self-efficacy level and was the guiding force in her goal making decisions. The third case selected appeared very conscious about the racial and sexist situations that many inner-city, African American adolescent girls endure. As a result of these distinct characteristics, Connie, Danielle, and Tanya were chosen as the three participants for the multiple case study portion of the research.

These participants appeared comfortable discussing personal life, academic life, and future dreams and hopes. Although rapport was built between the participants and the researcher, it remained a priority to maintain the focus of the study and responsibilities of the researcher to avoid biasing the participants’ comments.
In-Depth Interviews for Multiple Case Studies

The purpose of conducting in-depth interviews was to develop individual case studies with three of the participants. Case studies aim to obtain deep and rich data about the case(s) until the results are saturated with information (Herbert & Beardsley, 2001). To obtain this deep, rich data and to allow each case to be understood as a “unique, holistic entity” (Patton, 1990, p. 387), the data results were reported individually by case. In Chapter 4 prior to revealing data findings, the setting and the atmosphere are described in order to provide a comprehensive case, to give a mental visualization of the location, and to describe the ambiance between the researcher, the participant, and the setting (Hays, 2003). The three links of social structure and self-efficacy developed by Gecas and Schwalbe (1983) were used as a means of demonstrating the social structural connection of the participants’ responses. After the individual data were analyzed, I cross-compared the cases to devise the overarching themes in hopes of offering a generalization (Merriam, 2001) of how self-efficacy and dress relates to the academic achievement of inner-city, African American girls. Once more, the Seidel (1998) model for qualitative data analysis was helpful in understanding the meaning of the cases and to look for patterns in the cases comparatively. Finally, the cross-comparisons were explained to show the commonalities and differences among the social structural connections in the responses of the cases.

Trustworthiness

Researchers who employ naturalistic (interpretive/qualitative) inquiry must work to ensure trustworthiness through “credibility,” “transferability,” “dependability,” and
“conformability” in order to avoid charges of conducting “undisciplined” or “sloppy” research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 289). Credibility is the qualitative synonym to the quantitative term “internal validity” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 296). Credibility was addressed by employing a triangulation of methods (i.e., DSA questionnaire, focus groups, and in-depth interviews for multiple case studies) as discussed earlier in this chapter. The study also utilized member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985); specifically, the participants were allowed the opportunity to review the completed data to check for accuracy in their responses. A letter (see Appendix N) explaining the request for them to look over the data and a copy of their section of the results and findings were sent to each participant. They were given approximately two weeks to read the manuscript and to send back comments if they felt they were quoted incorrectly or if they wanted a portion of the data to be differently presented. No one sent back changes or edits to their manuscript, which could conclude that they were all satisfied with how their data were represented or that they were no longer concerned with the study.

Transferability is the qualitative synonym to the quantitative term “external validity” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 297). Through the use of in-depth interviews with the selection of three out of the already purposeful sample of seven participants, deep descriptions were obtained on their perceptions of self-efficacy, dress, academic achievement, and career goals. These rich descriptions (Herbert & Beardsley, 2001) helped inform the study regarding the complicated relationship between the self, dress, academics, and society for a limited sample of individuals. Although this was a relatively
small number, replication across participants helped address the transferability of these findings.

*Dependability* is the qualitative synonym to the quantitative term “reliability” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 299). With the use of data triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2001), the “overlap method” was employed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 317) to attempt to establish dependability within the research. The overlap method allowed the study to be conducted so that the separate portions of the methodology all resulted in an overlap of data regarding answering the research questions. Using this overlapping technique attempted to elicit truthful answers from the informants and allowed me to interconnect certain details of the study.

The last component necessary to establish trustworthiness is *conformability*, which is the qualitative synonym to the quantitative term “objectivity” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 300). With the use of audit trails (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and the assistance of academic peers (who are familiar with my study) as auditors, the research was kept cohesive and intact. The researcher’s responsibility in the audit trail was to maintain “clean” and updated raw data, including field notes, clear and understandable audio taped interviews/focus-group meetings, as well as clear and legible questionnaire responses. The auditor was responsible for remaining familiar with the study and helping to keep the data materials in order to ensure that a satisfactory—well organized and easy to interpret—audit trail was maintained. The auditor reviewed the data notes and talked with the researcher regarding how to simplify the data materials. The auditor read over the interviewing guides to ensure they related to the research questions at hand as well.
Since the auditor was also a doctoral student, she allowed for the researcher to read a copy of her research findings/results in order to help develop ideas for revealing the current research’s data results.

**Researcher as Instrument: The Heuristic Researcher**

A heuristic researcher is one who conducts naturalistic inquiry and engages themselves in their work from the perspective of “self as an instrument” (Eisner, 1998, p. 33). My culture, life experiences, and history lend themselves to an interpretation that is all my own in regards to this research. No one conducting the study utilizing the same tools that I utilized would analyze the data in the same way nor come to the same conclusions that I did. Eisner stated that my perceptive as the researcher is not a liability but a unique signature.

The connection that I have as an African American adult female who grew up in an inner-city milieu prompted a need to revisit the experiences I had as an adolescent. Many of the experiences were similar to that of the participants and some were distinctly my own. At various points during the focus groups and particularly the case studies, the participants’ responses caused me to ponder about my life and the link it has to the current study. As a result, I found that my voice—based on my experiences and reflections of those experiences—connect to the current research in ways that I had previously not realized. Thus, I offer an excerpt reflecting on my lived experiences in order to reveal a deeper connection between myself—the researcher, the study participants, and the overall substance of this study (Hatch, 2002; van Manen, 1990). In order to comprehensively analyze the findings of the focus group and especially the case
studies, I must reveal “who am I as the researcher” (Hatch, 2002). Van Manen (1990) stated that when conducting research it is vital that the investigator have an intense connection and interest in the lives of those being studied. The researcher must have experienced a situation similar to that of the participants in order to understand more deeply the obvious and the hidden dimensions of the data.

I approached this research and its participants with the realization that I was a person from the “inside” instead of a person on the outside looking in. Very similar to where these girls are currently in their lives, I have been. Not to say that my experiences are exactly identical, but my high school journey was much like the girls in this study. Being an African American woman from the inner-city public school milieu—just like my participants—puts me at a more personal level with them because I can relate. In some cases my family and overall community life were very similar to that of the participants, along with the fact that all of the participants involved in the study are members of Upward Bound (UB). This gave me another connection to them because I was also a member in this program. As a result of my personal, social, and physical similarities to them, the participants gave me privilege to information that they may not have had I been White or a male, or if I even came from a wealthy background. My inner-city culture also assisted in regards to understudying the slang terms used by the participants (ex: “I was the bomb,” meaning “I felt good about myself”). Three themes that emerged in the data were circumstances, choices, and support systems, thus I framed my lived experiences with these ideas in mind.
The Lived Experiences of My Circumstances, Choices and Support Systems

Circumstances: Home life. I grew up poor in the inner-city area of a metropolitan, Midwestern town. My neighborhood was one of the staple ghettos in the city, with a liquor store on the corner, the neighborhood bar a half-mile down the street, and the fried fish and/or chicken restaurant in close proximity. I was raised by my mother along with my younger brother and sister. My mom and dad had me when they were 16 years old, my brother when they were 17 and my sister when they were 20. About six months after my sister was born, my mother left my father because he was an alcoholic. Raising three children on money funded by the government was very hard for my young, single, uneducated mother. However, my mother was very strong and sacrificed much for us. By the end of the month there was never enough of anything in the house, especially food.

I remember one night when my mother made pork chops for dinner. After she was done cooking, she told us dinner was ready. My mother usually ate at the same time we did, but this particular night was different. I was probably about eight or nine at the time so I was old enough to count and was well aware of what was going on around me. That night only three pork chops were in the pan. My mother put a pork chop on each one of our plates which she also scooped some rice onto. I noticed that my mother did not have a plate of her own. All the food was distributed and there was none left in the pots for my mother. That night my mother went without food so that my siblings and I could eat and get full. Ever since that night, I promised myself that I would not be poor. I
remember telling myself that I was going to make enough money so that my children could eat and I could eat as well.

**Circumstances: Early school life.** I liked school and my mother knew it, so she encouraged me to succeed as much as she could. Her dream was for me to finish high school without getting pregnant and dropping out like she did. At one point, she started working toward her GED, but never finished. Although she did not have a formal education, she was very socially literate (or streetwise, as some say) and taught my siblings and me to be the same. I had bigger dreams than just graduating from high school, and I wanted to go to college. I always enjoyed learning and drawing, so I knew that whatever profession I decided to pursue had to be something creative. Much like the study participants, they strive to study fields where they believe their talents lie.

By the time I was in eighth grade, I had figured out what I wanted to do with my life and what I was going to study in college. My home economics teacher, Mrs. Gidden [pseudonym], taught our class how to sew. Once I got a hold of the sewing machine, I loved it and knew that I was going to be in fashion design. My teacher told me about the fashion design school that had just opened up at the local university. During the next class, Mrs. Gidden brought me a brochure of the fashion school and told me that her daughter had been accepted and would be attending the program that year. I knew from that moment on that I would be coming to the local university to major in fashion design.

**Support System: Academic support.** I was fortunate enough to be in what was called “major work” (honors classes) throughout grade school and high school. I had access to courses and programs that other students in my high school did not, such as
Project Green the Biology Experiment at the Cuyahoga River and the National Honors Society. My academic abilities also allowed me the opportunity to take advanced placement classes. I was fortunate enough to have had a counselor, Mrs. Bergdorf [pseudonym], who offered wonderful academic support and helped me with college applications, financial aid information, and scholarship essay writing. If I had not been in honors classes, I would have been “stuck” in mundane classes and would not have had access to Mrs. Bergdorf’s guidance. The “regular” students did not get the type of college information and assistance that the honors students received, which in retrospect, I find dismaying.

As a result of my familial circumstances, I was invited to participate in the UB program at The Community College Central [pseudonym]. I met the requirements of being a student from a low-income family who would also be the first person in her household to go to college. UB’s main goal was conditioning their students to get ready for college. The UB program was another means of academic support and I loved being involved in this program because it got me away from my neighborhood and onto a college campus.

A third source of academic support came from the College Scholarship Program [pseudonym]. This program was created as an incentive for students (“major work” and “regular”) going to the local public schools. The College Scholarship Program awarded students $50 for receiving A’s, $30 for Bs, and $10 for Cs on their report cards each semester toward their college education. It became a competition among my classmates and me to see who could gross the most money for college. I graduated sixth out of 100
students in my senior class and had a cumulative grade point average of 4.56/5.00, which indicated that I did very well in the money-making business. During my undergraduate studies, I worked for the College Scholarship Program as a peer mentor helping to support the freshman students coming to college from my inner-city public schools.

**Support System: Personal support.** I was always my own biggest supporter, but received spiritual strength through attending church after my best friend invited me to go to church with her family. Until that time I had never been before, although my mother talked about God sometimes. I continued to go even when my friend’s family moved away. I would get up alone on Sunday mornings and walk or catch the bus to church. Because I found a strong connection with God, I went alone almost every Sunday during my adolescent years. God was my support system when I felt I did not have the strength to go on.

I also had a strong work ethic; therefore I began financially supporting myself at a young age. When I was 12 years old I held my first job. My mother’s friend owned a photography business and I painted advertisement posters for him for $30-$40 per poster. I saved up my money and bought clothes or went out with my friends. I felt independent and free. I loved clothing even at that age and was proud that I could go to school and show my friends what I had bought with *my own* money. I always loved my friends’ reactions as they cooed over my outfits and then would ask their parents to buy something similar. I went from painting posters to making leather bracelets, hand bags and wallets, to doing hair. I made the leather goods and sold them at school to the students. I also learned how to braid hair with the use of kanekalon hair extensions,
which netted me many clients at school and my mom’s friends. I also worked for a fast food restaurant selling French fries and steak sandwiches. I would come home on the bus every night smelling of peppers and onions but I was proud to be making my own money and not having to ask my mother to buy me things she could not afford. Once my mother saw that I was earning money on a regular basis, she made it clear that I was to contribute to the household. I paid my mother $50 a month.

**Support System: Lack of support.** When I told my mother that I was going to go to college to be a fashion designer, all she said was “ok.” From then on, I realized I was going to have to get myself to college on my own. Most of my family members thought I was loony. How was I, a poor, Black girl from the inner-city going to get into a big White school like the local university? I had no support. None of my mother’s three sisters had gone to college and only one of the three finished high school, so how were they going to help me? My father had not been in my life, so I could not count on him. All of my grandparents had been deceased by the time I got to ninth grade, so I had no support there either. My mother had an aunt (my great-aunt) who was very successful. Her husband was a high school principal and had gone to college; however my mother was not fond of them. I knew that I could not get in touch with them to ask questions about college because my mother would chastise me. Unfortunately, I was on this journey alone—or at least that is what I thought.

About six months before my high school graduation, I completed the appropriate forms and applications to apply for college. In the spring of my senior year I discovered I was accepted into the local university’s fashion design school. I was ecstatic!! I had also
applied for a scholarship sponsored by the fashion school, and the essay that I wrote had made an immense impression on the reviewers. I had been invited to come to the campus for an interview with the director of the fashion school.

My excitement grew, but now I was faced with the problem of how to get to the university from my home, which was an hour drive. My mother did not have a car and the car I purchased for $800 the summer before had already given out on me. And by this time, my mother and I were becoming increasingly estranged; therefore I knew I would have to solve my transportation issue on my own. I also knew that once I found a way to get to the university I would have to make the trip alone.

My mother finally realized that I was serious about college and now that I had actually gotten accepted, we grew even further apart. I stopped talking to her and shared as little as possible about what was going on with me and my college plans. God must have realized that I needed His support, because I received a package of information from the local university. Along with information about the dorms, I received a flyer in the mail that stated that there was a bus that went from the nearby hospital to the local university. I would only have to take one bus—the number 10—to the hospital’s pick up location. Having secured a way to get to the university, I called and made the appointment to speak to the director about my interview for the scholarship. This was going to be the first time I had ever seen the campus. I could not believe I was really on my way.
Choices: My sacrifices. While in high school I was determined that I did not want to end up a teen mother nor did I want to have the financial struggles that my family went through on a daily basis. Both were very real and very unattractive to me. I wanted more for myself and made up my mind that I would have a better life. Hence, my high school experience with UB was productive but limited because I could not attend all of the meetings and events associated with being a member. I was expected to commit to tutoring (College Club) sessions twice a week and one Saturday a month. During my freshman and sophomore years of high school, this obligation was not a hindrance and did not interfere with the side jobs that I did to earn a little money. Once I turned 16 and was legally able to have a job, I began to work more and the twice-weekly commitment required of UB began to put a strain on my new work schedule. I had a choice to make: either I would stay in the program and not be able to provide myself with a car, the clothing, shoes, hair styles, and jewelry that I wanted, or drop out of UB. The latter was my preference and I left the UB Program when I was a junior in high school.

I often wondered if I slighted myself by leaving. The benefits of staying in the program were enormous. All students who graduated from UB received financial help with college application fees, and assistance with preparation for SAT and ACT testing. They got to take a college tour trip to see different college campuses, stay for six weeks on a college campus, and take classes that would count as college credits. Finally students that graduated from UB got scholarship money toward college. When I step back and reevaluate my decision I do not regret dropping out. I was still able to get into college by paying my own fees for applications. I took the ACT test and scored just high
enough to be admitted into the fashion school. I went on a college tour with the National Urban League my junior year in high school, which further convinced me that I wanted to go to the local university. Also, I received two scholarships: one from the College Scholarship program and the second from the fashion school.

**Choices: Determination and persistence.** My choice to pursue the fashion design scholarship persisted and the day of my interview with the director of the fashion school, Dr. Riddle [pseudonym], had finally arrived. I was required to bring some of my drawings and some of the garments that I had sewn. I was expected to show the director my work and convince her that I was the student that should get this scholarship. The bus ride was exciting, long, and nerve wracking all mixed in one gigantic emotion. Along with the constant rumbling in my stomach from the anxiety, I also had to bring two garments that I had constructed, and multiple drawings of my other designs. I emerged onto the campus with the sun and warmth of the soon-to-be summer days. Once I was on campus, I had to find my way to the building that housed the fashion design and merchandising department.

The feeling I had when I had got off the bus and walked around campus was incredible. I felt like I belonged there and that I had finally broken free of the ghetto that I called home. I arrived at the fashion school and to my sweet relief, it was as wonderful as I thought I would be—even better. The building was constructed of beautiful green marble architecture and black marble floors. There was a huge glass display case that contained garments and illustrations from current students. I gazed at the display and imagined my work in there one day.
The director of the school came from her office and greeted me. She was a well-dressed red-headed, petite woman, with a southern accent. She invited me to come to the conference room that had been reserved for our meeting. The first thing she asked me was, “Where are your parents?” I explained to her that I came alone and that I had caught the bus all the way here from home. I also explained to her that I could only stay for a short while in order for me to be able to get back to the bus depot so that I would not miss my ride back home. The director was so impressed with me from that first encounter, that she awarded me the scholarship. She said, “Any young girl with enough determination to find her way here to the fashion school alone and on the bus deserves this award more than anyone.”

I remember after I started school that fall in 1995. Every time I would see Dr. Riddle, she would always tell people, “That girl has determination. She caught the bus all the way here from home.” At first I was a bit embarrassed about other people knowing about my personal situation, and later I realized that it was just her expressing how proud she was of me, and therefore I should be proud too. Dr. Riddle eventually became a huge support system in my life, encouraging me through my master’s degree and pushing me to continue on to get my doctoral degree. God rest her sole, Dr. Riddle, the director of the fashion school, passed away on July 23, 2009, from a 15 year struggle with cancer.

The Results of my Circumstances, Choices, and Support Systems

More than a decade after my graduation from the fashion school with a Bachelor of Arts in fashion design, here I am, back at the local university as a Doctoral student. I
am still the only one in my immediate and extended family to go to a four year institution and graduate. I will soon be the first person to be a Doctor of Philosophy in my family. I am married and am happy to say that my husband and I have two sweet boys, Xavier and my step-son, Aaron. I am a Non-Tenured Track Assistant Professor still working hard to attain my dreams of making a name for myself in the industry of academia and fashion design. I was (and still am) a square peg that society, my inner-city community, and my family were trying to fit into a round hole. Coming from the inner-city, no one would have ever guessed a girl like me could go on to accomplish so much.

Growing up in the inner-city, resources for clothing and other things were always hard to come by. Attaining and wearing stylish clothing was a means by which I could be proud of myself. The clothing and other material things were items that I had worked hard for and something that I did not need my mother to give to me. The ultimate truth is that the things that I wore and bought helped increase my self-efficacy and made me feel valued because I was not getting that feeling of being valued from the person that it meant the most coming from, my mother. As a girl and young woman I was using dress as a means to cover my heartache. Dress has evolved into a career and livelihood for me. I have come to realize that I dressed a certain way in order to gain attention and validation from my peers and others. Now dress has a much deeper meaning to me than just what others see on the surface. I concern myself with dress as a tool for research to gain insight as to how it affects others’ lives and inner identity and not just as a means of an outward appearance.
When conducting the current study, I had the privilege of listening to the participants’ testimonies about dealing with dress, self-efficacy, racism, sexism, poverty, lack of resources, and familial support. This caused me to consider how far I have come fighting similar obstacles. One participant’s confessions about her mother not being able to support her through her academic and personal journey caused me to look back at my life in high school when my mother did not give me the support I needed. Much like the future plans of my participants, I had to claw my way out of the inner-city milieu alone with minimal family support while faced with racism and sexism on a daily basis. This accomplishment says much about the self-efficacy I had as a child, adolescent, and now as an adult. My high level of self-efficacy was established from my circumstances, choices, and support systems. My self-efficacy gave me the power and motivation to make certain choices that would better my situation despite my surroundings.

As a result of talking with the participants, I had to consider my own life and question whether the negative feelings I harbored for my mother were a result of the lack of support she gave me because she just did not want to or because she did not know how to. This thought changes everything for me and my future relationship with my mother. Maybe now that I have grown as a result of my participation in the doctoral program and through this dissertation journey, I can begin to heal myself, allow my relationship with my mother to be reconciled, and we can begin to love again—unconditionally.

**Ethical Considerations**

Codes of ethics exist comprehensively by all major scholarly associations, and by the 1980s, these codes were enforced using four directing guidelines: informed consent,
deception, privacy and confidentiality, and accuracy (Christians, 2000). After Institutional Review Board [IRB] approval was granted, the parents and participants were contacted and given a consent form with a stamped, self-addressed return envelope (see Appendix C). The form consisted of the purpose of the study, the security of anonymity, a description of the research process, and the explanation that participation was voluntary. The consent forms were signed by the parent and the participant and returned to the researcher in person before participation in the study. One participant was 18 years of age and filled out her consent form without a parental signature.

Privacy and confidentiality was explained in the consent form. Each participant was given an identification number in order to protect her and her family’s privacy. It was important to ensure that the research study location would protect the privacy of the participants. Conducting the study at their high school instead of the public library guaranteed the participants’ privacy from causal on-lookers.

In regards to the deception guideline, participants were informed of the purpose of the study once more at the focus-group meeting. As a result of conducting a member check, the participants had access to all of their responses and the results of the study. The member-checking process also assisted in maintaining truthfulness in the research, because the participants were able to examine the notes on their responses and the results of the study in order to ensure accuracy of the interpretations of the data.

**Summary**

In this chapter the theoretical framework and the methodological design used for this research was discussed. A triangulation of methods including the DSA
questionnaire, focus groups, and in-depth interviews were employed in order to answer the research questions. During the description of the setting and participants, the dilemma of having to seek another location for the study in order to ensure the privacy of the participants was divulged. Within the description of the inner-city, African American participants, the ethical need to identify them by number and pseudonym was discussed. The justification for selecting the participants for the case study portion of the research was also revealed. Next, the methods used for analyzing the data were explained. Looking for commonalities as well as uniqueness in the data was the main goal. With the use of objectivist and heuristic coding, as well as employing a color-coding system, allowed for ease in uncovering the data findings. Finally, the importance of developing trustworthiness in the research, the idea of utilizing the researcher as an instrument, and maintaining ethical guidelines were discussed. The next chapter reveals the results and findings from the questionnaire, the focus groups discussion, and the multiple-case study findings. Last, a cross-comparison of all the data as it relates to the three cases is discussed at length.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

As stated in Chapter 1, the purpose of this research was to examine the self-efficacy levels of inner-city, African American, adolescent girls through the concepts of dress and academic achievement. Using a triangulation of methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2001) encompassing the Dress, Self-Efficacy, and Academic Achievement (DSA) questionnaire, focus groups, and multiple-case studies, explorations included the participants’ perceptions of dress and whether they feel dress has a relationship to their academic achievement and self-efficacy levels, and how peers, the community, society, and teachers view them. The research also sought to determine to what extent, if at all, being involved in Upward Bound (UB) influenced the participants’ self-efficacy, way of dress, academic achievement and future goals.

In the following document older references will be noted and cited as background literature. It became apparent in the search for writings concerning the current topic that there is a void in the literature regarding works concerning African American high school females’ educational achievement, obtaining or maintain self-efficacy, and dress. Several key word searches lead to dead ends or studies that would offered tangential support for the current research.

Framed by three themes that emerged from the data—circumstances, choices, and support systems—the analysis aims to reveal the responses to the research questions categorized within the themes. Included in the themes are sub-categories that related to a
specific research question. For example: the first research question asked how inner-city, African American girls acquire their level of self-efficacy. Within each theme category is a sub-category titled *A sense of self* where the participant responses related to acquiring self-efficacy are discussed in the context of circumstances, choices, or support systems.

This chapter begins by detailing the demographics of the research study group, the findings from the DSA questionnaire administered during the focus-group session, and a data chart which visually depicts the participants’ answers to the questionnaire. The focus groups served as a means for collecting the initial data needed in order to wisely select the three participants for the multiple-case study by detecting consistencies and patterns in the participants’ responses.

The case studies were the main thrust and substance of this research, the findings of which are described in this chapter. When revealing the case study results, first the atmosphere and ambiance during the time of data collection are detailed. Then deeper demographic data are revealed, which includes a narrative of each case’s family life, school life, and future life. During this narrative, a more comprehensive discussion follows as to how the participants’ cognition of dress, self-efficacy, and academic achievement relate to Gecas and Schwalbe’s (1983) three links of social structure and efficacy-based self-esteem: “(1) context of action, (2) the meaning of action, and (3) the unintended consequences of action” (p. 81). An overall summary of the findings is given at the end of each case.

Last, a “cross-case analysis” is performed (Patton, 1990) for the three cases in order to offer an overall generalization of the data reflecting participants’ connection to
the research questions. The cross-case analysis table shows how each participant’s case aligns with Gecas and Schwalbe’s (1983) three links of social structure regarding self-efficacy, dress, and education. The findings were detailed in this manner in order to comply with Patton’s (1990) guidance:

Each case study in a report stands alone, allowing the reader to understand the case as a unique, holistic entity. At a later point in the analysis it is possible to compare and contrasts cases, but initially each case must be represented and understood as an idiosyncratic manifestation of the phenomenon of interest. (p. 387)

Focus Group Results

Dress, Self-Efficacy, and the Academics (DSA) Questionnaire

As explained earlier, the DSA included a demographic portion and a Likert scale portion, which included questions regarding dress, self-efficacy, and the participants’ thoughts of others’ perceptions of them. The following is a description of how the data informed the study in each of these areas.

Demographic data: Family life and income. All seven of the participants were African American girls living in the inner-city; however, their family life and socioeconomic status varied. Two participants lived in a household with both parents, one of whom was both an only child and a teenage mother. Three participants lived in single parent homes headed by their mothers. Of those three, one lived in a household of seven individuals. Two participants lived with their grandmothers.
The participants lived in a community with a median income of $33,672, as compared to the United States’ median income of $60,374, according to the 2007 Census report (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2007). The families are considered to be working class and lower-middle class status by government standards. The response options for the financial background question on the DSA questionnaire were “rich, well-off, not that poor, and poor.” Five participants stated that their families’ financial situation was “well-off” and two chose “not that poor.”

Upward Bound (UB) requires that “two-thirds of the participants in a project be both low-income and potential first-generation college students. The remaining one-third must be either low-income or potential first-generation college students” (U.S. Department of Education, 2008b). Because of UB’s admission requirements it was surprising that five of seven indicated that their families were “well off.” However, the two participants who were from a two parent home chose “well-off” as a response.

Statistics show that two parent/two income households often bring in more money than a single parent/guardian household (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2007). The State Median Family Income by Numbers of Earners In Family (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2007) census data shows that the more earners there are in a household the more income that family generates.

**Demographic data: Support systems.** It was difficult to determine the actual support given to the participants by their families, as often it is decided that those in attendance at particular school events are “more involved” than parents who are not. However, two participants living with both parents had “more visible” family support.
During the recruitment stage of this research, those two participants’ parents were present at the UB meeting in August 2008. One participant’s mother and the other’s father were in attendance, the latter serving as head of the UB parent network group. In this role, he was responsible for contacting other parents and setting up meetings to discuss ways to academically support their children. An assumption could be made that because two of the participants attended the meeting with their parents, they would therefore have a stronger support system than the other participants. Over time, data revealed this to be true.

A few of the participants living in single parent/guardian homes received some support from their families. One participant wrote on her questionnaire that her grandmother said she “can do anything” (Annette). This statement demonstrates support because the grandmother appeared to believe that Annette had the capability to be successful in her future endeavors. Another wrote on her questionnaire that “they [her family] are happy” (Debbie) about her future goals. The latter illustrates how family members being “happy” about her aspirations gave the participant a sense of encouragement and feeling of familial backing.

However, three participants discussed the lack of support they received from their families. On the DSA questionnaire, two disclosed that they received the least amount of school support from family and saw themselves as their only source of support. All three revealed that their parent or guardian “did not care” (Ciji) or “did not have time to care” (Danielle) about their academic achievements. One participant stated that her family “really don’t care as long as I graduate from high school” (Ciji). In determining self
-efficacy level, an individual’s thoughts and feelings play a key role in influencing her actions and behaviors toward achieving intended outcomes (Bandura, 1977). The extent to which this is actually the way the guardian or parent feels is unknown, but the importance lies in how the participant processes the feelings of not being cared for.

Another described not having support in terms of “learn[ing] from the lack of motivation” she received from her family and “refuse[s] to repeat that same legacy” (Tanya). She wrote that she does not “want to waste free education while it’s here and end up like others [who did not go to school].”

Support at school emerged as important to the participants as well, especially in relationships held with teachers and the impact of those on academic achievement. One participant described her teachers as a major support system in her life. From the data regarding the participants’ favorite teachers, supportive teachers were characterized as those who took their time going over the lessons and in giving the participants feedback on academic work. Being a “good grader,” “caring,” “funny,” and “inspiring” were cited as desired traits that participants wanted in their teachers. Research indicates that in many cases, teachers have the power to make or break a student’s academic achievement as a result of their high or low expectations of that student (Brophy & Good, 1970; Rist, 1972; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Thus a “caring” teacher appears to be important for some inner-city, African American girls, possibly due to the lack of support that they get elsewhere.

Likert scale data. Of the 26 Likert-scale items listed on the DSA questionnaire, 11 items resulted in four or more of the seven participants selecting the same response
option. All other responses were scattered and had no noteworthy similarity, meaning that only three participants or lower selected a given response. Table 4 lists all of the questions and participants’ responses. Items with a four or more response rate are bolded because they are the most relevant findings and are discussed further.

*A sense of self.* According to Bandura (1977) every person has a sense of self-efficacy—an overall level of perception of what she feels she is capable of or incapable of.
### Table 4

*Results From the Dress, Self-Efficacy, and Academic Achievement (DSA) Questionnaire*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel as though my way of dress is totally in style.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My way of dress helps me feel self-assured in school.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My friends like the way I dress.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The way I dress helps me fit in with my friends.</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get a lot of attention at school because of how I dress.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teachers think negatively of me because of my way of dress.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>My parents and family disapprove of my way of dress.</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to look different than my peers.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Society as a whole thinks that all girls who dress like me are headed for trouble.</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t care what my peers, teachers, family, or society thinks about the way I dress.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel like I can do anything when I have my hair done and I have on my favorite outfit.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Certain clothes I wear make me feel important.</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I dress a certain way I feel like I have more control over my life.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I dress a certain way I feel more confident to talk to others.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel like I do better in school when I have on an outfit I feel good in.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I have a hard time getting teachers to help me when I am stuck on schoolwork.</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I always try to take good notes in class.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am always organized in my schoolwork.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 4 (continued)

Results From the Dress, Self-Efficacy, and Academic Achievement (DSA) Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I just can’t seem to grasp certain subjects.</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>When I see my report card I often feel bad about what I got.</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have horrible study habits.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am great with balancing my time between school work and other things I want to do.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I am certain about what I want to do with my life after school.</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am only capable of certain careers because of the background I come from.</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>My future does not look that great because I’m not good at school.</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have every intention of going to college or trade school.</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


What the level is and how it was acquired differs amongst individuals. In the discussion that follows, the difference between “high” and “highest” levels of self-efficacy are distinguished by confidence in one’s abilities and working towards achieving one’s goals. Being confident regarding capabilities to accomplish future endeavors indicated a high level of self-efficacy. However, to obtain the highest level of self-efficacy, the participants had to establish that they were confident regarding their capabilities to accomplish their goals *and* actually working toward those goals.
The DSA questionnaire and the interview data from the focus groups showed that the two participants living with both parents seemed to have the highest level of self-efficacy regarding their academic future. Both sets of parents were actively involved in the academic lives of their children. In addition to being involved in UB, these two participants were also working toward their aspirations by being involved in extra-curricular activities which allowed them to learn more about their fields of interests (i.e., broadcasting and accounting). The other five participants also showed signs of high self-efficacy regarding their futures; however, their families were not as involved in their school life and the participants were not physically working toward their goals like the two participants living with both parents.

The data showed that family situations (i.e., structure and socioeconomic status) contributed to the self-efficacy level of the participants, as confirmed by the research of Whitbeck et al. (1997). Family situations offered resources and support for the study participants and affirmed their efficacious behavior. Although family situations did not solely dictate level of self-efficacy for the study participants, the participants’ behaviors and actions regarding working toward their goals did. For example, Connie lived with her mom and dad who helped establish her “high[est]” level of self-efficacy regarding going to college because their support allowed her the opportunity to physically work toward her goals. This is not to say that Connie’s level of self-efficacy was highest because she lived with both parents, however, of all the participants she appeared to have the most family support, which resulted in her having what seemed like the highest level of self-efficacy. As reported by Tanya, her family lacked the motivation to seek
educational advancement and did not offer the support which would allow her to physically work toward her goals; however Tanya’s self-efficacy level toward going to college is still “high.”

Further evidence of participants’ perceptions of their level of self-efficacy became clearer when responding to the DSA item: “My future does not look great because I’m not good at school.” Six answered strongly disagree and one answered disagree, which shows that all participants felt that their academic capabilities were adequate enough to attain their future goals. During the focus group, all participants talked very positively about their futures and continuing on to postsecondary education. One participant stated that she felt “well prepared” for her future (Connie). Another commented, “seeing that you do good in high school . . . will show that you got a good background” (Annette).

Participants’ responses to a latter item, “I have every intention of going to college or trade school,” revealed seven of seven strongly agreed that they intended to go to college or trade school. This unanimous result demonstrated that all of the participants had a high self-efficacy about their ability and motivation to further their education. Also, uniformity in the responses suggests that the influence of the Upward Bound (UB) program may have increased the participants’ self-efficacy and understanding that education past high school is an option. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2005-2006), UB had a college enrollment rate of 91.2% for students who remain in the program for at least 36 months. All of the participants in the current study have been involved with UB for at least two years, except for one who has been in the program just over a year.
The fact that all of the participants intend to further their education is extremely important because statistics show that many African Americans do not graduate from high school or extend their education beyond high school (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2007). Researchers believe that in some cases this is due to low self-efficacy (Chapell & Overton, 2002; Wilson, 1996). The U.S. Bureau of Census (2007) reported that only 17.3% of African Americans obtain a bachelor’s degree or higher. However, with the influence of UB and the participants’ high efficacy levels, they are more likely to accomplish their goal of attaining a post-secondary education. To further confirm their ambitions toward postsecondary education, five of the participants strongly agreed and two agreed that they were certain they knew what they wanted to do with their lives after school. The agreed response was selected by two younger focus group members, who waivered more on their decisions regarding future career goals, thus these participants still agree that they are certain about what they want to do after high school. This finding might indicate that UB impacted their thinking about higher education aspirations.

High levels of self-efficacy are also evident in the participants’ choice to do their best in school. According to Bandura (2006), the way in which a student takes notes and how organized she is in school is a valid indicator of a person with a higher level of self-efficacy because it demonstrates the person’s sense of control over her environment. High levels of self-efficacy regarding school work shows a person’s motivation and capability to be organized and displays the amount of effort a person expends in order to stay organized. When asked about taking notes in school, four strongly agreed and three agreed to always trying to take good notes. Being organized also shows that one values
education, which was confirmed in the participants’ responses to the DSA questionnaire and the focus group discussions. Five of the participants agreed that they try to be organized at school. One participant wrote that school is “great” because she is getting a “good education” (Debbie) and another because she “gets to have a free education” (Tanya). This same participant talked about her lack of finances in all aspects of her life, including future education and clothing; therefore having the opportunity to get a free education was important to her.

*A way of dress.* The research data indicated that choosing to dress a certain way related to the participants’ self-efficacy in most cases. Among the participants, dressing in a professional way was unanimously important for situations such as job interviews. Looking at the participants’ DSA questionnaire responses regarding their way of dress, four of the participants agreed that choosing to wear “professional” clothes helps them feel important. Prior research has shown this to be true as well; when students wear clothing considered to be socially accepted among their peers, their behavior changes for the better (Brock, Ulrich, & Connell, 2010; Daters, 1990). According to Bandura (1977), human behavior is determined by the level of self-efficacy that one possesses. The participants’ behavior changed because professional dress made them feel important; thus they behaved as such. In addition, the participants valued wearing comfortable clothing to help them concentrate better. Comfortable clothing was seen by some participants as an academic self-efficacy enhancer because they thought less about what they were wearing and more about their lessons.
A female’s self-efficacy regarding her way of dress is often influenced by social structural conditions such as media influences and socioeconomic status. With dress, society will either support or not support what one wears. Discovering the participants’ thoughts on others’ perceptions of them is a valid indication of the participants’ levels of self-efficacy. In the DSA questionnaire, when asked about others’ perceptions of how they dress, four participants were “neutral” when asked if their way of dress helps them fit in with their friends. Fifty-seven percent strongly disagreed that their families disapproved of the way they dress, and four strongly disagreed that “society as a whole thinks that all girls who dress like me are headed for trouble” when girls dress in the manner they do (i.e., provocatively).

Research has established that adolescent girls want to fit in with their peers and, at the same time, be thought of as individuals (MacGillivray & Wilson, 1997). The “neutral” DSA response to whether their way of dress helps them fit in with their friends suggested that the majority of the participants were not purposefully dressing to fit in with their classmates. For example, Danielle reported that she dressed for comfort and for what she could financially afford, whereas Tanya reported that she dressed to gain the respect of her male peers. Dressing to fit in was seemingly not the main priority with most of the participants in this study. The data showed that this group appeared to be more academically focused and, considering the low-income demographic of the majority of the participants, dressing in the latest fashion in order to fit in was not always an option (as reported by Danielle). Focusing more on academics than dress could also be the way in which the participants coped with not having the means to get certain items.
However, their responses should be questioned. If the participants had the financial resources, would their answers have differed?

On the other hand, the participant who reported being the most fashion focused responded neutrally to the item: “The way I dress helps me fit in with my friends.” She reported that clothing ranks a 10 in the degree of importance in her life. In spite of this, she agreed when responding to the item: “I don’t care what my peers, teachers, family, or society think about the way I dress.” This data suggest that she would be dressing just for her own satisfaction. According to the DSA questionnaire responses, five (three strongly agreed and two agreed) of seven like to look different than their peers. Research suggests that this instance falls under the category of a “personal fable” (MacGillivray & Wilson, 1997). The personal fable implies that adolescents believe they are different from everyone else regarding their dress even though in many cases, they are conforming to a certain type of dress in order to be accepted into a particular social group. The current data results are in line with Holloman et al.’s (1996) research which found that dress is both “covert” and “overt” for this particular participant. It is covert in the sense that she is dressing is “to gain approval, feel good about oneself” (Holloman et al., 1996) and overt meaning she is dressing is “to seek non-conformity” (Holloman et al., 1996, p. 270).

The second DSA item, “My parents and family disapprove of my way of dress,” revealed that four strongly disagreed that their family disapproves of their way of dress. These results show that four of the seven participants felt that their family liked or was accepting of their way of dress. One participant answered another way: she circled
neither agree nor disagree that her family disapproved of her way of dress. On the questionnaire and later during the focus group she revealed that her family was not very supportive of her academically or emotionally, and therefore, may lead her to feel neutral about their perceptions regarding her way of dress.

The third DSA item: “Society as a whole thinks that all girls who dress like me are headed for trouble,” indicated that four of the participants strongly disagreed. This finding is interesting because participants agreed on the notion that inner-city girls are often stereotyped for dressing inappropriately, with body parts exposed or tight clothing. Many times family and the society disapprove of this type of dress; the participants also rejected this type of provocative wardrobe. Conversely, one participant reported that she used to wear tight jeans and low cut shirts to gain attention, but has since renewed her religious faith and has begun to see her potential. She commented, “I feel like my whole life has broadened; like my view has expanded. I see way more for myself than I saw back there” (Danielle). This resulted in an enhancement of her self-efficacy regarding her education and way of dress.

Most of the participants felt they dressed appropriately for their age group. The interview data showed that the participants did not follow the stereotypical ideology of dress for adolescent girls. In the focus group it was stated that most of society believes that inner-city, African American girls look to the media (i.e., music videos and some celebrities) for guidance on how to dress. The participants talked about the sexist and misogynist images that music videos display of women. One participant commented: “I think society expects me to not care about myself like; they expect me to want to be like
the girls in music videos or on TV and stuff like that” (Tanya). All participants seemed to veer away from society’s stereotypical perception of the way that inner-city girls dress. The participants also discussed the fact that these typecast images exhibit inner-city, African American girls as not being interested in academics.

**Academic support systems.** Research (Cooper, Valentine, Nye, & Lindsay, 1999; Mahoney, Cairns, & Farmer, 2003; Marsh & Kleitman, 2002; Van Matre et al., 2000) has found that students who participate in after-school activities are more academically focused in school. All of the participants chose to be involved in UB, which, unlike a sport or other after-school activity, results in the participants being offered academic support such as tutoring help twice a week, the opportunity to be in a college environment for five weeks during the summer months, and financial support for college application waivers. Upward Bound helps its participants see that college is obtainable for first generation college students and/or students from low income backgrounds. As explained earlier, students who participated in extracurricular activities were expected by teachers to achieve more academically than students who were employed after school or who did nothing after school; therefore they received more academic support from teachers resulting in higher levels of self-efficacy. When responding to the questionnaire item: “I have a hard time getting teachers to help me when I am stuck on schoolwork,” four participants stated that they disagreed, confirming that the majority of the participants believe they get the needed support from teachers.

However, two participants neither agreed nor disagreed that they had a hard time getting teachers to help them. During the demographic portion of the questionnaire, one
of these two wrote that her least favorite teacher was one who did not pay attention to her, nor answer her questions. From a teacher’s perspective, one can see how something like this can happen. During the single encounter with her during the focus group discussion, it was obvious that she was very quiet. In many cases comments from her had to be initiated by asking her directly how she felt about a particular question. During the focus group she replied the least out of all seven participants. From the 18 questions that guided the focus group conversation, she only replied to seven of those (and mostly only when prompted). The lack of support that this participant felt from her teacher could be self-induced on the part of the participant. This participant’s teacher could very well not be aware that she has a question because, more than likely, she may not be speaking up in order to get the support she needs from the teacher.

The last item of discussion regarding the DSA questionnaire addresses the statement, “When I see my report card, I often feel bad about what I got.” Fifty-seven percent of the participants strongly disagreed and three disagreed that they often felt bad about the grades they received on their report card. This indicates that most of the participants were satisfied with their grades. The participants’ self-reported grades were as follows: three participants had an A average and four had a B average. One participant who had an A average responded that she disagreed to feeling bad about the grades she received on her report card. She appeared very serious about her education and viewed it as a way to eventually get out of her current home situation. During the focus group, she displayed a feminist perspective and asserted that one of her goals is to be treated equally
to men. Tanya reported how she feels she has been mistreated by her family because she is female:

The roles of women and how society views me there could definitely be obstacles . . . you know sometimes it makes me feel like I want to give up. . . . When I was growing up and one of my other brothers our dad he would just he would always come get my brother, and he would never really come get me. (Tanya)

Her partial satisfaction with her grades can be interpreted as a learned ideology that women are not equal to men, yet her self-efficacy shows that she is resisting this by continuing to motivate herself.

**Focus Group Summary**

According to the Dress, Self-Efficacy, and Academic Achievement (DSA) questionnaire, all of the participants demonstrated high levels of self-efficacy regarding academics and securing future success by following through with their goals. Connie and Shanna demonstrated the highest level of self-efficacy, not because they had both a mom and dad living with them but because they did have the strongest sense of family support amongst the other participants. The remaining five showed a high level of self-efficacy in spite of the lack of strong support at home. Their support came from other sources such as self in Tanya’s situation or UB in other participants’ situations. High levels of self-efficacy involved participants who believed they were doing well and would continue to do well in their future endeavors. The highest level of self-efficacy showed participants who felt the same as the high level self-efficacy participants, but they were actually working toward their futures or were involved in programs which would help
them obtain their future goals. The data revealed that dress was not a major priority for most participants in this study and their way of dress was not being used as a means of fitting in with their friends. It was also established that certain clothing helps make the majority of them feel important. In some instances certain dress also made the participants feel more capable which means that for this group, dress does relate to self-efficacy, academics, and future goals. The multiple-case study results provide a deeper understanding of the findings just presented as well as reveal outcomes that emerged from the data analysis for each individual case study participant.

**Multiple-Case Study Results**

During the data analysis of the multiple-case study participants, three themes emerged: circumstances, choices, and support systems. The themes were devised by evaluating the participants’ societal conditions, which are the circumstances that the individuals were born into as well as circumstances that arose throughout their lives. The second theme, choices, includes two parts. First, the choices made for the individual by a parent or guardian are considered circumstances because the participants had little or no input into choices made on their behalf. Second, choices that the participants were conscious of and made on their own (or with the help of others) were evaluated next. The third theme included the type and level of support systems that each participant had. Figure 3 illustrates how the three themes—circumstances, choices, and support systems—connect with the three main concepts of the study: dress, self-efficacy, and academic achievement/future goals.
As shown in Figure 3, the main research concepts (dress, self-efficacy, and academic achievement/future goals) make up the triangle surrounding the three themes of choices, circumstances, and support systems. Self-efficacy is at the center of the concepts triangle and the themes circle because they are related to each individual/participant. In other words, the themes circle and the concepts triangle represent the social structure that surrounds an individual. As explained earlier, the self is situated in a social-structural world and cannot function without it (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Fine, 1991); therefore many traits of the self are influenced by everyday conditions such as choices and dress. Further, self-efficacy is placed at the center because it determines how humans react to and deal with circumstances, choices, and support. As
shown in past research (Bandura et al., 1996; Rosenberg et al., 1995; Ross & Broh, 2000; Zimmerman & Cleary, 2006), self-efficacy dictates academic achievement.

The arrows of the themes circle are pointing in both directions because each theme is interconnected, meaning that the theme can cause or be the result of one or the other happening. For example, consider the item on the questionnaire, “When I see my report card I often feel bad about what I got.” Grades on a report card are an educational circumstance. Feeling bad about one’s report card could be the result of choosing not to go to class, not to complete school work/homework, or not studying for a test, among others; and therefore, getting poor grades. The outcome of one’s choices then results in a negative circumstance such as a report card with poor grades. Thus, the interconnection of the themes works as a reciprocal effect.

Another example would be—hypothetically speaking—the household may have been an abusive or neglectful home or otherwise one where the person had no means of a support system. Thus, survival was the main focus for this person while studying was second in priority, resulting in the circumstance of having poor grades and the person feeling bad about the grades she received. In some cases, the findings specifically aligned with one of the three themes. In other cases, the findings were the results of one, two, or even three of the themes. “However, it is also possible that people, circumstances, personality traits, prior experience or other factors [choices] may impede to obtaining support. Barriers to support restrict an individual from accessing desired resources” (Wilkum et al., 2008, p. 6).
Regarding the way in which one dresses, societal and familial circumstances teach that one is to dress in a certain manner. One can either choose to dress in that manner or choose not to, thus in order to decide the way in which one will dress, one must have a certain level of support/acceptance from others. Support also can be seen as resources. The quantity of resources will also determine how that person will dress. One’s self-efficacy affects her human functioning and therefore determines what that person will choose to wear and how she will behave when wearing certain clothes and material goods.

Life’s circumstances determine where a child lives and where she can obtain an education. What she does have control over—depending on the level of support she receives or in spite of it—she can begin to make choices concerning academic achievement and future goals. The level of support that she gets—whether emotional or monetary—from family, teachers, and others, is important because oftentimes it determines the amount of effort one extends. The following three cases illustrate how the level of choices, circumstances, and support systems impacted the decisions of each participant. The first case, Connie, leads us to understand how the relationship between dress, self-efficacy, and academic achievement/future goals has been determined by her choices, circumstances, and support systems.

**Connie—Case 01: The Olympic Hopeful Teen Mom**

The first introduction to Connie and her mother occurred in September 2008 at the initial round of UB participant recruitment. Her mother was quite interested in the study and wanted her daughter involved, thus she signed Connie’s name and phone
number to the participant sign up form. Connie did not appear interested nor
disinterested, complying with what her mother wanted. During the focus group meeting,
the notion of Connie’s mother’s enthusiasm was discussed. Connie emphasized that her
mother was excited about all opportunities pertaining to her educational betterment.

On a cold December evening, Connie arrived at the individual interview wearing
a stylish jacket and high-heeled boots, with her cosmetics nicely done. She mentioned
that due to the cancellation of track practice, she could dress up. During the focus group,
Connie had acted nervous and distrusting. She offered little information unless asked
directly, yet her answers displayed confidence. However, her behavior during the
interview showed her outgoing nature and ability to speak easily. These actions could
have reflected a comfort level with the researcher because it was the second meeting.
Another possibility is that Connie communicates more effectively in a one on one
conversation and is more comfortable than when participating in group discourse.
During the interview, the participant appeared confident about herself and her aspirations.

Connie is a 17-year-old high school senior. She self-reported that her grades were
mostly Bs. She is a teenage parent and lives with her mother, father, and 2-year-old son.
She considered her family financially “well-off” on the DSA questionnaire. Even though
she is a mother, she is very active in school activities and holds a part-time job. Connie is
an athlete and dreams of training for the Olympics in track and field once she graduates
from high school. Connie said that she has a great support system at home and discussed
how her family and favorite teacher give her the guidance and the encouragement she
needs to try her “hardest and never give up.” Her support system was in place with her
parents taking care of her 2-year-old son while she is in school, track practice, or work. Connie shared that it is difficult leaving her son with anyone. She mentioned that her mom is the next best person to take care of her son and confessed that sometimes she does not want her father to take care of him because he is not as thorough a caregiver as she or her mom.

A sense of self: Circumstances. The opening question during the focus group session was geared toward understanding how self-efficacy levels are developed within the participants. Having a certain self-efficacy level is a normal life situation or circumstance because self-efficacy is an already established condition within human functioning (Bandura, 1977). The concept of having personal control affects one’s level of self-efficacy. Research has reported that having a sense of self-control “increases effort, motivation and persistence in problem solving, which improves academic performance” (Ross & Broh, 2000, p. 271). Therefore, the opening question was: “Do you feel safe and in control at school? Why or why not?” Here is Connie’s response to this question:

To be honest, I feel safe. I don’t feel like I have any harm. People may not like me, but I feel safe because like Danielle said you control who you’re around and you control what happens so I feel fine.

During the focus group, Connie discussed the fact that she felt her peers did not like her but she is still in control and does not fear for her own safety while in school. Connie’s peer relationships are discussed later in the case. The focus group participants mentioned the violence between students at Rockport; however, Connie is not afraid of
the sometimes unsafe environment at school because she felt that she has control over the network of people with whom she is involved. Her self-efficacy regarding the school environment appeared to be high. Thus, she was motivated to be at school, which means her academic achievement would not be hindered by her school environment. Evaluating Connie’s comment based on Gecas and Schwalbe’s (1983) three links of social structure and self-efficacy, Connie’s established level of self-efficacy falls under the first link of “context of action,” which was the major factor in her degree of feeling in control over her school surroundings. According to Gecas and Schwalbe’s work, autonomy, control, and resources are the three main features in assessing one’s level of self-efficacy.

**A sense of self: Choices.** Human behavior as a reflection of inner self was important to understand in this research. One’s behavior during certain situations (i.e., stressful situations) is a true reflection of her level of self-efficacy at a given moment in time. Connie was asked to talk about her personality/character during the first part of our individual interview. She responded:

I carry myself professionally as if I’m being watched by people. I don’t just walk around yelling and stuff. I just keep to myself and I just act as if I’m somewhere where everybody knows my parents, and then when they see my parents they’re gonna be like oh I seen Connie and she was acting like this. You taught her well. So that’s how I act like because I don’t want my mommy to be like “why were you acting like this at the game?” so I carry myself as if my parents are with me. Connie’s choice of behavior displayed her sense of self-efficacy. Her intended consequence of action (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983)—to act “professionally”—was
fashioned to obtain a certain response from others. This desired response from others becomes an indication of how the structure of her community and school life related to Connie’s behavior and level of self-efficacy. Through her professional behavior, she hoped to increase the chances that others may give her support and view her in a positive manner.

**A sense of self: Support systems.** Although Connie acquires some support from UB, she does not feel that the program is directly related to her level of self-efficacy. When asked during the focus group session, “Do you think because of the influences from UB, you are convinced that you can do anything with your life?” Connie answered, “Yeah. I felt that before Upward Bound.” Connie stated that she felt pretty efficacious about her goals even before she got involved in the UB program a year ago. She explained that she was introduced to the UB program by her brother’s girlfriend, who happens to be the daughter of the UB program director. Unlike many other students, Connie was not invited to participate in UB because of a dire need of its services. Connie already had the support she needed at home and therefore did not depend on the program to help enhance her self-efficacy or to support her academic endeavors, like most of the participants in this study. Another factor in Connie’s apparent non-dependence on the UB program was that she seemed to have more disposable income than the other participants to purchase the latest clothing and accessories. Thus, one could speculate as to whether her family fits the low-income requirements that UB specifies (U.S. Department of Education, 2008b).
As stated earlier, Connie was one of two from the focus group who appeared to have the highest level of self-efficacy. Consequently, both Connie and the other participant were the only two living at home with both parents. According to Bandura et al. (1996), familial situations, especially family income, is a major structural component involved in one’s level of self-efficacy. The majority of the support that Connie gets comes from both her parents. For this reason she appeared to be an anomaly compared to the majority of the group. Connie mentioned during the focus group session, as well as during the individual interview, that she was often called “spoiled” by her peers and sometimes by her teachers. Connie associated others’ envy of her as being a result of the way she dressed. Certainly, material goods could have caused jealousy among her peers; however, the data suggested that Connie is considered spoiled in the eyes of others—not only based on appearance and the material goods she has access to—but also because (unlike many other students in her school) she does have two parents at home who love and support her.

The close relationship with her parents became clearer in her response to another question. When asked if she felt that having the influence of both her mom and dad gave her a better sense of how she could be successful in life, she responded:

Yes. It really helps because I have my mom telling me what to do, and then I have my dad’s advice; and then being as close as a family that we are it helps a lot ‘cause most people don’t have both parents in the household. And it just really helps a lot ‘cause my parents are supportive in like everything I do. They’re always there and that means a lot so it’s a big deal.
According to the context of action from the three links of social structure and self-efficacy (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983), having the resources of both parents is a factor in the high level of self-efficacy that Connie demonstrated. Connie knows that she is fortunate to have both her parents living at home with her and was aware that many of her friends at school are not so fortunate. She seemed to appreciate her family situation.

Connie stated that she felt “well prepared” for her future endeavors. It became apparent that because of her level of commitment as a student and her future goals, being well prepared was within reach. Her level of confidence in her skills was very obvious, almost to the point of boasting. It appeared from Connie’s behavior that her parents instilled a great deal of self-assuredness in her. Having her parents’ support appears to have allowed Connie the capability of minimizing the fact that she is a teenage mother because she was not made to suffer the stereotypical repercussions. Those repercussions include many teenage mothers suffering from lack of monetary resources and overall emotional support. Connie was provided the resources and support, which made it possible for her to be “well prepared” with her current academic achievement and for her future goals.

**Academic achievement and future goals: Circumstances.** Part of the interview with Connie uncovered how Connie’s circumstances influenced her life’s decisions and dominated her actions. When Connie was asked if she could foresee any obstacles that could interfere with her goals, she responded:

Well, right now I have a son. He’s two and it’s kind of hard being a mom and having to still do school. That probably will be like the hardest thing, trying to
stay in school and take care of him. . . . I plan on taking him, but I know that will probably be hard with his dad still living here, and that will probably be like the hardest thing that I will have to figure out what to do. But right now as far as I know I plan on taking him with me. . . . Dealing with his dad will be a totally different story in taking him to college with me.

Connie shared two obstacles, the first being that she is a mother and the second that she will not be able to leave Ohio for college with her son without the approval from her son’s father. Her circumstances may prohibit her from following through with her plans of going to her choice of college. This relates to Gecas and Schwalbe’s (1983) third link of social structure and self-efficacy which discussed the unintended consequences of action. Connie did not expect to become a mother, and therefore did not expect her goals to be altered and in some cases forgone because she has another person to think about beside herself. “When our actions produce unexpected negative outcomes, efficacy based esteem might only be decreased if we cannot preserve it by attributing these outcomes to external factors” (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983, p. 85). Connie’s self-efficacy regarding going to the college of her choice may be decreased as a result of this circumstance. The condition of being a mother means sacrificing one’s own life for the sake of her child/children.

**Academic achievement and future goals: Choices.** As stated earlier, Connie mentioned that she felt “well prepared” for her future and her current *choices* are the reason. Connie’s high level of self-efficacy became clear from her next comments:
That’s my main goal right there is for 2012 to go to the Olympics in track and field. And then when I’m in college I want to major in communications because I want to be on TV. So I want to do like broadcasting. So I have high standards for myself.

Connie’s strong desire to be a sports broadcaster motivated her to learn more about the field of Communications. She was learning these skills through involvement with Rockport’s high school television network: “Well, right now I’m on WVOV for the school. . . . When we do announcements we’re broadcasted on TV so the whole school can see my face and I talk and I’m on camera and everything.”

Connie appeared to be focused and had thought through her future plans. She had been running track since she was seven years old and had passion for her sport. She mentioned that she loved competing and has always been good at track. Connie displayed confidence in knowing what she wants to do with her life and declared, “I’m set as far as track and my major.” Gecas and Schwalbe (1983) discussed “subjective dimension” which involves our perceptions of self-as-cause, meaning that we believe that we are the reason for our successes or failures. Looking at Connie’s subjective dimension, she perceives her present successes as a great accomplishment on her behalf.

Participating in extra-curricular activities enhanced Connie’s self-efficacy because of her positive perception of her choice to be involved in the activities, her current successes in those activities, and future successes as a result of those activities.

Although Connie is making great choices now, she did not always make the best choices in regard to her academic achievement and future goals. Becoming a mother at
such a young age was a choice that could eventually deter all of the goals she has set. However, since she has the support of her mother and father, she may be able to go on to the 2012 Olympics. Again, it is important to note that Connie’s situation is a unique one because most teenage mothers do not have access to the type of help that Connie does. Many teen mothers were raised in a single parent home themselves (Wilson, 1996). Therefore, these choices and opportunities given to Connie are not given to most.

**Academic achievement and future goals: Support systems.** In continuing our conversation regarding her future goals, Connie admitted that she would like to move to North Carolina for college but does not think that her son’s father will let him go. She professed that taking her son out of the area is going to involve a “fight.” She explained that her son’s father is a good dad but their relationship just did not work out. Connie decided to go to North Carolina because her parents plan to move there after she graduates from high school. Connie, wanting to follow her parents, confirms the closeness of their family unit, and demonstrates her dependence on them. Because Connie’s parents’ care of her son allows her to live a “normal” life, she will be able to pursue her athletic and academic career goals with support from her parents.

According to Gecas and Schwalbe (1983), “efficacy-based self-esteem is dependent, in large part, upon the nature of the social contexts within which individuals function” (p. 81). Connie may be dependent on the support and resources of her parents to help her achieve certain outcomes in her life. Without this support, her dreams of going to college as well as performing in the 2012 Olympics may only be whimsical aspirations. The context of action link is in place in this situation because resources are a
major component in which one has the “possibilities for efficacious actions” (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983, p. 81).

Support from teachers is also imperative to the future of inner-city, African American girls. Research shows that teacher expectations greatly affect student progress and determines the type of support or lack of support the student will get from her teacher (Brophy & Good, 1970; Rist, 1972; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Again, Connie portrayed herself as a model student and daughter, particularly with how she believes her teachers perceive her: “Well, I would think that they would say like I was taught well at home like I am. I don’t disrespect teachers or adults. I’m good. I do what I’m taught. I’m a scholar student.” Connie may be accurate in her thoughts on how her teachers perceive her. However, she could be mistaken as well. According to the conversation with the participants during the focus group sessions, the data showed that in many cases, the participants felt that teachers (Caucasian ones, especially) “condemn” girls who are pregnant, meaning that teachers will not give pregnant girls or teenage mothers the same level of respect and dedication as they give other students. From Connie’s above comment, it became apparent that how her teachers feel about her as a student is important to her. The actual support that she gets from her teachers may affect Connie’s level of self-efficacy in regards to academic achievement. As mentioned earlier, Connie is doing everything she can, in a sense, to “right her wrong” by being a model student and daughter. She also began dressing with “more of a mature look” after her son was born—which Connie reported—allowed her teachers and others to see that she had grown.
A way of dress: Circumstances. Gecas and Schwalbe (1983) found that one’s level of autonomy is a valid indicator of one’s self-efficacy. Autonomy is developed as children transition into adolescence and thereby incur increased responsibility. In relationship to this, during the focus group session, the participants were asked at what age they began choosing their own clothing (from the closet as well as when buying at the store). It was relevant and valuable for this particular research study to know how participants felt when allowed to select their own clothes. Connie’s response regarding memories of the first time she chose her own clothing was:

Oh, I was grown like my momma don’t got to pick out my outfits no more. She don’t gotta she might say something like “why you wearing that?” Or “that don’t match” like but I just felt like I was getting older. I was happy.

This question explored the idea of dress contributing to the development of efficacious behavior. The responses received from all the participants displayed thoughts of feeling more in control of their lives. As explained earlier, a feeling of a sense of control affects the level of self-efficacy one has for a given task or during a given situation (Bandura, 1977; Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983). Life’s circumstances of growing up and becoming more independent come with the responsibility of being allowed to choose one’s own clothes. The participants all shared their feelings of heightened self-efficacy as a result of being able to choose what they wanted to wear when they were younger. The context of action link regarding the degree of constraint on individual autonomy (Gecas &
Schwalbe, 1983) is relevant here. Being allowed to be self-governing increases the amount of control one feels over her life. Therefore, lesser constraint on one’s control or autonomy is needed for production of efficacious actions (Bandura, 1977). In this case, Connie became more autonomous in selecting her clothes as a child which then resulted in her obtaining a heightened level of self-efficacy regarding her clothing choices.

**A way of dress: Choices.** One choosing to dress in a certain manner tells the society much about that individual. Dress has long been a form of identity (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992) and cultural expression (O’Neal, 1998, 1999). Conversations about dress continued during the focus group session with the question, “Does your way of dress show off your personality or hide it?” Connie answered in this respect:

I don’t even know. The way I dress it might show my personality. I like to dress, ok, maybe I have my days where I’ll have an attitude I might dress like not like bad but some jeans and a T-shirt. But like when I’m feeling nice or having a good day, I’ll wear something like this or some dress pants or something like that.

The data appeared to indicate that for high school girls, choosing to wear a certain type of dress tells society not just about who you are as a person, but also how you may be feeling that day. Figuratively, dress became like a shield for Connie. On the days when she was not feeling up to dressing fashionably and dealing with the possible forthcoming attention from her peers, she put on a pair of jeans and T-shirt to blend in with the rest of her classmates. Connie said that if she has an attitude on a certain day, she will wear something ordinary but “not like bad.” She appeared to have an image to uphold so she would never let her peers see her dressed “bummy” or “like [she] just woke up.”
gave the example of wearing sweat pants to school as something she would not do, although Danielle, a member of the focus group and the second case, was sitting across from her wearing sweat pants. Connie appeared to be boasting when she made that statement. She acted a bit conceited as well as insensitive because Danielle had earlier explained during the focus group conversation that she chose to wear sweats to school because of their comfort factor and the lack of resources she had to acquire more fashionable clothing.

The relationship between dress, self-efficacy, and academic achievement was explored during the focus group session. The participants were asked if they felt that their way of dress reflected their academic ability. They were also asked if they felt smarter when they wore certain clothes. None of the participants felt that their way of dress reflected how smart they are, but most said when wearing certain clothes they felt smarter. Connie replied by saying:

I’ll have like some slacks on with some heels and a suit jacket I’ll feel like I’m smart or I’m a business woman doing something. Yeah, I feel totally different. I feel like. . . . I just feel like if somebody looked at me and I have on a suit or something they like wow she’s doing her own thing, independent.

The findings indicate that choosing to wear certain clothing enhances one’s overall self-efficacy, which according to the research (Bandura et al., 1996; Ross & Broh, 2000), leads to enhanced academic ability and achievement. Clothing such as a suit has been shown to have a similar effect on how students appear to their peers and teachers. Students dressed in a more professional manner receive higher teachers’ academic
expectations over students dressed more casually (Behling, 1995; Behling & Williams, 1991). Thus, once a teacher’s expectations are high, that teacher will extend more support to the student (Brophy & Good, 1970; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968).

**A way of dress: Support systems.** During the focus group session the participants were asked what their teachers, family, peers, and society say about the way they dress. The data revealed that some people supported and accepted the way in which the participants dressed while others did not. It became apparent that with Connie, her family’s view of how she dressed was important to her because of the relationship with her mother and father. Her parents’ opinions about the way she dressed were revealed with Connie’s next statement:

Well, like on Monday I had some like jogging pants on and my mother was like you must not feel like being bothered and I was like no. And they were just like my momma she doesn’t like that either, but I’m not usually dressed like that. But my dad is like “why can’t you wear pants any looser,” and my dad doesn’t really like my jeans being that tight, but my mom she’s like that’s nice. You look like nice. My dad’s like, “well, can she breathe,” and all this stuff. My dad is real funny when it comes to clothes. He likes the jogging pants look, but I think my mom really doesn’t really care but my dad does.

Connie’s father’s disapproved of her wearing tight jeans, which may have shown him to be a loving and overprotective dad. The fact that her family commented on her way of dress shows that that they are interested in her life and how she presents herself. Way of
dress again denotes much about one’s identity; and in this case, dress becomes an indicator of how Connie is being raised by her parents.

Research on peer relationships found that adolescents are many times shaped by what their peers think of them (Alleyne et al., 2003; Holloman et al., 1996; MacGillivray & Wilson, 1997). The focus group was asked about how their peers viewed their way of dress. When responding, the participants became fervent with their answers. During the focus group session, Connie talked about a situation where she dealt with jealousy from her peers and seemingly also from some teachers because of the way she dressed. She stated, “Well, some teachers that have known me I get called spoiled or something like that, but they really don’t say nothing. They just say oh you look nice today.” Connie continued the conversation, now talking about her peers:

I get called stuck up because of the way I dress . . . This was today. [Inaudible] today. I mean I don’t really care what people think because that’s [inaudible]. They gonna have something to say no matter how you dress. No matter what you look like somebody always gonna find something about you that they gonna say about you so it really don’t matter. I think I got called stuck up; she thinks she’s all that. I think I’ve been called probably every name in the book, but I’m like I don’t even be caring no more. It don’t make no difference.

Although Connie attempted to act as if she did not care about what her peers thought, peer acceptance is very important to girls (Alleyne et al., 2003; Holloman et al., 1996; MacGillivray & Wilson, 1997). In examining the data, it was discovered that the comments did appear to bother Connie because she talked about them during both the
focus group and the individual interview. Connie seems to have been faced with hatred and jealousy from peers and created a wall of protection around herself. It is interesting to note that whereas Connie gets much support from her parents, she gets little or no support from her peers. This situation probably has something to do with Connie’s access to fashionable clothes, the fact that she lives at home with her mom and dad, as well as Connie’s overly self-assured and boastful demeanor. In retrospect, other participants who do not have the same familial support system and who cannot afford the most fashionable clothing seem to acquire more support from their peers. However, she argued that her peers have misconceptions about her, as noted in the following conversation between us:

Researcher: You said that being called spoiled and stuck up sometimes by teachers or your peers does that have an effect on how you feel about yourself because people have said that about you?

Connie: No. It doesn’t really bother me ’cause I really don’t pay attention. It’s just I mean I know I’m spoiled, but I don’t see myself as stuck up. I just keep to myself. And I don’t know I guess they figure that since I have a son that I’m supposed to look a certain way . . . And I’m not supposed to look as nice I guess as I look . . . And like most some of the girls do that’s here that has a baby. I just carry myself as any teenager that doesn’t have a baby or whatever.
Researcher: Right. What would you say would be like the stereotypical way in which girls expect to look if they already have a baby now in high school?

Connie: First of all, they probably won’t even think I’ll be here. Most of them have dropped out, but I guess hair not done, clothes as if I had since maybe freshman year or whatever. I don’t know, but some girls just look at me like I’m all that or whatever. But I don’t think that. I just my parents take care of me so and plus I have a job so I just get. It’s mostly me sometimes that buys my stuff.

Researcher: Mmm, hmm. So really in reality you really aren’t spoiled like people say. When you’re spoiled with probably love from your parents, but as far as spoiled with like getting things because you just said something about you working and supplying some of your own things that you want, which is good.

Connie: Right. ‘Cause my dad was like well you have a job now; you can go out and get it yourself. And I’m ok with that, but like cell phone my parents still pay the bill. And they just certain stuff that I want and I really don’t need they’ll just tell me to go get it if I want it. Like other food they get that. The clothes I’m big on clothes so I usually get my own stuff.

Connie’s cognition of dress surfaced in the above dialogue. She did not accept media and society dictates about what someone like her should be wearing. Connie
mentioned the fact that, because she is a teenage mom, people expect her to look a certain way. She said she dresses like a “teenager that doesn’t have a baby,” meaning that she tries to dress nicely and not look as though she was struggling financially as a result of being a teenage mother. Connie talked about breaking the stereotypes of what teen moms are supposed to be. Prior research (AAUW Educational Foundation, 1992; Wilson, 1996) discussed the fact that many teen parents are drop-outs, in contrast with Connie who still attends school and is involved in school activities.

From the research, it was understood that Connie’s case is not typical. Most teen mothers do not have supportive parents and were probably raised by a teen parent and/or single parent themselves. This is a familial pattern that many African Americans have a hard time breaking. Connie’s unintended consequence of action (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983), being called “spoiled” because of how she dressed, was something that Connie continues to address. She asserted that her aim was not to get negative or jealous-hearted feedback from her peers. As she mentioned, she likes to look nice and is just being herself and not trying to compete with anyone. When asked, “On a scale of 1 to 10, how important are clothes to you?” Connie responded that clothing is very important and she considered clothing to be a 10 in her life. However, she discussed that after she had her son she wanted to look more mature and so she began to dress nicely, which is in a sense an intended consequence of action (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983). According to Connie, when she dresses in the latest fashions, others notice how nice she looks and consequently some of her peers are envious and do not like her as a result.
Next, a conversation about clothing and how it affects one’s academic achievements took place. Connie talked about a situation that she felt could happen in her school between a teacher and a student who was dressed inappropriately:

Researcher: Do you agree or disagree with this? The way that a student dresses affects teachers’ perceptions of a student regarding their character and school capabilities. That’s what past research has said.

Connie: Well, if you come to school showing off everything to me that makes me seem like oh she wants attention from a boy. She’s not really here to learn, but some teachers might have that same opinion about girls or boys that droop all the time or girls that chest or butts hanging out or something.

Researcher: Right. Mmm, hmm. Do you think that or do you know of anybody who because of the way that they dress in school that they’ve actually that teachers will actually look at them in a different way because of how they dress?

Connie: Yes. I know a couple of girls, but they is like I don’t care. That’s just how I dress. And their attitude is they don’t care; they like attention from boys, and the teachers is just looking at them like then why are you here.

Researcher: Right. Do you think that because of the fact that the teachers have those opinions about them that then that eventually affects their grades?
Connie: Yes because then they’re probably arguing because the teacher is probably saying something smart and then she’ll probably say something smart back. So then she’ll probably get kicked out of class and then end up maybe not even coming to school period or not coming to that class.

Researcher: Right. Have you seen that happen before?

Connie: No.

This hypothetical incident addresses a proposed meaning of action (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983) with teachers’ perceptions of their students. The objective dimension within the meaning of action link is relevant here because this dimension takes into account others’ (in this case teachers) values or belief systems associated with a given life situation (in this case a student’s way of dress). According to research, a teacher’s perceptions of students’ way of dress oftentimes influence the teacher’s academic expectations of the students (Behling, 1995; Behling & Williams, 1991). Teachers’ perceptions of students have been found to be an important indicator of students’ academic achievement, because a teacher’s behavior toward a student will influence the student in feeling capable or incapable of doing a task or assignment (Beady & Hansell, 1981; Brophy & Good, 1970; Diamond et al., 2004; Ellis, 1965; Rist, 1972; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Therefore, based on the meaning of action—according to the three links of social structure and self-efficacy (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983)—the way in which a student dresses influences the way the teacher views the student, which then alters the student’s thoughts on how well she can do in school and future endeavors.
Danielle—Case 05: The Spiritual Survivor

The interview took place in the library of Rockport High School [pseudonym]. A faculty meeting was taking place, so the librarian escorted the researcher and the participant to a secluded area of the library where the conversation could be kept confidential. When meeting with Danielle the day of our interview, she was dressed casually in a pair of jeans and a sweatshirt. Her face and hair were natural; she wore little, if any, makeup. Danielle spoke about not making it a priority on a regular basis to come to school dressed in stylish clothes.

Danielle is a 17-year-old high school senior, and a self-reported B average student. She lives with her mother, two younger brothers, her 29-year-old sister, and her sister’s two children, which meant that Danielle was a part of family unit comprised of seven individuals. She considered her family to be “well-off” when filling out the DSA questionnaire; however, during the focus group and interview, she spoke about her family not having a lot of money and that she had to dress a certain way as a result of her financial situation.

According to the data gathered from Danielle’s questionnaire and the two conversations with her (once during the focus group and again during the individual interview), it was discovered that Danielle’s family most likely meets the poverty guidelines set by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (2009). The participant revealed that her mother was working as an administrative assistant for National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Her mother’s true income level is unknown. However, statistics show that if this participant’s mother, working as
an administrative assistant, earned the city’s median wage of $33,672 and was living in a seven person household when the average family size for the research location was 3.01, this would qualify this family to meet poverty guidelines. Danielle’s mother was recently divorced from Danielle’s step-father, which also meant that her mother is financially responsible for taking care of the entire family.

**A sense of self: Circumstances.** The opening question of the focus group was geared toward understanding how self-efficacy levels are developed within the participants. According to Ross and Broh (2000), having a sense of personal control enhances one’s ability and motivation for academic achievement. Danielle’s feelings about being safe and in control at school were important to know in order to gauge her academic self-efficacy. Safety within the inner-city school is a major issue that is dealt with on a daily basis (Holloman et al., 1996). The *circumstance* of living in an area that is often considered unsafe and being required to attend the area’s local high school may have put Danielle in a situation where she did not feel safe and in control. She was asked: “Do you feel safe and in control at school? Why or why not?” Danielle responded:

Alright, well, I feel safe. I mean I really don’t feel like I have a reason to feel threatened. I mean ’cause nothing really happens. I mean, of course, we got some fights here and there, but I feel like I’m safe and I’m in control because I control where I am and who I hang around and what I say and what I do.

This comment denoted that Danielle is functioning well in her school environment and safety issues are not likely affecting her behaviors toward doing well in her classes. For
Danielle, a feeling of being in control of her school environment may be interpreted as one indicator of her high level of self-efficacy.

Research shows that self-efficacy is developed from social structural conditions including others’ opinions of us (Bandura 1977; Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983). As such, the interview conversation was geared toward how Danielle perceived others’ thoughts about her. Danielle was asked, “How do you feel you are expected to act, dress, and achieve as an African American young woman?” Danielle’s response is found within the following conversation:

Danielle: I think I’m expected to act presentable and like just keep a standard to represent us well because people have so many they think so negative about us and you got to prove them wrong.

Researcher: When you say keep a standard, what do you mean by the standard?

Danielle: Well, my family like they don’t go around like looking all hoochie and stuff. Class a classy standard.

Researcher: Ok. And when you say represent us, what do you mean by that?

Danielle: As woman who respect themselves. Not trashy people on the street. I mean no offense but.

Danielle recognized how society views some women and she no longer wanted to adhere to that view. When speaking about being “hoochie,” she is referring to looking tawdry and promiscuous. She talked about upholding a “classy standard” so that her family would approve of the way she acted and dressed. Danielle talked about “proving them wrong,” meaning proving the community wrong. This motivation of “proving society
“Wrong” is relevant to the second link of social structure and self-efficacy, meaning of action (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983). The subjective dimension within the meaning of action link includes “self-as-cause.” Contrarily, the objective dimension involves others’ values influencing the cause. The way in which others perceived Danielle seems important to her. Therefore, proving to society that she is a classy and respectable woman helped her build a higher level of self-efficacy. As with all human beings, Danielle’s self-efficacy depends upon social structural conditions. Race and socioeconomic status are two examples of these social conditions.

Race and inner-city roots were discussed during the focus group and continued into the interviews. The circumstance of being from a certain racial background is an important topic because research affirms that race plays a major part in academic achievement. According to prior studies (Diamond et al., 2004; J. N. Hughes et al., 2005), teachers expect much less from African American children than they do from other races. Diamond et al. (2004) studied teacher expectations and sense of responsibility for student learning. They discovered that:

Teachers’ beliefs about students were patterned by race and social class composition. When students were majority African American and low income, teachers held more deficit oriented beliefs about them than when students were majority White or Chinese, or when a higher percentage came from middle-class families. (p. 93)

J. N. Hughes et al. (2005) studied the influences of teacher/parent relationships on teacher expectations and found that teachers reported having better relationships with White and
Hispanic children and parents than with African American children and parents. The authors discovered that the quality of the relationship did influence teacher perceptions on student abilities. In this study teachers had “more negative perceptions of African American children’s personality traits, adaptive capabilities, and learning ability” (p. 315).

In addition, the circumstance of growing up poor in an inner-city environment and being a female are two variables that were proposed as critical contributors to the negative thoughts of academic capabilities of African American children (Al-Fadhli & Singh, 2006; Diamond et al., 2004; J. N. Hughes et al., 2005). This focus group topic solicited the following response from Danielle.

I think that being African American I have to work extra hard. You know I know that they say like racism is over, but I don’t believe that. And I just feel like I’m gonna have to go over and above to be able to be noticed and to be respected, but even though a White person would have to, too. You know what I mean, but I think we got to prove more because especially coming from this school, too. This statement was powerful and it depicted that racism is still an issue for some African American youth. A feeling of having “to work extra hard” communicates that Danielle witnessed the reality of not being accepted in society based on her skin color alone. That is, she talked about having to “prove” herself to society that she is worthy of the same rights as others.

The participants explained that their school did not have a good reputation because it is a predominately African American school. Educational history tells us that
African Americans are continually slighted in the distribution of school finances and students getting an adequate education (Howard, 2003; Nieto, 2003). Danielle appeared to understand the societal dynamic of being a minority and growing up in a poor environment. She continued to discuss the stereotypes that come with being from an inner-city, predominately African American public school:

We don’t have a good name so when you put on your resume or on an application, you know, I went to Rockport High School, they automatically oh she’s probably no good. It’s a stereotype. Because Rockport does not have a good name at all.

Circumstantially, being an inner-city, African American student from Rockport High School appeared dooming for Danielle. However, this perceived dogma surrounding the participant did not seem to have a negative effect on her self-efficacy level. In fact, data analysis revealed that being an inner-city, African American girl pushed Danielle to be better because of typecasts that are placed on her simply because of her SES and race.

Danielle made the disheartening statement during the focus group discussion that “racism is not over.” There was a need to dig deeper to understand more of her meaning behind this statement and how this societal perception actually related to her self-efficacy level. When meeting for the interview, Danielle was asked to elaborate on her feelings regarding racism. She explained:

Well, I don’t think racism is over because like I find it a lot in the workplace. Like I work at Lady Gym Shoe Store [pseudonym] and so many like [inaudible] White people come in, and they see me and the color of my skin and they just
assume that I don’t know how to do their money. Or like they’ll walk out and stuff. And I used to work at Hippster’s [pseudonym] which is like very, very racist. Like oh my gosh I don’t know any Black people that shop there except for the ones that act White. And when I was on register somebody even requested to have a White person to do them so like it was like whoa ok. Ok. Fine. And then I worked at Grocery Circle [pseudonym], out in High Hill [pseudonym]. A lot of mean people. They would switch lines even if mine was short walk past, so it’s still present in our society.

Danielle felt that many people still view her negatively because of the color of her skin, which is directly related to the objective dimension within the meaning of action link described by Gecas and Schwalbe (1983). White people placing less of a value on African Americans’ capabilities is a prime example of the structural conditions of racism. Gecas and Schwalbe believed that those who are affected by devalued contexts placed on them by others tend to “derive less esteem from their performances than from performances in more highly valued contexts” (pp. 83-84). Danielle felt that the ways some White people viewed her had negatively impacted her ability to fulfill some of her job responsibilities. The focus group participants all reported that they believed they have to work harder than others to prove themselves worthy.

Critical Race Theory supports Danielle’s observation, highlighting the fact that discrimination does affect some people’s day-to-day life. Her comments suggest that race is still holding back many African Americans from leading truly free and limitless lives. Danielle reported that she felt some of the White people who came into her places
of employment assumed that she was incompetent because of the color of her skin. Since the Civil Rights Act of 1964, racism has manifested into a more subtle form of discrimination (Bell, 1987; Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2000). Some White patrons reportedly moving to another line when they saw that Danielle was working that register depicts the subtle form of racism that Critical Race Theory is attempting to combat.

The acting White phenomenon came up in Danielle’s conversation regarding those African Americans who “act White.” Usually those African Americans considered acting White are those that are high achieving and/or those who associate themselves with mostly White people (Fordham, 1996; Ogbu, 1990). Danielle believed that those African Americans are considered to be more acceptable and qualified in the eyes of some White people. However, those African Americans considered acting White are often ridiculed within the African American community (Elder, 2007; Fordham, 1996; Ogbu, 1990).

A discussion regarding Danielle’s self-efficacy to perform certain tasks was the next topic. The participants were asked during the focus group session if they feel smart and if that feeling changes from day to day. All participants agreed that they felt smart and that their beliefs about whether or not they feel smart changes from day to day. The participants mentioned that this feeling could be affected by outside circumstances such as getting back a bad grade on a paper or that they do not feel smart when they are working on certain subjects. Danielle admitted that math has always been a difficult subject for her. “Sometimes like in math I feel dumb. That’s yeah I feel dumb in math like it’s a complete and total remedial person, but overall I feel like I’m a very intelligent
person. It’s just math is my downfall.” It is possible that Danielle does need to be put into a lower grade/remedial level of math in order for her to learn. She may need a slower pace and simpler instruction; an overall different circumstance, so that she can feel more comfortable regarding the subject. An enhanced comfort level would eventually raise her level of self-efficacy regarding math.

During the individual interview, Danielle’s self-efficacy level regarding mathematics was further discussed. She was asked whether changing her outlook on mathematics would cause her to try harder to succeed in the subject. She commented:

I think I agree ’cause like math I already have the mindset that I am not good at math, and because of that I probably don’t try as hard as I should. Everything else I’m pretty confident in. It’s just math. I have I guess a low self-esteem in that . . . my senior year I told you I had all my goals lined up, and I’m like you know I’m gonna do good in math. And I didn’t do great and now it’s just like ugh. I don’t even know what we doing in class. If I change my outlook ’cause it was already changed and then I changed it back to what it was ’cause it got difficult, and it’s like well this first little thing that come up. I don’t like not being able to do something, and once I if I can’t do it I kind of give up, which is bad and I need to fix that. But that’s just the truth about me. If I can’t do it I get mad because I don’t like looking like a failure so.

Danielle admitted that she has a low self-efficacy regarding mathematics. She said that she would give up if she thought she could not do the work. She had already established a low self-efficacy level in mathematics and reported she would have a hard time
changing. She mentioned that she cannot be a medical doctor because she is not good in mathematics and she is not disappointed. Danielle admitted that if she changed her mind set about how difficult mathematics is for her, she might do better in the subject.

Danielle’s self-efficacy regarding dealing with difficult situations was also discussed. Danielle reported not liking to look like a failure. This sense of pride that she feels may be a deciding factor in how she reacts to adversity, which might greatly impair her self-efficacy. Possessing the capability to deal with difficult circumstances displays a high level of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Thus, Danielle discussed her ability at accepting constructive criticism from others. Her career goals include becoming a writer, and accepting criticism comes along with that particular occupation. The conversation progressed in this manner:

Researcher: Do you think that you’ll be able to handle criticism in a creative writing class ’cause there’s gonna be criticism?

Danielle: Yeah. I think I’m becoming more mature and being a singer I get a lot of criticism so I’m used to it; I’m just saying I know how to handle it in front of you, but like I’m not gonna make a scene and just interrupt you and say well no. I can take it; it’s just the way that I deal with it alone. I cry sometimes, but then I fix it. I’m just a crybaby. It’s like I think I handle it well but I’m just sensitive. But I won’t kill myself over it; I’ll just fix it.

Through these comments Danielle demonstrated a lower level of self-efficacy in accepting criticism. The meaning of action link (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983) is valid here.
The objective dimension includes the perceptions that others have of Danielle in their own context—in this case, criticism of Danielle’s future work. The subjective dimension of this link encompasses the perceptions that Danielle might have regarding her successes/failures, within the context of receiving criticism. As discussed, accepting criticism is a major part of being a writer and she will need to develop an ability to cope with criticism in order to do well in the field. The assessment is that if she is to become a good writer, eventually Danielle will begin to learn from these types of circumstances in order to use the knowledge as an advantage to her work.

A sense of self: Choices and support systems. Danielle had some unfortunate circumstances happen in her life that forced her to make some tough choices. She found the adequate support system she needed which led to the enhancement of her overall self-efficacy. As the focus group dialogue continued, Danielle’s thoughts must have weighed heavily on her mind. The conversation had already moved to another topic and she rerouted it back to the topic of perceived societal views regarding the way the participants dressed. This redirection began a deep conversation about an incredible metamorphosis Danielle had undergone approximately one year earlier. She gave the following revealing testimony:

Danielle: Yeah, I had a question that you had asked about society and stuff earlier. . . . I just now thought about like ’cause I don’t really wear tight jeans and stuff. And I used to but now I don’t because I go to church, and I’m always at church. And society could stand for the people at church, and the way that they’ll look at you if you wear
tight jeans and like hers they ok, but like I’m talking about jeans I
used to wear just ridiculous. They like hurt, you know? So like I
can’t do that anymore because I have to uphold an image like that’s
presentable. I mean not saying that I got to look like a nun, but I just
have to ’cause I mean they say that the guys at church are our
brothers and we cannot try to tempt them and they look and you like,
you know, so.

Researcher: It seems like the first time when I met you the first time 2 years ago
and the fact and how you are now it seems like in the process you’ve
gotten a closer relationship to your faith . . . That’s what it seems to
me like . . . And that in a sense has changed you as far as like
academically, as far as I mean just kind of elaborate on how your
relationship now you getting closer to God or closer to your faith has
just changed. How has that changed you?

Danielle: Well, I could say like I was a little wild when I first met you. I
wasn’t extreme until last year, and I started doing stuff that wasn’t
right. And it made me real unhappy, and I didn’t used to be like that.
And I’m like ok something missing and then I’m like I know what’s
missing. My faith was missing. So I decided to give my life back to
Christ, and this time I was like I’m not gonna do it half way because
half way got me to where I’m at. So I’m gonna do it all the way, and
I decided I’ll go give up everything. I gave up my belly ring because
I believe that God told me to get rid of the old me. Anything that had to do with that. I gave up all these pictures that I had of me that some of them was provocative. And I gave up all of them. I wanted to get rid of it. And I started over, and I made the choice to become celibate because I ended up getting caught up in it. And, yeah, it wasn’t right so I became celibate and stopped cussing and stopped drinking. Stopped everything and went to church, joined the choir.

Researcher: What do you think that that has done to change what you feel you can accomplish in life the fact that you’re now a more spiritual person?

Danielle: I feel like my whole life has broadened like my view has expanded. I see way more for myself than I saw back there. I had limits and I just took them off because I know that with God, you know, there are no limits. And you can achieve the impossible with him. That’s what I believe. And I’m not saying I’m going to try I believe by faith I’m gonna be a doctor. No, because I know that I’m not good at math, but I know that God will supply all my needs for me to write my book and things like that that I want to do.

During the time of the situation described above, Danielle’s mother was going through a divorce with her step-father, which caused some friction in the household. According to Danielle, her mother began to have less time for her, and Danielle became attention
-starved. Dressing provocatively to attract male peers was a way for her to satisfy that need for attention. Danielle fell in love with a young man and got her heart broken. She then looked to the church to fill the void that she felt as well as to help her gain forgiveness from herself and God. In her case, spirituality was a means of a support system. Danielle made a choice that was meaningful to her to become a better person and, as a result, raised her self-efficacy regarding her way of dress, academic achievement, and her future goals. She has begun to look at school more seriously; she is now making better grades and better decisions for her life.

Gecas and Schwalbe’s (1983) work is relevant to this situation. First, the context of action link depicted the level of autonomy and personal control Danielle felt after her evolution. With church and her religious faith as the main resources, she gained control of her destiny. Second, the meaning of action link’s subjective dimension (self-as-cause) demonstrated Danielle’s self-directed metamorphosis. She was extremely proud because of her recent accomplishments and possible future accomplishments, despite her past hardships. Third, the intended consequences of action involved Danielle’s proclamation of all that she gave up in order to become a God-fearing human being. As a result, she became more capable of producing efficacious actions in her life. This has thus affected her motivation to work toward her academic achievement and future goals.

**Academic achievement and future goals: Circumstances.** Danielle’s home and family situation was discussed during the focus group conversation and then again during our individual meeting. She said that when her mother was married, her mother was more involved in her school life, but now that her mother is divorced and must take care
of the family alone, she is not available to be involved with Danielle’s academics. 

*Circumstantially,* Danielle is forced to handle her personal and academic life on her own. When Danielle was asked if she could foresee any obstacles that could come between her and her goals, she talked about finances. Here are Danielle’s comments about her future financial situation:

> I might stumble ’cause I’m gonna be on my own. My mom’s moving to somewhere. She don’t know, but she wants to get out of here. So she’s moving when I graduate. She got interviews lined up and stuff so. I’m probably gonna be real tight. I will have to sacrifice a lot. I’ll have what I need, but I won’t have what I want for a minute probably.

The social structural issue of not having necessary money will likely affect the efficacy levels that Danielle has regarding going to and staying in college. The context of action link (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983) discussed how having the appropriate resources available for producing intended outcomes are a major part of one’s actions. These actions reflect one’s level of self-efficacy. In this case, Danielle’s high self-efficacy level reflects the sacrificial actions she is willing to take in order to aid herself in getting through college.

**Academic achievement and future goals: Choices.** When Danielle gets to college, she wants to major in English. She has dreams of becoming a writer and a motivational speaker. Within the context of action link (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983) she tapped into her already established level of self-efficacy. Danielle reported that English is her best subject in school and she loves creative writing. She felt that her spiritual connection will coincide well with her
aspiration to become a motivational speaker. When asked why she desired to become a speaker, Danielle offered the following:

Danielle: ’Cause I’ve got a lot to say. ’Cause I want people to be able to look at me and say “oh my gosh she’s just something great,” but then I want to tell them that my past and they be like “oh man she’s just like me. She was just like me so I still have a chance.”

Researcher: That’s a big task being a motivational speaker because you have to touch so many people’s lives. Do you think that you have the capability to do that?

Danielle: I do. I think I do have the capability and like I want to be a motivational speaker, but like even more than that I want to be a minister. But I can’t minister at schools so I choose to call myself a motivational speaker.

Danielle wants to be an inspiration to young women like herself. She wants to be able to touch peoples’ lives without forcing her religious beliefs on them. When her capabilities were questioned regarding becoming a motivational speaker, the current research study wanted to determine her level of self-efficacy regarding this part of her life. From Danielle’s comments, she demonstrated that she feels ready and willing to do all things necessary to obtain her dreams—even “sacrifice a lot” as she stated earlier. Danielle admitted that she enjoys being the center of attention. Choosing the occupation of motivational speaker will still allow Danielle to satisfy her desire for attention;
however, she will be able to transfer some of the satisfaction and fulfillment to the people she lectures to in the future.

More dialogue transpired about her past choices and how she has grown from them and is looking forward to her future academic success:

You know I made mistakes, and I think that the teachers that have been with me throughout the whole way long run, they respect me because I’ve came up and like this year I made honor roll this year. And like last the last two years of my high school I’ve sucked because I was just not focused. But now I’ve tightened it up and I’m doing good, and the teachers see that and they commend me on that. And I’m proud of myself, and they’re proud of me and that makes me feel better because I like to make people proud.

Danielle is not afraid to admit that she has made bad choices regarding school which may have caused some teachers to have a poor opinion of her. Danielle mentioned that she has “came up,” which means she is doing better than she had previously been doing. She discussed how she used to be not particularly concerned about her grades and that her focus was more on boys than school. She now has evolved from that and is now on the honor roll. Danielle made the choice to concentrate more on her work than on her peers.

Objective dimension in the meaning of action link (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983) denotes how one is perceived by others. Danielle reported that since her evolution, the views that her teachers had of her have changed. Teachers used to feel that she was not a serious student, and Danielle admitted that she had not been very serious. She asserted that her teachers are now proud of her and are happy to offer their support.
Academic achievement and future goals: Support systems. Within the context of action link (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983, p. 81) resources become an essential factor regarding the level of emotional, financial, academic, and personal support which the participants received or did not receive. In stating this, the data shows that the influence that Upward Bound (UB) had on some of the participants was very important in guiding those participants’ future goals. During the focus group session, the participants were asked if being a part of UB has changed the way they feel about school and their future. They were also asked: “Do you think because of the influences from UB, you are convinced that you can do anything with your life?” Here is how Danielle responded:

I love Upward Bound and it gives me confidence because I know that I have people like Mr. Harvey [pseudonym] and everybody else on the team supporting me, and, you know, only having the best interest, you know, just wanting to help me out. So it gives me confidence being in Upward Bound like I got an edge over most students because they don’t get the workbook that we have. They don’t get waivers like we do. So, yeah.

All the participants had something positive to say about the UB program. Some participants discussed the fact that they needed the academic support that UB gives. Upward Bound may be particularly valuable to Danielle because she did not have the advantage of living with a supportive family.

This study backs previous research indicating that the support from parents and family is critical to acquiring high levels of self-efficacy (Whitbeck et al., 1997). However, in Danielle’s case not having the support from family did not cause her self
efficacy levels to suffer. When Danielle was asked on the DSA questionnaire where she gets most of her school support, she wrote that it comes from within. Albeit, Danielle stated assuredly that her mother would support her if she could:

Researcher: You wrote on your questionnaire that your school support comes from you and your teachers. And that your mom was the least supportive. . . . Would you mind elaborating on that for me?

Danielle: If my mom heard that, she would kind of be hurt.

Researcher: I’m sure she would because my mom would have been hurt, too, yeah.

Danielle: But it’s like the truth like and it’s not even like her fault. And I don’t blame her for it. She has to work and so I don’t resent her. I’m not spiteful. I’m not angry, but it’s just the honest truth that I’m pretty much in this on my own. And it’s like parent/teacher conferences she can’t make those. And award ceremonies she can’t really make those. Like she can’t for Upward Bound she can’t go to the meetings and she can’t come to Saturday sessions and stuff ’cause she’s working to take care of my brothers. I mean when she was married she could come, but she got a divorce. So when she was married I was junior high and I was in my freshman year, and she was always able to come. She was at everything, but now that it’s just her she got a lot. And it’s hard to find babysitters and rides and stuff so.
Researcher: Right. And that makes a lot of sense because when there’s a two family or two person heading the household then you could split the duties.

Danielle: Divvy up the . . .

Researcher: Yeah. But it’s interesting that you . . . I’m glad that you explained it to me that way because you saying that you weren’t resentful that really showed a lot of maturity on your end. But I mean it makes a lot of sense now saying that when your mom did have time she did come and support you.

Danielle: Yeah. That’s why I’m not angry because I know her heart. And like I mentioned it to her like mom you don’t ever come to my stuff, and she was like well she looked like she was about to cry. And like I want to and this and that. So I don’t take it personal. There’s no reason to. She’s being my super woman.

Danielle said that her mother could not offer the support system Danielle needed because she was a single mother working to take care of the family. Danielle claimed to be accepting of the lack of support that she gets from her mother; however, her previous behaviors suggest a contradiction here. Acting out and having relations with young men was Danielle’s way of obtaining the needed attention. However, this is not to say that Danielle has not grown to become accepting or maybe even numb to the lack of support she gets at home. Danielle seems to still need her mother’s support because she did ask
her mother why she cannot attend certain important functions with Danielle. The data suggests that Danielle is using her faith as a means of coping with the deficient support.

Religion and spiritual beliefs were primary sources of support for this participant. Danielle was asked what strengthening her relationship with God has done for her life and the things she feels she can now accomplish. She answered:

Danielle: It’s caused me to look at things more positively. I’ve never been a negative person, but sometimes you fall into that funk and you just ugh. So I look at things positively like what I told you I’m going through like not many people could just be smiling and laughing and joking still. It would take a while, but like ‘cause I read my Bible I read about Job and how he got tested and he was being tested and he passed. He never once out of everything that he lost he never once turned away from God. He questioned him, but he got reprimanded for that. But he never bashed God or nothing let him go. He stayed there and remained faithful. And then another thing is contentment. I’m able to be content. And that’s why I’m like this because in the Bible it also talks about be content in every situation whether good or bad whether you’re rich or poor.

Researcher: In regards to how you feel about yourself as far as your capabilities, what has your faith done in regards to that? Like in regards to like your school capabilities.
Danielle: It’s helped me to be more focused because last year when I was just a mess my grades suffered from it. But like when I came in here this year my senior year I came in a different person so I was like ok I set goals for myself. I’m gonna make honor roll each grading period. And I’m gonna do this and I’m gonna do that. And so far I’ve done everything that I said I was gonna do.

Researcher: That’s wonderful.

Danielle: And I made honor roll last grading period. This grading period right here I think probably [inaudible] because I kind of got lazy. Just a little bit just because I got lazy in my faith like I just been don’t feel like waking up to pray, which is bad. But I’m human so I can’t say that I’m working on it, but I will pick myself back up. I haven’t done anything; it’s just I don’t feel like praying sometimes. But that’s no excuse. I’ll pick it back up.

It became apparent from this portion of the conversation that Danielle’s faith has enhanced her level of self-efficacy and maturity in all aspects of her life. The meaning of action link is important to note here. The subjective dimension within the link discusses the need to have a “self-conscious experience” (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983, p. 82) in order for one’s self-efficacy to be affected. In a previous conversation, Danielle stated that she is very proud of her accomplishments and newfound relationship with God. She attributes her school success to her faith in God. As a result of her own support acquired through her religious faith, Danielle was able to achieve good grades, therefore her “self”
-as-cause” perception within the meaning of action link (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983) enhanced her self-efficacy regarding academic achievement—and as she discussed briefly a little earlier in the conversation—with her way of dress as well.

**A way of dress: Circumstances.** Dialogue with Danielle regarding her way of dress began during the focus group conversation when she was asked about circumstances surrounding her childhood and when she was allowed to choose her own clothing. As mentioned in the first case, this topic caused a few glossy eyed smiles from the participants. Danielle said that it made her feel “big” to be allowed to select her own clothes. The participant’s comment demonstrates the newfound level of autonomy that she felt, which aligns with Gecas and Schwalbe’s (1983) first feature in the context of meaning link of social structure and self-efficacy, thus, confirming the current findings which suggest that dress is related to self-efficacy.

Continuing with the conversations about her way of dress, discussion of Danielle’s SES became a relevant circumstance to discuss next:

I would be into fashion, but it’s just like my financial situation prohibits me from, you know, being able to get what I want. . . . So like that’s like that’s the real truth, but the bigger truth is that I’m confident in myself and so I don’t need clothes to affirm that.

This statement suggests again the level of growth that Danielle has made. I have to question, though, that if she could afford the most stylish clothing, would those clothes then affirm her confidence and identity? Prior research suggests that for adolescent females clothing does just that, affirm who they are (Franklin, 2001; Holloman et al.,

After discussing her financial situation Danielle reported that even though money is lacking and she cannot afford to get the types of clothes that she would like, clothing is still a big part of her life. On a scale of 1 to 10, in terms of overall importance, with a 10 being of high importance, Danielle ranked clothing an 8 in her life. Here is her rationale:

Because like I care about what people see like I want to be presentable. I don’t want to look like just some regular street walker. Like I want leave a mark. I want you to remember me. And I want you when you see me to be like oh man she’s a cool girl. You know? . . . ’cause that’s the first thing people see pretty much. What kind of shoes you got and what you got on. . . . Because you know like nobody want just some bum like working for them.

Danielle’s comment demonstrates a connection between dress and self-efficacy for her. She believed that she will be able to leave a “mark” with someone if she is dressed in the appropriate clothing for the appropriate time. Caring about what others think about her way of dress aligns Danielle’s self-efficacy with the objective dimension within the meaning of action link (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983). She understands that society values a certain way of dress and that dressing in that particular manner will help her obtain the desired job experiences she is after. Danielle also talked about experiencing the fact that people treated her in a certain manner because of the way she dressed; therefore, dressing “appropriately” in work situations and other aspects of her life is what she chooses to do.
A way of dress: Choices. The conversation then shifted to choosing to dress for show versus choosing to dress for comfort, and how that could affect one’s school experience. During the focus group discussion Danielle disclosed to the group that she used to dress with the goal of gaining attention from certain male students. Danielle used clothing as a means to cover her need for attention; she said that she would wear her jeans tight and her blouses low-cut in order to get male students interested in her. She has since changed her way of dress, reporting that currently she dresses “comfortably” in jeans or sweat suits most of the time. Danielle commented that every now and then she chooses to get a little more dressed up:

Oh like when I do dress like I said last time like they’ll be like oh Danielle you look so cute this and that. You should dress like this more often. Like I do it when I feel like it, but like I said I just my dress down comfy look I like that. And I’m comfortable in it. And like I’m not worrying about who looking at me and what they think about me ’cause I got on sweats ’cause I’m still a cute person.

I think I am so it’s not about what you, well, that kind of contradicts what I’m saying. It’s like I don’t think at school like you just it’s not about what I wear. Like for me it’s not about what I wear. Like some people are so focused on themselves and what they have on that they forget that they’re coming to school to learn. And no matter what I wear I still have my focus so but other than that I’m comfortable. And when I do dress I dress, but that’s not often though.

As the dialogue continued, it became apparent that Danielle’s self-efficacy level has increased considerably regarding dress. She used to dress inappropriately because
she needed affirmation about herself from other students. Now Danielle’s main concern is to dress comfortably so that she can focus and do well in school, replacing the overly tight and uncomfortable jeans she used to wear for sweat pants. Danielle’s intended consequences of action (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983) with dressing comfortably allows her the concentration she needs to do well academically. The term comfortably encompassed the idea of dressing appropriately—meaning non-revealing. Danielle discussed that when she used to dress in a revealing manner, she felt uncomfortable while in school and thought more about what she was wearing than her school lessons.

During the focus group interview the participants were asked if UB influences had a reflection on what they chose to wear. Danielle’s next statement describes how her choice of dress changed as a result of a workshop that I did with the UB students:

Yes it does because I remember when I met you in work study, and you told us like the proper attire and stuff, you know, going to work and stuff. ‘Cause like when I was gonna go to my job I was gonna just wear like jeans and stuff, but then after we had that I made sure I picked nice slacks and a nice top to wear instead of my normal hoodie.

As a result of her spiritual evolution, Danielle’s cognition of dress has changed. She no longer follows direction from the mainstream regarding her style of dress. As previously discussed, Danielle and I first met when I was a graduate assistant working for UB in the summer of 2007. Danielle’s above comment came from her recollection of when the researcher conducted a *Dress for Success* workshop for the UB students. She said that since she has changed her outlook on life and her way of dress; the information that I
discussed with the UB group over a year and a half ago was now pertinent to her. Again, Danielle’s intended consequences of action (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983) with dressing “appropriately” for a job interview resulted in her obtaining the job she had at the time of the interview.

During the focus group, the topic of appropriate dress continued with discussions of choosing to dress in certain clothing which could affect how smart the participants felt. Within this conversation the advantages of wearing a suit was discussed. Everyone confessed that they felt important when wearing a suit, and Danielle stated that she felt “sophisticated” when wearing a suit. A feeling of powerfulness was also discussed regarding wearing certain clothes:

It [dressing in certain clothes] makes me feel powerful, empowered because, you know, and respected because when people see you dressed like that they like oh she must be somebody, and it just makes you feel good about yourself, you know, I’m somebody.

Danielle’s statement is aligned with research (Daters, 1990) demonstrating how certain clothing can change an adolescent’s attitude and behavior. This attitude and behavior motivation is what Bandura (1977) stated is essential in a person’s level of self-efficacy. “Power relationships between people are a function of the resources (or support), dependencies, and alternatives available within context of action, and so are quite consequential for the development of self efficacy” (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983, p. 82). Metaphorically speaking, dress becomes like a support system enabling the participants
to feel more powerful. That self-perceived power becomes an indication of a heightened form of self-efficacy.

**A way of dress: Support systems.** Next, Danielle was asked if she believes that the way a student dresses affects how a teacher views that student. She gave an example of how teachers may view students and what type of support teachers may give students as a result of their way of dress:

With guys you know baggy pants and drooping and stuff a teacher will look and be like no good, hood boy, trouble. I already know. But then in some cases some guys like to fit in but once they get in the classroom if they don’t got their friends in there they tend to be smarter than what they appear to be.

And maybe the same with girls. Like maybe the girls that’s dressed all flashy maybe they’re like oh she just want attention. She’s just gonna be talking and she’s not gonna be focused. She don’t looked focused. I don’t know. I don’t really know how teachers see us, but that’s what I think.

This statement demonstrates a hypothetical situation for the objective dimension in the meaning of action link (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983). According to Danielle, teachers may misjudge students because of what they wear, which may have a negative impact on how well the student does in school. As discussed earlier, past research on teacher expectations (Beady & Hansell, 1981; Brophy & Good, 1970; Diamond et al., 2004; Ellis, 1965; Rist, 1972; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968) suggested that teachers hold power over students’ schoolwork, efficacy levels, and may make a student feel capable or incapable based on the teachers’ reactions toward the student. Behling (1995) discussed
the fact that the expectation levels of teachers depended heavily on how professionally the student dressed. Danielle stated that it was explained to her that the teachers at her high school give grades “based off of our work, and they stress it that we are the ones that give us our grade.” She appeared confident that she earned her grades and the grades were not given to her as a reflection of the way she was dressed.

Sexual attraction can serve as a means of support by way of the attention (positive or negative) that it brings. This phenomenon is discussed in the next comment from Danielle:

I used to show cleavage and all that don’t mean [inaudible], but when I used to show cleavage a lot and I mean I thought that, you know, I wanted attention. So everybody be like oh she want attention, and they was right. I wanted attention, and I’ve had [inaudible] on my eye, and I was like oh yeah you going to see me. And people I know that I didn’t get no respect. My peers, guy peers, they didn’t respect me, thought they could touch me, and do whatever anytime.

And I brought that on myself because I didn’t have respect for myself so I dressed, you know, like that. But now when I do dress oh Danielle you look nice or I like your clothes Danielle. I like your shoes. This and this and that, and I feel good because I feel like I could still be sexy without showing my cleavage.

From the above comment, it was gleaned that dress is a major part of peer interaction, especially when it comes to the opposite sex. Most of the participants said they did not care what their peers thought, but Danielle was the one who changed her motivation toward certain types of dress because of negative comments and unwanted physical
advances she received from male peers. Unintended consequences of action (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983) come into play here. Danielle wanted a certain type of attention and when she got it, she discovered that it was not what she wanted. In Danielle’s case, choosing to change her way of dress in order to gain back her respect also helped enhance her self-efficacy. She now understands that she can choose to wear something non-revealing and still be “sexy.”

During the final segment of the focus-group session, the participants commented on society as a whole and its perceptions of the way in which the participants dress. The participants asserted that because they are African American inner-city girls, society is very unsupportive and tries to “judge” them and/or “predict” what type of person they are by what they are wearing. The majority of the participants reported that society perceives inner-city, African American girls as dressing provocatively like the females on the music videos. Danielle did not disagree with their comments but felt it necessary to tell her opinions because she used to dress provocatively and follow the mainstream stereotype:

I think they might be critical and judge me based on if they saw me today I think they would judge me based on what I had on because that’s how we are. We see and we’re likely to judge. . . . Have preconceived notions about everybody, and I think that they would just be like oh she doesn’t care about herself or she just she must be a bum. . . . Or something like that and when that’s not really the case. You know maybe it’s just a bad day, or maybe that’s just how that person likes to dress.
This statement from Danielle about society being judgmental stemmed from her feeling of the need to defend her choice of dress. She admitted that she often wears sweat pants for their comfort level and cost effectiveness, but as a result believes that she is negatively judged for it. Also Danielle did assert that wearing sweat pants detracted her male peers so that she can concentrate on her schoolwork. The male peers no longer supported Danielle’s way of dress and became less attracted to her as a result. Wearing sweat pants became an intended consequence of action (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983) for Danielle. She was comfortable and could concentrate on her school lessons plus she was no longer subjected to unwanted advances. A review of the data indicates a perception that tight and revealing clothing is not acceptable to the participants, school officials, family, and society as a whole. If one wears these items, they will receive negative feedback and no meaningful support/acceptance from others.

**Tanya—Case 06: The Conversational Feminist**

Tanya, a conversationalist, contributed much to the focus session. Her self-reported grades indicate that she is an A student, she is 16 years old and is in the 11th grade. When filling out the Dress, Self-Efficacy, and Academic Achievement (DSA) questionnaire, she detailed that her school life is “great” because she had good grades and that there are teachers at school who care. When “people [peers] try to interfere” with her school learning, Tanya felt that school is unpleasant. She liked teachers who took their time when going over the material and hated when they consumed too much time talking off topic because she and her classmates have to spend a longer time taking notes.
Tanya lives with her mother and two brothers and considers her family’s financial situation to be “well off.” Some of her family members are a large part of her support system, as she reported that her family “encourages my dreams. They push me and urge me to work hard nonstop.” However, she admitted that much of her school support comes from herself. She talked about witnessing how other family members and people in her community have not graduated from high school or done anything productive with their lives. She said that she does not want to waste the free education that she is able to get by going to a public school and end up “like those others.” The negative comments from some members in her family and people in the community, such as “you will never be successful” and that “I will never have a career,” is what helps keep Tanya going. She wants to prove them wrong; therefore she has high ambitions. Similar to Danielle, Tanya wants to be an example for others that success is attainable. She discussed the role her family played in her educational advancement and reported that while growing up, her family was never able to help her with schoolwork because many of them had not finished high school. One reason that Tanya made the choice to complete high school and further her education is so that she can help her future children do their homework.

The day of our interview, Tanya was wearing a pair of jeans, a pair of boots because of the snow, and a casual shirt. Her coat was just as casual as the rest of her wardrobe. She mentioned during the focus-group discussion that a male peer told her that she could be more attractive if she did not dress so manly. She said, “I told him where he could go.” She is a headstrong young woman who loves herself and who she is as a person; she was inspiring to talk with.
A sense of self: Circumstances. As established earlier, feeling as though one is in control of herself and her environment is a great indicator of her self-efficacy, which makes safety a major concern for those in inner-city schools and communities (Holloman et al., 1996). The focus group shared the fact that their school had been on the news for a crime that took place there. The participants were asked: “Do you feel safe and in control at school? Why or why not?” Tanya’s response indicated that she did not always feel safe at school:

I think it could be safe at times, but then there’s times when it’s not because they can’t really be certain of what’s gonna happen within the next moment or like you can’t be certain that somebody won’t try to come in with a gun or try to shoot up something or somebody. You can’t be safe that something bad could happen inside the school and you’ll sit there and think like oh I wasn’t expecting that person or expect this to happen. So I agree to a certain extent it can be safe.

Tanya’s comments showed a neutral stance regarding feeling safe and in control at school. Her self-efficacy level regarding this seems to be questionable and dependent upon what is going on around her at any given moment. Tanya discussed the reality of not being able to control what others do. This is a fitting example of how “social structural conditions both enable and constrain an individual’s opportunities for engaging in efficacious actions” (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983, p. 81). Societal surroundings offered a degree of worry and uncomfortable feelings, yet Tanya’s sense of self-efficacy permitted her from being negatively impacted by it.
In relation to not being able to control others’ thoughts, words, or actions, the topics of race, discrimination, and sexism emerged. The focus group was asked whether they felt that the circumstance of “being African American and from an inner-city school plays a part in your academic achievement or future goals?” Immediately the words “stereotype” and “double standard” began to be used by the focus group participants. Tanya believed that the circumstance of being born female played a major role in academic achievement and future goals. Her response made her appear to be an advocate for feminist rights. She was very vocal about this matter, which partially contributed to her selection as a case study participant:

There’s especially with the double standard. It’s like they expect so much of the females and it’s so much different from the males. And then when there’s something done that each gender might do, it’s more bad for the females than it is for the males. Like for the males it seems like its ok . . . And so far as race, there are some people who are not stuck in the past, but then there is also people that are stuck in the past. And they can’t just seem to get over the racism and the discrimination. And then so far as we can be the same race; it could probably be my family, and they’ll still sit there and say the most ignorant stuff to you like oh you won’t make it or anything. Or you’re a girl so you’re expected to stay at home. You raise the children. You cook and you clean or you won’t be anything. Tanya felt that racial and female discrimination continued to be an issue in her community. The inhibiting feelings that Tanya has fall in line with the context of action link which encompasses “the degree of constraint on individual autonomy” (Gecas &
Schwalbe, 1983, p. 81). Tanya appeared to believe that her choices in life are being dictated by societal stratification, which did have an effect on her self-efficacy. Instead of being decreased, her self-efficacy was enhanced because she asserted several times that she was determined to prove society wrong about its ideologies regarding African American, inner-city girls.

**A sense of self: Choices.** The conversation continued regarding societal standards and values with the question, “How do you think you are expected to act, dress, and achieve as an African American young lady?” Tanya’s response showed deep thinking as she got directly to the issues that were bothering her:

For society, I think because I’m an African American and I’m a female I think they expect from me to act and dress as one of the video girls that you see on TV. And for the ones who care about me they want me to uphold myself. They want me to be classy, appropriate. They expect me to I think like my parents they expect me to be the person that they want me to be. And it’s actually kind of hard because I feel like they’re [her parents] trying to live their life through me, and I just don’t like it. And sometimes I might act out, but then the majority of the time I am the person that they want me to be or I’m acting a way that they want me to be and I dress how they want me to on a few occasions.

Tanya appeared to be having a hard time choosing to be what or who she really wants to be. She was trying to please her family and was sacrificing her own autonomy for the sake of others. Her situation relates to the context of action from the three links of social structure and self-efficacy (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983). The constraint that Tanya felt
regarding her autonomy affected her level of self-efficacy. She could not behave in a manner that was true to her own ideals because it compromised the way her family wanted her to act. Self-efficacy addresses our capability to deal with day-to-day life and Tanya feels that her ability to do that was being monitored, scrutinized, and in some cases taken away.

**A sense of self: Support systems.** On the DSA questionnaire and during the focus group, Tanya commented on the lack of support she had experienced. She reported that some of her family members encouraged her; however she also reported that most of her family showed her little or no support. It became apparent that the lack of family support was affecting her self-efficacy level. Our discussion during the interview allowed me to ask Tanya to elaborate on this familial situation. The probe, “What type of person do you think your parents want you to be?” elicited this response:

My parents they, I mean they want me to be a leader, and I am a leader. But it’s had times where it seem like being a leader in certain situations can be hard, and I’m the only girl and I’m older than my younger brothers so it’s like double standards. With them if they do something it’s ok, but when I do it it’s not. And they feel like I’m lowering the bar for my brothers and I feel like . . . It’s not fair. And I’m like well I keep my grades up. I go to school everyday. I really don’t get in trouble at all. I’m always home on time. And it’s like my brothers they don’t come home; they don’t get good grades; they’re suspended all the time. And it’s like if I was to get in trouble it would be different. And they treat me so much worse than how they would treat them, and I just feel like that’s wrong.
From the above comment it appeared that Tanya felt that her brothers got special privileges and that she was being treated harshly by her family. Unfortunately her intended consequence of action (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983)—thriving in her academic achievement—was not working in her favor. She did well in school so that her parents would be happy with her; however she believes that she was treated worse than her brothers who were not doing as well in school. As a result of this negative outcome, Tanya’s self-efficacy could very well have been decreased, but with her perseverance, she demonstrated that she has been able to pull through. The data suggested that her self-efficacy has been enhanced by her own doing which indicates the subjective dimension (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983).

For a second time Tanya discussed a double standard. She indicated that women are not viewed as strongly as men. She also commented on feeling that she is not being taken seriously because she is female:

I don’t want to just be looked at or I’m the wife or I’m the girlfriend or I’m just the girl, and I have to be the shadow. I want to have my own name, and I want to be able to strive and I want support like everybody else would support a man. I think because some people are stuck back in old days they feel as if it’s the role of a woman to cook, clean, and stay at home and not have a job and take care of the kids. That sounds ok, but that’s not the point of view I want to live. I want kids one day and of course I will take care of them and I will cook and I will clean, but I don’t want that just to be a role for myself. I feel like if we’re gonna have children and if we’re gonna settle down then it should be the role of both of us
because it takes both to actually make a relationship work. It takes both to make children anyway so we should both share that responsibility just as we both should have jobs.

Tanya appears to be fighting against the negative ideology of women, which suggests that she has been dealing with the construct of misogyny for some time. This cultural set of values determined the context of action that Tanya encountered while she was in the self-efficacy developmental stages of her life (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983). Her resilience displays her high level of self-efficacy as well as a love and respect that she demands for herself.

Tanya explained that she did not have the type of love that she desired from her father. She reported that she still holds a bit of animosity towards her father and her brothers:

Like with me when I was growing up and one of my other brothers our dad he would just he would always come get my brother, and he would never really come get me. Like the only time I would talk to my dad is if he was gonna bring me money or if I needed something he was gonna provide it like basically he was only there for me financially. With my brothers he was there physically and emotionally. And I just felt like I didn’t know my dad. It always seemed to me that that was a person I was closest to, but how can I possibly be close to someone that’s never around me?

From the data analysis it appears that Tanya’s feminist attitude comes from her familial relationship. Her perception is that she is not adequate enough for the men in her
family and therefore feels the world also finds her inadequate because she is a young woman. Since she does not feel valued, the self-perceived control she has over her life has been altered. Therefore, her sense of self-efficacy has been shaped by these relationships. Consequently, Tanya became her own main source of support.

Dialogue continued regarding the lack of support that this participant received and was further demonstrated by her self-efficacy levels with the next comment:

I just want to strive in everything I do. I don’t want to feel as I’m a failure. And it’s like I said I’m fairly confident because at times it seems like I only have my support, and I’m the only person who believes in me. And then it feels like it’s not enough like I want somebody else to care, and I want somebody else to support me and just to know and be aware of what I’m doing every step of the way. . . . But nobody’s actually helping me explore which opportunity would possibly fit me best.

Tanya explained that she lacked the proper assistance in helping her determine who she is and what she wants to do with her life. Within the context of action link, Gecas and Schwalbe (1983) discussed the need for resources in order to be able to develop or enhance our self-efficacy. So that this participant can build self-efficacy regarding her future goals, she might benefit from a having a mentor. A mentor might help her realize that someone cares for her future well-being. The comment below suggests this notion:

Tanya: It’s like when we’re at home with my family like you can say like I love you, but then when you say it you feel like you don’t mean it or
you feel like they don’t mean it. So I mean I just want the same thing as for support and somebody caring because at least somebody would be able to be here when I have a problem. And it would be easier for me to talk to them and tell them exactly what it is or what I’m thinking or things that I could possibly wanted to know that somebody else might not know because they never asked.

Researcher: Right. Do you think that maybe the support that you want to get at home you’re probably not getting because maybe the people at home don’t know how to help you?

Tanya: It seems that way that I think they don’t because they always say I can talk to them, but then it’s like when I try to talk to them either they’re not paying attention, they’re not giving me the attention that I expected, or they’re half listening or they’re asking too many questions or I just get totally mad and I just shut down. And I can’t find myself to be open with them again.

Researcher: Yeah. And I’m sure that’s really hard.

Tanya: It is ‘cause like it be times when I want to tell somebody something and then it’s like I can’t ‘cause either they’re gonna probably use it as leverage against me or they’re gonna make me feel bad, and I just don’t want somebody to be judging me ‘cause I try so hard not to judge somebody else.
Tanya discussed that the lack of love or support from family influences the fact that she trusts very few people. Being provided with a mentor may not only allow her the support she seeks academically, but may also provide her with the emotional support lacking in her family. Because she appears to believe that no one is listening, she gave off the impression of having put up a barrier of protection to allow herself to cope with this deficit of love, support, and trust. The barrier appears to be a means by which Tanya is taking control over her situation which allows her the power to rule her destiny and to become her own biggest support system. Even though Tanya felt that she does not have the proper support, she took the initiative to pursue her dreams alone. This speaks volumes regarding the context of action link toward her self-efficacy (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983). Tanya taking control boosted her autonomy which then supplied her with a high self-efficacy level; this action provided her the motivation needed in order to continue striving toward academic achievement and future goals regardless of lack of resources.

**Academic achievement and future goals: Circumstances.** As the interview continued, Tanya’s societal views became clearer. She seems to believe that traditional female roles are a continued hindrance and indissoluble issue. When Tanya was asked if she could foresee any obstacles that could deter her from her dreams, she stated:

I feel like it’s always obstacles no matter what, ’cause, even in high school there’s obstacles where it could be my peers or it could be a teacher or anything. Just something that could possibly trigger me to be angry and not want to do what I’m expected to do while I’m in school, or someone telling me oh I’m not gonna be anything or I’m not gonna amount to anything. I can’t do this; I can’t do that.
And basically the roles of women and how society views me there could definitely be obstacles ’cause in you know sometimes it makes me feel like I want to give up. But then I don’t because if I give up then I’m proving them right and what am I leaving to prove and who am I shedding light on.

It appears that certain people in Tanya’s life have been her main obstacles. Surrendering to negative comments made by others seems to be what Tanya is fighting against. Specifically, she mentioned wanting to prove them wrong. The meaning of action link (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983) is relevant here because it encompasses the value that society assigns to us. This objective dimension ultimately determines our self-efficacy levels. Whether Tanya accepts or rejects the valuation that is placed on her as an inner-city, African American female, it appears that she will continue to be resilient.

**Academic achievement and future goals: Choices.** Through Tanya’s hardships, she is still willing to work hard for her education. This says much about her drive, determination, and level of self-efficacy. Evidence of her resilience continues in the next statement:

Right now this Saturday I’m actually taking my ACT, and I’m trying to get into the program that Shana [pseudonym] is in. They’re saying a sophomore program at the University of Another [pseudonym] ’cause that can actually help me because I’d be attending college while I’m a high school student.

And then this spring I was gonna enroll in postsecondary option which also helps me with the college level so at least I would know how college classes are. If it’s if I could possibly feel like it’s too hard for me or it’s hard of a subject
then I might be able to try the other one. And I’m trying to deal with math and
science a lot because science is my hardest subject. And I’m trying to be able to
be open-minded and to go into it without actually thinking of all the problems that
could possibly surface or me trying to remember what exactly some things are.

As Tanya spoke she became emotional and began to cry. She wants to succeed in
school and may be exhausting all options within her reach to achieve her goal at
becoming either an accounting major or criminal-justice major. Tanya’s context of
action (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983) in choosing to obtain resources denotes that she has a
high level of self-efficacy in this regard.

**Academic achievement and future goals: Support systems.** Support systems
have been found to have a major effect on self-efficacy, which in turn result in higher
academic achievement (Whitbeck et al., 1997; Wilkum et al., 2008). A conversation
regarding UB’s influence on the participants’ academic achievement and future goals was
the subsequent discussion at hand. The academic support system that UB offers was
found to help guide the participants’ future goals. They were asked if being a part of UB
has changed the way they feel about school and their future, and “Do you think because
of the influences from UB, you are convinced that you can do anything with your life?”
Tanya replied:

Me personally with or without Upward Bound I want to be able to go somewhere
and do something better than somebody else that I’ve seen, or I don’t want to end
up in a condition to where I would be having to live probably paycheck to
paycheck. Or I have children and not be able to fend for them or myself. But
with Upward Bound I feel like it gives me a better opportunity. It broadened my horizon as far as education and certain colleges of applying. Like it may be something I misunderstood on an application or misunderstood that the school had sent and with Upward Bound they help us understand this process.

Tanya seemed to be using UB as a vehicle instead of as a means of support, very much like Connie and her relationship with the program. Tanya plans to enhance her life with or without UB’s help. This can be interpreted to mean that she did not depend on the program like Danielle. It appeared that UB was a tool and not the tool in Tanya’s future success. It appeared that Tanya felt she already possessed the power within herself to obtain academic achievement and to reach her future goals. This result is intriguing because Tanya did not speak of any other main line of support that she has besides herself; she was not in any other after school activities; and she was searching for a mentor to assist her in her quest for success. Having resources such as UB and a mentor might allow Tanya the extra wherewithal that she cannot provide for herself. According to Gecas and Schwalbe (1983), the extra resources provides more “possibilities for efficacious actions” to occur (p. 81). As a result, it is assumed that Tanya would have gravitated closer to UB because of her lack of support. One explanation may be that since Tanya has a hard time trusting others, trust may be a deterrent in her connecting in closer with the UB program and coordinators.

A Way of Dress: Circumstances. The interview turned toward the topic of dress. When asked “On a scale of 1 to 10, how important is clothing and the way you dress to you?” Tanya’s life circumstances and feminist opinions made clothing secondary
in her life. However, she said that clothing was about a seven or eight in the matter of
importance for her:

Clothing isn’t everything to me. Some women are defined by their clothing. And
some women are looked at like they’re asking for it. Asking for unwanted
attention. I need positive energy around me. I don’t want to be labeled as
something negative.

Tanya’s comment is contradictory to the seven or eight rating that she gave and appeared
to reflect more of a four or five rating. There may be an inconsistency here because
Tanya—like most of the other study participants—did not have the means of obtaining
the most stylish clothing. Thus she asserted that clothes do not “define” her.

However, her intended consequence of action (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983) is
apparent. She does not want to be looked at in a disrespectful manner and therefore she
dresses to reflect that. Her cognition of dress demonstrates that she does not follow what
the media says is the norm for girls her age to wear. As mentioned during the focus
group discussion, Tanya prides herself for not choosing to look like the girls in the video.
She wants and demands respect from her peers and others in her community.

**A Way of Dress: Choices.** Tanya was then asked to clarify the comment made
during the focus group that encompassed the feeling that no type of clothing makes her
feel important. She explained her thoughts behind feeling important and how she wants
others to view her:
It [important] is just how I feel. People should be looking at who I really am. If I had on something tight, I don’t want them to just be looking at my body parts instead of looking and listening to me. I must be comfortable in what I wear.

Tanya’s position on how she chooses to dress and how that relates to her self-efficacy again displayed her feminist standpoint. The data showed that she believes clothing does not make her more capable of doing certain things in her life. She feels that she is in control of her destiny; the way she dresses is not related. As discussed earlier, Gecas and Schwalbe’s (1983) subjective dimension within the meaning of action link “involves perceptions of self-as-cause” (p. 82). Tanya’s high level of self-efficacy reflects this because she believes she can accomplish her goals and the clothing she wears does not enhance or hinder her capabilities; in other words, Tanya displayed a self-as-cause, not dress-as-cause philosophy.

However, Tanya did feel that there is an appropriate way to dress at specific times and this can enhance or hinder other’s perceptions of her. For example, in preparing for a job interview, she explained that she would wear something more “dressy” than her normal attire and that a pair of “pumps or Mary-Jane”-style shoes would be appropriate. Tanya mentioned that what she wears is important because she does not want to make the wrong impression:

If I have on something tight they [employers or employees] may be looking at my body parts. They may think I can’t do the job. If I am covered up and not showing my body parts, people feel like I can do the job that I need to do.
Tanya’s conservative viewpoint on her way of dress is prevalent in this comment as well. In the work place she wants to be remembered for the work she does, not the clothes she wears or the body parts she shows. This stance is consistent with her feminist beliefs—her wanting to be equal to men and wanting to have access to the same societal support that they receive.

**A Way of Dress: Support systems.** The final topic of our interview dealt with others’ views of the way Tanya dressed. During the focus group, the participants were asked what they think their family, peers, teachers, and society think about the way they dress. The data revealed that some people supported and accepted the way in which the participants dressed while others did not. Tanya commented: “I know’ cause my grandma she would say, ‘Well, back in my day we didn’t dress like that.’” Tanya did not clarify if this comment was directed at her as a result of her way of dress, but I assumed that because she is so conservative, her grandmother would not have a reason to make a comment such as this toward her.

When the focus group participants were asked about their peers’ thoughts of them, the conversation became livelier and their responses were more assertive. This is attributed to LaPoint et al.’s (2003) finding that adolescents are guided and developed by what their peers think of them. More importantly to note is the discovery that the opposite sex’s opinions of the participants were found to be the most negative and degrading:

We was in class and we was talking because like I said I don’t dress girly. I don’t wear skirts. I don’t wear shorts and stuff like that. And I mainly stick to pants
and they was like, well, Tanya, you be. He was like “you’ll be more sexy if you wear something not so manly.”

Tanya’s response to this comment was that “she will not change herself to please a guy.” She mentioned that she prefers wearing pants and feels more comfortable in them. Within the study, the comfort level of the clothing was seen as the most important attribute to initiating academic achievement with the study participants. Sexually attracting her peers was not Tanya’s aim, albeit being comfortable was. Her intended consequences of action (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983) were essential to the formation of her high self-efficacy regarding her way of dress.

The discussion then led to how teachers perceive students’ capabilities based on how they dress. Tanya was asked if she believed that teachers’ academic perceptions of their students were affected by what the students were wearing. She asserted:

I do and then I don’t. There are some teachers who look at the inside and some look at the outside. I have a teacher who looks at our [students’] body parts. If I have on a T-shirt that has words on the front this teacher always asks, “what does that say,” and is always looking at my boobs.

From this comment Tanya is accusing the teacher of looking at her inappropriately. This particular type of teacher’s main focus might be what the student is wearing and may base his or her academic expectations on whether the student looks attractive that day. However, Tanya and Danielle both commented that teachers always say “we earn our grades.” Data suggested that Tanya may or may not have believed the statement because
she admitted that one of her teachers knew she was slacking off in a particular subject but still gave her an A. However, she confessed that the teacher was her mother’s friend.

**Cross Case Analysis**

Conducting a cross-case analysis (Patton, 1990) can enhance the research when employing a multiple-case-study methodology. When beginning a cross-case analysis one must examine similarities in the data as well as unique data (Dey, 1993). The data are not completely the same nor completely different from one case to the next; the researcher must look respectively for how the results are alike or different. The benefit of a cross-case analysis is that it gives an overarching view of all the findings so the researcher can offer some generalizability among the sample studied (Patton, 1990).

The process began by reevaluating the answers from the individual interviews with each case. The interviewing guides were created with the three research questions in mind. The questions from the interviewing guides were categorized by those that were the same for all three cases and those tailored to a particular case, thus it was interesting to review how each participant responded when asked the same questions. Emphasis on the first two research questions was the main focus of this cross-case analysis because the third question regarding the participants’ involvement with UB was answered during the focus-group session. In addition, no new data were unearthed during the case study interviewing process regarding the participants’ involvement in UB.

With the multiple-case-study method the goal was to dig deeper into the participants’ levels of self-efficacy and to understand how self-efficacy related to their way of dress, academic achievement, and future goals. Having established that
adolescents hold in high regard others’ views of them, it was important to learn how others’ views related to the participants’ self-efficacy, way of dress, academic achievement, and future goals.

**Comparable Research Question Findings**

Looking at the overall self-efficacy levels of the cases, all three participants had high levels of self-efficacy, although the levels addressed different aspects in the participants’ lives. All aspired that their postsecondary education be completed at a four-year institution; however their goals were very different from one another.

**Research question 1.** How do inner-city, African American adolescent females obtain their level of self-perceived efficacy? How does their self-efficacy level relate to their way of dress, academic achievement, and future goals?

**Self-efficacy, academic achievement, and future goals.** Regarding obtaining their level of self-efficacy, the process was unique for every case, although, all three cases demonstrated a high level of self-efficacy, with Connie demonstrating the highest. Support was a major factor in the development of high self-efficacy. Connie did live at home with both her parents who both supported her personally and educationally. The dynamics of a two-parent home helped to foster situations that could lend themselves to higher levels of self-efficacy being established, the two parents themselves being in the home is not the result of high self-efficacy; the support that they offered did in Connie’s case. Danielle on the other hand, discussed the fact that her mother used to be more supportive of her personally and educationally. However, since the divorce between her
mother and step-father, Danielle’s mother was faced with the responsibility of caring for the family alone; which resulted in less time her mother had to offer support.

Of the three cases, Connie was the only one currently getting experience in the fields geared toward her future goals. She also was the one that appeared to be the most assured about her career direction. Connie discussed the fact that her self-efficacy was developed through her relationship with her parents and the support they offered her and her son. Connie was able to engage in efficacious actions in her schoolwork as well as with her extra-curricular activities. Danielle’s self-efficacy was obtained in part as a result of her prior mistakes. After she realized her personal and academic descent, she turned her life around and established a closer relationship with her faith ultimately enhancing her self-efficacy level. Tanya’s self-efficacy was obtained in part by witnessing a level of negativity and lack of productivity in her family. She aspired not to be like her family, thus she had high aspirations resulting in a high level of self-efficacy.

We discussed the current and future goals of the participants. When I asked each participant what she wanted to do with her life after high school, they answered in the following ways:

Connie: That’s my main goal right there is for 2012 to go to the Olympics in track and field. And then when I’m in college I want to major in communications because I want to be on TV. So I want to do like broadcasting.

Danielle: Well, here’s my plan. I plan on graduating, hopefully I get selected to Bridge for Upward Bound, and after that once I go home I plan on
moving in me and my sister are getting an apartment. And I am going to be going to Another U [pseudonym]. I’m gonna pay my money next weekend my $75 to get the rest of my stuff situated so that I know I’m actually going. And I’m gonna major in English and minor in creative writing. And that’s my plan. . . . And I want to be a motivational speaker, too.

Tanya: And like me I’m not sure all the way; I know I want to go into accounting, but then I also want to go into criminal justice. And it’s like with them it’s like oh yeah they make a lot of money you should do one of those.

All three participants had some idea about what they wanted to do and they demonstrated that their future dreams are prominent in their minds because they were working toward those goals in different ways. Connie’s self-efficacy regarding her abilities to accomplish her dreams appeared the highest. Connie was working with her high school’s television station and continuing to work on her running techniques while on the school track team. However, she did not discuss specific actions taken toward obtaining the goal of going to the Olympics. Connie was the only participant involved in extracurricular activities at school as well as the UB program. Prior research found that students who are involved in extracurricular activities after school are viewed by teachers as more academically focused than students who are not (Van Matre et al., 2000).

Danielle was applying for a postsecondary program called Bridge that is offered through the local university’s UB office. Bridge allows students to take college courses
during the summer after their high school graduation. Therefore, once they start college, the students will already have good standing college credits and will have achieved sophomore standing by the end of the fall semester. Tanya, being a junior in high school, was not ready to apply for college yet; she was preparing for her future by taking the ACT college-entrance examination.

Further data analysis revealed that self-efficacy was not strong or valid in all aspects of their lives. Bandura (1977) discussed how different areas of one’s life will have different levels of self-efficacy attached to them. For the participants, self-efficacy levels were higher in some areas of their lives and lower in others. An example is reflected in Tanya’s relationship with her family. She has high self-efficacy regarding her academic capabilities but low self-efficacy in her ability to gain her family’s love and appreciation for her. An interview question regarding this fact was posed to all three participants:

There have also been research studies that have found that the way in which you feel about your capabilities (what you think you can and cannot do) will actually affect what type of grades you will get in school and what you may do later in life. Do you agree with this? Why or why not?

All of the case participants agreed.

Connie: That happens to me every year ’cause there’s this girl at Halbert Hill High [pseudonym] that’s real good. And we compete all the time and it’s like a battle and once I put myself down and said that I can’t do I’ll scare myself and end up not doing it at all. And end up getting beat by
somebody another person that’s never beaten me before so two people or three peoples actually beating me because I done beat myself up about one person.

As discussed earlier, a self-fulfilling prophecy results from one’s mind being manipulated to advance or deter the person who possesses it. If one thinks her capabilities are at a certain level, they usually are. For example, Danielle described how self-fulfilling prophecies affect her academic abilities:

Danielle: I think I agree ‘cause like math I already have the mindset that I am not good at math, and because of that I probably don’t try as hard as I should . . . That’s the only thing. It’s just that math. Everything else I’m pretty confident in. It’s just math. I have I guess a low self-esteem in that . . . Leads me to think that I can’t be a doctor even if I wanted to be . . . It’s just not realistic; it’s not in my books; it’s not in my future, but it could be.

Tanya’s response was similar to the other responses except that she added thoughts about diminishing negative feelings about herself and her perception of whether she can accomplish a goal. Agreeing with Danielle, Tanya stated, “If I say I can’t do this or that I am just not applying myself. At some point I will start believing that I can’t.”

She reported that she can do anything that she sets her mind to, thus, this participant appears to hold herself to a high standard because she thinks society already holds her to a high standard because she is an African American female. Tanya talked about wanting
to be seen as strong as a man; however, the only way she can do that is to believe in her ability and to do her best.

**Self-efficacy and dress.** One of the goals of the research study was to evaluate the participants’ cognition of dress. Data indicated that dress was perceived and used differently by the three case study participants. Dress seemed to be more superficial to Connie and used primarily as a means to express herself as a stylish, mature, young woman and mother. For Tanya, dress was intended to be a reflection of her inner self. Because she was looking for respect and equality from her male peers, she tried to portray that by wearing pants and non-revealing clothes. Danielle’s cognition of dress was perhaps the most involved. In a sense, dress changed her outlook and allowed her to see greater possibilities in her life. After being disrespected by others because of her prior way of dress, Danielle changed from wearing “jeans so tight they hurt” to wearing more comfortable clothes that allowed people to see her for the person she is.

Efficacious behavior regarding dress was discussed during all three interviews. Dress was important to all three participants. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most important, Connie said that dress is a 10 in her life. For Danielle, dress was an 8; and for Tanya, dress was a 7 or 8. Certain types of clothing made Connie and Danielle feel more important and capable of specific outcomes (e.g., obtaining a job), whereas Tanya felt that clothing did not change her attitude about how well she will do in specific situations.

They all agreed that there is a time and place to wear certain clothing; for instance, job interviewing clothes are not the same clothes one wears to school or to go
out with friends. Regarding appropriate dress for job interviews and work place attire, all
three participants stated that it is important to dress professionally, without wearing tight,
revealing clothing. Connie talked about being “professional” and Danielle mentioned
how important first impressions are and stated, “no one wants a bum working for them.”
Tanya argued the necessity of wearing appropriate clothing so that people will not look at
her “body parts.” All of the participants appeared to understand the need to look a certain
way when going into specific situations.

Research question 2. How do inner-city, African American adolescent females
think that their way of dress relates to the way that peers, the community, the society, and
their teachers perceive them?

Dress and the society. The way others view adolescent girls is very important to
them. Danielle and Tanya talked about not following what the media depicts as normal
dress for inner-city, African American girls. However, Connie looked to the media for
style identification more than the others. It is important to note that Connie prided herself
on being and looking professional. One’s cognition of dress depends on whether that
person allows others’ opinions to dictate appropriate dress or what is stylish. The person
has one of three choices: (a) to behave in a way that displays acceptance for the ways of
dress they see around them; (b) to behave in a way that opposes the ways of dress they
see around them; or (c) somewhere in between the two, accepting some ways of dress
portrayed by society and the media while rejecting others. The data analysis suggested
that both Tanya and Danielle chose option (b), whereas Connie appears to have chosen
option (c)—she looks to the media for guidance; however does not fall into the category of dressing like a “video girl.”

According to the participants’ testimonies, society thinks that African American girls their age should be dressing like “video girls.” If this is the case, then none of the participants dressed provocatively or chose option (a); yet, Connie’s attitude regarding clothing leads one to believe that she gleaned some of her inspiration for dress from the media. However, looking back at Connie’s case, she asserted because she is a teen mother, she is stereotypically perceived in a certain manner. In the inner-city high school milieu, teen mothers are expected to look and act a certain way (i.e., dressing provocatively or dressing “bummy” because they are struggling to care for their child). Furthermore, teen mothers are expected to act as if they do not care about their educational advancement. In this regard, Connie chose option (b), to oppose the stereotypes forced upon her. She asserted that she acts and dresses “as a normal teen who doesn’t have a baby would.”

**Dress and family.** Regarding how society and family view African American adolescent girls, Tanya said that society expects her to look like a provocative “video girl,” and because of this, she believes that, according to her family standards, it was important to uphold a “classy” look:

For society I think because I’m an African American and I’m a female I think they expect from me to act and dress as one of the video girls that you see on TV. And for the ones who care about me they want me to uphold myself. They want me to be classy, appropriate.
Connie’s response was similar to that of Tanya:

I think we’re supposed to carry ourselves as if to me I carry myself professionally as if I’m being watched by people. I don’t just walk around yelling and stuff. I just keep to myself and I just act as if I’m somewhere where everybody knows my parents, and then when they see my parents they’re gonna be like oh I seen

Connie and she was acting like this. You taught her well.

Connie’s comments revealed her thoughts on behavior in public. She often used the terms “professionally” or “professional” interchangeably when referring to her way of dress and behavior. Data analysis revealed that all three participants valued their family members’ opinions toward them. They all wanted to maintain their families’ reputation by presenting themselves in a respectable manner. Both Tanya and Connie talked about their parents as a guide for the way they should dress and behave. Connie prided herself for acting professionally and dressing maturely. Danielle focused on familial approval:

I think I’m expected to act presentable and like just keep a standard to represent us well because people have so many they think so negative about us and you got to prove them wrong. . . . my family like they don’t go around like looking all hoochie and stuff. Class A classy standard.

Family approval and acceptance of dress was found to be of major importance to all three participants. The opinions of others outside the family structures were found to be important as well, although the participants discussed reacting to those opinions in a somewhat different manner.
Dress, teachers, and peers. The participants were asked if they felt that teachers treat students differently because of their dress and all three agreed that this was the case. One of them talked about a young man who came to school with baggy pants, which indicated to some teachers that he was not serious about learning. Connie offered a scenario of a young woman coming to school “half dressed.” The three participants discussed how teachers frown on both types of clothing, unless, however, as Tanya attested, the teacher enjoys gawking at young girls’ body parts. Tanya believed that some teachers look at students’ “inside” and some teachers look at students’ “outside” to make judgments. Danielle felt that teachers do think negatively of students who dress inappropriately, which may have a corresponding effect on students’ academic achievement; however, she stated that teachers claimed that “students earned their grades.”

Discussions of peers’ thoughts on the way of dress for the study participants brought about some emotional reactions. From the discussions, Connie appeared to have more disposable income than the other participants and therefore deemed it important to look stylish at school. As a result of her fashionable wardrobe—according to Connie—she was mistakenly called “spoiled” and “stuck-up” by teachers and peers at school. She claimed that she “don’t even be caring” about what others say about her. Dressing comfortably was also a common theme discussed among the participants. Connie wore sweatpants on “days she don’t feel like being bothered.” Danielle talked about no longer wearing tight jeans because they distracted her learning due to their lack of comfort as well as because of the attention she gained from male peers. Tanya discussed being more
comfortable in pants than skirts and shorts. As a result of wearing pants, a male peer told her that she looks “manly.” Thus this structural situation caused Tanya to feel as though she needed to defend her dressing preference—which ultimately enhanced her self-efficacy because she was strong enough not to follow what others thought she should be wearing.

The Three Links of Social Structure and Self-Efficacy

Comparing and contrasting the participants’ answers, within the context of Gecas and Schwalbe’s (1983) theory, adds another layer of data analysis. This theory enhanced and helped explain the findings of the study because the focus was geared toward inner-city, African American girls who are faced with social-structural issues on a daily basis because they are a double minority (female and African American), in addition to being from a poor background. As discussed earlier, individuals cannot function without the social structure that surrounds them, and therefore must embrace and learn from these stratifications (Fine, 1991). Table 5 simplifies the voluminous data from each case in order to visually depict how social structure affects self-efficacy, dress, and academic achievement. The analysis begins by detailing the connection between Gecas and Schwalbe’s theory and the case study participants.

The three links of social structure and efficacy-based self-esteem include: “(1) context of action, (2) the meaning of action, and (3) the unintended consequences of action” (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983, p. 81). First, in the context of action, Gecas and
Table 5

*Results of the Three Cases and the Three Links of Social Structure and Efficacy*

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<th>Context of action</th>
<th>Meaning of action</th>
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<td>Degree of autonomy</td>
<td>Established efficacy/control</td>
<td>Resources</td>
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<td>Connie</td>
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Schwalbe discussed the organization of practical activities and the social context of human functioning. Determining possibilities for efficacious actions in an individual is dependent on “(1) the degree of constraint on individual autonomy, (2) the degree of constraint on individual control, and (3) the resources available to the individual for producing intended outcomes” (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983, p. 81).

Second, the meaning of action links to Bandura’s (1977, 2006) conceptualization of performance success. Gecas and Schwalbe (1983) asserted that the importance is not the success itself but how others perceive the success. The meaning of action has a dimension called the “objective dimension” (p. 83) where one’s actions have a differential value depending on the society structure or one’s community. The “subjective dimension involves the perception of self-as-cause” (p. 82), meaning this dimension determines how one views her successes and failures.

The third link—intended and unintended consequences of action—also bear on the formation of self-efficacy (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983). Unintended consequences encompass the idea that one thinks a situation is going to turn out a particular way and the situation does not follow the person’s expectations. It is just the reverse for the intended consequences of action. Self-efficacy is built when one has a situation that she is happy with and the situation happens in the intended manner. However, self-efficacy is also built from the unintended consequences of action based on one’s ability to preserve her esteem by attributing the outcomes (especially negative) to external factors.

On the left side of Table 5 the names of the multiple-case study participants are listed. Under each name, the three main concepts of this research study are listed: self
-efficacy, dress, and academics. Along the top of the table the three links of social structure are listed: context of action, meaning of action, and consequences of action. The links have also been broken down into their respective sub-categories. When the concept and the link corresponded to one another in the specified case’s research data, an X was placed in that cell of the table.

**Explanation of Table 5: Connie.** In the column labeled context of action regarding degree of autonomy, Connie received an X under self-efficacy because she felt in control of her school environment, which allowed her the capability to produce efficacious actions such as running track. She received an X under degree of autonomy regarding dress as well because she discussed the feeling of being in control when being allowed to dress herself as a child. This new level of autonomy made her feel that she “was grown.” Also under context of action, Connie got an X under already-established efficacy for both self-efficacy and academics. Connie demonstrated that she had a certain level of self-efficacy regarding her skills as a runner and in mathematics. She reported that she is an excellent runner, but her mathematics skills are lacking.

Under context of action, Connie received an X under resources in achieving outcomes for all three concepts: self-efficacy, dress, and academics. She has a major support system in her parents. As a result of living with both parents, Connie felt she had an advantage over others in her school because many of them were growing up in single-parent homes or with other family members besides their parents. The support received from both parents allotted her a higher level of self-efficacy compared to the other cases. Her belief in her abilities to make it to the 2012 Olympics is an indicator of the high
standards she has set for herself. Connie also had the financial resources of her parents and an after-school job, therefore access to the disposable income, fashionable clothing, and other material goods that the other two cases did not.

With regards to the meaning of action link, Connie received an X under the subjective dimension for academics. She is very active in school and contributed her success to hard work and ingenuity. Connie received an X under the objective dimension for the meaning of action link regarding dress. She discussed the fact that others are often envious of her because of her way of dress.

Last, the intended and unintended consequences of action link both are indicated by an X under dress because Connie imparted two scenarios that resulted in different consequences related to her way of dress. The intended consequence of action was in regard to Connie’s wardrobe after her son was born. She wanted to appear more sophisticated and mature and therefore began to dress more stylishly. Unintentionally, because of her stylish way of dress, Connie discussed being labeled “stuck-up” and “spoiled” by teachers and peers at her school. Along with her more mature dress also came her more mature behavior. Connie received an X under the intended consequences of action regarding her self-efficacy because others saw that she had grown up after having her son and therefore she continued to act as such.

**Explanation of Table 5: Danielle.** In the column labeled context of action regarding degree of autonomy, Danielle received an X under dress. Her childhood experiences allowed selection of her own clothes, making her feel “big”—meaning that she felt in control of her wardrobe. This enhanced her self-efficacy regarding her way of
dress. Regarding academics, Danielle received an X under already-established efficacy regarding self-efficacy and academics. Danielle discussed her troubles with mathematics and her qualms about handling constructive criticism. She reported that because she excels in writing and is not good enough at mathematics, she cannot become a doctor, but instead can set her sights on becoming a writer. It was suggested to Danielle that as a writer, she may have to learn how to deal effectively with constructive criticism, which may allow her to develop a higher level of self-efficacy. Danielle agreed, but shared how she sometimes cries privately when receiving less than positive feedback about her work.

Under resources in the context of action, Danielle also received an X for self-efficacy, dress, and academics. As related to her way of dress, she admitted that she dresses a certain way because she does not have the financial resources to obtain the most stylish clothing. Danielle worked a part-time job, but used much of that money to help her mother with household expenses. She disclosed that because her mom is a single parent raising three children and two grandchildren who live with her, she is very busy with work and therefore has no time to be academically supportive of Danielle. The data analysis suggested that Danielle reacted maturely about the fact that she must support herself and reported that she harbors no ill feelings toward her mother and that her mother is her “super woman.”

Next, Danielle received Xs under the meaning of action link for both the subjective and objective dimensions. In the objective dimension, she reported that many times, society views African American inner-city girls in a negative light and argued that “we have to prove them wrong.” Danielle was very concerned with how she is perceived
by others and tries diligently to have a “classy” image. Her renewed faith in God influenced her actions. Danielle also received an X in the dress concept under the meaning of action—objective dimension. She talked about how teachers view students but did not know if teachers form opinions about students from their way of dress or the student’s personality. Danielle remembered that teachers claim that all students “earn their grades” and are not given grades solely based on teachers’ perceptions of students. Regarding academics, Danielle received an X under the subjective and the objective dimensions. Through her spiritual faith (subjective dimension) Danielle has provided herself with support that allowed her to obtain better grades and aspirations for her life. It was the negative view of others (objective dimension) that started her metamorphosis.

The final X that Danielle received under the unintended consequence of action link displays her need for attention, which produced the wrong types of attention she was seeking. Regarding the intended consequences on action link, she talked about her way of dress not being flashy, but comfortable. Danielle said that she used to dress more provocatively because she was seeking attention. Now that she is more committed in her faith, she dresses purposefully to detract the attention that she used to get. As a result her teachers and peers treat her with more respect than they used to.

**Explanation of Table 5: Tanya.** Tanya was the only individual for whom constraint on autonomy was indicated. Her first X was under the context of action link: degree of autonomy on self-efficacy. She stated that she was being forced by her parents to be someone she is not. Her goal is to make her mother happy, therefore she sacrifices who she is to appease her mother. As a result of this behavior, Tanya received an X
under the context of action link: already-established efficacy. The lack of control she feels over her life has caused her to have lower self-efficacy levels regarding her relationship with her family. Tanya professed that her parents neglect her and that in order for her to obtain her parents’ attention she alters who she really is. She also received an X under self-efficacy for academics. Tanya has an already established sense of self-efficacy regarding her capability to do well in school despite the familial deficit support.

Under the context of action, resources to achieve certain outcomes link, Tanya received an X under academics. She discussed the fact that some of the people in her family support her goals but others tell her she is not going to be successful, and it is those negative views that drive her. An X under the objective dimension under academics comes from family members telling her that she will not be successful in life. Tanya used the negativity she observed in her family and in her community as a catapult for her determination to do something different with her life. She admitted that sometimes she “wants to give up” but then she would be “proving them right.” Her main goal is to show others like her that success is possible.

Next, Tanya received an X under the meaning of action link; subjective dimension, under self-efficacy. She attributes much of her academic success to her will and self-determination. Also within the meaning of action link Tanya got an X under the subjective and objective dimension regarding dress because she believed that clothes do not make her feel more important and that she controls her destiny, not her clothes. She talked about dressing to be comfortable and to ensure that no one will be tempted to look
at her as being provocative. She told the story with pride about the young man at her school who told her that she could be “more sexy if she didn’t dress so manly.” Tanya proudly rebuked the boy and asserted that she refused to change her wardrobe to make him happy.

Last, Tanya’s intended consequences of action matched with the concepts of dress and academics. Again, she discussed intentionally dressing so that she will be “taken seriously.” This young feminist believes women should be respected and on an equal plane with men; as a result she dresses to demonstrate this. Under the academics concept, Tanya’s intended consequences of action failed her. She did very well at school so that she could make her parents proud of her, but instead she felt neglected and unloved. She admitted that her brothers do not do well in school and they are the ones that receive the most attention from her father. She said that her dad was never interested in her emotionally. All he ever did was take care of her financially but would never spend any time with her.

**Summary of Cross-Case Analysis**

The case-study data were instrumental in answering Research Questions 1 and 2. Question 3 was answered sufficiently during the focus-group portion of the research, whereas Questions 1 and 2 required more comprehensive conversations to understand the participants’ self-efficacy, way of dress, academic aspirations, and how they perceived others viewed them.

Connie’s, Danielle’s, and Tanya’s future goals were discussed and compared during the cross-case analysis. Data analysis revealed that all of the cases showed high
levels of self-efficacy. Dress was an important concept to all of the participants; however it was most important to Connie, who rated clothing a 10 in her life. During all three cases it was agreed that appropriate ways of dressing are necessary for success in school, job interviews, and work. Through dialogue it was discovered that certain ways of dress gave Connie and Danielle a boost in their efficacy, which in turn related to their thoughts and beliefs about their capabilities.

All three participants felt that society’s negative view of inner-city, African American girls could be altered by how they dressed and behaved in public. All three talked about “upholding a standard” and being “classy” and “sophisticated” so others might take them more seriously. Tanya stressed the importance of being treated equal to men. Finally, all three believed in the self-fulfilling prophecy that if one believes they can achieve something, it will come to fruition.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study revealed data identifying the self-efficacy levels of inner-city, African American adolescent females. The relationship between their self-efficacy levels, way of dress, academic achievement, and involvement in the Upward Bound program was examined, as well as the perceptions of others’ thoughts about the participants as a result of their way of dress. A triangulation of resources including a Dress, Self-Efficacy, and Academic Achievement questionnaire, focus groups, and multiple-case studies were used for the purpose of answering the three research questions. Seven participants filled out the questionnaire and were involved in the focus group portion. Of those seven, three were chosen for the multiple-case study. Data analysis revealed that dress often dictates the level of self-efficacy for academic achievement and future goals. It was reported among all participants that dress was related to society’s thoughts about inner-city, African American adolescent girls. The findings below were analyzed from the perspective of the cultural knowledge and lived experiences of the researcher as she interprets the data results for the three multiple-case study participants.

Conclusions

Research Question 1

How do inner-city, African American adolescent females obtain their level of self-efficacy? To what extent, if at all, does their self-efficacy level relate to their way of dress, academic achievement, and future goals?
Finding 1. The multiple-case study participants acquired self-efficacy in various ways (i.e., familial support and religious beliefs). Connie spoke about the tremendous support she gets from her parents. As a result, Connie demonstrated what seemed like the highest level of self-efficacy among the three participants. She set the highest standards for herself and she was also the participant who was involved in afterschool activities (i.e., track and the high school television network) that she thought would catapult her into her career of choice: that of professional athlete and sports broadcaster.

Danielle shared much about her newfound faith. She disclosed that her faith in God dramatically increased her level of self-efficacy. Danielle’s self-efficacy regarding her way of dress increased; and therefore, she no longer felt the need to dress provocatively in order to obtain attention. Danielle’s focus on faith also increased her self-efficacy regarding school. She felt more capable of doing well in school and spoke about believing that she can do something productive with her life, although in the past she did not think she would. As a result of Danielle’s renewed faith, her self-efficacy level regarding going to college was enhanced.

Tanya’s lack of support at home appears to have heightened her self-efficacy. Her goal is to do better than what she witnessed while growing up—family members and friends being uneducated and not taking advantage of what life has to offer. Tanya said that seeing these people in her life makes her want to push harder so that she does not “end up like them,” or find herself in the same poverty-stricken situation.

These findings confirm and enhance the literature regarding support systems and self-efficacy (Wilkum et al., 2008). Knowing the manner in which inner-city, African
American girls gain their support allows for a broader understanding of this culture and gives new knowledge that can be used to help increase student success. As seen in the data, it is important to note that all inner-city, African American girls do not gain access to support (Fordham, 1996; Herbert & Beardsley, 2001; Howard, 2003; Nieto, 2003; Wilson, 1996). Few have the resiliency that Tanya did and remain inspired no matter the circumstances.

**Finding 2.** All three multiple-case study participants demonstrated a high level of academic self-efficacy. Regarding the Dress, Self-Efficacy, and Academic Achievement (DSA) questionnaire, all participants agreed that they possessed the capabilities to achieve their future goals. In addition, all participants reported that they intend to go to college or trade school and believed that they were good students because they were organized and tried to take good notes while in school. The findings show that the participants felt intelligent, depending on the day and the particular subject matter; however, two participants reported struggling with mathematics and one with science. The participants overall felt that their academic abilities would help them reach their goals.

Specifically, the individual interview revealed that the three participants were working toward their goals. The participants were realistic in their endeavors because they aimed for goals that reflected certain talents or skills that they felt they possessed. They were certain that they wanted to pursue college after high school graduation and reported that they excelled in the subject matter that would provide them access to college. Going to college remains an anomaly for African Americans since only 17%
actually go on to complete a four year degree, according to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (2007). The fact that all three multiple-case-study participants plan to go to college is an indication toward educational growth for inner-city.

**Finding 3.** Way of dress related to two of the three participants’ self-perceived efficacy and capabilities. Research has been done in regard to self-efficacy as it relates to academic achievement (M. Hughes & Demo, 1989; Rosenberg et al., 1989; Rosenberg et al., 1995; Ross & Broh, 2000) and dress as it relates to academic achievement (Behling, 1995; Behling & Williams, 1991; Daters, 1990; Holloman et al., 1996), but the current research has uncovered a relationship between all three concepts: dress, self-efficacy, and academic achievement. Two of the participants felt that certain clothes made them feel important. Participants reported that when they first began choosing their own clothes as children, they all remember feeling more mature and more in control of their lives. This action increased their self-efficacy regarding their way of dress. The participants believed that the way they dressed was reflected in their personality. However, all participants said that their way of dress does not reflect their academic ability, though they talked about the need to be comfortable in their clothes. All three cases agreed that comfortable clothes—those that are not tight and not revealing—enhanced their school concentration and detracted from negative/unwanted attention. The multiple-case-study research showed that the participants believed that being dressed professionally increases their chances of obtaining and keeping a job. They also discussed that dressing “professionally” causes people to respect them and take them seriously.
Finding 4. Racism and sexism related to two participants’ self-efficacy levels.

Racism and sexism were still prevalent in the lives of these adolescents; this stratificational situation was unexpected for this age group of individuals. From these findings, it could be argued that the laws in place to prohibit discrimination based on race and gender demographics have done little to make these participants feel that change has come or is upon them. Forty-five plus years after the Civil Rights Act was passed, the current study’s inner-city, African American participants continue to feel the effects of slavery, capitalism, and sexism.

According to Danielle and some of the other participants, “racism is not over.” During the focus-group discussion they spoke of their school as having predominately African American students and being located in an inner-city area; as a result Rockport High School (pseudonym) is classified as a “bad school.” All of the participants believed that they would have to work harder than others because they are African American females. One participant stated that she was sometimes leery of putting Rockport High School on her resume for fear of not getting a job. Danielle also spoke about being discriminated against while at work when some White people did not believe she had the capability to do her job because she was African American.

Tanya reported aspirations of working in the accounting field, which is still a male-dominated field. She admitted to being nervous about getting into this profession for this reason. She reported that she may have to work hard in order to be “taken seriously” and regarded equally with men. Being a female also meant that the way they dress needed to be taken into consideration. Tanya spoke about the need to dress
appropriately so that people would talk directly to her rather than “looking at her body parts.”

**Research Question 2**

To what extent, if at all, do inner-city, African American adolescent females think that their way of dress relates to the way that peers, community, society, and their teachers perceive them?

**Finding 1.** The multiple-case study participants reported receiving positive comments from peers as well as less positive comments from peers perceived to be related to the participants’ way of dress.

When filling out the DSA questionnaire, all three participants were neutral about whether or not their clothing helped them fit in with their peers. These findings suggest that with this population of adolescent females, fitting in with peers was not a priority. However, the participants talked about obtaining compliments from female peers regarding how they dress. One participant also discussed supposed jealous female peers who called the participant “stuck-up” or told her that her outfit was not cute and then a few days later copied that particular style. Also during the focus group the two of the three participants talked about male peers and how they spoke negatively regardless of what the participant was wearing. In Danielle’s case, she reported that she used to dress provocatively and therefore received unwanted sexual advances from her male peers. Tanya on the other hand did not dress provocatively and was told by a male peer that she “could be more sexy if she did not dress so manly.”
Finding 2. The multiple-case study participants reported that their community and society as a whole judged them because they were African American girls and expected them to dress provocatively, as seen in the media.

Media plays a key role in guiding adolescents’ cognition of dress (LaPoint et al., 2003), and “media influences increase with [adolescent’s] age” (MacGillivray & Wilson, 1997, p. 44). Some participants thought that the community and society did not find their way of dress to be problematic, whereas others thought that society was critical and judgmental. The participants talked about how society felt that inner-city, African American girls were often scantily clad like “video girls” and that inner-city, African American boys dressed in baggy clothes and hoodies and looked like “no good hood boys.” As a result of the society’s misjudgments of these populations, the participants argued it is important to uphold a “classy” and “professional” standard.

Regarding their familial community, the participants felt that their parents approved of their way of dress in most situations. If a participant occasionally wore a pair of tight jeans, the family questioned it. Connie said that her dad would ask her if she had looser fitting jeans and Tanya said that her grandmother referred negatively to the body conscious dress for today’s adolescent females.

Finding 3. Two of the three participants reported that teachers at times look at students negatively because of their way of dress. Behling and Williams (1991) and Behling (1995) found that the types of clothing a student wore influenced teachers’ expectations of a student’s academic abilities. The current research study revealed that the participants seemed to think that teachers sometimes misjudge students because of
their way of dress. They reported that teachers often think that girls and boys who dress “inappropriately” are not in school to learn. Danielle’s case study analysis revealed that she used to dress “inappropriately” and she believed that her teachers felt she was “not focused.” However, Danielle and Tanya reported that teachers claimed that the students “earned their grades” and that their grades were not based on teachers’ opinions of the types of clothing students wear. The researcher must question whether the participants believe this.

Inner-city, African American girls continue to be labeled by society based on media interpretations. This population of girls seems to be displaced in society and constantly up for debate regarding who they should or could be. As the data has shown, inner-city, African American girls get ostracized for wearing provocative dress and ostracized for wearing conservative dress, therefore finding balance in way of dress constantly remains a battle for this population of girls. Behling (1995) found that in an academic realm, “professional” dress results in African American students appearing to be more academically focused, thus continuing this form of dress seems to be the most beneficial for the educational well-being of these girls. As the lowest on the totem pole of the human race (Wisniewski, 2005), African American girls need CRT philosophy to help society understand that dress is a means of cultural expression and being chastised for way of dress does not allow ease in this population of girls to become or remain confident within themselves.
Research Question 3

To what extent, if at all, does being a member in the Upward Bound Program relate to the participants’ self-efficacy level, way of dress, current academics, and future goals?

Finding 1. Two of the three multiple-case study participants felt that being involved in UB increased their level of self-efficacy regarding going to college.

It was discovered during the focus-group conversation that all of the participants “loved” UB and what the program offered them. Two participants talked about how involvement in UB improved their chances for a better high school education and for getting into college. Their self-efficacy levels regarding going to college were heightened because of UB. Also as a result of the UB program, the participants felt they have the skills needed to fill out college applications as well as the financial support to submit those applications (UB pays for college-application fees). The participants talked about the network of UB support systems such as scholarship opportunities, help with filling out college-admittance paperwork, and tutoring services offered during the College Club meetings twice a week.

This finding may be seen as particularly important because it helps to strengthen the research done regarding UB postsecondary enrollment rates (U.S. Department of Education, 2008b). Upward Bound reported that approximately 79% of their female participants enroll in college. The current findings connect to this in a unique way because all three multiple-case study participants discussed going to college; however two (approximately 70%) admitted that their decision was based partially from their
participation in UB. This demonstrates the continued need for programs such as Upward Bound in order to resume the educational growth in inner-city, African American girls.

Finding 2. One participant appeared to believe that UB did not relate to her future academic career. Connie was the only person who talked about how her ability to go to college was not affected by her participation in the UB program. Specifically, she reported that UB was helpful to her by offering tutoring during the College Club meetings. She indicated that she had the capability to attain her goals with or without the assistance of the UB program. Because Connie was the newest member, she may not have possessed the same level of loyalty to the program as the other participants. Most participants became involved with UB during the summer before their freshman year of high school, and therefore by the time they graduate from high school they would have had at least four years of involvement that could be included on their academic résumés. Connie had been involved with UB since her sophomore year of high school. This participant’s level of self-confidence and boastfulness led the researcher to understand that Connie is very subjective in her thoughts about support systems. She praises her parents for raising her “right” and all other credence went to Connie herself.

Finding 3. Two of the three multiple-case study participants felt that being involved in UB did not influence their way of dress. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier in the manuscript, Danielle was a member of the UB Work Study program that was directed by the researcher in 2007. Danielle reported that after her participation in the Work Study program, she had an entirely different outlook on the appropriate way to dress. Danielle stated during the focus group that she would have worn a t-shirt and jeans
to a job interview, but now she knew that certain dress was unsuitable in certain situations, therefore she knew better to wear more professional clothes in professional situations. Danielle declared that when she had a job interview, she dressed in slacks and a nice blouse, and she was awarded the job.

**Limitations**

The limitations that emerged from the data collection and data analysis are discussed here. According to Rudestam and Newton (2001), limitations are those aspects of the study over which the researcher has no control but must still consider. The first limitation regards the fact that using an under-aged population warrants extra precautions and more strict regulations on privacy and informed consent. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the study setting was originally planned to be the area public library. It was within walking distance of the school and the hours of operation were convenient. However, the library could not ensure that the privacy of the participants would not be compromised by outside patrons; therefore, gaining permission from the school district to use the school facility was required. Unfortunately, the school was only available on certain days and during certain hours. In order to stay within school parameters, interviews were sometimes scheduled back to back following dismissal, which caused the students to leave the school building late and walk home in the dark. In addition, it was important to be continually aware of the time in order to get the participants out of the school building in a timely manner.

A second limitation was the level of participation in the focus groups. Eleven students signed up to take part in the focus groups, however only seven participated.
This resulted in five participants instead of six in Focus Group 1, and two participants instead of five in Focus Group 2. The study could have benefited from having the views and opinions of more students. Thus, evaluating research for generalizability is not the main thrust of qualitative studies; looking for patterns in the data is (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). A larger sample would have allowed for more definite topics or themes to have emerged.

Consideration must be given to the socioeconomic status question on the DSA questionnaire. The question stated: “In regards to finances, I consider myself and my family (Please circle one): Poor; Not that poor; Well-off; or Rich.” It was decided that giving actual income brackets may not have been helpful to some participants because many may be unaware of the exact income of their parent(s)/guardian. While in the analyzing process, it was discovered that the wording of the responses did not gain results that were deemed totally accurate. For example, Danielle reported not having any money for clothes but she considered her family’s socioeconomic status to be “well-off.” A suggestion to correct this would be to give the response of “lower class, lower-middle class, middle class, upper-middle class and upper class.”

Member checking was performed in order to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. A letter was sent to the three participants involved in the multiple case study explaining that their input was important. Along with the letter, copies of the results and findings were provided in order to get feedback from the participants; nonetheless, no comments were received. It was assumed that they did not respond because the participants felt that the results were accurate. To ensure that this assumption is correct, a
follow-up conversation with each participant may have confirmed that the results or interpretations were correct.

The relationship between the researcher and Danielle must be discussed as a possible limitation because of the probability of generating biased data and/or non-reliable data. About a year and a half before the research study was conducted, Danielle attended a workshop directed by the researcher, which included approximately 20 other students. The students (Danielle being one of those) and the researcher had a total of four to five encounters during the workshop and had no further contact until the study recruitment meetings. Of the three participants chosen for the multiple-case study, Danielle appeared to have opened up the most, which is assumed to be the result of her outgoing personality and desire for attention, not only her familiarity with the researcher. Danielle was selected for the multiple-case study not as a result of her relationship with the researcher. There was another study participant, Shana, who also participated in the workshop, but was not included in the multiple-case study segment. Thus, Danielle was selected as one of the participants for the multiple-case study based on the same stipulations as all the other participants: (a) showed great interest in the study, (b) showed ease in communicating with the researcher, and (c) possessed a unique perspective in answering the research questions.

Last, this study was a qualitative naturalistic inquiry and employed a small purposeful sample, thus, the research findings cannot be generalized to a mass population. However, the findings from this study can be used by researchers, teachers, and administrators to better understand what motivates and might drive some inner-city,
African American high school girls. The findings can also indicate where further research is warranted, including the determination of a larger research sample.

**Implications**

The main goal of the current study was to evaluate the relationship between the concepts of dress, education, and self-efficacy. Through focus group and a multiple case-study methodology, data were collected and results determined from a series of coding techniques. All suggestions for practice and future research come from the foundation of findings from the study.

**Implications for Practice**

Regarding the practice of educating inner-city, African American high school girls, this study reveals that support systems are heavily related to academic self-efficacy. Schools could use this data as a means to help obtain access to a support system for each of the students through a family member, teacher, counselor, administrator, or academic program. Upward Bound was a means of a support system for many participants and had a positive influence on the self-efficacy of the participants regarding going to college. Referring more students to UB and other college-prepatory programs may well be a critical key to demonstrating to inner-city, African American females that college is an attainable, realistic goal.

Support and resources are two elements which foster efficacious actions (Bandura, 1977; Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983). A mentor could provide a means of support and resources to the study participants. It appeared that one participant in particular, Tanya, would benefit from that type of a relationship in her life. Self-fulfillment
prophecy (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968) is relevant here because a mentor can instill that sense of high expectations within inner-city, African American females that appears to be essential in order to succeed.

Issues of racism and sexism formed the next implication for practice in the school milieu. Researchers (Al-Fadhli & Singh, 2006; Diamond et al., 2004; J. N. Hughes et al., 2005) confirmed that the three main components that influence teacher expectations are race, socioeconomic status, and gender. Understanding and confirming that these two forms of discrimination are still a concern for some inner-city, African American girls, school administrators must do all they can to ensure that students will not be subjected to this type of inequality. Bakari (2003) suggested that Caucasian teachers shift their attitudes and behaviors and be willing to include culture as a tool to reach African American students. Some Caucasian teachers do not understand the culture of the child and non-verbal cues (from the teacher and student) often get misrepresented, causing tension between the student and the teacher. Teachers must educate inner-city, African American females from a critical pedagogy point of view, with educational freedom and empowerment at the center of all curricula (Greene, 2003).

A last implication for school practices comes from the results that some participants felt that certain ways of dressing actually increased their self-efficacy levels. It was suggested that schools not requiring a dress code or uniform offer workshops so students can learn what is appropriate dress for school and how professional dress can be beneficial to the students’ overall outlook on their capabilities. The researcher directed a *Dress and Etiquette* workshop for UB students which guided them through the
appropriate ways to dress for school, formal events, and professional situations. Understanding that there is a right way to dress and behave during certain events appears to give youth a sense of self-efficacy when placed in these situations.

**Implications for Future Research**

According to Lunenburg and Irby (2007), when one is writing implications for future research, they should deliberate on a few key elements: if additional variables or concepts can be added to the study; how the methods can be improved for the study; and if there are questions that still are not answered or that need further explanation. It is important to recommend implications based on the results and findings from the study and not only from the author’s opinion (Lunenburg & Irby, 2007).

Regarding the practice of researching inner-city, African American high school girls, the first recommendation comes from a concept that emerged from the data: support systems. Taking the time to find out more about support systems may be very important as related to success for inner-city, African American high school girls. As seen in the study results, many times the participants lacked the proper support to ensure their success in the future, although some do get the support they need from family, friends, or teachers. It would be intriguing to find out how these support systems related to their self-efficacy, which, as we saw in the research, related to their educational endeavors. One could research the differences between the participants who are supported and those who are not, and explore whether their perceptions about their capabilities are based solely on the type of support systems they have, or if there are other variables at play. With support being a major variable it would have been valuable to discover if the three
different living situations represented in this research (two participants living with both parents, three participants living with their mother, and two participants living with a grandmother) related to dress, self-efficacy, academic achievement, and future goals.

In order to conduct future research regarding support systems, it is recommended that focus groups be used more extensively. This study demonstrated that for inner-city, African American adolescent females, focus groups can be a good way to connect and get them talking. These conversations could be an effective way to understand emotions about their support system or lack thereof, and how the inner-city, African American girls feel these support systems relate to their academic achievement.

Another suggestion for future study is to do a longitudinal version of the current multiple-case study in order to follow the three participants to find out if they actually succeeded at accomplishing their goals. Following up with the two participants who are seniors in high school now a year later would allow a researcher to see if they attained admission to their respective schools of choice and if they are in the majors that they specified during their interviews.

However, if continuing with a multiple case study is not of interest to the future researcher, studying a case individually would be an effective way to extend the current data findings. Each case was unique in its own right and therefore more data results collected would contribute to a better understanding of inner-city, African American females. For example, the opportunity never presented itself to learn whether or not the mentor that Tanya was placed with was beneficial for her. More case study research would be necessary to discover if and how the relationship between Tanya and the
mentor developed. Further case study research would be valuable in learning how the support of an academic mentor affected Tanya’s educational well-being and motivated her decision making toward an accounting or criminal justice major.

Along with any research methodology chosen, the importance to continue studying inner-city, African American females from a Critical Race Theory perceptive is suggested. The data analysis showed that racial discrimination is prevalent in their lives. Philosophies geared toward gender theory and class discrimination are also still valid for this population of participants. Future researchers must be sensitive to these types of theories in order to have a complete understanding of inner-city, African American females. More research is needed in the areas of race, class, and gender, “both theoretically and practically” (Outlaw, 2005, p. 33). In extending the research on class, CRT comes from a Marxist foundation, thus discussing economic theory and socio-political issues were concepts that were too wide for the scope of the current research study. However, delving into this for future research as it relates to inner-city, African American girls’ chances at educational equality would be needed in order to fully understand the ties that capitalism plays in the educational advancement of this population.

Future research with an emphasis on hair and self-efficacy is suggested. The concept of dress was a strong influence on self-efficacy for some participants. It would be interesting to discover how other aspects of appearance such as hair styles might fit into the relationship with self-efficacy. Some of the participants discussed the fact that certain ways of dress made them feel more important and that “professional” attire would
help them gain respect and help them obtain and keep a job. My past research focused on the concept of hair, and found that people wearing certain types of hairstyles tend to have a high level of self-esteem and racial self-awareness. It would be intriguing to discover what, if any, type of relationship hair has to the self-efficacy of inner-city, African American high school girls.

Finally, the current research indicated that ongoing conversations are needed toward further insight to the lives of inner city, African American girls, with the hope of supplying them with tools to uplift and empower them. I end with the suggestion that along with CRT, another relevant epistemology which researchers must look toward is that of Black Feminist Theory. Works from the likes of Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks could assist in expanding our consciousness of the way in which inner city African American girls are tirelessly navigating through current and future academic achievement, goals, way of dress, and levels of self-efficacy as a result of their destined social stratification.

Concluding Remarks

The results indicated that inner-city, African American adolescent females do possess high levels of self-efficacy when support systems are involved. Thus, continuing to provide support systems for this population is critical to their academic advancement. Historically suffering from low levels of self-efficacy, African American girls often fall behind their White counterparts (AAUW Educational Foundation, 1992). This study showed that the participants are moving in the right direction in order to break this societal stratification. According to these participants, society’s interpretation of inner
-city, African American girls shows them dressed “inappropriately,” in tight low cut clothing; more focused on material goods, and less focused on education. With the media’s skewed depiction of African American girls, rarely are images shown of positive, academically focused young African American women. The current study involved inner-city girls that do not accept the media’s rules for what they should be wearing, and who are still college bound despite their oppressed surroundings.

Racism and sexism were discussed as dogma, which continues to haunt the participants. A Critical Race Theory perspective allowed for their resilience to be recognized as a step in the right direction for the African American culture. As Outlaw (2005) indicated, with the guidance of a critical stance, a hermeneutical understanding is necessary among those in the African American culture. A hermeneutical understanding would increase “self-transparency,” which means becoming more familiar with the lives of the participants and becoming well aware of one’s own standing in society, in the community, in the family, and with themselves.

In conducting this research study, I have increased my hermeneutical understanding of inner-city, African American high school girls. To my disappointment these participants felt as though they are still subjected to racism and sexism from our society. I naively assumed that the Generation Y population would not be faced with the same forms of oppression their parents, grandparents, and other ancestors fought against. In anticipation for a better world, I believed that by now this generation would be fully benefiting from the laws created as a result of the Civil Rights Movement and the Feminist Movement. Now I know that the African American female struggle is not over
and continued research is needed in order to inform others and help them understand this population of human beings so that one day the fight against racism, sexism, and capitalism are no longer necessary.
APPENDIX A

PARENTAL RECRUITING SCRIPT FOR

DRESS, SELF-EFFICACY, AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT STUDY
Appendix A

Parental Recruiting Script For

Dress, Self-Efficacy, and Academic Achievement Study

Hello to all of you today. My name is Tameka Ellington and I am a doctoral student here at Kent State University. I am also an Upward Bound alum from Cleveland at the Cuyahoga Community College campus. I was an employee of Upward Bound and I worked for the summer work study program and I already know a few of your daughters.

I am here today because I am interested in the educational and personal advancement of your daughters. I was once a young lady very similar to them. Being the first to possible go to college and coming from a home where money and other things were a detriment to me getting into college or going on to pursue other goals. Because I was once like them I had to figure out many things on my own in regards to my future and I’m sure your girls will be faced with a similar situation.

Your girls’ advancement in life is my major concern. I am interested in their perceptions of themselves as African American inner-city girls. I want to find out what they feel their academic capabilities are. How they feel about those things and if her way of dress relates to how she feels about herself and how she thinks others feel about her.

Your daughter would be invited to participant in a focus group that will be held at the [local] library. There will about 5-7 other girls in the group with your daughter. Because I know her time is precious and she may even have an after school job to get to, I will pay your daughter $20 cash to participate in the focus group. I would greatly love the blessing from all of you to have your daughters join the focus group. I am interested in girls that live in the city of [local area] and that attend Rockport High School and who are from the age of 14-18 years old. Please take one of my packets. I am in need of your signature on the consent letter in the package. A stamped address envelope has been supplied so that you can send the information back to me.

I am passing around an information sheet, please print your name and your daughter’s name and provide a number I where I may reach you. I appreciate your assistance with this.
Appendix B

Recruitment Flyer

This research project has been approved by Kent State University. All participants are partaking in this research voluntarily. The findings from this study in no way represent the philosophy and beliefs of the school district.
Appendix C

Consent Form for Dress and Self-Efficacy Study

CONSENT FORM FOR DRESS AND SELF-EFFICACY STUDY

As an African American woman and Upward Bound alum, I am interested in the academic and personal advancement of young women. Your daughter has been invited to participate in a study involving feeling about her self as a student, her style of dress, and how she feel others perceive her way of dress as well as her school capabilities. The study conducted will serve as my Doctoral studies research at Kent State University. The purpose of this study is to determine how African-Americans high school girls feel about their school capabilities, their way of dress and how they feel others perceive them. The end result of this study will hopefully provide literature that others can read to learn more about the personal and academic endeavors that high school girls must go through. Your daughter was chosen for this study because she is an African American girl, in high school, and between the ages of 14-18.

If she agrees to participate, I will meet with her for a focus group session involving her and 5-8 other participants. The focus group session will take approximately 60-90 minutes. There will be a $20.00 incentive given to her for the completion of this process. Before the focus group meeting, a short questionnaire will be given to her. I am interested in knowing how she feels about herself as a student, her style of dress and how she feels others perceive her way of dress as well as school capabilities. If your daughter is chosen to participate in the second and third portion of the study, another $10.00 incentive will be given to her for the completion of these portions. During this time, I will be conducting an individual interview with your daughter that will take approximately 45 minutes.

The focus group and interview will be voice recorded on a tape cassette. You may choose to have your daughter’s voice recorded or not, this will not eliminate her from the study. All cassette tapes will be destroyed after the study is complete.

The third portion of the study will be another individual meeting with your daughter and I to help her develop a strategy for her current and future academic success. During that time we will be researching school options, career options and ways to go about reaching the goal your daughter has for the remainder of her high school career and her options for after her high school career.

Your daughter’s privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. All information she provides in the questionnaire, focus group and interview will remain completely confidential. Her name will not be associated with any comments she makes. The questionnaire, responses in during the focus group, answers to the interview questions and her audio taped...
responses will be recorded using an identification number instead of her name. Also all of her information will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the office of Dr. Teresa Rishel, my academic advisor. Any saved word processed information will be securely kept on a computer that will be accessed by my password only. Lastly, all of her information will be shredded and destroyed after the study is complete.

All portions of this study are completely voluntary. While I hope your daughter will complete the whole study, she may choose to omit questions or end her participation at any time.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study please feel free to contact me, Tameka Ellington, at (330) 475-8305, email: tferguso@kent.edu. My advisor, Dr. Teresa Rishel will also be available to answer any questions you have about this study or in regards to your daughter’s rights. Contact Dr. Rishel at (330) 672-2580 or email: trishel@kent.edu. The project has been approved by Kent State University. If you have questions about Kent State University's rules for research, please call Dr. John West, Vice President of Research, Division of Research and Graduate Studies (330) 672-2704.

I will provide you and your daughter with a signed copy of this form at your request.

Your signature below indicates you have read all parts of this consent and you have voluntarily decided to allow your daughter to participate in this study. I greatly appreciate your interest and participation.

_______________________________        _______________________
Signature of the Participant’s Parent   Date

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Participant – Would you like to be involved in this study?

Yes  or  No

Your signature below indicates you have read all parts of this consent and you have voluntarily decided to participate in this study. I greatly appreciate your interest and participation.

______________________________  ________________________
Signature of the Participant   Date

_______________________________  ________________________
Signature of the Researcher   Date

This research project has been approved by Kent State University. All participants are partaking in this research voluntarily. The findings from this study in no way represent the philosophy and beliefs of the school district.
CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO TAPING OF THE MEETINGS FOR THE STUDY OF DRESS AND SELF-EFFICACY

The focus group meeting and interview will be voice recorded on a tape cassette. You may choose to have your voice recorded or not, this will not eliminate you from the study. All cassette tapes will be destroyed after the study is complete.

Do you agree to allow having your daughter’s voice recorded on a cassette tape?

Yes or No

_______________________________        _______________________
Signature of the Participant’s Parent   Date

Do you agree to have your voice recorded on a cassette tape?

Yes or No

_______________________________        _______________________
Signature of the Participant   Date

I have been told that I have the right to hear the audiotapes before they are used. I have decided that I:

_____ want to hear the tapes   _____ do not want to hear the tapes

Sign now below if you do not want to hear the tapes. If you want to hear the tapes, you will be asked to sign after hearing them.

Tameka Ellington and other researchers approved by Kent State University may / may not use the tapes made of my child. The original tapes or copies may be used for:

_____ this research project   _____ teacher education   _____ presentation at professional meetings

_______________________________
Signature of the Participant’s Parent   Date

_______________________________        _______________________
Signature of the Participant    Date

This research project has been approved by Kent State University. All participants are partaking in this research voluntarily. The findings from this study in no way represent the philosophy and beliefs of the school district.
APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUP OUTLINE
Appendix D

Focus Group Outline

I. Put out food and arrange chairs in a circle @ 3:15pm

II. Students will come in, grab some snacks, and get their number @ 3:30pm

III. Explain to students how the meeting will go (questionnaire first, group discussion second, fill out the exit slip last) @ 3:45pm

IV. Questionnaire (Use an ink pen!!) @ 3:50-4:15pm

V. Icebreaker @ 4:20pm
   a. Tell me something funny or embarrassing about yourself that no one here knows. (Since now I am pregnant I burp a lot because of heart burn. I accidently burped in one of my student’s faces. Luckily I was chewing fruity gum because that’s all she smelled.)

VI. Ground Rules @ 4:30pm:
   a. Everyone has been given a number. In order to maintain everyone’s privacy we will only refer to each other by their number.
   b. The goal of the focus group is to hear everyone’s individual thoughts. You do not always have to agree about what is being said.
   c. The discussion that we have today will be evaluated by me and be used as part of my research on dress, the self and education.
   d. I am not here to give you my thoughts on the subject matter. I want to hear from you therefore I will speak only briefly at times and will moderate by helping to keep the focus group going.
   e. Everyone will get the opportunity to speak
   f. No one will interrupt someone else while they are speaking
   g. In order for me to keep track of who is saying what, we should do our best to speak one at a time.

VII. ***Turn on digital recorder!!!*** Discuss topic @ 4:35pm-5:30pm

VIII. Fill out exit slip (Use an ink pen!!) @ 5:30pm

IX. Thank them for coming and give out incentive @ 5:45pm  
   **Does everyone have someone to walk home with??**

X. Spend about 30 minutes jotting down information that comes to mind after the meeting is over @ 6:00pm

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APPENDIX E

DRESS, SELF-EFFICACY, AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT STUDY

QUESTIONNAIRE
Appendix E

Dress, Self-Efficacy, and Academic Achievement Study Questionnaire

Participant Identification # ___________________

**Dress, Self-Efficacy, and Academic Achievement Study**
***Inspired by the Bandura’s Children Self-Efficacy Scale (2006) and the Sontag and Lee Proximity of Clothing to Self Scale (2004)***

Answer the following questions as truthfully as possible by either filling in the blanks or circling the answer that describes you best. Your answers will be kept completely confidential.

1. I am (Please circle one)
   
   African American  Caucasian  Hispanic  Bi-racial  Other

2. I’m ___________ years old and in the (Please circle one)
   
   9th grade  10th grade  11th grade  12th grade

3. My grades in school are mostly (Please circle one)
   
   A’s  Bs  Cs  Ds  Fs

4. In regards to finances, I consider myself and my family (Please circle one)
   
   Poor  Not that poor  Well-off  Rich

5. I live with
   
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

6. My school life is great because
   
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

7. My school life sucks because
   
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
8. My favorite teacher is wonderful because

___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________

9. My least favorite teacher is horrible because

___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________

10. I get most of my school and learning support from

___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________

11. I get the least school and learning support from

___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________

12. How does your family feel about your future goals? What do they say to you about them?

___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________

13. I feel as though my way of dress is totally in style.

   Strongly agree     Agree     Neither agree nor disagree     Disagree     Strongly Disagree

14. My way of dress helps me feel self assured in school.

   Strongly agree     Agree     Neither agree nor disagree     Disagree     Strongly Disagree

15. My friends like the way I dress.

   Strongly agree     Agree     Neither agree nor disagree     Disagree     Strongly Disagree

16. The way I dress helps me fit in with my friends.

   Strongly agree     Agree     Neither agree nor disagree     Disagree     Strongly Disagree

17. I get a lot of attention at school because of how I dress.

   Strongly agree     Agree     Neither agree nor disagree     Disagree     Strongly Disagree
18. My teachers think negatively of me because of my way of dress.
   Strongly agree    Agree    Neither agree nor disagree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

19. My parents and family disapprove of my way of dress.
   Strongly agree    Agree    Neither agree nor disagree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

20. I like to look different than my peers.
   Strongly agree    Agree    Neither agree nor disagree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

21. Society as whole thinks that all girls who dress like me are headed for trouble.
   Strongly agree    Agree    Neither agree nor disagree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

22. I don’t care what my peers, teachers, family or society thinks about the way I dress.
   Strongly agree    Agree    Neither agree nor disagree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

23. I feel like I can do anything when I have my hair done and I have on my favorite outfit.
   Strongly agree    Agree    Neither agree nor disagree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

24. Certain clothes I wear make me feel important.
   Strongly agree    Agree    Neither agree nor disagree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

25. When I dress a certain way I feel like I have more control over my life.
   Strongly agree    Agree    Neither agree nor disagree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

26. When I dress a certain way I feel more confident to talk to others.
   Strongly agree    Agree    Neither agree nor disagree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

27. I feel like I do better in school when I have on an outfit I feel good in.
   Strongly agree    Agree    Neither agree nor disagree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

28. I have a hard time getting teachers to help me when I am stuck on school work.
   Strongly agree    Agree    Neither agree nor disagree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree
29. I always try to take good notes in class.
   Strongly agree    Agree    Neither agree nor disagree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

30. I am always organized in my school work.
   Strongly agree    Agree    Neither agree nor disagree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

31. I just can’t seem to grasp certain subjects.
   Strongly agree    Agree    Neither agree nor disagree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

32. When I see my report card I often feel bad about what I got.
   Strongly agree    Agree    Neither agree nor disagree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

33. I have horrible study habits.
   Strongly agree    Agree    Neither agree nor disagree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

34. I am great with balancing my time between schoolwork and other things I want to do.
   Strongly agree    Agree    Neither agree nor disagree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

35. I am certain about what I want to do with my life after school.
   Strongly agree    Agree    Neither agree nor disagree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

36. I am only capable of certain careers because of the background I come from.
   Strongly agree    Agree    Neither agree nor disagree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

37. My future does not look that great because I’m not good at school.
   Strongly agree    Agree    Neither agree nor disagree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

38. I have every intention of going to college or trade school.
   Strongly agree    Agree    Neither agree nor disagree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

This research project has been approved by Kent State University. All participants are partaking in this research voluntarily. The findings from this study in no way represent the philosophy and beliefs of the school district.
APPENDIX F

BANDURA’S CHILDREN’S SELF EFFICACY SCALE (2006)

FOR SELF-REGULATED LEARNING
Appendix F

Bandura’s Children’s Self Efficacy Scale (2006)

For Self-Regulated Learning

This questionnaire is designed to help us get a better understanding of the kinds of things that are difficult for students. Please rate how certain you are that you can do each of the things described below by writing the appropriate number. Your answers will be kept strictly confidential and will not be identified by name.

Rate your degree of confidence by recording a number from 0 to 100 using the scale given below.

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

Cannot do at all Moderately can do Highly certain can do

Finish my homework assignments by deadlines
Get myself to study when there are other interesting things to do
Always concentrate on school subjects during class
Take good notes during class instruction

Use the library to get information for class assignments
Plan my school work for the day
Organize my school work
Remember well information presented in class and textbooks
Arrange a place to study without distractions
Get myself to do school work
APPENDIX G

SONTAG AND LEE PROXIMITY OF CLOTHING TO SELF SCALE (2004)

DIMENSION 4 AND DIMENSION 5
Appendix G

Sontag and Lee Proximity of Clothing to Self Scale (2004)

Dimension 4 and Dimension 5

SONTAG AND LEE PROXIMITY OF CLOTHING TO SELF SCALE (2004)

Please rate your responses using the scale below. Your answers will remain completely confidential.

1=Never or almost never true of me, 2=Usually not true of me, 3=Sometimes true of me, 4=Often true of me, 5=Usually true of me, 6=Always or almost always true of me

DIMENSION 4: Clothing in Relation to Self-Esteem - Evaluative Process Dominant

The clothes I like to wear help me feel self-assured. _____
My self-confidence increases when I dress appropriately. _____
I try to buy clothing that makes me feel attractive. _____
When I wear clothes that make me feel good, I am better able to talk with others. _____
Dressing up makes me feel important. _____
Good quality clothes that look good on me make me feel competent. _____
The way I dress is important in giving me a sense of being in control of my life. _____
When I feel good about what I am wearing, then I have confidence in myself. _____

DIMENSION 5: Clothing in Relation to Self-Esteem - Affective Process Dominant

Certain clothes make me feel good about myself. _____
Taking time to dress up gives me a feeling of pride in how I look. _____
When I look good in what I wear, I feel content with myself. _____
When I look good in my clothes, I feel good about myself. _____
When I feel good about myself, I take care in getting dressed. _____
I feel good about myself when I have something new to wear. _____
I feel better about myself when I am well dressed. _____
APPENDIX H

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWING GUIDE

FOR DRESS, SELF-EFFICACY, AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT STUDY
Appendix H

Focus Group Interviewing Guide

For Dress, Self-Efficacy, and Academic Achievement Study

1. Think about your school environment. Do you feel safe and in control at school? Why or why not?

2. How smart do you feel you are? Does that change from day to day?

3. Does being a participant in Upward Bound (UB) change the way you feel about school and your future?

4. Do you think because of the influences from UB, you are convinced that you can do anything with your life?

5. Do you feel that your race or being from the inner-city plays a part in your academic achievement and future goals?

6. How do you feel your academic capabilities will help or hinder what you want to do in life?

7. How old were you when you started picking out your own clothes? Do you remember how that made you feel?

8. Does the way you dress show off your personality or hide it? Explain.

9. Does UB’s influence on your life change the way you dress in any way?

10. Do you feel that the way you dress reflects your academic ability? How/why?

11. Do you ever feel smarter when you wear certain clothing? If so, why?

12. Does your way of dress make you feel you are more capable of accomplishing things? How?

13. Does your way of dress help you maintain or enhance what you feel you can accomplish?

14. As African American ladies living in the inner-city, how do you feel your teachers and school officials view you?

15. What do you think your teachers say about the way you dress?

16. What do you think society as a whole says about the way you dress?

17. What do your parents and family say about the way you dress?

18. What do your peers say about the way you dress?
APPENDIX I

INTERVIEWING GUIDE #01

FOR DRESS, SELF-EFFICACY, AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT STUDY
APPENDIX I

Interviewing Guide #01

For Dress, Self-Efficacy, and Academic Achievement Study

1. How do you think you are expected to act, dress, and achieve as an African American girl?
   ___________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________

2. All of the ladies that I have spoken to including you are fairly confident in knowing what they want to do in life. What exactly do you want to do with your life?
   ___________________________________________________

   a. What are you doing now in order to move toward that goal?
      ___________________________________________________
      ___________________________________________________
      ___________________________________________________
      ___________________________________________________

   b. Do you foresee any obstacles that may interfere with you doing what you want in life?
      ___________________________________________________
      ___________________________________________________
      ___________________________________________________
      ___________________________________________________
3. You wrote on your questionnaire that you live with both your mom and your dad. Do you think that living with both your parents gives you a better sense of what you can do in your life?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

a. Has your mom and dad influenced your thoughts of what you feel your capabilities are?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

4. With you being a mom right now, how do you feel that will effect what you can/will do in life?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

5. You mentioned being called spoiled and stuck-up by teachers and/or peers. Does that have an effect on how you feel about yourself?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
6. On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being the most important), how important is clothing and the way you dress to you? Can you explain you your position on this?

___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________

7. During our last conversation you mentioned that certain clothing you wear such as a nice pair of slacks, heels and a business jacket, makes you feel smarter. You said that it makes you feel totally different. However on the questionnaire that you filled out you disagreed with the question that read “I do better in school when I wear certain clothing.” Can you clarify this for me?

___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________

8. Do you think that dress can make or break how well you do during an interview or while on the job? Why or why not?

___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
9. It has been said in some research studies that the way a student dresses affects teachers’ perceptions of a student regarding their character and school capabilities. Do you agree with this? Why or Why not?

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

10. There have also been research studies found that have said that the way in which you feel about your capabilities (what you think you can and can’t do) will actually affect what type of grades you will get in school and what you may do later in life. Do you agree with this? Why or why not?

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX J

INTERVIEWING GUIDE #05

FOR DRESS, SELF-EFFICACY, AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT STUDY
1. How do you think you are expected to act, dress, and achieve as an African American girl?

___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________

2. During the focus group conversation you mentioned that race and inner-city background may have an effect on your academic achievement and future goals. I believe you said that “racism is not over.” Can you elaborate on this?

___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________

3. All of the ladies that I have spoken to including you are fairly confident in knowing what they want to do in life. What exactly do you want to do with your life?

___________________________________________________

a. What are you doing now in order to move toward that goal?

___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
b. Do you foresee any obstacles that may interfere with you doing what you want in life?

______________________________________________
______________________________________________
______________________________________________
______________________________________________

4. You remind me so much of myself at your age because on the questionnaire you wrote that most of your school support comes from you and your teachers. And that your mom was the least supportive. Would you mind elaborating on that?

______________________________________________
______________________________________________
______________________________________________
______________________________________________

5. You had a faith based breakthrough a while ago that you discussed during our focus group meeting. What has strengthening your faith done for your life and what you feel you can accomplish?

______________________________________________
______________________________________________
______________________________________________
______________________________________________

6. On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being the most important), how important is clothing and the way you dress to you? Can you explain your position on this?

______________________________________________
______________________________________________
______________________________________________
7. Do you think that dress can make or break how well you do during an interview or while on the job? Why or why not?

___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________

8. It has been said in some research studies that the way a student dresses affects teachers’ perceptions of a student regarding their character and school capabilities. Do you agree with this? Why or Why not?

___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________

9. You mentioned during the focus group that dress can affect your academic capabilities. You now pride yourself on dressing for comfort and not for show while at school can you talk more about that?

___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
10. There have also been research studies found that have said that the way in which you feel about your capabilities (what you think you can and can’t do) will actually affect what type of grades you will get in school and what you may do later in life. Do you agree with this? Why or why not?
APPENDIX K

INTERVIEWING GUIDE #06

FOR DRESS, SELF-EFFICACY, AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT STUDY
Appendix K

Interviewing Guide #06

For Dress, Self-Efficacy, and Academic Achievement Study

1. How do you think you are expected to act, dress, and achieve as an African American young lady?
   _____________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________

2. You started a great conversation regarding a “double standard” in roles of men and women and what society thinks they can or should achieve. Can you comment more about this?
   _____________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________

3. All of the ladies that I have spoken to including you are fairly confident in knowing what they want to do in life. What exactly do you want to do with your life?
   _____________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________

   a. What are you doing now in order to move toward that goal?
      _____________________________________________________
      _____________________________________________________
      _____________________________________________________
      _____________________________________________________
      _____________________________________________________
b. Do you foresee any obstacles that may interfere with you doing what you want in life?

______________________________________________
______________________________________________
______________________________________________
______________________________________________

4. You mentioned that one of your main motivations for doing well in school is that you don’t want to end up like others who didn’t go to school. Can you tell me what does having that in mind do to what you feel your capabilities are?

______________________________________________
______________________________________________
______________________________________________
______________________________________________

5. On your answers from your questionnaire you wrote about people who were the least supportive, those being people who said you would not be successful. Can you elaborate on this?

______________________________________________
______________________________________________
______________________________________________
______________________________________________

6. On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being the most important), how important is clothing and the way you dress to you? Can you explain your position on this?

______________________________________________
______________________________________________
7. On your questionnaire you wrote that clothes do not make you feel important, but then during the focus group you said that you do better when you wear certain clothes. Can you clarify this for me?

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

8. Do you think that dress can make or break how well you do during an interview or while on the job? Why or why not?

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

9. It has been said in some research studies that the way a student dresses affects teachers’ perceptions of a student regarding their character and school capabilities. Do you agree with this? Why or Why not?

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
10. There have also been research studies found that have said that the way in which you feel about your capabilities (what you think you can and can’t do) will actually affect what type of grades you will get in school and what you may do later in life. Do you agree with this? Why or why not?
APPENDIX L

LETTER FOR MEMBER CHECK COMMENTS
Appendix L

Letter For Member Check Comments

May 14, 2009

Dear _______________

I have gotten the opportunity to look over the conversation that we had together. I have written up a synopsis of our talk and I would like to share that with you. This document is a rough draft; therefore grammar and spelling are not important. I am looking for any comments that you may have regarding how I represented you in the document and your comments that I used. If you want to share a word or two, please write legibly in the margin next to the paragraph that it pertains to. As you begin to read the synopsis, please note that I have changed your name to ensure your privacy.

Once you have finished writing your comments please stick the document into the small envelope with my address on it. You have until May 25th to get this back to me. If I don’t receive the document back from you, I will assume that you approved of the way everything was written and you have no comments to add.

I greatly appreciate your time and I want to thank you again for agreeing to talk with me. If you should ever need anything please don’t hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Tameka Ellington

330.475.8305

This research project has been approved by Kent State University. All participants are partaking in this research voluntarily. The findings from this study in no way represent the philosophy and beliefs of the school district.
APPENDIX M

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD LETTER OF APPROVAL
Appendix M

Institutional Review Board Letter Of Approval

September 22, 2008

Tameka Ellington
TLC

Re: # OB-642: “Dress and self-efficacy as they relate to the academic achievement and future goals of inner city, African American, high school girls”

Dear Ms. Ellington:

I am pleased to inform you that the Kent State University Institutional Review Board has reviewed and approved your application for Approval to Use Human Research Participants as Level II research. This was approved on September 22, 2008. Approval is effective for a twelve-month period, September 22, 2008 through September 21, 2009.

Federal regulations and Kent State University IRB policy require that research be reviewed at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk, but not less than once per year. The IRB has determined that this protocol requires an annual review and progress report. The IRB will forward an annual review reminder notice to you by email as a courtesy. Please note that it is the responsibility of the principal investigator to be aware of the study expiration date and submit the required materials. Please submit review materials (annual review form and copy of current consent form) one month prior to the expiration date.

HHS regulations and Kent State University Institutional Review Board guidelines require that any changes in research methodology, protocol design, or principal investigator have the prior approval of the IRB before implementation and continuation of the protocol. The IRB must also be informed of any adverse events associated with the study. The IRB further requests a final report at the conclusion of the study.

Kent State University has a Federal Wide Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRC): FWA Number: 00001879.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at 330-672-2704 or jfrederic2@kent.edu.

Sincerely,

[Signature]
Tonya Frederick, R.N., B.S.N.
Research Compliance Administrator

Cc: Dr. T. Riche

Division of Research and Graduate Studies
Office of Research Safety and Compliance
(330) 672-3206 Fax (330) 672-3698
P.O. Box 5190, Kent OH 44242-0190
APPENDIX N

AKRON PUBLIC SCHOOLS LETTER OF APPROVAL
Appendix N

Akron Public Schools Letter of Approval

October 17, 2008

Ms. Tamoka Ellington
577 Vineta Avenue
Akron, OH 44320

Dear Ms. Ellington:

Of those who responded, the Akron Public Schools' (APS) Research Proposal Review Committee has granted approval to conduct a research project entitled: "Dress and Self-Efficacy as they Affect the Academic Achievement and Future Goals of Inner City, African American High School Girls" at Buchtel High School. Approval is given with the following stipulations:

- Revision of the footnote of your questionnaire in two places (a) remove the name "Akron Public Schools", (b) revise the last sentence to read "The findings from this study in no way represent the philosophy and beliefs of the school district".
- Information obtained without any new or additional programming on the part of our Information Services Department.
- All state, federal and Akron Public School guidelines are to be followed.
- No identification of participants, school, the Akron Public School system, or other identifiable information revealed in any report or publication resulting from this research project.
- Upon completion of the project, a copy of the study/research results must be provided to the Department of Testing, Research and Evaluation, Akron Public Schools, Administration Bldg., Room 101, 70 N. Broadway, Akron, OH 44308 as well as to the principal at Buchtel High School.

Please present a copy of this letter of approval to the building principal as you begin your research.

If you need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me at 761-2817.

We appreciate your interest and involvement with the Akron Public Schools.

Sincerely,

nell Goggins, Ph.D., Director
Testing, Research and Evaluation

EG/pa

cc: Patricia Agble, Bernie Burchett, Connie Hathorn, Ellen McWilliams, Julia Mann, and Deborah Hochmans (Buchtel)
APPENDIX O

DRESS, SELF-EFFICACY, AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES
Appendix O

Dress, Self-Efficacy, and Academic Achievement Questionnaire Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>#1 (teen mom)</th>
<th>#4 (goes to U of A)</th>
<th>#5 (faith based)</th>
<th>#6 (conversationalist)</th>
<th>#8 (b. friends w/ #9)</th>
<th>#9 (very quiet)</th>
<th>#10 (very vocal)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age and grade</td>
<td>17; 12th grade</td>
<td>17; 12th grade</td>
<td>17; 12th grade</td>
<td>16; 11th grade</td>
<td>15; 10th grade</td>
<td>15; 10th grade</td>
<td>18; 12th grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic grades</td>
<td>Bs</td>
<td>Bs</td>
<td>Bs</td>
<td>As</td>
<td>As</td>
<td>As</td>
<td>Bs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>Well-off</td>
<td>Well-off</td>
<td>Well-off</td>
<td>Not that poor</td>
<td>Well-off</td>
<td>Not that poor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lives with</td>
<td>Mom, Dad &amp; son</td>
<td>Mom, Dad, sister &amp; brother</td>
<td>Mom, 2 younger brothers, sister &amp; her 2 kids</td>
<td>Mom &amp; 2 brothers</td>
<td>Grandmother &amp; younger sister</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Grandmother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great school life because ---</td>
<td>engaged in lots of activities (runs track)</td>
<td>I attend college while at high school and earn college credits</td>
<td>I am focused</td>
<td>my grades are up &amp; people here care</td>
<td>I have a 4.0 gpa</td>
<td>I get a good educ.</td>
<td>I get to have a free education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School sucks because ---</td>
<td>lots of homework</td>
<td>I’m class president, I get talked about because I’m not taking classes at my home school</td>
<td>sometimes I procrastinate</td>
<td>there are people who don’t care and try to interfere with my learning</td>
<td>it is hard to keep my grades up</td>
<td>teachers give a lot of homework</td>
<td>the children are too immature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorite Teacher is wonderful because --</td>
<td>helps me w/ my work</td>
<td>funny &amp; good grader</td>
<td>he cares &amp; is helpful</td>
<td>takes time w/ lessons</td>
<td>she inspires me</td>
<td>helps me learn</td>
<td>knows how to teach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Least Fav Teacher is horrible because --</td>
<td>gives out homework</td>
<td>can’t understand what he says</td>
<td>moves too fast &amp; doesn’t teach well</td>
<td>gets off topic &amp; we spend more time taking notes</td>
<td>gives out a lot of homework</td>
<td>they don’t pay attention to my question</td>
<td>yells at the students &amp; the main focus is behavioral problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most school support</td>
<td>my family</td>
<td>family, some friends &amp; boyfriend</td>
<td>myself &amp; teachers</td>
<td>I don’t want to end up like others who didn’t go to school; my family</td>
<td>my grandmother</td>
<td>family &amp; friends</td>
<td>myself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Least school support</td>
<td>friends</td>
<td>No one, everyone is there for me</td>
<td>my mom</td>
<td>Those who say I will never be successful</td>
<td>my enemies</td>
<td>No one</td>
<td>my family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does your family feel about your future goals</td>
<td>they support me &amp; they say never give up</td>
<td>they are happy - “you can achieve anything if your mind set to it”</td>
<td>they tell me to be realistic but still reach for the stars</td>
<td>they encourage my dreams and push me to work hard non-stop</td>
<td>they support me and say that I can do anything</td>
<td>they are happy</td>
<td>they really don’t care as long as I graduate from high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I dress in style</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dress &amp; self assured</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends like how I dress</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>NAD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td># 1 (teen mom)</td>
<td>#4 (goes to U of A)</td>
<td>#5 (faith based)</td>
<td>#6 (conversationalist)</td>
<td>#8 (b. friends w/ #9)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
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<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
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<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My dress helps me fit in with friends</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get attention by dress</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers think negative of dress</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family disapproves of dress</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to look diff than peers</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society-dress- headed for trouble</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t care what others say about my dress</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can do anything in certain clothes</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothes make me feel important</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dress a certain way, I have control</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do better in school wearing certain clothes</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard time getting teachers to help me</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I take good notes</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized with school work</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can’t grasp certain subjects</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting my report card I feel bad about grades</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have horrible study habits</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great with balancing school and other things</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>NAD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am certain about what I want to do in life</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>SA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My background prohibits my career choices</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>NAD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My future looks bad because I’m bad at school</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am going to college or trade school</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>SA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Focus Group Exiting Comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>#1 (teen mom)</th>
<th>#4 (goes to U of A)</th>
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<th>#9 (very quiet)</th>
<th>#10 (very vocal)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anything you didn’t get the opportunity to say</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO, they were wonderful topics</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO, I got all my feelings out</td>
<td>NO, we commented on everything I wanted to talk bout</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anything you didn’t feel comfortable saying</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO, the topics were well chosen</td>
<td>No, I was totally comfortable</td>
<td>No, I was totally comfortable</td>
<td>No, I was totally comfortable</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO, all the topics were relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you enjoy the focus group</td>
<td>YES, I was able to say what was on my mind without any argument</td>
<td>YES, it was fun and everyone had input.</td>
<td>YES, it was fun, relaxed and informational</td>
<td>YES, it was open and comfortable</td>
<td>YES, because I feel like I was heard</td>
<td>YES, it was fun</td>
<td>YES, it allowed me the chance to hear the insight of others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES
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