ACADEMICALLY SUCCESSFUL AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN: AN EXAMINATION OF MOTIVATION AND CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCES

A thesis submitted to the
Kent State University College
of Education, Health, and Human Services
in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts

By
Alicia M. Robinson
May 2016
Thesis written by

Alicia M. Robinson

B.S., Kent State University 2010

M.A., Kent State University, 2016

Approved by

___________________, Director, Master Thesis Committee
Rhonda Richardson

___________________, Member, Master Thesis Committee
Maureen Blankemeyer

___________________, Member, Master Thesis Committee
Kelly Cichy

Accepted by

___________________, Director, School of Lifespan Development
Mary Dellmann-Jenkins and Educational Sciences

___________________, Interim Dean, College of Education, Health
Mark A. Kretovics and Human Services
The purposes of this study are to examine levels of motivation in a sample of African American women who completed a four-year college degree and to identify the contextual factors that influenced their success. The intended outcome is to provide a foundation and framework for an academic mentoring program with a holistic approach that incorporates academic assistance as well as social and emotional support to help facilitate academic success in African American girls. A total of 121 African American women who at least had their Bachelor’s degree were recruited for this study. The participants completed several measures to retroactively assess their motivation levels and to assess the impact that various contextual components had on their academic success. The contextual components consisted of family influences, school influences and community influences on academic success. Results indicated that African American women who were academically successful had relatively high levels of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Findings also indicated that none of the demographic variables (family structure, parent education level, etc.) were related to intrinsic motivation, however childhood neighborhood was significantly related to extrinsic motivation. Overall, the group was more extrinsically motivated and showed that school and community had a bigger impact on their academic success than family.
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### CHAPTER

#### I. INTRODUCTION
- Statement of Purpose .................................................. 4
- Research Questions ......................................................... 4
- Operational Definitions .................................................... 4

#### II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE ................................................. 6
- The History of African American Women and Education ............... 6
- Factors Related to Academic Success in African American Women .......... 8
  - Motivation ...................................................................... 8
  - Contextual Factors ......................................................... 12
  - Family impact .................................................................. 13
  - School impact .................................................................. 16
  - Community impact ........................................................... 19
  - Societal factors ............................................................... 23

#### III. METHODOLOGY ............................................................ 25
- Sample .............................................................................. 25
- Measures .......................................................................... 26
- Procedures ........................................................................ 27
- Data Analysis ..................................................................... 28

#### IV. RESULTS ....................................................................... 29

#### V. DISCUSSION ................................................................. 38
- Study Limitations .............................................................. 45
- Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Research ............... 46
TABLE OF CONTENTS continued

APPENDICES .................................................................................................................................................. 47
APPENDIX A. THE CONTEXTUAL FACTOR SCALE .................................................................................. 48
APPENDIX B. THE ACADEMIC MOTIVATION SURVEY ........................................................................ 51
APPENDIX C. THE DEMOGRAPHIC ASSESSMENT .................................................................................. 54

REFERENCES .................................................................................................................................................. 57
List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mean Scores for Intrinsic Motivation and Extrinsic Motivation for Total Sample</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Analysis of Variance for Extrinsic Motivation by Childhood Neighborhood</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Sample means for Perceived Impact of Contextual Factors on Academic Success</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Impact of Family Members on Academic Achievement by Childhood Public Assistance</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Analysis of Variance for Father Impact by Degree Earned</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Analysis of Variance for Father Impact by childhood family structure</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Analysis of Variance for Father Impact by Father Education level</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Analysis of Variance for Guardian Impact by Guardian Education level</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Correlations between motivation and contextual influences</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

African American women have made tremendous strides over the past 50 years as the fastest growing population of entrepreneurs, largest number of workforce participants and largest segment of African American academic achievers. There are a large number of African American women such as Oprah Winfrey, Michelle Obama and Beyoncé Knowles who have graced TV screens and magazines, as role models not only to other African Americans but also to the whole world. It has only been 152 years since African Americans were freed from slavery, 51 years since racial discrimination was outlawed, and 7 years since the first African American was elected as the President of the United States. What has helped African Americans overcome oppression and tap into new found power that has elevated them into arenas they have never been in before? In 1597, Sir Francis Bacon said “knowledge is power.” The increased access to education that African Americans have been allotted over time has had a direct impact on the strides that African American women have been able to make in society (Bradshaw, 2008).

Recent studies conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics have documented that academic attainment is directly correlated with the unemployment rate. In 2013, the unemployment rate for young adults was 29.2% for those who did not complete high school, 17.5% for those whose highest education level was high school completion, 12.2% for those with some college education, and only 7% for those with a bachelor’s degree. The correlation between high unemployment rates and low levels of education has been a constant factor since the year 2000 and has a direct impact on the
upward mobility of African American women in this country (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). African American women have achieved a notable increase in college completion rates over the past 50 years, now representing 66% of all African Americans who completed Bachelor's degree, 71% of those completing a Master’s degree, and 65% of those completing a doctoral degree (Black Women in the United States, 2014). Although African American women comprise a large percentage of African American degree holders, they fall behind compared to the rest of the degree holders in America. In 2010, only 21.4% of all African American women had a college degree or higher, compared to 30% of Caucasian women. They also only account for 2% of college graduates in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. African American women are also at a disadvantage in regards to employment and wage equality. U.S. census data about work-life earnings indicate that in 2008 full-time workers who were Caucasian women made more than full-time workers who were African American women regardless of what degree was obtained (Julian & Kominski, 2011).

Despite the achievement gap between them and their majority counterparts, African American women are making tremendous strides in a variety of areas. Over the past 50 years, the high school graduation rate of African American women has increased 63%, which eliminated the gap with Asian women and narrowed the gap with Caucasian women to only 7% (Black Women in the US, 2014). African American women also have the highest labor force participation rate out of all other groups of women, and they are the fastest growing segment of the women-owned business market, with a start up rate six
times higher than the national average. In 2013, there were 1.1 million African American women-owned businesses, which accounted for 42% of businesses owned by women of color and 49% of all African American-owned businesses (Black Women in the US, 2014).

In light of the fact that African American women are making strides in college enrollment, college completion, labor force participation, entrepreneurship and career development, there is a need to explore the motivational and contextual factors related to the academic achievement of African American women. There is limited research on what contextual factors are motivating African American women to overcome psychological and societal obstacles such as classism, racism, and sexism in order to achieve academic success. Identifying these factors may provide a basis for developing programs to support the academic success of the next generation of African American girls. The Human Ecological Theory (Smith, 2012) suggests that family, school, community and societal factors all may pose barriers to or potentially facilitate the achievement of academic success. For these reasons, the impact of family, school and community on the academic success of African American women will be evaluated.
Statement of Purpose

The purposes of this study are to examine levels of motivation in a sample of African American women who completed a four-year college degree and to identify the contextual factors that influenced their success. The intended outcome is to provide a foundation and framework for an academic mentoring program with a holistic approach that incorporates academic assistance as well as social and emotional support to help facilitate academic success in African American girls.

Research Questions

- What levels of motivation are exhibited by African American women who have achieved academic success?
- What demographic factors are related to motivation in academically successful African American women?
- How influential were various family, school, and community members on the academic success of African American women?

Operational Definitions

**Intrinsic Motivation** - inherent tendency or desire of the individual to learn, explore, and seek challenges because of the inherent interest and enjoyment experienced by an individual as measured by the Academic Motivation Scale

**Extrinsic Motivation** - Behaviors in which the motivation originates from outside of self rather than from the self as measured by the Academic Motivation Scale
**Academic Success**- Graduating College with a 4-year degree

**Family Factors**- perceived impact of parent(s) or guardian(s) on an individual’s academic success

**School Factors**- perceived impact of teachers, principals, guidance counselors and school quality on an individual’s academic success

**Community Factors**- perceived impact of community activities (after-school programs, mentoring programs and sports) on an individual’s academic success
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The History of African American Women and Education

The history of African American women is very unique because they represent two groups of marginalized people, women and African Americans. From the era of enslavement, reconstruction, Jim Crow, the Progressive era, the Great Depression, the Civil Rights Movement and the close of the twentieth century, African American women have faced racism, sexism, classism and other obstacles as they fought to establish their humanity, womanhood and citizenship (NWHM, 2010). African American women cannot be discussed in a deep context without bringing up one of the biggest components of African American history: slavery. The concept of one man owning another tore apart families, dehumanized people for centuries, and crushed millions of people’s will to live (Mahmood, 2013). Members of society who were enslaved had no control over their own life and could be sold, abused, raped and murdered without the threat of discourse. One of the biggest ways that slavery affected people was that it inhibited their ability to receive any form of education. In the United States, the effects of slavery are still being felt today. Programs such as affirmative action and other minority assistance programs have tried to combat the racial gap that is found in school systems across the country (Mahmood, 2013).

Harriet Tubman, Hattie McDaniel, Kathy Hughes, Oprah Winfrey and Rosalind Brewer are some of the women who have paved the way out of oppression and into success. There is ample historical evidence to indicate that African American
women used education as a means to remove some of the societal chains that had them bound. African American women have achieved a notable increase in college completion rates over the past 50 years, now representing 66% of all African Americans who completed Bachelor's degree, 71% of those completing a Master’s degree, and 65% of those completing a doctoral degree. Although African American women have come a long way, there is still an area of opportunity to fill the academic and financial gaps that are found between African American women and their majority counterparts. In 2010, only 21.4% of all African American women had a college degree or higher, compared to 30% of Caucasian women. They also only account for 2% of college graduates in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. African American women are also at a disadvantage in regards to employment and wage equality. U.S. census data about work-life earnings indicate that in 2008 full-time workers who were Caucasian women made more than full-time workers who were African American women regardless of degree was obtained (Julian & Kominski, 2011). In order to help the next generation of African American girls to overcome these gaps, it is important to identify what contextual factors have motivated African American women to overcome psychological and societal obstacles such as classism, racism and sexism to achieve academic success.

Although research clearly indicates that an individual’s level of intrinsic motivation is associated with academic achievement (Ayub, 2010; Creekmore, 2010; Kaplan, 2010), very little research has focused specifically on the population of successful
African American women when examining this construct. It is very valuable to explore the positive attributions that empower African American women to be successful, because these women who “defy the odds” can be viewed as women who are operating from a “strength-based model.” A strength-based model focuses on the positive potential of individuals and communities (Salley, 2005), as opposed to a “deficit model” which blames individuals for environmental facts over which they have no control. Rasberry (1986) states, “The only reason to spend your time studying failure is if you want to produce more failure. You cannot learn to produce success by studying failure….It’s a mystery to me why we spend so much of our time crying over our failures and so little time trying to learn from our successes” (p. A15). This perspective suggests it would be extremely beneficial to study academically successful African American women and the factors that helped them achieve success.

**Factors Related to Academic Success in African American Women**

**Motivation**

Researchers have found that motivation is a significantly important factor in academic achievement across the lifespan (Ayub, 2010). The Self Determination Theory proposes that there are three different types of motivation levels: intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation (Cokley, 2003). Intrinsic motivation is the inherent tendency or desire of an individual to learn, explore, and seek challenges because of the inherent interest experienced by an individual. Self Determination Theory also proposes that as long as the three basic psychological needs of competence,
relatedness, and autonomy are met, all human beings are inquisitive and intrinsically motivated (Cokley, 2003).

Academic intrinsic motivation in particular plays a significant role in achievement, competency, academic learning, and it stems from the psychological needs of competence and self-determination (Ayub, 2010; Dev, 1997). According to the Self Determination Theory, there are three types of Intrinsic Motivation: intrinsic motivation to know; intrinsic motivation to accomplish things; and intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation (Cokley, 2003). Intrinsic motivation to know is comprised of exploration, curiosity, learning goals, intrinsic intellectuality, and the intrinsic motivation to learn. Intrinsic motivation to accomplish things is comprised of mastery motivation and the way an individual interacts with the environment in order to feel competent and to create unique accomplishments. Intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation occurs when someone engages in an activity in order to experience stimulating sensations such as aesthetic experiences, sensory pleasure, fun, or excitement. Numerous studies have found that no matter the ethnicity, gender, or age, those with higher intrinsic motivation levels are more competent in school, have greater academic achievement, have more positive perceptions of their academic competency, experience lower academic anxiety, and experience less extrinsic motivation (Ayub, 2010; Creekmore, 2010; Kaplan, 2010).

Extrinsic academic motivation involves participating in academic activities because they are seen as essential in achieving an academic goal. The three types of extrinsic motivation are identified regulation, introjected regulation and external
regulation. Identified regulation refers to engaging in an activity because it is valued and internalized. Introjected regulation refers to engaging in an activity because of internalized rules or demands to engage. External regulation refers to engaging in an activity because of the expected reward or the threat of punishment (Cokley, 2003). Extrinsic motivation is not as positively correlated to academic success as intrinsic motivation (Ayub, 2010; Cokley, 2003; Deci & Ryan, 2000). Students can perform extrinsically motivated actions with resentment, resistance or disinterest. This type of extrinsic motivation is when a student feels externally propelled into action. They can also perform an action with willingness that reflects an inner acceptance of the value of the task. In this case of extrinsic motivation, the goal is self-endorsed and adopted with a sense of willingness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Amotivation refers to behaviors that reflect the lack of intentionality and are driven by either extrinsic or intrinsic motivation, and is considered to be the lowest level of autonomy. Since the goal of this study was to analyze what motivates African American women to be successful and to subsequently recommend approaches to increasing helpful forms of motivation, amotivation was not be evaluated.

Limited research has examined levels of intrinsic motivation in academically successful African American women. There was a study done in the Cleveland Public school system that assessed the specific “Successful Learner Characteristics” found in African American children that helped make them academically successful. Successful Learner characteristics were identified as self-respect, command of Standard English, goal-setting ability, self-motivation, time management skills,
consequence awareness and respect for others. Students in the study who reported these “Successful Learning Characteristics” performed higher academically than those who didn’t (Hampton, 2014). Although this article did evaluate the key characteristics that are found to make African American students academically successful, it did not explore intrinsic motivation or specifically just African American women.

There was another study of 200 students (100 males and 100 females) from different colleges that assessed the relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and academic performance. The study found that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation were positively correlated. The study also found that motivation improves academic performance of students, and that there was a gender difference in motivation and academic performance. Females were found to have higher academic ethics, and they were also found to be more intrinsically motivated than their male counterparts (Ayub, 2014). Although this article did evaluate the various levels of intrinsic motivation that lead to academic success, it failed to examine minorities/African American women specifically.

There was also a study done on the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic achievement in African American female college students. Sixty “successful” undergraduate female African American college students were asked to complete a demographic survey, an emotional intelligence test, an emotional quotient test, and a brief intelligence test. The study found that there was no significant correlation between African American female college students’ emotional
intelligence level and their academic performance. The study did find themes that correlated with academic success; they included a sense of identity as a woman, association with African American heritage, family structure or responsibility within the family structure, and community connectedness/obligations (Bradshaw, 2008). Although this article did identify the key themes that are exhibited in successful African American women, it did not evaluate their intrinsic motivation and the level of intrinsic motivation that is demonstrated by African American women who are academically successful.

As previously mentioned, there is a lack of research on the intrinsic motivation of African American women. The lack of research could be due to a variety of things such as the broader problem of insufficient research on women, the underrepresentation of ethnic minority scholars who are interested in the group, or the difficulty in obtaining funds to study non-European American populations (Bradshaw, 2008). The question of the levels of intrinsic motivation in African American women who are academically successful remains unanswered. Therefore, the present study will attempt to answer this question.

**Contextual Factors**

Academic success is not simply a function of motivation. Acknowledging the multiple barriers faced by African American women reminds us of the importance of looking beyond the individual to the broader context. The Human Ecology theory focuses on the interaction and interdependence of humans as biological and social entities with the environment. The theory recognizes that individuals and families
need to be examined within the context of their environments because each is influenced and changed by one another (Hamon & Smith, 2012). This theory also highlights the fact that different types of environment systems, such as microsystems and macrosystems, influence human development. The microsystem is the direct environment that an African American woman lives and interacts with and it includes her family, friends, classmates, teachers, and anybody else who has direct contact with her. The macrosystem is the actual culture of an African American woman and includes her socioeconomic status (Sincero, 2012). The Human Ecology theory sheds light on the strong impact that the various family, school, community, and societal factors may have on African American women and their motivation for academic success.

**Family impact.** When evaluating the factors that have an impact on African American women’s academic achievement, one must evaluate the different factors across the lifespan, such as the various childhood influences that had an impact on their academic success. Studies show that the home environment is one of the most prominent influences on academic achievement (Center on Education Policy, 2012). Supporting research reveals a correlation between parent involvement, children’s educational development, and motivation. When parents believe in their children, have high expectations, provide resources for children to feel connected to others, and facilitate a sense of autonomy, children are more likely to be academically successful (Nokali et al., 2010). Parents who are actively involved in their children’s education and provide a stimulating learning environment at home can help children develop
competence, control, curiosity, and positive attitudes about school. Studies have found that when parents support autonomy, their children are more likely to be intrinsically motivated and engaged in school activities (Center on Education Policy, 2012).

Some parents may be dealing with outside factors that hinder their involvement, such as time constraints, resource constraints, and family structure (single-parent vs. two-parent homes) (Center on Education Policy, 2012). In the United States, 31% of African American children come from two-parent households, 53% have only a mother present, 7% have only a father present, and 9% have neither parent present. In 2010, 57% of African American girls ages 5 to 17 lived in a single parent household (The State of Unfinished Business, 2013; Toldson, 2013). The percentage of African American children in a single parent household is more than twice the percentage of white children. Studies have shown that African American children from two-parent households have an academic advantage over those from single-parent households (Amofa, 2013). According to the National Household Education Parent and Family Involvement survey, African American students with both parents in the household have higher GPAs than those who did not have both parents in the household (Toldson, 2013).

Another family factor that affects the achievement of African American women is parental education. Studies have shown a link between parental education level and cognitive development in children as young as three months old (Center on Education Policy, 2012; Hirudayaraj, 2011). Parents with more education tend to place a higher
value on their children’s academic accomplishments and pass down skills and beliefs that are conducive to success. These parents also tend to get more involved in their children’s education, have higher expectations for academic success, and are more familiar with the educational system. The value that parents place on education can be transmitted to their children and help cultivate an environment that encourages educational attainment (Hirudayaraj, 2011).

Another family factor that is somewhat unique to the African American community is kinship care or the stronger connection between African Americans and their extended family members. African American families who struggle against social and economic diversity appear to have flexible family forms that help them to respond to their elevated needs. This flexibility includes a greater reliance on extended family members for economic and social support (Brown et al., 2003). African American family members have historically been instrumental in helping members cope with adverse life conditions such as racial discrimination, poverty, and chronic unemployment. African American families have provided various forms of support such as support for adolescent mothers, elderly adults with health issues and by providing comfort to members with serious personal problems (Celious et al., 2003). Household survey studies reveal more than seventy different family structures (based on the number of generations and relationships of people living in a single household) in African American families as opposed to only forty structures for Caucasian families (Murphy, 2011). About 20% of African American grandparents
reside in the household with their children and grandchildren, and in about 11% of these households, grandparents are responsible for at least one child (Belgrave, 2009). In the present study, participants were asked to reflect on the contributions of various family members and extended family and friends to their academic success. In addition, family structure was examined in relation to motivation levels.

**School impact.** In addition to the family, the school context is also related to academic achievement. Many African American girls are enrolled in schools without access to quality resources, fully certified teachers, college preparatory courses, and extracurricular activities, which have all been proven to enhance educational experiences and learning outcomes. Nearly 7% (500,000) of African American students in the US attend schools where 20% or more of their teachers have not met state certification or licensure requirements. Lack of qualified educators and lack of resources can be very detrimental to academic success. Research supports the idea that student achievement, especially among students from low-income families, is more heavily influenced by teacher quality than by the student’s race, class, academic record, or the school that the student attends (National Women’s Law Center, 2014). A study done at Harvard University found that having a good fourth grade teacher makes a student 1.25% more likely to go to college, and 1.25% less likely to get pregnant as a teenager. The study also revealed that each student in this 4th grade class will go on as an adult to earn, on average, $25,000 more over a lifetime than if they would have had a poor quality teacher. On the other hand, a poor quality teacher has the same effect as a student missing 40% of the school year (Kristof, 2012).
Teacher quality is not the only predictor of academic success. Lenz (2011) concluded that principals are the second most important figures at school in determining a child’s academic success. Principals have the responsibility of hiring quality teachers, creating a positive school atmosphere, monitoring student performance, getting adequate resources for teachers and developing relationships with the students (Lenz, 2011). School counselors also play a pivotal role in the academic success of students. Schools with lower counselor to student ratios, have shown to improve the academic, social, and personal skills of students, as well as foster a successful transition to college. It has also been proven that guidance counselors really play a key role in the academic success of students from low-income families (Professional School Counseling, 2012). Intentional efforts by school counselors can also help reduce the racial disparities in proportions of students taking Advanced Placement courses (Davis & Mobley, 2013).

African American girls are also more likely to attend schools that do not offer college preparatory courses, and where many of the teachers fail to meet all the state requirements for certifications (Black Women in the US, 2014). African American girls experience an out of school suspension rate that is six times that of Caucasian girls (Black Women in the US, 2014). This increased suspension rate could be due to the fact that African American girls are often stereotyped by educators before they enter a school building as being aggressive, angry, or promiscuous. These generalized stereotypes that are placed on African American girls can affect their self-perception, self-esteem, and perception of their teachers. This issue is very rarely addressed or
acknowledged in school systems and can cause many factors that hinder the academic success of African American girls such as lower academic expectations, harsher discipline procedures, and increased referral rate to the juvenile justice system (National Women’s Law Center, 2014).

The increased discipline rates that many African American students encounter has led to a theory known as School-to-Prison Pipeline. The School-to-Prison Pipeline refers to the collection of policies, practices, conditions and prevailing consciousness that facilitate the criminalization of youth within educational environments and the processes by which this criminalization results in the incarceration of youth. This theory explores the lived experiences of African American youth who are criminalized in their learning environments, which ultimately leads to contact with the juvenile and criminal justice center (Morris, 2012). African American students are also three times more likely to receive special education services for developmental disabilities and 2.3 times more likely for emotional disturbances than all other ethnic/racial groups combined (Milner, 2014). The fact that African American students are over-referred and over-represented in special education has caused them to be more likely to be educated away from their peers than any other ethnic/racial group (Milner, 2014).

The school context continues to be significant for African American females who pursue education beyond high school completion. A study done by a California advocacy group known as the Campaign for College Opportunity, concluded that African Americans have the lowest completion rates for freshman and transfer
students. It also concluded that African American students are more likely than any other group to attend college without earning a degree. In 2011, 24% of African Americans obtained a bachelor’s degree compared to 41% of Caucasians. These findings are largely due to the lack of support and preparation that many African American students have received prior to attending college (Rivera, 2013). Some universities have figured out the key components that help minorities overcome the academic achievement gaps and become academically successful. Programs that improve student performance and attainment, such as labs, tutoring, and workshops improve academic achievement and graduation rates among minority students. Summer bridge programs that target minority incoming freshmen, first year transition programs, diverse student populations, and leadership development are also beneficial to the academic success of minority students (Flores, 2013). The present study will include the impact of teachers, guidance counselors, and college assistance programs and professionals on the academic success of African American women.

**Community impact.** Research has shown that there are links between neighborhood characteristics such as poverty and inequality that lead to teen pregnancy, high school dropout and delinquent behavior (Dupais & Mather, 2012; Squires & Kubrin, 2006). Various outcomes such as infant mortality rates, employment opportunities, quality of schools, and life expectancies are all affected by where an individual is born, lives, works and plays (Squires & Kubrin, 2006). More than 10% of U.S. children live in high-poverty neighborhoods, which are neighborhoods that have a poverty rate of 30% or more. Although African American
and Latino children only make up 37% of the total population that is under 18, they make up 76% of the child population living in high-poverty neighborhoods. Twenty-seven percent of all African American children live in high-poverty neighborhoods, which makes them more likely to suffer from the risk associated with living in these neighborhoods than their majority counter parts (Dupais & Mather, 2012).

Although the impact of school on academic success was discussed previously, the impact of after-school programs will be assessed as a component of the community. Research suggests that the after school time period is unique and important for all students. During these hours, students are most likely to be unsupervised while parents are still at work, which could cause them to become involved with violence or crime (Woodland, 2008). The role of the community on the academic achievement of African American girls can also be analyzed from a historical perspective. Inner city after school programs that serve African American youth evolved due to a variety of socioeconomic concerns. The movement of jobs from urban areas to predominately Caucasian suburbs in the 1960s, the increase of black female workers in the 1970s and the increase of illegal drug activity in the 1980s all played a major role in the importance of afterschool programs in African American communities. The lack of living-wage employment opportunities during the 1980’s made the lure of an illegal, but financially lucrative drug market very appealing to latch key kids who had very little supervision. As a result, children from these areas have a higher risk of engaging in drug-related risky behaviors, such as carrying weapons, violence, high-risk promiscuity, and the dangerous lifestyle that accompanies narcotics. This type of
lifestyle typically leads youth to academic difficulties and failure (Woodland, 2008).

There is very little research that has been done on the impact of the neighborhood on African American girls, but there is research linking children’s reports of exposure to violence to poor academic performance. A study of elementary school students in Los Angeles found a “moderately strong” relationship between community violence and depressive tendencies, which is also associated with poor academic performance (Black Women in the US, 2014). A study done by Posner and Vandell concluded that low-income African American children who attended after school programs consistently performed better in math, reading and other subjects than their peers who had no after school supervision, and their peers who had after school supervision (1994). After-school program participation for urban youth has also been associated with improved academic performance, better conduct in school, better peer relationships, improved emotional adjustment, decrease in teen pregnancy, decrease in juvenile arrests, and a decrease in drug activity (Mason-Dixon Pulling and Research, 2002; Posner & Vandell 1994; Woodland, 2008).

African American girls spend more time at home unsupervised than their majority counterparts. They are also shown to have lower levels of participation in out of school activities, but report high levels of religious service participation. Sports are the most common out of school activities for African American girls, followed by performing arts, academic clubs, and student government (The State of Unfinished Business, 2013). African American girls struggle to participate in afterschool and
extracurricular activities due to various factors such as cost, lack of transportation, and responsibilities in their households, such as a part-time job (National Women’s Law Center, 2014). African American girls lack full access to extracurricular activities that have been shown to improve the educational success of all students. Studies have shown that after school programs and activities improve students’ engagement in school, graduation rates and overall academic achievement (Fortino, 2014; National Women’s Law Center, 2014). The participation in sports in particular, has been proven to have health, academic and economic benefits to students. Studies have shown that girls who have the opportunity to play sports have a lower risk of obesity, higher levels of self-esteem, lower rates of depression and lower rates of sexual activity compared to non-athletes (National Women’s Law Center, 2014; The State of Unfinished Business, 2013). African American female athletes are actually 27% more likely than students overall to graduate from college (National Women’s Law Center, 2014).

Given that the community plays such a major role in the lives of teens, it is very beneficial to acknowledge the key people who have a positive influence in their life. The previous literature highlights the benefits of key programs and people in the community, but very little research was found on the impact of key figures such as pastors, and mentors on African American women. The present study will include the impact of neighborhood, after school programs, and key people such as pastors, mentors and enrichment programs on the academic success of African American women.
**Societal factors.** Although the current study did not include assessment of macrosystem variables, it is important to acknowledge that the macrosystem may impose particular barriers that could impede academic success for African American students. The macrosystem refers to societal and contextual conditions and norms that may influence human development. When considering academic achievement of African American females, socioeconomic status is a critical component to review because education levels have a direct impact on poverty.

Poverty can be broken down into two categories, generational poverty and situational poverty. Generational poverty is defined as being in poverty for two generations or longer, and situational poverty is for a shorter amount of time and usually caused by a circumstance (Payne, 2013). Given the percentage of African American women who come from low-income, single parent homes, it is not a surprise that many of these women suffer from generational poverty (The State of Unfinished Business, 2013).

In 2010, 37% of African American girls lived in poverty as opposed to only 12% of their Caucasian counterparts (Center on Education Policy, 2012). Studies show that by the time children from socioeconomically disadvantaged families enter school, they have lower levels of cognitive and non-cognitive skills and they lag behind their more advantaged peers. Children from disadvantaged families tend to have fewer opportunities at home to foster competence, encourage them to find the interest in learning, and to develop relationships that support and value achievement (Center on Education Policy, 2012). Socioeconomic status has been shown to have a
direct link to academic achievement. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2011 82% of high school graduates from high-income families enrolled in college, as opposed to only 52% of high school graduates from low-income families (NCES). Only 38% of low-income high school seniors go right to college after graduation, compared to 81% of their peers from the highest income bracket (US. Department of Education, 2015).

Researchers have failed to dive into the intersectional identities that African American women are comprised of and evaluate the contextual factors that are related to their motivation. Intersectionality is derived from the context of “interlocking systems of oppression”, and looks at the effects of racism and sexism on individuals of society who identify as “double minorities” (Carastathis, 2014).

The sample for the present study consisted of adult women who possess these intersectional identities and likely encountered challenges of generational poverty when they were children. The purposes of this study were to examine levels of motivation in a sample of African American women who completed a four-year college degree and to identify the contextual factors that influenced their success. A retrospective developmental approach was utilized to enable these women to reflect back on their childhood experiences and evaluate their significance for their eventual adult success. The intended outcome is to provide a foundation and framework for an academic mentoring program with a holistic approach that incorporates academic assistance as well as social and emotional support to help facilitate academic success in African American girls.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Sample

A total of 121 African American women were recruited for this study. The age of respondents ranged from 20-64 years old, with a median age of 37. Nearly 29.8% (n=36) of the respondents were between ages 20-29, 26.4% (n=32) of the respondents were between the ages of 30-39, 30.6% (n=37) were between the ages of 40-49, and 13.2% (n=16) were 50 years or older. Approximately 96.7% (n=117) of the respondents identified as African American, and 3.3% (n=4) of the respondents identified as other/multicultural. 28.3% (n=34) of the respondents obtained a Bachelor’s Degree, 55.8% (n=67) obtained a Master’s Degree, and 15.8% (n=19) obtained a Doctorate/Professional Degree.

The largest percentage 50.8% (n=61) of respondents lived with both parents during childhood, followed by 45.0% (n=54) of respondents who reported living in single parent home. 2.5% (n=3) of the respondents reported living in kinship care or with an extended family member and 1.7% (n=2) of the respondents reported living in a multigenerational family. 62.7% (n=74) of the respondents grew up in families that did not receive public assistance, 37.3% (n=44) grew up in families that did receive public assistance and 2.5% of the respondents didn’t know if they received public assistance or not. 43.8% (n=53) of the respondents reported growing up in urban/inner cities, 36.4%
(n=44) reported living in suburban areas and 19.8% (n=24) reported living in small town/rural areas.

**Measures**

Data were collected via an online survey consisting of three sections:

Contextual Factor Scale (Appendix A) was created based on the contextual factors that were explored in the literature review. The instrument contains sixteen items; Four items evaluate the perceived impact that the participant’s family had on their academic journey. Five items evaluate the perceived impact of various school personnel and programs. Six items evaluate the impact that the participant’s community had on her academic journey. There is also a space for participants to list any additional people or programs that had a positive influence on their academic journey. The first fifteen items utilize a five-point likert scale that evaluates the perceived impact of the various contextual factors, which ranges from not much of a perceived impact to had a huge perceived impact. The last item provides participants the space to openly reflect on their experience.

The Academic Motivation Scale (Appendix B) was developed by Robert Vallerand, Luc Pelletier, Caroline Senecal and Evelyne Vallieres. The original scale is based on the self-determination theory and is comprised of twenty-eight items subdivided into seven sub-scales assessing three types of intrinsic motivation, three types of extrinsic motivation and amotivation (1997). This study only used the items from the scales that evaluate the different types of extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation. The Academic Motivation scale in this study is comprised of twenty-three items: twelve items
assess the different types of intrinsic motivation that the participants have and eleven items assess the different types of extrinsic motivation that the participants have. The original academic motivation scale is a 7-point scale, but the scale was reduced to 5 points for this study to help participants to be able to more easily reflect on the various levels of impact on their academic success. The Cronbach Alpha Reliability coefficient for the intrinsic motivation scale is over 0.9 and for the extrinsic motivation scale it is over 0.8. Higher scores indicate higher levels of motivation.

A demographic assessment (Appendix C) ten-item scale was developed to obtain general information about the respondents. Information about the participant’s academic accomplishments and childhood experiences such as family structure and quality of school system were asked. The scale items include “What is your gender,” “What is your current age range,” “What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed,” “What adult(s) did you live with for the majority of your childhood,” and “What is your parent(s) highest level of education.”

**Procedures**

Emails were sent to a group of African American women who then forwarded the email to their networks. Information about the survey was also sent out to graduate student and young professional organizations. All prospective participants were sent an email invitation to participate in the study, which also included a link to the survey. Participants had two weeks to complete the survey and received a reminder email one week prior to the survey deadline. Participants were not compensated for the study.
Data Analysis

For each participant, responses on the Academic Motivation Scale were used to compute an intrinsic motivation and an extrinsic motivation score. T-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to examine the relationship between each demographic variable (respondent age, highest degree completed, childhood family structure, mother’s educational level, father’s educational level, use of public assistance during childhood, childhood neighborhood) and the dependent variables of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and contextual influences (family, school, and community). Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to examine the relationship between contextual influences and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Descriptive and bivariate statistics were used to answer the first research question: What levels of motivation are exhibited by African American women who have achieved academic success? Table 1 reports descriptive results of the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation scores for the entire sample. As indicated there, the group had a mean extrinsic motivation score of 3.92 and an intrinsic motivation score of 3.40. T-test results indicated a statistically significant difference between levels of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for this sample of successful African-American women. The group reported higher extrinsic motivation levels than intrinsic motivation levels.

Table 1

| Mean Scores for Intrinsic Motivation and Extrinsic Motivation for Total Sample |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----|-----|-----|
| N               | 121             |     |     |     |
| Intrinsic Motivation Mean (SD) | 3.40 (.89) | 3.92 (.76) | 7.60 | 120 | .000 |

Results of a series of ANOVAs were used to answer the second research question of what demographics are related to motivation in academically successful African American women. Results indicated that none of the demographic variables were statistically significantly related to intrinsic motivation. Mean differences were found only for childhood neighborhoods. As reported in Table 2, women who grew up in
suburban neighborhoods reported having higher levels of extrinsic motivation when compared to women who grew up in urban neighborhoods.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis of Variance for Extrinsic Motivation by Childhood Neighborhood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>df</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Town/Rural</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *a* significant difference between neighborhood groups

The final set of analyses explored the third research question of how influential were various family, school, and community members on the academic success of African American women? Table 3 reports the mean ratings of the impact of each of thirteen contextual factors on respondents’ academic success. As indicated there, the majority of the factors were described by respondents as having been moderately important to their academic success. The perceived impact of the components of the family context appear to have been greater than the perceived impact of school and community components.
Table 3

*Sample means for Perceived Impact of Contextual Factors on Academic Success*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contextual Factor</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>4.30 (1.1)</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>3.63 (1.6)</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guardian</td>
<td>4.46 (1.4)</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close Family Friend</td>
<td>4.21 (1.3)</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Family Friend</td>
<td>4.66 (1.2)</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>3.72 (1.4)</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>2.13 (1.5)</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Asst. Program</td>
<td>3.03 (1.9)</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-College Prep Program</td>
<td>4.08 (2.0)</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra-Cur. Activities</td>
<td>3.60 (1.4)</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
<td>3.57 (1.6)</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrichment Programs</td>
<td>3.96 (2.0)</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>4.34 (1.8)</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ANOVAs and t-tests were utilized to examine the relationship between demographic variables and family member influences on academic achievement. As reported in Table 4, the impact of family members differed significantly in families who received public assistance compared to those who did not. Women whose families received public assistance when they were growing up reported that their mother, father, guardian and other loved one all had less of an impact on their academic success than was the case for women who didn’t receive public assistance.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Relationship</th>
<th>Public Assistance Mean Impact Score (SD)</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>No Public Assistance Mean Impact Score (SD)</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>4.00 (1.4)</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>4.50 (.94)</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>-2.35</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>3.11 (1.8)</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>3.99 (1.4)</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>-2.99</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guardian</td>
<td>4.97 (1.7)</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>5.80 (.91)</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>-3.24</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loved One</td>
<td>3.86 (1.3)</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>4.42 (1.3)</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>-2.26</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Family</td>
<td>4.50 (1.2)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>4.79 (1.2)</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>-1.20</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>.233</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ANOVA results indicated that women’s reports of their father’s impact on academic achievement differed significantly by degree level and family structure. Specifically, Table 5 reports the significant differences in father’s impact on academic
achievement by degree level. Women with Masters degrees reported that their fathers had a significantly higher impact on their academic success than women with Doctorate or professional degrees. Table 6 reports the impact that fathers had on academic success based on family structure. Women from two-parent households reported that their father had a significantly higher impact on their academic achievement than women from one-parent households.

Table 5

Analysis of Variance for Father Impact by Degree Earned

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree Earned</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>3.47 (1.5)</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.89 (1.5)</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate/Professional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.89 (1.8)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: a significant difference between degree groups
Table 6

| Analysis of Variance for Father Impact by childhood family structure |
|-------------------|---|---|---|---|
|                   | df | F   | P  | Mean (SD) | N  |
| Family Structure  |    |     |    |           |    |
| Single Parent     | 3  | 8.24| .00| 2.96 (1.7) | 53 |
| Two-Parent        |    |     |    | 4.26 (1.2) | 61 |

Note: a significant difference between age groups

The relationship of parent education levels and family impact on academic achievement was also evaluated. Table 7 reports the mean difference in father’s education level and the impact that fathers had on academic achievement. The higher the father’s education level, the higher the reported impact he had on respondents’ academic success. Fathers who were reported to have high school, some college, college and graduate school had a significantly greater impact on academic success than those who reported that they didn’t know their father’s education level. A similar trend was found with guardian’s level of education and the guardian’s impact on academic success. Table 8 reports that guardians who were reported to have high school, some college, college and graduate school had a significantly higher impact on academic success than those who reported that they didn’t know their guardian’s education level.
Table 7

Analysis of Variance for Father Impact by Father Education level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education level</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than High School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.50 (1.4)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.49 (1.5)</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.86 (1.5)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.11 (1.3)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.50 (.97)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.14 (2.1)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: a-d significant difference between father education groups
Table 8

*Analysis of Variance for Guardian Impact by Guardian Education level*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education level</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than High School</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>5.29 (1.9)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>5.46 (1.3)</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>5.62 (1.1)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>6.00 (.00)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate School</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>6.00 (.00)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>4.08 (2.2)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *a*d significant difference between age groups

To further consider the role of contextual influences, Pearson correlations were computed between each of the thirteen contextual factors and levels of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Results are reported in Table 9. As indicated there, contextual factors were more likely to be correlated with intrinsic than extrinsic motivation. Specifically, two aspects of school and two aspects of community were positively associated with higher levels of intrinsic motivation. Teachers and school-based academic assistance programs as well as after-school enrichment programs and community-based mentors were significant influences on intrinsic motivation for this
sample of successful African-American women. Extrinsic motivation was significantly predicted only by strength of impact of a childhood guardian.

Table 9

Correlations between motivation and contextual influences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contextual Influence</th>
<th>Intrinsic Motivation</th>
<th>Extrinsic Motivation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guardian</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.19*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close Family Friend</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Family Friend</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>.21*</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Asst. Program</td>
<td>.29***</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Prep Program</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra-Cur. Activities</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrichment Programs</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p < .05  **p < .01  ***p < .
Chapter V
DISCUSSION

The purposes of this study were to examine levels of motivation in a sample of African American women who completed a four-year college degree and to identify the contextual factors that influenced their success. The intended outcome is to provide a foundation and framework for an academic mentoring program with a holistic approach to help facilitate academic success in African American girls.

The first research question examined the levels of motivation that are exhibited by African American women who are academically successful. Results indicated that African American women who were academically successful had relatively high levels of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Findings also showed that the group had higher levels of extrinsic motivation than intrinsic motivation. These findings may imply that African American women are more extrinsically motivated when it comes to their academics. The findings in the current study are also in-line with current research on extrinsic motivation. It has been proven that in higher education, extrinsic factors have been used as motivators for student achievement. The degree that is awarded and obtaining good grades are extrinsic rewards (Murray, 2013). So it makes since for academically successful women to have higher levels of extrinsic motivation. The women in the study could also exhibit higher levels of extrinsic motivation because of their family dynamic and culture that they grew up in. Some of the women in the study
indicated that college wasn’t an option for them and that they were forced to attend. This sample could have been more extrinsically motivated because of the external pressure they received from family members to “make it” and become successful. The fact that African American women are more extrinsically motivated could be seen as a positive or a negative. Extrinsic academic motivation involves participating in academic activities because they are seen as essential in achieving an academic goal. Extrinsic motivation is not as positively correlated to academic success as intrinsic motivation (Ayub, 2010; Cokley, 2003; Deci & Ryan, 2000). Students can perform extrinsically motivated actions with resentment, resistance or disinterest. This type of extrinsic motivation is when a student feels externally propelled into action. They can also perform an action with willingness that reflects an inner acceptance of the value of the task. In this case of extrinsic motivation, the goal is self-endorsed and adopted with a sense of willingness (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Academic assistance programs that are targeting African American girls may want to focus on cultivating the extrinsic motivation in African American women and also build up their intrinsic motivation. Academic intrinsic motivation in particular plays a significant role in achievement, competency, academic learning, and it stems from the psychological needs of competence and self-determination (Ayub, 2010; Dev, 1997). Numerous studies have found that no matter the ethnicity, gender, or age, those with higher intrinsic motivation levels are more competent in school, have greater academic achievement, have more positive perceptions of their academic competency, experience
lower academic anxiety, and experience less extrinsic motivation (Ayub, 2010; Creekmore, 2010; Kaplan, 2010).

The second research question assessed the various demographic factors that are related to motivation in academically successful women. Findings indicated that none of the demographic variables were related to intrinsic motivation, however childhood neighborhood was significantly related to extrinsic motivation. Women who grew up in suburban neighborhoods reported higher levels of extrinsic motivation than women who grew up in urban neighborhoods. Women who grew up in these neighborhoods may demonstrate higher levels of extrinsic motivation because they received more exposure to successful families than those who grew up in more urban areas. They were able to see more cases of success then some of the other women in the study. Youth Enrichment programs that are based in urban communities could use this finding as a basis to implement components into their curriculum to help increase extrinsic motivation. For example, a youth enrichment program could be implemented in urban areas that give young girls exposure to things that lead to academic success, such as college trips, job-shadowing and college prep.

The third research question examined how influential various family, school, and community members were on the academic success of African American women. The present study explored thirteen contextual factors and respondents reported the degree of impact they had on their academic success. The contextual factors included mother, father, guardian, close family friend, teacher, principal, academic assistance program, college prep program, extra-curricular activities, church, after school enrichment
programs and mentors. Family contextual factors (mother, father, guardian, close family friend and significant other) were all reported to have a moderate to high impact on their academic success. Father was the family factor that was rated as having the lowest impact on academic achievement for the women in this study, which isn’t surprising, considering a portion of women who reported coming from single-parent homes.

The school contextual factors (teacher, principal, academic assistance program, pre-college prep program, extra-curricular activities) were reported to have a moderate to low impact on the academic success of the women in this sample. Principals were reported to have the least impact on academic success out of all the school contextual factors, which was somewhat surprising. Prior research has shown that principals are the second most important figures at school in determining a child’s academic success, due to the fact that principals have the responsibility of hiring quality teachers, creating a positive school atmosphere, monitoring student performance, getting adequate resources for teachers and developing relationships with the students (Lenz, 2011). Women in this survey may have rated their principals as having a small impact on their academic success based on their “perceived impact”. So although they may have not had a direct bond with their principal, they probably weren’t aware of the role that their principal had in the overall quality of education they received.

The present study also examined the relationship between demographic variables and family member influences on academic assistance. Women whose families received public assistance when they were growing up reported that their mother, father, guardian and other loved ones all had less of an impact on their academic success than women who
didn’t receive public assistance. These findings are in-line with current research on low-income families. Research has shown that children from disadvantaged families tend to have fewer opportunities at home to foster competence, encourage them to find the interest in learning, and to develop relationships that support and value achievement (Center on Education Policy, 2012). The findings in the current study could be used to form an enrichment program that outreaches to youth from low-income families and focuses on providing the students with the educational components they are missing at home. Enrichment programs could also add a “parental education component” that helps teach parents how to be engaged and instrumental in the academic success of their child.

Results of the present study also indicated that women’s reports of their father’s impact on academic achievement differed significantly by degree level and family structure. Women with Masters degrees reported that their fathers had a significantly higher impact on their academic success than women with Doctorate or professional degrees. This finding could be because women with Doctorate degrees are older and when they reflect back on their entire academic career, they may not think their father had that much impact on their success. There is no research that explores whether or not family influences on academic achievement are more or less apparent as people advance in their academic career, but this finding definitely provides an opening to explore the topic. Not surprisingly, women from two-parent households reported that their father had a significantly higher impact on their academic achievement than women from one-parent households. The results in this study showed that most of the women from single parent homes lived with their mother which can support why women from
two-parent homes reported that their father had a higher impact on their academic achievement. Studies have shown that African American children from two-parent households have an academic advantage over those from single-parent households (Amofa, 2013). According to the National Household Education Parent and Family Involvement survey, African American students with both parents in the household have higher GPAs than those who did not have both parents in the household (Toldson, 2013).

Other results of this study further support the importance of fathers as sources of influence on academic success. Fathers who were reported to have high school, some college, college and graduate school had a significantly greater impact on academic success than those who reported that their father had less than a high school degree or that they didn’t know their father’s education level. This finding may also have been an artifact of family structure. Those who reported not knowing their father’s educational level were probably also those who grew up in a single-parent home.

The present finding also supports the basis that the more educated the father, the higher level of importance the father places on education. Studies have shown a link between parental education level and cognitive development in children as young as three months old (Center on Education Policy, 2012). Parents with more education tend to place a higher value on their children’s academic accomplishments and pass down skills and beliefs that are conducive to success. These parents also tend to get more involved in their children’s education, have higher expectations for academic success, and are more familiar with the educational system. The value that parents place on education can be transmitted to their children and help cultivate an environment that encourages
educational attainment (Hirudayaraj, 2011). This finding could also support the basis for having youth mentoring programs that foster academic assistance to youth from single-parent households.

The present study also found that when looking at contextual influences on intrinsic motivation, school and community was reported as having a higher impact than family. Teachers, academic assistance programs, enrichment programs and mentors were reported as having the highest impact on intrinsic motivation. This is a very significant finding because most research uses broad measures to evaluate motivation, but this is the first study to highlight the key contextual factors that are influential on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

These findings could support the structure of an enrichment program that targets African American women. The program could be comprised of teachers, academic assistance, youth enrichment and mentors with an expected outcome of increasing intrinsic motivation in African American women. Although there isn’t much research on enrichment programs specifically for African American girls, studies have shown that after-school program participation for urban youth has also been associated with improved academic performance, better conduct in school, better peer relationships, improved emotional adjustment, decrease in teen pregnancy, decrease in juvenile arrests, and a decrease in drug activity (Woodland, 2008). A teen girl’s enrichment program could be developed and implemented in urban school systems where girls can go to receive enrichment and mentorship. The program could incorporate teachers and influential school staff into the program by allowing them to be academic coaches and
speakers. The program could also work really closely with school facilitators to help foster the connection between the school and the child.

**Study Limitations**

Despite the contributions of the study, it is not without limitations. One of the limitations that was identified by the survey participants was the depth of the questions that explored the contextual factors that had an impact on their academic success. For example, when it came to responses on the motivation scale, some respondents expressed that some of their reasons for having attended college were not adequately represented on the scale. Respondents expressed in their open-ended comments, interests in different reasons for attending college such as “college wasn’t an option”, “peer influences”, and to “get away from home and become an independent adult”. Some survey participants also expressed the need for more questions about peer influence/motivation and stated that their friends had more impact on their academic success than their family.

Another limitation that has been highlighted in a previous study (Cokley, 2014) and by the survey participants was the lack of relatability with the academic motivation scale. A couple of participants found some of the questions on the motivation survey a little confusing. For example, one respondent stated that “I found the "to prove to myself" questions interesting and a tad confusing. For me, I didn't need to "prove to myself that I am an intelligent person", I had always believed.” A recent study done by Kevin Cokley (2014) explores the effectiveness of the Academic Motivation scale for use with African American samples. He did a study on the effectiveness of the 7-factor academic scale and found that the validity of the scale was measured with mostly European samples and it
doesn’t take into account the different ways African American’s motivation may need to be measured (Cokley, 2014).

**Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Research**

The findings from this study have implications for an improved understanding of what levels of motivation academically successful African American women exhibit and what aids their academic success. This study supports the notion that African American women need a holistic program that can speak to the intersectional identities that they are comprised of. Key components such as teacher collaboration, academic assistance, youth enrichment and mentoring would all be beneficial components in creating a program that will increase the academic success of African American women.

Now that we know what motivation levels are exhibited by academically successful African American women, future studies are needed to explore ways to increase the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation levels of African American women. A longitudinal study could be done on African American girls to see exactly what components are needed to increase motivation. Future studies should also focus on the impact of societal factors such as racism and sexism and how they impact African American women’s motivation levels. Results of this study affirmed that communities do have an impact on the academic success of African American women, so one could assume that other broader societal factors play a meaningful role in how African American women view themselves as members of society. Once this is analyzed, programs can be implemented to help African American girls to embrace their culture and the value that they add to today’s society.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

THE CONTEXTUAL FACTOR SCALE
THE CONTEXTUAL FACTOR SCALE

Directions: Please think back on the people and programs that made a difference in your academic journey. This would include those that enabled you to overcome various obstacles in your life. For each of the people or programs listed below, please select the number that best reflects how much of an impact it had on your academic success. Please circle N/A if a component wasn’t present during your academic journey.

1= Not much of an impact
3= somewhat of an impact
5= had a huge impact

1. How much of an impact did your mother have on your academic success?
2. How much of an impact did your father have on your academic success?
3. If you had a different guardian who wasn’t your biological parent, how much of an impact did they have on your academic success?
4. If you lived with a guardian, please specify the relation that the guardian was to you. (i.e. grand parent, Aunt, Foster parent, etc.)
5. Please reflect back on your most memorable High School Teacher. Please indicate how much of an impact that person had on your academic success
6. Please reflect back on your High School Principal. Please indicate how much of an impact that person had on your academic success
7. How much of an impact did academic assistance programs (i.e. tutoring) have on your academic success?
8. How much of an impact did Pre-College Prep Programs (i.e. Trio Upward Bound, Academic Talent Search, etc.) have on your academic success?
9. How much of an impact did sports have on your academic success? (i.e. sports helped keep you motivated in school)
10. How much of an impact did extra-curricular activities have on your academic success (i.e. key club, student senate, yearbook club, band, etc.)

11. How much of an impact did Church have on your academic success? (i.e. the spiritual support helped you overcome obstacles in your life so that you could focus on your academics)

12. How much of an impact did an after school enrichment program have on your academic success? (i.e. Girls enrichment program that helped with self esteem, body image, goals etc.)

13. How much of an impact did a mentor have on your academic success?

14. Please list any other people or programs that had a positive impact during your academic journey. (If you list people, please specify the role they played in your life-i.e. Youth Leader, Pastor, Coach, etc.)
APPENDIX B
THE ACADEMIC MOTIVATION SCALE
APPENDIX B

THE ACADEMIC MOTIVATION SCALE

Using the scale below, indicate to what extent each of the following items corresponds to one of the reasons why you went to college.

1 = Does not correspond at All
2 = Corresponds a Little
3 = Corresponds Moderately
4 = Corresponds a lot
5 = Corresponds Exactly

Why did you go to college?

1. Because with only a high school degree I would not find a high paying job later
2. Because I experience pleasure and satisfaction with learning new things
3. Because I thought that a college education would help me better prepare for the career I have chosen.
4. For the intense feelings I experience when I am communicating my own ideas to others
5. For the pleasure I experience while surpassing myself in my studies
6. To prove to myself that I was capable of completing my college degree
7. In order to obtain a more prestigious job later
8. For the pleasure I experience when I discover new things I have never seen before
9. Because eventually it would enable me to enter a job market in a field that I like
10. For the pleasure that I experience when I read interesting authors
11. For the pleasure that I experience when I surpass myself in one of my personal accomplishments
12. Because of the fact that succeeding in college made me feel important
13. Because I wanted to have the “good life” later on in my life
14. For the pleasure that I experienced when I broadened my knowledge about subjects that are appealing to me
15. Because it helped me make a better choice regarding my career orientation
16. For the satisfaction I felt when I was in the process of accomplishing different academic activities
17. To prove to myself that I was an intelligent person
18. In order to have a better salary later on in life
19. Because it allowed for me to learn about many things that interested me
20. Because I believed that a few more years of education would improve my competence as a worker
21. For the “high” feeling that I experience while reading about various interesting subjects
22. Because college allowed me to experience a personal satisfaction in my quest for excellence in my studies
23. Because I wanted to show myself that I could succeed in my studies
APPENDIX C
THE DEMOGRAPHIC ASSESSMENT
APPENDIX C
THE DEMOGRAPHIC ASSESSMENT

1. What is your Gender
   a. Male
   b. Female

2. What is your Current Age Range? ______

3. Please specify your ethnicity
   a. White
   b. Hispanic or Latino
   c. Black or African American
   d. Asian/Pacific Islander
   e. Other (Please specify) ______________________

4. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed
   a. Bachelor’s Degree
   b. Master’s Degree
   c. Professional Degree
   d. Doctorate Degree

5. What adult(s) did you live with for the majority of your childhood (the first 18 years of your life. Please select all that apply)
   a. Mother
   b. Father
   c. Grandparent (s)
   d. Other Relative-Please specify ______________________
   e. Other ______________________

6. What was your mother’s/guardians highest level of education?
   a. High School
   b. Some College
   c. College
   d. Don’t’ Know

7. What was your father’s/guardians highest level of education
   a. High School
   b. Some College
   c. College
   d. Don’t’ Know
8. Did your family receive any public assistance during your childhood (the first 18 years of your life) i.e. food stamps, Medicaid, etc.
   a. Yes
   b. No

9. What type of neighborhood did you grow up in during the first 18 years of your life (Please check all that apply)
   a. Urban/Inner city
   b. Suburban
   c. Rural
   d. Small Town
REFERENCES


Bradshaw, F. (2008). Exploring the Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Academic Achievement in African American Female College Students.


Brown, Stephanie, Don Cohon, and Rachel Wheeler. "African American Extended


Cokley, K. (2003). What Do We Know about the Motivation of African American Students?


