“With a Little Faith and Support, You Could Really Do Anything”:

A Study of Urban Youth

DISSERTATION

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By

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative investigation was to explore the educational experiences and social relationships of urban youth. Twenty African American, Latino, and Biracial/Multiracial high school students comprised the sample. Further, the study critically examined students’ perceived barriers to academic success, as well as those identified factors that enhanced their school experiences. The findings indicated that meaningful relationships with family and the Upward Bound program staff, and high aspirations influenced students’ perceptions towards learning and achievement, whereas school policies, lack of school and community safety, and negative relationships with school personnel contributed to poor school experiences. Implications for educators (e.g., administrators, teachers, and school psychologists and school counselors) and parents are discussed.
Dedication

This study is dedicated to the students who shared their stories with me; I am extremely thankful, as I could not have completed this endeavor without you.

You are amazing individuals; never stop reaching for your goals!
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As I reflect on the final stretch of my journey towards the PhD, I have many people to thank for their love and support throughout this often trying process! Although I have experienced many ups and downs over the last 5 years, it still feels like I began graduate school yesterday. First, I would like to thank my family for always supporting and encouraging my educational goals. You never let me give up and have supported all the places school has taken me, from Binghamton to Ohio to Nebraska! You have remained strong sources of motivation as I embarked on completing my graduate degree. Thank you to my girls for life, Alexandria for visiting me in Ohio and Omaha, and Jamie for coming to Ohio, I felt a piece of home when y’all came to town. I sincerely appreciate you all for being there for me throughout these transitions; I would not have been able to make it without that support.

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Fields of Study

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The persistent gap in education among African Americans, Latinos, and Whites has been well documented. A corpus of the research literature has focused on standardized testing, high school completion rates, school achievement and track placement, and postsecondary school attendance and completion (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; O’Connor, Horvat, & Lewis, 2006; Thomas, Caldwell, Faison, & Jackson, 2009; Valencia, 2000). The education literature highlights several factors (e.g., social, psychological, and school) that affect the degree of academic success students of color experience. To this end, it is important to understand the causes of these factors and their influence on achievement from the perspective of students to provide impactful instruction and services that meet their unique needs.

Over the years, cultural anthropologists and educational researchers have found that many students of color fail to develop positive academic orientations for learning and school success and underachieve as a result (Fordham, 1988; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1988, 1991). To this end, Ogbu (1988) suggested that racial discrimination and limited educational and occupational opportunities contribute to these students’ negative academic identities and poor school performance. More specifically, Ogbu (1991) posited that the historical legacy of racism and discrimination has negatively impacted school outcomes for African Americans. Fordham (1988) also argued that successful
students of color, such as African Americans and Latinos, develop a “raceless” persona to succeed in school. From Fordham’s (1988) perspective, the only way students of color are able to succeed in society is to disidentify from their racial/ethnic group, because it is characterized by an oppositional identity and cultural frame of reference that commonly does not identify with school achievement and social mobility.

However, educational sociologists and other social scientists have found that African American and Latino youth respond to discrimination in various ways and can achieve success without compromising their racial/ethnic identities. For example, Sanders (1997) found that students of color respond to racism and discrimination in ways that promote academic success and excellence. In studies by Chavous et al. (2003) and Wong, Eccles, and Sameroff (2003), they found that a strong racial identity served as a protective factor in the face of discrimination among African Americans adolescents. Similarly, in a qualitative study by Graham and Anderson (2008), African American males used their awareness of racial discrimination as motivation to succeed in school; they also felt academic success was a means to prove others wrong.

In 1997, Sanders used the qualitative interviewing method to identify the existence of an achievement ethos among African American eighth grade students and examine its effect on their academic performance. Further, she explored the factors that most influenced the development of their academic orientation, which allowed African American students to respond to racial discrimination in ways that were conducive rather than detrimental to academic success. Three categories of racial awareness emerged: (a) minimalization or denial of racism and racial barriers; (b) moderate to low awareness of racism and racial barriers; and (c) high awareness of racism and racial barriers. The
results showed that the majority of high awareness students were also high achievers; therefore, an awareness of racism and discrimination may not lead to poor academic outcomes as Ogba (1988, 1991) posited. It is important to note that these students possessed a strong racial identity and awareness of the obstacles that existed in relation to their racial group. Furthermore, these students did not withdraw from schools; instead, they exerted more academic effort, which was evident by their above average grades (Chavous et al., 2003; Graham & Anderson, 2008; Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003).

Latinos are the largest and most rapidly growing ethnic minority group in the country; however, educationally, they lag far behind other groups (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Latino students face issues similar to African American students, such as racism, racial discrimination, poverty, tracking, and school segregation (Valencia, 2000). Nonetheless, contrary to Fordham and Ogba’s (1986) contention of an oppositional culture and a raceless persona (Fordham, 1988) among involuntary immigrants (e.g., African American and Latinos), many Latino students possess a strong academic identity and motivation to achieve. The high-achieving students interviewed in Flores-González’s (1999) qualitative investigation voiced a strong Puerto Rican ethnic identity and revealed that they neither perceived themselves nor were perceived by other students as “acting White” (Fordham & Ogba, 1986). These students used their Puerto Rican ethnicity to prove to others that they had the potential to be successful regardless of negative stereotypes and low academic expectations held by teachers and peers. Antrop-González, Vélez, and Garrett’s (2005) qualitative study also found that having a strong ethnic identity was one of the four success factors that Puerto Rican working class urban high school students attributed to their high academic achievement.
It is evident from the literature base that urban youth face considerable barriers to high achievement. Based on this research, it is also clear that educators play a significant role in transforming potentially negative circumstances into positive school experiences. Research shows that, while all students benefit from supportive, caring, and encouraging educators, African American students may need additional assistance (Moore & Owens, 2009). This is also true for Latino students.

The current study is an extension of Sanders’ (1997) study, where she sought to identify the existence of an achievement orientation among African American middle school students. The current study examined the educational experiences of urban youth, particularly African American and Latinos high school students. A major emphasis was placed on students’ school identities and academic attitudes. Further, the researcher examined the factors that, both positively and negatively, influenced the achievement orientations of urban youth. The researcher deemed a qualitative research design necessary and advantageous, given the nature, purpose, and complexity of this study. Generally speaking, this qualitative study offers researchers, educators, and parents, a greater understanding of the factors that most influence and affect urban youths’ attitudes toward achievement. In closing, the findings have the potential to improve instruction and services students receive in and out of school, and assist educators in understanding their school experiences in order to develop realistic interventions.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The goal of this research study was to design and conduct a qualitative study, using the face-to-face interviewing method, on urban youth of color currently enrolled in an urban public school district in the Midwest. Its purpose was to examine the
educational experiences of urban youth and pinpoint how these experiences positively and negatively influence their attitudes and behaviors towards learning. Often times, researchers, educators, and others with student’s best interest in mind provide solutions to the barriers urban students face. However, the literature fails to incorporate these students’ own perceptions of their experiences (Howard, 2003). To this end, this study examined urban students’ educational experiences through storytelling; to gain a better understanding from students firsthand.

1.3 Significance of the Study

Many African American and Latino students attend highly segregated schools with unqualified teachers, less challenging courses, and attain poor outcomes, such as higher rates of grade retention, higher dropout rates, and low rates of college matriculation when compared to their white counterparts (Valencia, 2000). Teacher-student relationships play a major role in academic success. Not only teachers’ attitudes about urban students’ cognitive abilities, but their commitment to teaching shapes students’ learning (Halvorsen, Lee, & Andrade, 2009). Research in low-income secondary schools has found that teachers’ dedication to teaching is associated with how much students learn (Lee & Loeb, 2000; Lee & Smith, 1996). Teachers in urban schools, a setting where students tend to have greater educational needs, often hold low expectations and give up on their students. Yet these teachers need to take responsibility for their students’ ability to learn, rather than writing them off as unable to learn (Halvorsen, Lee, & Andrade, 2009). Researchers have found that preservice teachers take on color blind approaches to teaching in urban settings and often place blame on students and their families by indicating they just need to work harder (Leland & Harste,
Nonetheless, Leland and Harste (2005) found that as preservice teachers progressed through their program, they learned that their urban students engaged in learning when they felt issues addressed in lessons were relevant to their lives.

A study by Marx (2008) examined how popular white teachers connected with Latino students. She found that these teachers were able to relate with their students through sharing of personal experiences and struggles. However, they held negative stereotypes about their students’ culture and family. Marx found that teachers of Latino students who valued education and hard work felt they were exceptions to the rule for not confirming their stereotypes. Although these teachers managed to develop positive connections with their students, their underlying beliefs about students’ backgrounds needed to be evaluated.

Despite the obstacles many urban students face to positive academic outcomes, a strong belief among teachers in their students’ ability to learn and social responsibility as a change agent can help students make educational strides. Therefore, for educators, this research project has major implications for improving instruction provided to urban youth, as well as assistance in developing positive relationships. It also has the potential to help urban educators, specifically; teachers, school psychologists, school counselors, and administrators, better understand the school experiences of these youth in today’s urban public schools. To expand our understanding of these students’ perceptions and attitudes toward achievement and school support, teachers, school psychologists, school counselors, administrators, and parents, need current and timely information that integrates the findings from related studies and evaluates the meaning of those findings, while simultaneously collecting and analyzing data.
1.4 Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the educational experiences of urban youth in urban school contexts. To achieve this goal, this study examined how negative and positive academic experiences influenced the school identity and achievement attitudes of urban youth. This study explored the following research questions:

1. Which of these factors (e.g., school, psychological, and social) contribute to or inhibit urban students’ school identity and academic attitudes?
   a. Which of these factors (e.g., school, psychological, and social), if any, differentiate by academic performance (e.g., high academic performance versus low academic performance)?
   b. Which of these factors (e.g., school, psychological, and social), if any, differentiate by gender?
   c. Which of these factors (e.g., school, psychological, and social), if any, differentiate by race and ethnicity (e.g., African American and Latino students)?
   d. Which of these factors (e.g., school, psychological, and social), if any, differentiate by school?

2. What individuals have the most influence on urban youth’s school identity and academic orientation?

1.5 Limitations of the Study

The researcher used qualitative methods for the study. According to the literature, there is a dearth of research that includes the voices of traditionally marginalized
students. Therefore, a need to hear the voices of urban student groups, such as African American and Latinos, certainly exists. It is quite likely that their voices provide a deeper understanding of the complexities of school and learning for African American and Latino students in urban school settings. To this end, the interviewing method gave students the unique opportunity and stage to construct their own narratives. However, these interviews relied primarily on information reported by the students. Other voices, such as administrators, teachers, school psychologists, school counselors, and parents, were not included. This is a limitation of the study. However, the researcher took measures to ensure trustworthiness in this study, which is addressed in chapter three.

The sample selection was another limitation. The participants in this study were recruited from an Upward Bound program at a local Midwestern university and a local urban public high school. Although, all of the participants attended high schools in the same urban public school district; it is feasible that those students who participated in Upward Bound program may have had a different outlook on school and learning. However, the majority of the non-Upward Bound participants were high-achieving students, whereas more academic variability existed between Upward Bound participants. Additionally, the Upward Bound sample consisted of 10 African American students, one Latino student, and two students of mixed race, whereas the sample from the local urban public high school consisted solely of seven Latino students. Nonetheless, potential differences across the participants, schools attended, race/ethnicity, and gender were addressed in chapter five. Finally, the sample only included two biracial participants; therefore, it was difficult to gain a clear understanding of how their school experiences differ from the other racial and ethnic groups.
1.6 Definition of Terms

School identity

A school identity is defined as the degree to which a student identifies with academics. Students with a strong school identity achieve high academic outcomes, spend a considerable amount of time outside of school on academic assignments and activities, and are involved in academic clubs and organizations, etc. Students with a weak school identity have low academic outcomes, spend little to no time outside of school on academic assignments, and are not involved in academic clubs and organizations, etc.

Urban youth

Urban youth refers to students who attend public schools in urban environments, regardless of race/ethnicity.

African American and Black

These two words are used interchangeably to represent people of African descent.

White, European American, and Caucasian

These words are used interchangeably to represent people of European descent.

Latino and Hispanic

These two words are used interchangeably to represent people of Latino descent (e.g., from South America, Central America, Mexico, Spain, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic).

Attitudes

Attitudes refer to the way a person feels towards other people, situations, actions, etc.
Achievement orientation

The degree to which a student has a school identity that aligns with high or low academic outcomes.

High-Achieving students

High-Achieving students refer to those students who have grade point averages (GPA) of B (89-80) and higher.

Low-Achieving students

Low-Achieving students refer to those students who have grade point averages (GPA) of C (79-70) or lower.

Academic socialization

Academic socialization refers to those factors that contribute to students’ development of a school identity (i.e., parental support, teacher support, positive school experiences, etc.).

Advanced Placement (AP) courses

Advanced Placement (AP) courses refer to college-level courses that students typically take in high school. Students who pass AP exams are eligible to receive college credit at select colleges/universities they decide to attend after high school.

Credit Recovery

Credit recovery is a program that allows students to make up missing credits through alternative instructional deliveries.

Upward Bound (UB) Program

Upward Bound (UB) is a federally-funded program, designed to serve first-generation college students and those students with low-income backgrounds. This
initiative provides these students with supplementary academic instruction and college preparation. Students also attend Saturday Academies and summer institutes to receive these educational services.

*Saturday Academy*

Upward Bound students attend a Saturday Academy, where they receive five hours of academic instruction in mathematics, sciences, language arts, foreign languages, and standardized test prep (i.e., state achievement test, Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), and American College Testing or ACT).

*Summer Institute*

Upward Bound students may participate in a Summer Institute, which is offered for six weeks over the summer. This summer experience offers students daily academic instruction, as well as an introduction to life as a college student. Students reside on a college campus for the last three weeks of the Institute.

*Upward Bound after-school tutoring program*

Upward Bound offers after-school tutoring for participants at its home university campus. It gives students extra assistance to ensure they are successful in school.

*Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act)*

The Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act or the DREAM Act, if ever signed into law, would provide undocumented students with the opportunity to pursue a postsecondary education with federal assistance. Further, it would give these students a chance to become a legal U.S. citizen.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

For this study, the review of the literature focused on the salient issues affecting the educational outcomes of urban youth. Utilizing Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit), and invitational education as conceptual frameworks, race/ethnicity, gender, and relationships within urban school contexts were emphasized throughout. Further, this literature review focused on those factors that contribute to their positive and negative academic outcomes. Below is a synthesis of this literature base.

2.2 Educational Outcomes

In the research literature, there is a strong tendency to focus on the factors that negatively affect school outcomes rather than those that positively affect school achievement. This chapter highlighted school, psychological, and social factors found in the literature that accounted for the variability in academic success among urban students of color, such as African Americans and Latinos.

2.2.1 School Factors

The Discipline Gap. The overrepresentation of urban youth (e.g., African American males) receiving harsh disciplinary consequences has been well documented throughout the literature for more than 30 years (Fenning & Rose, 2007). Schools most frequently punish the students with the greatest academic, social, economic, and emotional needs (Johnson, Boyden, & Pittz, 2001). Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson
(2002) found that African Americans received harsher punishments than their white peers did and often times for less serious or subjective reasons. For instance, teachers commonly referred white students to the office for offenses such as smoking, vandalism, and obscene language, whereas African American students received office referrals for behavior such as excessive noise, disrespect, and loitering. Furthermore, differences in cultural learning styles lead teachers to misinterpret the behavior of African Americans as inappropriate, when the behaviors are not intended to be that way (Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003). This cultural mismatch increases the chances of disciplinary action among urban youth.

Schools react to the behavior of students of color, while neglecting to respond to their unmet needs at the root of their problematic behavior (Noguera, 2003). Disciplinary practices, such as suspension and expulsion, contribute to the marginalization of these students, while removing them from school and ignoring the source of the problem. The need for control within urban schools appears to take precedence over meeting the academic needs of students of color. Additionally, the adoption of zero tolerance policies has led to the significant increase in the number of children suspended and expelled from school (Skiba & Rausch, 2006, 2008). To this end, it is critical that school leaders re-examine these failing school disciplinary policies.

These disciplinary practices rid schools of the so-called “bad” students but leave students with little options for a successful future. As a result, many of these students turn to criminal behaviors. The literature has demonstrated a direct link between these exclusionary disciplinary practices and entrance into the criminal justice system, called the school-to-prison pipeline (Fenning & Rose, 2007). In 2003, Casella examined how
schools use preventive detention to punish students who appear to be dangerous. In most cases, these students were African American and Latino males. Further, Casella found that preventive detention, the assignment of students to school outplacement programs, the increased presence of school police officers, and the adoption of zero tolerance policies restrict and isolate students; he also found a correlation to aforementioned practices and the criminal justice system. School officials explained that they felt pressured to maintain control in their schools due to highly publicized school shootings and they felt compelled to fill outplacements provided by the district (Casella, 2003). This explanation is interesting as many school shootings have occurred in suburban schools, rather than urban settings.

Furthermore, once students are suspended or expelled, Casella (2003) found readmission into school was often extremely difficult. For example, school officials reported placing students into outplacement programs such as vocational programs, adult education, general education diploma (GED) programs, or even worse settings such as boot camp or lockdown facilities. Placement into these programs further marginalizes troubled urban youth and clearly puts them on the pipeline into prison. Further, schools do not take responsibility for their role in the criminalization of minority students; rather than addressing their academic and emotional needs, schools place students into programs that fail to meet these needs. As a result, students continue to disengage from school and consequently engage in criminal behaviors.

For students who fail to abide by rules that demand the schools inherent need for control, the consequences are suspension and/or expulsion. Often times, the same students experience disciplinary action and as a result, they learn that school is not a
rewarding place and find little incentive to comply since their academic, social, and/or emotional needs are not being met. Suspension does not improve student behavior and the cycle of punishment leads to involvement with the criminal justice system (Noguera, 2003). The disproportionate amount of minority youth suspended and expelled clearly demonstrates the ineffectiveness of such policies. Schools deprive the neediest students of an education as suspension and expulsion warrant student removal from the classroom; therefore they miss out on much needed learning opportunities (Noguera, 2003). School officials do not examine why the problem behaviors occur or attempt to solve them, instead it is simpler to remove the student from the environment.

Monroe and Obidah (2004) examined how cultural synchronization or a cultural match between teachers and students resulted in a positive, engaging classroom environment. The authors explored an African American teacher’s disciplinary practices with students of the same race. They found that the teacher infused culturally-based strategies into her disciplinary methods; for instance, she drew on referents such as speech patterns, voice tones, facial expressions, and word choices that conveyed her behavioral expectations to students in meaningful ways. The methods used in her classroom led to fewer disciplinary referrals. Therefore, teachers must examine how culture relates to effective classroom management techniques for low-income students of color in urban schools. The lack of synchronicity causes teachers to focus more on discipline and takes away valuable opportunities for students to learn. Bridging the cultural gap between students and teachers is important in changing the negative experiences minority students face in urban schools.
Few studies have examined how teachers perceive discipline issues within their schools, considering they are the ones referring students for disciplinary action; it is an area warranting examination. Gregory and Mosely (2004) found that teachers attributed disciplinary problems to the school, adolescent, the community, and the majority of them held color-blind approaches to the problem that failed to examine the intersection between race and discipline. For instance, the teachers in this study explained that because adolescence is a time where youth rebel against all authority figures, thus, students cope with academic problems through misbehavior. Teachers also attributed poverty, lack of school organization, and poor classroom management to the discipline issues within the school. These factors imply a consistent distribution of disciplinary practices across race throughout the school, however, that was not the case as African American students were overrepresented in suspension (Gregory & Mosely, 2004).

Only two teachers reflected on the relationship between race and discipline, one African American teacher discussed how school personnel perceived African American males negatively and she wished her colleagues would set aside their stereotypes and get to know their students as individuals. A white female teacher discussed how she learned over the years to change her disciplinary practices because she “figured out that some of those issues, turns out they’re not discipline issues, they’re just different ways of participating” (p. 25). These teachers understood the implications of cultural differences and believed in getting to know African American students rather than judging them based on stereotypes or deficit perspectives. Schools must take strides to ensure cultural competence among teachers and employ culturally responsive discipline strategies to
facilitate academic achievement among minority youth as the teacher in Monroe and Obidah (2004) utilized.

Monroe (2009) conducted a qualitative study in an urban middle school to learn about student discipline and to explore the perceptions and practices of effective Black and White teachers as related to discipline. Four key findings emerged in the study: learning-based perceptions of student behavior; the role of pre-service teacher preparation; the influence of remembered teachers and teacher mentors; and outreach efforts to students’ parents and families. The teachers in the study (two African Americans and two whites) emphasized student learning in their classrooms, rather than a focus on discipline and control. The teachers allowed for flexibility within the realm of traditional classroom expectations, for instance, they created a space where student talk and physical movement were permitted for learning purposes. Townsend (2000) discussed the “so-what” test to determine what expectations are more important for students to meet, so if a student is sitting on his or her knee rather than sitting with their feet on the floor, ask “so-what” is the harm of sitting that way? The flexibility teachers employed in their classrooms accommodated for student’s cultural learning differences and it did not take away from learning opportunities, in fact, they increased by spending less time on discipline.

Monroe (2009) also found teacher’s pre-service preparation was instrumental in their success within the classroom. The teachers received certification in their content areas resulting in the creation of engaging learning activities that diminished off-task behaviors. In addition, teachers attributed coursework in areas such as assessment and child development as beneficial to their understanding of working with students.
Teachers also conducted student-teaching in high poverty schools, which allowed them to dismiss deficit views. Furthermore, their cooperating teachers modeled positive teaching techniques that helped them gain a wealth of skills. One teacher attributed a mentoring relationship with a colleague to her success; the teacher learned cultural dialect and cultural humor as disciplinary strategies. The skills gained by the teachers underscore the importance of pre-service learning opportunities, the pairing of new teachers with veteran teachers to enhance teaching skills, and continued professional development throughout their careers. Finally, the teachers developed and maintained strong relationships with the parents and families of their students, which created a support network between the teachers and families. They did so by regularly communicating with parents through phone calls.

*Teacher Expectations.* Interactions between students of color and school personnel influence their academic outcomes. In many urban schools, teachers often hold low academic expectations and negative perceptions about the academic ability of these youth. Wiggan (2008) found teacher practices had the most significant impact on school success; high-achieving African American students perceived teachers who delivered high-quality instruction, cared about students, emphasized teamwork and self-direction, interactive teaching/learning, and encouraged critical thinking as characteristics of engaging pedagogies. Antrop-González, Vélez, and Garrett (2005) found Puerto Rican students provided similar descriptions of caring teachers. For instance, their teachers held high academic expectations, got to know students on a personal basis, and provided additional assistance outside of class time. Thus, teachers must examine how their
classroom practices affect student performance because caring relationships and high expectations can result in positive academic outcomes among urban youth.

Tenenbaum and Ruck (2007) conducted a meta-analysis comparing teacher expectations towards European American, African American, Asian American, and Latino students. Teachers held the highest expectations for Asian American students and held more positive expectations for European American than for Latino or African American students. These studies underscore the relevance of positive teacher-student relationships for the academic success of minority students because when teachers demonstrate an investment in their students and remove deficit perspectives from their pedagogies, academic outcomes increase. Many urban schools are predominantly African American and Latino, yet their teachers are not; this difference draws attention to the need for cultural competence in order to provide equitable learning opportunities.

**Deficit Views.** Long-standing deficit perspectives that place the blame on students, their families, and their socioeconomic status are commonplace in society. Rather than engage students in learning, teachers assume students are incapable of learning and allow them to underachieve. Rolon-Dow (2007) examined school engagement among Puerto Rican girls in an urban public school and found that low demands from teachers permitted students to pass time in class without actually engaging in learning. She found that one teacher conducted class at a fast pace and students who could not keep up ended up doing poorly. Rather than scaffolding instruction to meet the needs of diverse learners, the teacher disregarded the students who needed the most assistance. The teacher explained that, “there are kids who will get it and there will be kids that no matter how long I spend on it, they will not get it. Because they don’t take
the time to pay attention or concentrate and focus on it for a while” (p. 359). The teacher did not take responsibility for her student’s inability to grasp material or attempt to understand why students could not “get it”; instead, she blamed the students for failing to pay attention.

Deficit attitudes construct students who underachieve as failures and as a result, they disengage from learning. Conversely, other students in Rolon-Dow’s (2007) study passed as engaged in class by conforming to teacher’s values and expectations in the classroom such as by sitting at their desks quietly completing worksheets and complying with teacher’s requests. It appeared that compliance favored actual learning as teachers in the study did not attempt to actively engage their students in classroom activities or demand critical thinking rather they required minimal amounts of work. These teaching strategies limit the educational opportunities and capacity to learn for its students. Allowing students to pass time without high academic requirements limits their competitiveness and chances to pass upper-level coursework dominated by whites (Rolon-Dow, 2007). These deficit perspectives are inherent within the school system as educators generalize these beliefs to all students of color. School officials judge students as incompetent without knowing their actual capabilities and in turn construct school as an unwelcoming place that contributes to negative academic experiences.

Barajas and Ronnkvist (2007) examined school racialization and its resulting differential outcomes across racial lines. The racialization of school spaces demonstrates an investment in whiteness as the norm and standard for achievement. The researchers found evidence of racialization in schools through external markers of race such as skin color and the last names of Latino students. School personnel assumed Latino students
were less competent based on external factors, which resulted in some student’s erroneous placement in English as a second language (ESL) classrooms. Teachers and administrators held perceptions that Latinos were unable to cope with normative academic standards based on appearance without knowledge of the student’s actual academic ability. Students become cognizant of these inaccurate views and many disengage from school as evidenced in Rolon-Dow’s (2007) study.

This study by Barajas and Ronnkvist (2007) demonstrates how the inherent structure of the public school system positions Latinos as inferior and makes them aware of their status through invalid assumptions about their ability. If students do not feel welcomed or supported in their school environment, many will underachieve. Instead, through positive relationships between adults and Latino youth, these students can develop an academic identity and see him or herself as an important part of their educational experience (Cammarota, 2004). In order for this to occur, school personnel must abandon their deficit perspectives and provide students with an opportunity to display and enhance their achievement levels.

School Belonging. Similar to teacher expectations and deficit views, school belonging or a feeling of relatedness or connection to others (Booker, 2007) plays a significant role in academic outcomes. A school that is psychologically welcoming and supportive of all students, regardless of ethnic composition of the student body and faculty, is likely to produce students who demonstrate higher levels of achievement. Lack of identification with the school environment is a predictor of dropping out (Osborne & Walker, 2006). Additionally, a student might value education and want to do well academically, but be educated in an unwelcoming or unsupportive environment
leading to poor academic outcomes. For instance, negative interactions and experiences with members of the majority group can prevent a genuine feeling of belonging at school (Booker, 2007). Booker (2007) found that peers and teachers influenced perceptions of belonging among African American students. In addition, students reported feeling warmth and encouragement from their teachers and peers as important factors of belonging.

Similarly, Sánchez, Colón, and Esparza (2005) found that a sense of school belonging significantly predicted academic outcomes, including academic motivation, effort, and absenteeism among Latino youth. Close and Solberg (2008) also found that Latino students who reported feeling connected to their teachers and schools reported higher levels of autonomous motivation for attending school. Furthermore, these students reported more confidence in their academic ability and performed better academically. These studies highlight the important role school climate plays in academic outcomes for minority youth; educators must develop culturally appropriate strategies to bridge the gap between themselves and their students to increase opportunities for success.

**Resegregation.** The resegregation of public schools continues to intensify as the Supreme Court struck down voluntary desegregation plans. In 2007, the Supreme Court ruled in *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District* that schools could not assign or deny placement to individuals based on race, even if the intent was to integrate schools (Orfield & Lee, 2007). In other words, this decision reversed the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* ruling, which mandated the integration of schools or race-based assignment to schools. In a society where separate has never been
equal and segregated schools have the poorest conditions, the school districts in Seattle and Louisville sought to remedy these issues by providing students with the opportunity to attend racially balanced schools; however, the Supreme Court deemed this method unconstitutional. Is it constitutional for students of color to attend poor schools, to have unqualified teachers, and to track students into failure?

School segregation is strongly linked to inequalities in schooling opportunities, processes, and outcomes among students of color. Many Latino students attend inferior schools, live in poverty, and in heavily segregated neighborhoods, thus, they struggle educationally against the odds (Contreras, 2004). The future appears even more troubling, as schools throughout the country are instituting achievement tests as a prerequisite for graduation (Contreras, 2004). Many Latino students attend poorly funded schools with under qualified teachers that track them into remedial curriculums. Therefore, schools set them up for failure by providing them with inadequate preparation for these high-stakes exams.

2.2.2 Psychological Factors

**Ethnic/Racial Identity Development.** Adolescence is a transition period, which is critical for establishing developmental trajectories relevant to psychological adjustment, coping, and identity development. For adolescents of color, the identity search includes the exploration of their ethnic group membership in the context of white mainstream (Pahl & Way, 2006). Racial/ethnic identity development is a dynamic process that involves integrating both positive and negative perceptions of one’s group (Oyserman, Gant, & Ager, 1995). Theories of ethnic identity development draw on both ego identity theory (Erikson, 1968) and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Erikson
(1968) stated that the central crisis of development occurs in adolescence when individuals have to resolve the conflict between identity versus identity confusion. During this time of conflict, adolescents explore different roles before committing to an identity. Social identity theory on the other hand, examines the individual’s identification with social groups and the affective processes associated with group membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). For adolescents of color, identity development during adolescence involves the exploration of multiple social identities including ethnic and/or racial identity (Pahl & Way, 2006).

Researchers have proposed various models of racial/ethnic identity development, for instance, Phinney (1989, as cited in French et al. 2006) proposed a model of ethnic identity development for members of all ethnic groups in which individual’s progress through three stages. In the first stage, unexamined ethnic identity, individuals have unexamined positive or negative views about their ethnic group. The second stage, ethnic identity search involves beginning a search to understand what it means to be a member of one’s own ethnic group. In the last stage, achieved ethnic identity, individuals have explored their ethnic group membership and the meaning of ethnicity in their life is clear.

In 1971, Cross proposed a racial identity model, his model of Nigrescence, or of becoming Black. This model has undergone revisions three times over the last three decades. The most recently revised model (Cross & Vandiver, 2001) has eight identity types clustered into three major stages: pre-encounter, immersion-emersion, and internalization. Three identity types categorize the pre-encounter stage: pre-encounter assimilation, pre-encounter miseducation, and pre-encounter racial self-hatred. Pre-
*encounter assimilation* describes the Black person who places little emphasis on racial group identity, affiliation, or salience, and as a result, he or she is not engaged in the Black community and culture. *Pre-encounter miseducation* describes a person who accepts the negative portrayal of Black people without question. The person does not believe in the strength of the African American community and is hesitant to engage in working with the Black community. This individual believes they are different from other Black people and chooses to distance him or herself. Finally, the *pre-encounter racial self-hatred* type experiences deep negative feelings about being Black. This feeling limits the person’s positive engagement of Black problems and Black culture.

Two identity types characterize the immersion stage: *immersion-emersion anti-White* and *immersion-emersion intense Black involvement*. In *immersion-emersion anti-White*, the person is consumed with hatred towards White people and society. He or she engages in Black problems and culture, but is full of fury and rage. In *immersion-emersion intense Black involvement*, the person holds a simplistic dedication to everything that is Black. He or she engages in Blackness and holds a superior attitude towards others.

Three identity types comprise the final stage of internalization: *internalization nationalist*, *internalization biculturalist*, and *internalization multiculturalist*. *Internalization nationalists* stress an Afrocentric perspective about him or herself, other African Americans, and the world. Without question, as compared to the pre-encounter miseducation type, the individual engages in the Black community and its problems. *Internalization biculturalist* is an African American who gives equal importance to being an African American and an American. The individual is able to celebrate and engage in
both cultures without identity conflicts. *Internalization multiculturalist* is an individual who is interested in resolving issues that address multiple oppressions and is confident and comfortable in multiple groups.

Cross posits that at any time, individuals can regress or stay at one stage. These models of racial/ethnic identity exemplify the heterogeneity of historically marginalized groups, thus, not all African American or Latino youth feel the same degree of affiliation towards their racial/ethnic group. These differences may explain why racial identity can be a risk factor for achievement and psychological adjustment for some children or a protective factor that facilitates success and positive adjustment for other children. Therefore, a strong racial/ethnic identity is associated with many positive benefits including healthy psychological functioning; however, research also demonstrates its negative effects.

*Racial Identity as a Risk Factor to Academic Achievement.* Several researchers have posited that having a strong racial identity places African Americans at risk for decreased academic engagement due to the increased awareness of the negative status of their racial group in society (e.g., Fordham, 1988; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). For instance, Fordham and Ogbu’s (1986) cultural-ecological framework of ethnic minority achievement states that as involuntary immigrants, African Americans and some Latino groups, develop a collective identity that rejects ideals dominated by mainstream culture. As a result, these groups hold an oppositional culture and reject the standard of high academic achievement. Those individuals who achieve success are said to be “acting white” and face opposition from his or her peers for identifying with the mainstream
(Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). This social exclusion can be detrimental to the students psyche and the degree to which one relates to their racial/ethnic group.

Other theories present in the literature that perceive racial identity as a threat to high academic achievement include coping strategies such as a “raceless” persona, academic disidentification, stereotype threat, and cool pose theory. Fordham (1988) claimed that African American students must develop a “raceless” persona, which rejects their own culture in order to be academically successful; thus, a dual racial and academic identity is incompatible. Osborne (1997) found that African American youth disengage from school because academics are an area where society regards their racial group negatively. Results showed that African American students had higher self-esteem than Latino and white students, but their achievement grades dropped over time, specifically between 10th and 12th grade.

Similarly, stereotype threat theory (Steele, 1997) posits that out of fear of confirming negative racial stereotypes related to intellectual ability, African American students do not perform well academically. Consequently, they identify and engage less with academics. An incorrect answer is not only personally damaging but also confirms the negative stereotype; therefore, in order to protect their self-esteem students sometimes devalue or reduce their identification with academics. It is important to note that Steele (1997) posits that stereotype threat only affects academically identified students. In order to escape this aversive situation, students either disengage or withdraw from school. By disidentifying with school, students are no longer concerned with how others academically evaluate them (Osborne, 1999). Withdrawal from school alleviates the worry by removing the student from the anxiety-provoking situation. Therefore,
academically identified students are at a significant risk of dropping out or disidentifying from school due to stereotype threat (Osborne & Walker, 2006).

Osborne and Walker (2006) examined the existence of stereotype threat among a racially diverse sample of high school adolescents. The researchers found that for African American, Latino, and Native American students, withdrawal was associated with higher identification with academics, whereas for Caucasian students, withdrawal was associated with lower identification with academics. These findings support Steele’s (1997) stereotype threat theory and have significant implications surrounding the importance of teaching coping strategies to prevent academic disidentification or withdrawal not only low achieving students of color, but those who are also highly academically identified as they are also at risk.

Although the majority of research focuses on adolescents and adults, a study by McKown and Weinstein (2003) found that children as young as age 6 become aware of others’ stereotypes and this awareness increases dramatically with age. They also found that on challenging cognitive tasks and self-reported effort, diagnostic testing conditions led to stereotype threat effects among academically diverse students. This finding directly contradicts Steele’s (1997) argument that only students strongly identified with school are affected by stereotype threat, it appears to potentially be a risk factor for all students. Nevertheless, children unaware of broadly held stereotypes did not show this pattern of performance. Due to the importance of high-stakes testing, the finding that elementary school student’s performance may be impaired as a result of stereotype threat is disturbing. This finding demonstrates the impact stereotypes have on academic performance at such a young age that can impair the duration of children’s school
performance. Therefore, educators require an awareness of the conditions that place students of color at risk for academic failure. They must develop prevention and intervention programs at the elementary school level to thwart the risk of academic disidentification.

Finally, Majors and Billson (1992, as cited in Osborne, 1999) argue that African American males adopt a “cool pose,” or the attitudes and behaviors that position African American males as calm, emotionless, and tough. A cool pose permits them to cope in an environment of social oppression and racism, such as what many students of color experience in public schools. This persona developed by African American males buffers the pain caused from being a member of a stigmatized group. Although some of the coping mechanisms described protect students’ self-concept, prevent the development of negative feelings about his or herself, and bar the negative effects of racial discrimination, they are counterproductive as academic outcomes suffer as a result. These strategies weaken student’s motivational attitudes and behaviors that lead to academic success. The theories discussed also underscore the belief that the only way youth of color can have a positive academic identity is through disidentification with his or her culture (Smalls, White, Chavous, & Sellers, 2007).

Although these theories have identified a strong relationship between strong racial identity and poor academic performance, very little empirical evidence exists to support all of these assertions (Smalls et al., 2007). Smalls et al. (2007) posits that few studies have directly assessed the relationship between racial identity attitudes and academic engagement in African American youth. For instance, Fordham and Ogbu’s (1986) study did not ask students about their racial identity and its relation to their academic identity.
The low-achieving African American students in the study perceived behaviors such as studying in the library, reading, and being on time as inconsistent with their personal identities; however, race was not discussed throughout the study. In addition, Smalls et al. (2007) cites Osborne’s (1997) study as showing only a small association between African American adolescent’s self-concept and academic performance relative to other ethnic groups. These limitations may contribute to the conflicting findings throughout the literature.

Racial identity as a Promotive Factor of Academic Achievement. On the other hand, more empirical support exists for the notion that a stronger Black identity and feelings of group pride relate to more positive achievement values and attitudes (Chavous et al., 2003; Sanders, 1998). Studies have found that a strong racial identity buffers adolescents from the negative impact of perceiving racial barriers and discrimination on their academic motivation, engagement, and performance (Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003). Racial identity has been conceptualized as an important source of resilience in the normative development of African American youth (Cross, Strauss, & Fhagen-Smith, 1999, as cited in Smalls et al., 2007).

Racial identity as a promotive factor is consistent with the historical perspective of African Americans perceiving education as a pathway to social mobility (Chavous et al., 2003; Mickelson, 1990; O’Connor, Horvat, & Lewis, 2006; Smalls et al., 2007). More recent research rejects the notion of the development of an oppositional identity and a “raceless” persona; not all students of color sacrifice their racial/ethnic identity for academic success (e.g., Flores-Gonzalez, 1999; Graham & Anderson, 2008). Graham and Anderson (2008) found that academically gifted African American males at a
predominantly African American urban school maintained strong racial and academic identities without having to sacrifice one over the other. The students were aware of the existence of racism in their schools and believed that educational attainment was the best way to overcome adversity. Graham and Anderson (2008) found that the respect the students had for their history left them with a sense of obligation to be seen and heard in class, school, and other areas in their lives. These students did not have to disidentify with their racial group in order to be academically successful, instead, they demonstrated the ability to simultaneously maintain a strong academic and racial identity.

The perception of racial identity as a risk factor assumes homogeneity among students of color; it fails to account for individual differences in racial identity attitudes that account for variations in academic outcomes. When researchers examine racial identity as a source of resilience, it accounts for how African Americans define their racial membership in a way that academic success is valued despite structural and individual level racial barriers to academic outcomes (Smalls et al., 2007). Racial identity development is a multidimensional process influenced by the degree to which individuals experience racial stigma and discrimination. These experiences function as risk factors for negative psychological, behavioral, and academic outcomes. The various components of racial identity must be examined to identify which attitudes may serve as protective factors against discrimination and other negative outcomes (Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, and Lewis, 2006).

*Racial Identity as a Compensatory or Protective Factor against Racial Discrimination.* More recent research has found that racial identity can serve as a protective factor in African Americans responses to racial discrimination (e.g., Chavous
et al., 2003; Wong et al., 2003). For example, researchers have found that racial identity may play a significant role in buffering students from the risks of experiences with racial discrimination. Chavous et al. (2008) suggested racial identity might serve both compensatory and protective functions. As a compensatory factor, the presence of racial centrality or the degree to which youth feel their racial group is a defining component of their self-concept, relates to higher levels of psychological functioning and adjustment for these individuals. On the other hand, the absence of this attribute relates to more negative adjustment. Sanders (1997) found that among high-achieving African American adolescents, a strong sense of group connectedness facilitated positive achievement motivation beliefs and subsequent academic adjustment. From these results, high-achieving African American students with a strong sense of racial centrality placed higher value on education and persisted academically. Therefore, racial identity has the potential to serve as a buffer and prevent negative academic and psychological outcomes for students of color when facing discrimination.

Wong et al. (2003) also found that for African Americans, a strong affiliation to one’s ethnic group acts as a promotive and protective factor by compensating for and buffering against the impact of perceived discrimination. Thus, although experiences of racial discrimination can have harmful effects on the mental health and academic functioning of African Americans, when these students have strong ties to his or her racial/ethnic group it prevents them from the negative psychological effects of these experiences. Yasui, Dorham, and Dishion (2004) examined the role of ethnic identity and psychological adjustment among high risk and academically successful African American and European American youth. They found that both groups reported
comparable levels of ethnic identity, indicating they are at the same stage of ethnic identity development. However, ethnic identity achievement functioned as a resiliency factor for African American youth, whereas it was unrelated to psychological outcomes for European American adolescents. Conversely, lower ethnic identity status was associated with being identified as at risk, suggesting the importance of ethnic identity as a predictor of negative academic and psychological adjustment, especially for African American youth. Consequently, when adolescents were uncommitted to their ethnicity, they were more likely to experience negative psychological outcomes such as depression, internalizing, and externalizing problems.

Sellers et al. (2006) conducted a study among African American adolescents to examine the relationships between racial discrimination, racial identity, and psychological functioning. The researchers found that African American adolescents reported experiencing covert forms of racial discrimination in their daily lives such as others perceiving them as a threat or incompetent. The adolescents who held low public regard views or feelings that others viewed their racial group negatively appeared to be at greater risk for experiencing racial discrimination. This may be a result of a heightened sensitivity towards racial cues. These findings pose a risk to the psychological functioning of African American youth as previous studies have shown. However, Sellers et al. (2006) also found an association between private regard beliefs or positive attitudes towards one’s own racial group and more positive psychological outcomes regardless of the level of discrimination reported. Although it is not exactly clear how public regard beliefs buffer the effects of discrimination, Sellers et al. (2006) hypothesized that adolescents who believe that other groups have more negative attitudes
towards African Americans may have developed more effective coping strategies for handling racial discrimination as a result of having to use them more often.

Gonzalez (2009) interviewed Mexican American adolescents to understand how the school context can facilitate a positive racial/ethnic identity. She found that the high-achieving students were better able to describe positive encounters in their high school. They described positive racial/ethnic encounters as involving their white peers who perceived them as normal and equal in status, for instance, one student stated, “I can still be proud of my race, I don’t have to act a different way” (p. 24). Students reported that they appreciated public events that validated the contributions Mexican American students made to their schools and communities, provided such events included an arena to demonstrate competence that included peer and school-wide recognition, and broke down stereotypes. Programs that simply instilled or celebrated cultural pride are potential harmful if they do not foster equal status among white peers. Therefore, in this study high-achieving students had more positive racial experiences in school, characterized by recognition of their capabilities. This is an important implication for schools struggling to integrate students of color.

Racial Discrimination as a Risk Factor. In urban public schools, especially those that are predominantly African American and Latino, students are highly likely to have white teachers. Unfortunately, many of these teachers are unlikely to have experienced extensive training in multicultural education (Ford & Harris, 1996). As a result, many students report racially biased treatment within the classroom as commonplace (e.g., Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000; Noguera, 2003; Skiba et al., 2005). Research suggests that low expectations by teachers are a form of discrimination that African American and
Latino students face on a regular basis (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lipman, 1998, as cited in Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). In a qualitative study by Rosenbloom and Way (2004), the African American and Latino adolescents reported their teachers held low expectations and stereotypical beliefs towards them. Additionally, the students in the study described their teachers as uncaring, ineffective, emotionally distant, and not committed to education. The students interpreted these events as implicitly racist and as a result, it created a hostile school environment. In response to this treatment as will be discussed below, students reacted in different ways, sometimes disengaging from school.

Recent studies have indicated that discrimination is a stressor that has deleterious effects on the mental health of African Americans (Brown et al., 2000; Simons et al., 2002, as cited in Scott, 2003). In addition, Comer (1995, as cited in Scott, 2003) asserted that the additional stressor of racism complicates the adolescent period for African Americans. Furthermore, researchers have found direct relationships between African American adolescents’ reported racial discrimination at school, lower self-esteem (Fisher et al., 2000), more psychological stress (Scott, 2003), higher psychological distress, more behavioral problems, and lower academic attitudes and performance (Wong et al., 2003). From the existing literature, it is clear that racial discrimination experienced in school has the potential to negatively influence the lives of students of color. Therefore, if educators are to assist students in reaching their full academic potential, the school setting is an important context to study to understand the discrimination experiences of students of color and its relationship to academic achievement (Chavous et al., 2008).
Masko (2005) explored the effects of racism on a 12-year-old African American female. The young girl, Keandra, described racism as an ordinary part of her life, for instance she stated,

Well, if me and my friend is, like, walking down the hallway and they would just come up to you and then, for no reason they’ll blame you for stuff and then they call you like Black or nigger or all kinds of other stuff…because you’re like Black and they’re different colors of us (p. 341).

Keandra explained that she felt humiliated, angry, and she often broke down in tears during interviews with Masko. hooks (1995, as cited in Masko, 2005) posited that if all Americans do not acknowledge that racism causes psychic trauma and develop systems for healing within the mental health framework, as opposed to programs for economic reparation, equal opportunity, and other attempts at social equality, there can be no recovery. Keandra was able to cope with the negative feelings she experienced as a result of racist experiences by talking to her mother and grandmother. However, this study highlights the effects racist experiences can have on adolescents as Keandra experienced sadness and anger in trying to make sense of her experiences. Educators need to engage in racial conversations with children to help make sense of racial experiences in their lives. Masko’s study (2005) demonstrates that racial issues are a serious mental health issue that should be treated by mental health practitioners.

In a study by Gaylord-Harden and Cunningham (2009), the researchers found that discrimination stress was positively associated with depression and anxiety. They also found that African American youth preferred culturally relevant coping strategies (e.g., *emotional debriefing* or managing stress by expressing oneself creatively; *spiritual*
centering or spiritually based attempts to manage a situation; and communalistic coping or attempts to cope by relying on individuals’ interdependence with those around them) over mainstream coping strategies (e.g., active coping, distraction, avoidance, and support-seeking strategies). These findings demonstrate the impact of racial discrimination on the functioning of African American youth. They also reveal the importance of utilizing cultural specific coping strategies to buffer the risks of developing internalizing symptoms such as depression and anxiety. By gaining an understanding of the struggles students of color encounter, researchers can begin to generate solutions to improve their academic success.

Lambert, Herman, Bynum, and Ialongo (2009) examined the longitudinal association between perceptions of racism and depressive symptoms and the mediating effect of perceived academic or social control among African American adolescents. The findings revealed that African American female adolescents who reported greater perceptions of racism endorsed a decreased belief in their ability to achieved desired outcomes; these feelings of decreased academic control related to increased depressive symptoms. In other words, those females who perceived racism more often felt like they had less control over their academic outcomes and consequently developed depressive symptoms. The gender differences found may be due to the way males internalize experiences with racism or the salience of academics among them.

Wong et al. (2003) found that African American adolescent’s experiences of discrimination by peers and teachers served as potential risks and threats to academic motivation, positive mental health, self-esteem, and created an increased likelihood of engaging in problem behaviors. Furthermore, research has shown that when families,
schools, peers, and other socializing agents communicate messages of devaluation that undermine individuals feelings of relatedness to that context, there is an increased likelihood of negative developmental outcomes (Wong et al., 2003). Similar to how people do not feel a sense of belonging in uncaring environments, ethnic discrimination conveys to individuals that they are devalued because of their ethnic group membership. Ethnic discrimination sends the message that minorities are different and not a part of the “in-group” (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998 as cited in Wong et al., 2003). This study underscores the importance of positive and healthy relationships within schools to enhance academic achievement. Support systems serve as buffers against experiences with racial discrimination. In addition, as results remain conflicting surrounding the effects of racial discrimination, researchers must continue to examine the conditions in which students of color have positive academic and psychological outcomes, such as through parental ethnic-racial socialization.

_Ethnic-racial Socialization as a Protective Factor._ Because minority youth face various obstacles throughout their educational career, it is important for parents to provide their children with the tools to protect themselves from this hostile environment. The research literature identifies racial and ethnic socialization as pertinent to the healthy development of youth of color, African Americans in particular. These terms have been used broadly throughout the literature to refer to the transmission from parents to children of messages regarding race and ethnicity (Hughes, Rodriguez, Smith, Johnson, Stevenson, & Spicer, 2006). Research on racial socialization stemmed from scholars’ efforts to understand how African American parents maintain their children’s self-esteem.
and prepare them to understand racial barriers (e.g., Boykin & Toms, 1985; Peters, 1985, 2002, as cited in Hughes et al., 2006).

Research on ethnic socialization emanated from the experiences of immigrant Latino, Asian, and sometimes African and Caribbean groups in the United States, largely focusing on children’s retention of culture, identity achievement, and in-group affiliation in the face of pressures to assimilate into the dominant culture (e.g., Knight, Bernal, Cota, et al., 1993; Knight, Bernal, Garza, et al., 1993, as cited in Hughes et al., 2006). However, current literature uses these two concepts interchangeably, suggesting it is fragmented and difficult to integrate results. The two terms are difficult to distinguish from each other because technically both terms can be applied across all ethnic-racial groups since all peoples are members of racial categories legally recognized by the U.S. government. In addition, all people are members of an ethnic group defined as a group of people sharing a common culture, religion, language, or nationality (Cooper, Garcia-Coll, Bartko, Davis, & Chatman, 2005, as cited in Hughes et al., 2006). Hughes et al. (2006) settles for the term ethnic-racial socialization to refer to the broader research on this subject area. Despite the differences in terminology, these ethnic-racial socialization messages and practices can buffer ethnic minority group members from the racism and racial discrimination that they are likely to experience in their schools and throughout their lives.

The development of a strong racial identity is critical to the development of ethnic minority youths’ positive self-perceptions (e.g., French et al., 2006; Pahl & Way, 2006), especially in response to challenges presented by negative societal stereotypes and experiences of discrimination (Hughes, Hagelskamp, Way, & Frost, 2009a).
racial socialization and ethnic-racial identity are linked to each other. For example, messages children receive from their parents about how they should position themselves concerning their ethnic-racial group and about the meaning of their ethnicity and race play a critical role in shaping youths’ ethnic-racial identity processes. The cultural values and traditions passed down assist children in making sense of their identities.

With a sample of African American, Latino, and Chinese adolescents and their parents, Hughes et al. (2009a) explored the relationships between multiple components of ethnic-racial socialization: cultural socialization (messages about ethnic pride, history, and heritage), preparation for bias (messages about discrimination and racism), and multiple aspects of ethnic-racial identity (exploration, affirmation, belonging, and behavioral engagement). The researchers found that mothers and adolescents reported more cultural socialization than preparation for bias. They hypothesized that encouraging ethnic knowledge and pride may be a more salient socialization goal for mothers compared to preparation for discrimination. Furthermore, it is probable that discussions about discrimination may be difficult for mothers compared to other types of discussions. Additionally, it is possible that mothers and adolescents did not want to appear prejudiced or biased for engaging in such practices; therefore, they underreported these messages.

The researchers also found that African American mothers discussed issues of discrimination more often than Latino and Chinese mothers. This result may be a function of the mothers’ own experiences with discrimination, perceiving it more frequently, or more intensely than other ethnic minority groups. The researchers found gender differences in that girls reported higher affirmation and behavioral engagement
compared to boys. This greater pride, sense of connectedness, and behavioral engagement may be due to women’s traditional roles as cultural bearers.

Hughes, Witherspoon, Rivas-Drake, and West-Bey (2009b) examined relationships between two dimensions of racial socialization: cultural socialization and preparation for bias, and the multiple youth outcomes including self-esteem, ethnic affirmation, academic efficacy and engagement, and antisocial behavior among African American and white early adolescents. The students reported receiving moderate levels of cultural socialization from their parents, with African American youth reporting receiving a greater amount than their White counterparts. This result reflects the greater salience of race for ethnic minority groups. Those who received more cultural socialization messages reported more favorable academic and behavioral outcomes.

Among Mexican adolescents, Huynh and Fuligni (2008) found they reported receiving cultural socialization messages most frequently from their parents. Consistent with Hughes et al. (2009b) study, they found adolescents from Chinese and Mexican backgrounds reported more cultural socialization than their peers did from European backgrounds. Although cultural socialization was not related to grade point average (GPA), it mediated the ethnic differences in academic motivation. Specifically, these results suggest that ethnic minority adolescents may need additional motivation to achieve success at the same level as their white counterparts. As cultural socialization served as a mediator against ethnic differences, it may keep adolescents from Mexican and Chinese backgrounds engaged in school despite facing challenges of being a member of a stigmatized group.
Neblett, Philip, Cogburn, and Sellers (2006) also examined the interrelationships among African American adolescents’ discrimination experiences, academic achievement, and parent racial socialization messages. They found a negative relationship between discrimination experiences and academic curiosity, persistence, and performance. Nevertheless, self-worth messages were associated with higher levels of academic curiosity and persistence. These positive messages about themselves received from their parents potentially facilitated academic learning. Socialization behaviors or engaging in activities or behaviors involving African American culture (e.g., going to Black cultural events or parents buying Black toys or games) were positively related to academic curiosity, persistence, and performance. Additionally, egalitarian messages or those referring to interracial equality and coexistence predicted academic curiosity. Therefore, these results exemplify that such messages and behaviors may counteract the negative effects of discriminatory experiences encountered by African American adolescents.

Hughes et al. (2009b) results contradict Neblett et al.’s (2006) finding that racial pride messages (cultural socialization) negatively predict academic curiosity and GPA, as they found cultural socialization messages were associated with more positive academic and behavioral outcomes. The correlational nature of Neblett et al.’s (2006) study makes it impossible to determine whether racial pride messages predicted academic curiosity or vice versa, as poor academic performance may result in increased racial pride messages from parents.

In her qualitative study, Sanders (1997) found that African American students respond to racial discrimination in different ways. High-achieving students had strong
racial identities and were most aware of racism and racial discrimination. In response, students exerted more effort and did not mentally withdraw from school. Positive racial socialization and/or attitude toward one’s racial group can sometimes promote healthy racial identities and awareness of and constructive responses to racism without promoting hatred or discrimination toward members of other racial or ethnic groups. High-achieving students interviewed in this study described receiving racial socialization messages in their homes, this may account for their strong racial identity, higher awareness of racism and discrimination, and understanding of the potential harmful effects it could have on their long-term goals.

Miller and MacIntosh (1999) examined the role of racial socialization and racial identity as protective factors in response to racism. They found that having a positive racial identity can serve as a protective factor against the discrimination they experience in their daily lives. Therefore, racial identity can serve as a buffer that provides protection from and maintains academic competence in the presence of adversity. Nonetheless, researchers found evidence of a raceless persona (Fordham, 1988) for some students in the study, as it was positively associated with GPA. These students are at further risk for developing psychological symptoms due to the isolation and alienation they may feel from their racial group. Miller and MacIntosh (1999) did not find evidence of racial socialization as a protective factor; it related to increased stress levels, for that reason, the awareness of racial stressors may be deleterious for African Americans. The researchers did not examine racial socialization in the same manner that Hughes et al. (2009b) did, consequently, this may explain the differences in results related to the effect racial socialization has on the achievement and psychological functioning of African
American youth. In addition, Miller and MacIntosh’s conducted their study ten years prior to Hughes’s study; therefore, gains made in the research field since then may contribute to discrepant findings.

2.2.3 Social Factors

Help-seeking behaviors. As children progress through adolescence and build their cognitive skills, they become more aware of their need for help. However, a problem arises when students need help and are aware of this need, but do not seek out assistance (Ryan, Pintrich, & Midgley, 2001). Several reasons explaining why students avoid seeking help when needed have been identified throughout the literature. Such reasons include the feasibility of asking for help in a given situation, for instance, time constraints or the norms of a setting may prohibit help seeking. In addition, asking for help may serve as a threat to a students’ competence, there may not be a competent person to provide help, or the desire for autonomy and self-reliance may affect help seeking behaviors (Ryan, Pintrich, & Midgley, 2001).

Students’ competence concerns play a major role in seeking help from their teachers; they may feel as if their teachers and peers will make negative judgments regarding their intellectual ability (Ryan & Pintrich, 1997). Students must understand that when they do not seek out needed assistance they are putting themselves at a disadvantage because they lose out on learning opportunities (Ryan, Pintrich, & Midgley, 2001). Ryan, Pintrich, and Midgley (2001) found from their review of the literature that when teachers emphasize personal improvement and promote positive social connections, help seeking concerns decrease. They also found that low-achieving students are more likely to avoid seeking help. In addition, as discussed earlier regarding stereotype threat,
students of color, particularly, African American students may avoid help in the face of the fear of confirming negative intellectual stereotypes held by majority society concerning their racial group (Steele, 1997).

Thus, with this information, educators must understand the needs of their students and structure their classrooms in ways that foster an environment where all students feel comfortable asking for help. Moreover, teachers must be in tune with the needs of their students and attend to students who clearly need help, but are not seeking help. This may help in making students feel at ease to ask for help when they need it in the future.

*Acting White.* Fordham and Ogbu (1986) stated, “that one major reason black students do poorly in school is that they experience inordinate ambivalence and affective dissonance in regard to academic effort and success” (p. 177). The historical experiences of African Americans and their relationship with whites have contributed to the current problem of underachievement. Education was traditionally reserved for whites during and after slavery, therefore, whites relegated African Americans to a subordinate position in society. This treatment contributed to the development of a fictive kinship or collective identity that existed among African Americans (Ogbu, 2004). Slavery denied African Americans basic human rights, for instance, they were unable to speak their indigenous African languages and learn to read or write, and slave owners extended punishment for violation of rules to all slaves on the plantation. Consequently, the collective experiences of oppression caused African Americans to develop a sense of a Black community that embodied their collective racial identity (Ogbu, 2004). This collective identity served as a support system for all African Americans throughout difficult times.
Fordham and Ogbu (1986) argue that this collective identity is at the root of the underachievement of involuntary minorities such as African Americans and Latinos. Because these groups reject white values, behaviors, and attitudes, including academic identification, they perform poorly in school. High-achieving students cope with the burden of “acting White” by sacrificing their racial identity to achieve success. The researchers described various strategies employed by students at Capital High to resolve the tension between the desire to do well and conform to their peer group’s collective identity such as participating in athletics and group activities, camouflaging their academic effort by clowning around, associating with bullies, and not bragging about their success or bringing attention to themselves.

Furthermore, Fordham (1988) posited that high-achieving African Americans develop a raceless persona in order to be successful. The results of her study showed that high-achieving African American students were unable to maintain a strong racial identity and achieve success at the same time; a pyrrhic victory occurred in that their success came at the expense of a collective identity. A person with a raceless persona disidentifies from his or her own racial group and takes on attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics not typically attributed to Black Americans (Fordham, 1988). This persona develops due to the tensions experienced by Black students as they try to define their dual relationship to their racial group and the individualistic culture of school and society. The incompatibility of the two identities, racial and academic, leads to a raceless persona.

Since these seminal studies (Fordham, 1988; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986), many researchers have examined the validity of the acting white thesis and raceless persona
theory (e.g., Bergin & Cooks, 2002; Horvat & Lewis, 2003; Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus, & Harpalani, 2001; Tyson, Darity, & Castellino, 2005). The consensus among researchers is that the accusation of acting white does in fact exist; however, responses to this label vary. Bergin and Cooks (2002) conducted a qualitative study among 38 relatively high-achieving African American and Mexican American students in various private and public schools. The researchers found that only ten students reported receiving accusations of acting white. Yet none of the students shunned academic achievement in order to avoid these accusations as evident by their fairly high grade point averages (GPA) and reports of competing with their classmates for high grades.

Additionally, students did not report giving up their ethnic identity in order to do well. Accusations of acting white bothered students and as a result they experienced negative feelings; however, their academic achievement remained strong. For instance, Joe stated, “It made me feel bad because I had probably known more black history and had done more to delve into my history than most of them, and they had the nerve to see me as something that was trying to negate my heritage” (p. 128). Thus, these results invalidate the existence of an oppositional culture or a raceless persona as students in the study continued to receive high grades in the face of taunts from their African American peers.

Flores-González (1999) studied the relationship between ethnic identity and academic identity among Puerto Rican high-achieving high school students. She found that students did not associate academic success with “whiteness.” In addition, the students reported they had not been accused of acting white, did not camouflage their accomplishments, or assume a raceless persona. Similarly, Antrop-González, Vélez, and
Garrett (2005) found that having a strong Puerto Rican identity was one of the four success factors that Puerto Rican urban high school students attributed to their high academic achievement. In Flores-González’s (1999) study, student’s equated success with achieving middle-class status because education would assist them in reaching their goals of attending college and achieving economic success.

School structure also appeared to influence students’ attitudes towards school as opportunities to engage in school came in the form of academic and extracurricular programs (Flores-González, 1999). This high school celebrated high achievement; however, participation in advanced and honors courses, and extracurricular activities were reserved for students with high grades. Therefore, the opportunity structure advantaged the high-achievers and excluded the low-achievers from participation. Schools must find ways to engage all students in academic and extracurricular activities to help boost high achievement and create a positive and supportive school environment.

Flores-González (1999) suggested that there does not appear to be a pattern of how involuntary minorities deal with academic success, which may explain the conflicting results throughout the literature. Instead, some involuntary minorities seem to approach school success cautiously and may cope with the burden of acting white through underachievement, while others do not hesitate to excel academically. Researchers must continue to examine the circumstances in which students of color engage in school in order to gain a better understanding of how all students can achieve success. Other researchers have also found similar results opposing Fordham and Ogbu’s theories. For instance, Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus, and Harpalani (2001) found a relationship between high self-esteem and achievement goals to high levels of
Afrocentricity rather than high levels of Eurocentricity as Fordham (1988) posited. Therefore, African American students with strong racial identities also had high self-esteem and highly valued achievement.

Horvat and Lewis (2003) examined the role peer groups played in managing academic success among African American female adolescents. Participants used camouflaging to downplay their academic success among their less academically successful African American peers, not to avoid being ostracized by their peers, but reportedly, to spare their peers feelings. These methods assisted students in maintaining their academic success and friendships with their low achieving African American peers. The participants interviewed by Flores-González (1999) did not report camouflaging their achievement; however, the opportunity structure physically separated high and low-achieving students making this behavior unnecessary and impossible. High-achieving students attended class in a different section of the school building than low-achieving students limiting the opportunity for interaction between the two groups.

In addition, the African American females in Horvat and Lewis’ (2003) study shared their academic success with a supportive peer group that provided them with encouragement for their achievements. The students also maintained a positive racial identity as many expressed an interest in attending historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). This study stresses the heterogeneity of African American females because not all students respond to accusations of acting white through academic disidentification or by developing raceless personas. Other responses exist and future research must continue to examine them to understand how African Americans and other students of color successfully navigate their educational experiences.
Tyson, Darity, and Castellino (2005) suggested that the examination of school structure may help explain the stigma of acting White. Resentment from low-achieving students appears to occur in highly segregated schools with students from distinct socioeconomic differences that do not reap the same benefits as high-achieving students. This stratification system engenders accusations of acting white due to within school segregation among a particular racial group. Two of the 40 participants reported accusations of acting white potentially because these students came from middle-class families, whereas most of their peers reported living in nearby housing projects. Nonetheless, the accusations did not deter them from enrolling in advanced courses or being high-achieving students. On the other hand, those who reported avoiding advanced courses said they did so out of fear of poor performance, not due to a fear of accusations of acting white. Therefore, other reasons exist for the lack of minority enrollment in advanced courses, not simply due to a fear of the label acting white.

Mickelson and Velasco (2006) found several reasons for under enrollment in rigorous courses among African Americans adolescents including personal beliefs, peer culture, parental expectations, the opportunity structure at school, and the fear of being labeled acting white. The track structure of the school made students aware that the advanced courses were considered white courses whereas black students enrolled in regular courses. However, the high-achieving African American students in the study, all of whom enrolled in advanced courses, challenged this structure. The within school segregation resulting from the tracking system creates the resentment Tyson, Darity, and Castellino (2005) explained in their study. Students begin to associate track levels with race and academic ability, which in turn shapes peer interactions. When black students
enroll in courses known as “white courses,” they become the target of accusations among black students not enrolled in these advanced courses. Nevertheless, like the students in Tyson et al. (2005), Mickelson and Velasco (2006) found that these students did not underachieve because of such accusations.

Tyson (2006) also argues that schools create and sustain structures that construct racial boundaries. As African American students reach adolescence, they increasingly become aware of the lack of minority students in challenging courses such as advanced placement (AP) and honors courses. This awareness is insulting to African Americans as they make sense of why students who look like themselves are not in rigorous courses. Tyson (2006) urges researchers and educators to evaluate students early school experiences and examine how it may influence later school attitudes and behaviors. Students may become cognizant of tracking structures early in their academic career, which potentially affects how they interpret their schooling experiences as they progress through it.

Nasir, McLaughlin, and Jones (2009) similarly found school context played a large role in how African American adolescents made sense of their racial and academic identities. They found two identities existed within the same school system: a “street savvy” African American identity and a “school-oriented and socially conscious” African American identity. The former represents an identity characterized by a connection to the street or the “block”; it included representations of African Americans as drug dealers, pimps, and gangsters, uneducated, and indifferent towards the law and their futures. The students in the study who typified this identity described school as a place for social
interaction rather than academic development, they discussed their involvement in selling drugs, gang banging, and fighting in school.

Flores-González (2005) similarly termed these opposing identities as “street kids” and “school kids.” Consistent with Flores-González (1999, 2005), Nasir et al. (2009) found a “two schools” phenomenon that divided the high-achieving and low-achieving students from each other. They received differential treatment, for instance, school officials perceived the high-achieving students as college bound, so they provided them with information about college and viewed as leaders. On the other hand, the low-achieving students experienced poor or nonexistent teaching in many of their classes. The “school-oriented” students had a strong sense of African American identity that included a strong connection to their community and history; in addition, they saw themselves as potential change agents in their communities. The researchers found that academic success did not come at the expense of belonging; the students simultaneously maintained a strong racial and academic identity. However, the low-achieving students received little opportunity to develop a strong academic identity. The opportunity structure maintained their low-achieving status rather than provide assistance to overcome academic difficulties. As a result, accusations of acting white occurred from low-achieving students who did not feel welcomed in their school environment.

From these studies, it is clear that some high-achieving students experience accusations of acting white. Some students successfully cope with the burden of acting white while maintaining high achievement; African American and Latino students did not report disengaging from school or avoiding rigorous courses due to such accusations (e.g., Flores-González, 2005; Mickelson & Velasco, 2006; Tyson et al., 2005).
Researchers have begun to examine the conditions that facilitate high achievement in the face of such peer pressure. Findings show that socioeconomic status differences, structural factors such as within school segregation or tracking, and school opportunity structure play a significant role in how accusations of acting white interact with achievement among urban youth. Because no one racial/ethnic group is homogenous, not all students are able to successfully cope with this burden or navigate their school experiences; therefore, researchers and educators alike must understand why some students fail in order to prevent this failure from occurring.

**Immigration status.** For many Latino students, the lack of citizenship often impairs their ability to fully navigate the American educational system. The 1982 Supreme Court ruling of *Plyler v. Doe* barred the exclusion of undocumented children from the public school system. The ruling afforded undocumented students access to education, but it did not establish their right to an education (Perez Huber & Malagon, 2007). Therefore, following the completion of high school, undocumented youth are frequently unable to continue their education because their status precludes them from receiving federal financial aid (Abrego, 2006). Undocumented youth are considered international students on college admissions applications; therefore, left with the only option of paying extremely high tuition costs.

Nevertheless, several states have addressed this issue for undocumented students. Texas, California, Utah, New York, Washington, Oklahoma, Illinois, and Kansas passed legislation that permits institutions of higher education to grant in-state tuition to undocumented students meeting certain criteria (Ruge & Iza, 2005). Texas was the first state to enact such legislation, eligibility requirements include undocumented students
who have graduated from a Texas high school or equivalent, are enrolled in a state institution of higher education, have resided in Texas for three or more years, and sign an affidavit promising to file a petition to become a US citizen (Ruge & Iza, 2005). Similarly California introduced assembly bill 540 shortly after Texas’ legislation passed also allowing undocumented youth the ability to attend college as in-state residents (Perez, 2010).

Abrego (2006) explored the experiences of documented and undocumented youth in Los Angeles. The undocumented students explained the troubles they experienced in navigating their journey to higher education, for instance, one student unaware of his undocumented status until his freshman year of high school began to disengage from school after realizing he may not be able to achieve his dreams of going to college to become a doctor. Another student, Alisa was admitted to the University of California, but was unable to attend due to ineligibility to receive financial aid. Abrego (2006) found that undocumented youth had very limited options for their futures, those who attended community college struggled economically to matriculate and others worked menial jobs. Students accepted into four-year universities found themselves unable to attend because of high tuition costs and no financial aid. Therefore, even the brightest and most academically motivated students must obtain employment unlawfully for low wages and sometimes abandon their academic aspirations because of their undocumented status (Abrego, 2006).

In Perez’s (2009) book he interviewed undocumented high school students, community college students, university students, college graduates, and formerly undocumented students to gain an understanding of their pursuit of their goals to attain
success and citizenship in the U.S. Penelope, an undocumented high school senior, described the college application process. She shared, “you don’t have a choice. It’s what you can afford, not what you want” (p. 6). Although she realizes she does not have the same opportunities as her U.S.-born peers, Penelope remains motivated. She attributes her family’s financial struggles to her desire to want more for her life. Additionally, she discussed that she has friends who are undocumented and have attended and completed college. These supports give her hope for being able to achieve her goals. Jaime, another undocumented high school senior, explained that he and his undocumented friends “realize that if we don’t work, we aren’t going to succeed, especially because we don’t have our citizenship, so it is our goal to work hard and make sure we succeed in life” (pp. 15-16). Despite his perseverance and drive to achieve his goals, Jaime lives in constant fear knowing that he could be deported and removed from a country he calls home.

The Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act) was introduced in the Senate in 2001. After a failed attempt, it was reintroduced in 2005; however, it did not pass again. If passed, the DREAM Act would provide immigrants a means to secure legal status in the US so they can work and become eligible for education benefits such as financial aid (Ruge & Iza, 2005). To date, a revised version of the DREAM Act was reintroduced in 2009, it would provide immigration benefits to those who arrived in the United States as children, before the age of 16 and who have been residing in the U.S. continuously for at least five years prior to the Bill being enacted into Law (http://www.dreamact2009.org/). The DREAM Act would play a
significant role in affording undocumented youth not only the opportunity to attend college with financial assistance but a means to gain legal residency status in the US.

*Familial Influence.* Efforts to raise the level of parental involvement in children’s education have been among the most popular interventions offered for reducing the achievement gap observed between White students and students from other racial ethnic minority groups, including Latinos (Kuperminc, Darnell, & Alvarez-Jimenez, 2007). Research has documented a positive link between parent involvement and a range of achievement and motivational outcomes (Grolnick, Kurowski, Dunlap, & Hevey, 2000).

Studies indicate that minority parent’s care about their children’s academic outcomes and want to be involved in their children’s schooling (Trumbull et al., 2001). However, several obstacles affect the degree to which parents can be involved. Structural constraints and motivational barriers often times hinder parental participation (Shah, 2009) such as socioeconomic status, beliefs about the role and place of parents in school, misunderstandings regarding school officials’ expectations, and the level of comfort with the English language (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Garcia-Coll et al., 2002; Huss-Keeler, 1997; Lopez, 2001; Trueba, 1988). Additionally, long work hours and lack of work schedule flexibility also make it difficult for Latino working class parents to attend school functions (Kuperminc, Darnell, & Alvarez-Jimenez, 2007). Therefore, it is important that school officials consider these issues and be flexible in meeting the needs of these parents in order to develop successful parent-school partnerships.

Indirect parental involvement in schools may play a significant role in the academic achievement of Latino youth such as through adolescent perceptions of parental monitoring. Research shows a positive relationship between parental monitoring and
grades (Jacobson & Crockett, 2000) and a negative relationship to dropout risk for Latino adolescents (Martinez, DeGarmo, & Eddy, 2004). Although parents may not be in attendance at school functions such as parent-teacher association meetings, they remain actively involved in their child’s education by monitoring their children’s school attendance, making sure their assignments are completed, and demonstrating support for their children’s academic goals.

Plunkett, Behnke, Sands, and Choi (2009) examined the effects of perceived parental engagement on adolescents’ academic achievement in immigrant Latino families. Results showed that adolescents’ perceived engagement of their immigrant parents, especially their mothers, indirectly influenced adolescents’ grades through adolescents’ own academic engagement. Consequently, all immigrant Latino parents, including those with low educational attainment, demonstrate the potential to enhance their children’s academic engagement when their children perceive them as involved by monitoring their activities.

In Ceballo’s (2004) qualitative study examining the role of parents in the academic success of Latino students attending Yale University from low-income immigrant families, she found four factors that contributed to the academic success of the student’s achievement. These factors included having a strong parental commitment to the importance of education, parental facilitation of their child’s autonomy, an array of nonverbal, parental expressions of support for educational goals and tasks, and the presence of supportive faculty mentors and role models in the student’s lives. The participants asserted that although their parents were not always aware of the school assignments they had or how to help them with their homework, these parents provided
emotional support in the form of words of encouragement and support for their educational goals.

These studies emphasize the ways in which Latino parents shape their children’s academic attitudes and outcomes. A large percentage of Latino students in urban public schools are from low-income families. Their parents often work long hours to support their families, which can make it almost impossible to be involved at their child’s school. In combination with other factors including limited English proficiency and the perception that school officials know best, Latino parents are limited in their ability to be directly involved with their children’s schooling. Educators must keep these factors in mind when working with Latino parents, because these parents care greatly about their child’s education and are involved in their own way in their children’s schooling.

Shah (2009) found that the increased presence of Latinos within the schools led to an increase in parental involvement among Latino parents. Additionally, three main factors affected Latino parent involvement in the Chicago public schools: Latino representation, school policies, and individual characteristics of being a participator. These results demonstrate the importance of Latino representation in the schools, if parents feel others respect and value their culture within the schools they feel more welcome and willing to participate in school activities. If educators are interested in improving the academic outcomes of Latino students, they must understand the factors that impact parental involvement as the benefits are worth the effort put in (Vega, 2010).
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The barriers African American and Latino youth encounter towards positive achievement are more detrimental to their future outcomes than their white counterparts (Valencia, 2000). Rather than examining what must be done to improve the learning outcomes of African Americans and Latinos, the literature emphasizes their underachievement. To better meet the needs of these urban students, researchers must closely examine how students perceive and interpret their educational experiences and study how different factors shape students’ academic attitudes, and behaviors. With these findings, educators have the potential to improve school instruction and in and out of school services for students through the development and implementation of interventions tailored to meet their unique needs. Moreover, the implications of this study can influence policy reform.

3.2 Research Questions

Due to the persistent achievement gap among different racial and ethnic groups, the purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the educational experiences of urban African American and Latino students. This study examined how their experiences shaped their attitudes and behaviors towards learning and achievement. More specifically, the study explored the following research questions:
1. Which of these factors (e.g., school, psychological, and social) contribute to or inhibit urban students’ school identity and academic attitudes?
   a. Which of these factors (e.g., school, psychological, and social), if any, differentiate by academic performance (e.g., high academic performance versus low academic performance)?
   b. Which of these factors (e.g., school, psychological, and social), if any, differentiate by gender?
   c. Which of these factors (e.g., school, psychological, and social), if any, differentiate by race and ethnicity (e.g., African American and Latino students)?
   d. Which of these factors (e.g., school, psychological, and social), if any, differentiate by school?

2. What individuals have the most influence on urban youth’s school identity and academic orientation?

3.3 Research Design

3.3.1 Theoretical Frameworks

The purpose of this study was to examine the educational experiences of urban youth and understand how these experiences positively and negatively influence their attitudes and behaviors towards about learning. African American and Latino youth in public schools experience school failure at a disproportionate rate when compared to white students (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; O’Connor, Horvat, & Lewis, 2006; Valencia, 2000). Through a deficit view lens, society blames urban African Americans
and Latinos for their academic failure and ignores the role structural factors playing in contributing to the achievement gap (Gándara & Contreras, 2009).

This investigation utilized Critical Race Theory (CRT; Bell, 1988; Delgado, 1989), Latino Critical theory (LatCrit; Haney-Lopez, 1998; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001), and Purkey and Novak’s theory of invitational education (1996) as guiding conceptual frameworks. Both CRT and LatCrit emphasize the social categories of race, gender, class, and sexuality, and recognize them as social constructions and categories that have material effects on people (Fernández, 2002). CRT and LatCrit also focus on traditionally marginalized persons through methods, such as storytelling, to recognize their voices, which educational research often silences (Fernández, 2002; Valdes, 1998). Using CRT and LatCrit as frameworks for the investigation allowed the researcher to present students’ experiences as realities and document racism as institutional and inherent in systems of society, such as education.

Invitational education focuses on the messages communicated by people, places, policies, programs, and processes within the school system (Novak & Purkey, 2001). These messages convey to students their worth and value in the school setting. Negative or uninviting messages “inform people that they are worthless, incapable of accomplishing much, and unable to participate in anything that matters” (Novak & Purkey, 2001, pp. 7-8). Positive or inviting messages “tell people they matter, are capable, and can participate in meaningful activities” (Novak & Purkey, 2001, p. 7). Thus, in the context of urban schooling, messages are constantly transmitted that influence students attitudes and behaviors toward achievement. These frameworks are discussed at length in the following sections.
Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a framework allows students of color to share their stories and essentially have their voices heard, specifically in relation to their experiences with race and racism in the educational system. CRT, a legal theory of race and racism designed to uncover how race and racism operate in the law and society, can be used as a tool through which to define, expose, and address problems in the educational system (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Racism is commonly viewed as a purposeful act of aggression against a person for instance, based on their skin color; however, discussions centering around race and racism rarely take into account how they are deeply embedded within the foundation of American society (Parker & Lynn, 2002). In other words, race and racism fail to be discussed in terms of systems of oppression, instead mostly as individual acts of discrimination.

The pioneers of CRT Derrick Bell and Richard Delgado argued that racism is an endemic part of American society; it is deeply rooted through historical consciousness and ideological choices about race (Parker & Lynn, 2002). As a result, it directly molded the U.S. legal system and the ways people think about the law, race, and privilege (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) introduced CRT into the field of education because at the time, race remained unemployed in the analysis of school inequality. Institutional and structural racism are built into public schooling and maintain a position of inferiority among students of color. CRT serves as a means to challenge the dominant discourse on race and racism as it relates to education by examining how educational theory and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001), e.g., African American and Latino youth.
CRT has three main goals: (a) - to present storytelling and narratives as valid approaches through which to examine race and racism in the law and society; (b) - to argue for the eradication of racial subjugation while simultaneously recognizing that race is a social construct; and (c) - to draw important relationships between race and other axes of domination (Milner, 2007; Parker & Lynn, 2002). Storytelling played an important role as a means of gathering legal evidence in racial discrimination litigation because, “only through listening can the conviction of seeing the world one way be challenged and one can acquire the ability to see the world through others’ eyes” (Delgado, 1989, p. 2439, as cited in Parker & Lynn, 2002).

CRT narratives and storytelling provide readers with a challenging account of preconceived notions of race (Parker & Lynn, 2002). By telling a story, listeners hear an alternative perspective on racialized situations and through this, there is the opportunity to challenge one’s belief system. The voices heard in narratives acknowledge the importance of personal and community experiences of people of color as sources of knowledge (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). In addition, the stories of those considered to be at the bottom of the social hierarchy by the dominant culture illustrate how race and racism continue to control our society (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Through participant’s stories, their experiences become reality for those who ignore the prevalence of racism in society.

The second goal of CRT is the recognition that race is a social construction. Racism is shaped by society; it is so ingrained in society that they become normalized (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Because they exist in society, they are also present in education. Critical race theorists attempt to explain implicit and explicit consequences of
systemic, policy-related racism and work to disrupt and transform policies, laws, theories, and practices through the exposure to racism (Milner, 2007). The third goal of CRT is the intersectionality of other underrepresented areas, such as feminism and sexism. Researchers seek to use CRT in these fields to uncover injustices and instances of disempowerment. Further, CRT has emerged from the legal arena to uncover systematic patterns of marginalization to push a social justice agenda into legal and public discourse on race and gender (Parker & Lynn, 2002).

It is important to note that Ladson-Billings (1998) warns CRT scholars of the dangers of engaging in research but never penetrating the classrooms and daily experiences of students of color. Utilizing a CRT framework in education requires scholars to expose racism in education and propose radical solutions to address it. There is a risk that comes with adopting a CRT stance and scholars must be prepared to take bold and unpopular positions. Ladson-Billings (1998) fears educational researchers will not assume this position due to the danger and discomfort of such a stance “in a nice field like education” (p. 22). Therefore, it is important for CRT scholars to study and understand CRT and its tenets and prepare to put forth changes to the inequities inherent in the educational system. Otherwise, CRT will not have the effect it intended to have- to challenge and expose inherent racist structures and find solutions to address these problem areas.

**Latino critical theory (LatCrit)**

Latino critical theory (LatCrit) is similar to CRT (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). However, unlike CRT, it explicitly explores the role of race, nation, language, culture, and ethnicity in shaping the experiences of Latinos in the US and abroad (Lynn
LatCrit scholars such as Haney-Lopez (1998) have highlighted the limitations of focusing exclusively on the Black/White paradigm in studies of race because the experiences of other groups are consequently minimized and ignored. Haney-Lopez (1998) argued that LatCrit theorists must retain the language of race because focusing exclusively on ethnicity ignores the important aspects of Latino life in this country, can hinder our knowledge of the ways in which Latino communities are racialized, and can move us away from pursuing social justice. Therefore, it is important that scholars examine how race, ethnicity, language, colonization, and immigration add complexity to Latinos racialized experiences.

Valdes (1996) posits that LatCrit is complementary to CRT; consequently, the researcher employed both theories as guiding conceptual frameworks for this study. A CRT/LatCrit framework centers around race and racism and seeks to understand ways in which race operates in society to influence individual experiences and outcomes (Bell, 1992). Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) posit that at least five themes form the basic perspectives, research methods, and pedagogies of a CRT and LatCrit framework in education. They are the following: (a) the centrality of race and racism and intersectionality with other forms of subordination; (b) the challenge to dominant ideology; (c) the commitment to social justice; (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge; and (e) the interdisciplinary perspective.

The first theme, the centrality of race and racism and intersectionality with other forms of subordination discusses how race and racism are endemic to society; it is permanent and inherent in American life, as the foundation of the U.S. is based on a hierarchical system. Both race and racism intersect with other forms of marginalization,
such as gender and class discrimination, which persons of color also often experience. The second theme, the challenge to dominant ideology, confronts the traditional claims of the educational system to objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, and equal opportunity. CRT and LatCrit scholars argue that these traditional paradigms are disguised as self-interest power and privilege of dominant groups in the United States (Parker & Lynn, 2002). In structures such as the public education system, norms relate to middle-class values and behaviors which conflict with those of students of color leading to their subordination.

The third theme, the commitment to social justice, offers a liberatory response to racial, gender, and class oppression. Such a social justice agenda focuses on eliminating racism, sexism, and poverty, as well as empowering underrepresented minority groups. The fourth theme, the centrality of experiential knowledge, recognizes the value of the experiences of students of color. Their experiential knowledge is critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination in the field of education. CRT and LatCrit educational studies draw on lived experiences of students of color by including storytelling and narratives. The last theme, the interdisciplinary perspective, insists on analyzing race and racism in education by placing them in both a historical and contemporary context using interdisciplinary methods (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

Given the high rate of underachievement among African American and Latino students in public schools, LatCrit and CRT were selected as theoretical frameworks for this study. These frameworks provide a method of theorizing the ways in which educational structures, processes, and discourses support and promote subordination...
Solórzano & Delgado Bernal (2001). This study provided further evidence of the inequities urban youth face in public schools. The findings have the potential to improve services students receive in and out of school, assist educators in understanding their school experiences, and develop realistic solutions.

*Invitational education*

Invitational education is still an evolving theory of practice as it has progressed since its foundation in the 1970s. Invitational education centers around three cornerstone assumptions: the perceptual tradition, self-concept theory, and democratic practice. The perceptual tradition focuses on how an individual perceives their experiences in the world. Therefore, people behave according to how they perceive themselves, others, and the world; their perceptions are learned, and they can be reflected upon (Purkey & Novak, 1996). Self-concept theory states that how a person perceives him or herself develops from the messages they receive; inviting or disinviting ones. Finally, democratic practice emphasizes mutual respect and dialogue among people regarding shared aspects of their lives (Purkey & Novak, 1996).

Novak and Purkey (2001) define invitational education as “the process by which people are cordially, creatively, and consistently summoned to realize their potential…its focus is on the messages transmitted by people, places, policies, programs, and processes” (p. 7). These messages can be inviting or disinviting, in that, they can communicate value and ability or they can assist in the development of positive relationships or lead to negative relationships. The authors discuss the five areas to apply invitational education, referred to as the “Five P’s”- people, places, policies, programs, and processes. Therefore, the data analysis in this study focuses on the “Five P’s.
Invitational education begins and ends with people because they are the ones who develop relationships and positive patterns of interpersonal behavior in the school environment. Therefore, it is important for educators to create positive spaces for interaction and view persons within the school setting as valuable and contributing members in the learning community. Teacher perceptions and expectations play a major role in how students perceive their self-worth and value in the school environment.

Places are described as the appearance of a setting, how schools are maintained and kept. This upkeep speaks to the value of people in the community; it shows whether people care about the place, such as the school. Thus, when students attend schools that are poorly maintained and lack necessary resources, as is characteristic of high-poverty urban schools, they feel undervalued and disinvited.

Policies within a school can strongly influence the attitudes of those in the setting such as students. If students perceive policies or school rules as negative or unfair, their attitudes towards school is negative as a result. Zero tolerance policies have a strong impact on student’s attitudes towards school and learning, if students feel school rules treat them as a juvenile delinquent, their attitudes will shift in a negative way (Skiba & Knesting, 2001). Additionally, school programs must benefit all those involved and encourage active participation. Invitational programs are inclusive and encourage students to view themselves as lifelong learners. Finally, processes combine the first four P’s and implement them in a democratic manner. Therefore, those affected by decisions should be involved in the process of reaching a conclusion.
3.3.2 Settings

*Crawford City Schools.* According to the Crawford City Schools District 2008-2009 school year report card (the most recent available data) as given by the state Department of Education, the district’s designation is “Continuous Improvement” out of a scale of six designations: Excellent with Distinction, Excellent, Effective, Continuous Improvement, Academic Watch, and Academic Emergency. Crawford City Schools met 6 out of 30 state indicators in the following areas: fourth grade achievement test (75.9%), 10th grade state graduation tests in reading (76.6%) and writing (85%), 11th grade state graduation tests in reading (91.4%) and writing (92.9%), and attendance rate (94.3%).

In addition, the average daily school enrollment for the district was over 51,000 students, consisting of 60.9% Black, non-Hispanic; 27.4% White, non-Hispanic; 5.9% Hispanic; 3.7% Multi-racial; 1.9% Asian or Pacific Islander; and 0.2% American Indian or Alaska Native. Crawford City Schools classified 81.1% of its students as economically disadvantaged, 8.3% are Limited English Proficient, and 16.9% are students with disabilities. The 2007-2008 graduation rate was 73.9%, it fell short of the state graduation rate of 84.6%, and the state requirement rate of 90%. Therefore, the district graduation rate falls well below the state average and state requirement.

*Upward Bound.* The Upward Bound program is a federally funded educational program; it is one of several TRIO programs created under the *Higher Education Act of 1965.* It is designed to support participants in their preparation for college entrance (http://www2.ed.gov/programs/trioupbound/index.html). The staff of the Upward Bound program provides academic instruction in mathematics, sciences, language arts, and foreign languages. The program targets first-generation (a student whose parent and/or
guardian does not hold a baccalaureate degree) and low-income (an individual whose family’s taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150 percent of the poverty level amount), college-bound 9th, 10th, and 11th graders from four high schools in the Crawford City Schools District: Baker, Evergreen, Stanley, and Waterford. Further, Upward Bound provides students with the necessary support to successfully graduate high school, enroll in, and graduate from college. Participating students receive these services at a local large Midwestern university.

Description of schools. Students from six Crawford City high schools participated in this study: Baker, Evergreen, Miami, Stanley, Waterford, and Watson. Five of the six schools have similar graduation rates and all of the schools have over 80% economically disadvantaged students. These schools are what the U.S. Department of Education terms “high-poverty” schools, where more than three quarters of the children qualify for the free or reduced price lunch program. All but one of the six schools have been designated as being in Continuous Improvement and have failed to meet their adequate yearly progress (AYP) for the 2008-2009 school year. Miami is designated as Effective and met their AYP for the 2008-2009 school year. Brief information about each of the five high schools is presented below and detailed information can be found in table 3.1.

Baker High. For the 2008-2009 school year, Baker High met 6 out of 12 state indicators on the 10th grade state achievement tests in reading (76%) and writing (88.8%), and 11th grade state achievement tests in reading (93.3%), mathematics (89%), writing (95.7%), and social studies (90.2%). For 10th grade, the state requirement is 75% and for 11th graders, the state mandate is 85%. The average daily school enrollment at Baker was
998 students consisting of 62.2% White, 27.9% Black, 4.4% Asian or Pacific Islander, 4.1% Hispanic, and 1.4% Multi-racial. In addition, the school is 80.4% economically disadvantaged, 2.4% Limited English Proficient, and 16.0% are students with disabilities. The 2007-2008 graduation rate was 65.7%. In the district for the 2007-2008 school year, this school’s graduation rate ranked 15th out of a total of 23 high schools.

*Evergreen High.* For the 2008-2009 school year, Evergreen High met 3 out of 12 state indicators on the 10th grade state achievement tests in writing (83.1%) and 11th grade state achievement tests in reading (86%), and writing (92.4%). The average daily school enrollment was 727 students consisting of 97% Black and 1.9% White. The school is 90.8% economically disadvantaged, 4.9% Limited English Proficient, and 17.5% are students with disabilities. The 2007-2008 graduation rate was 67.9%. In the district for the 2007-2008 school year, this school’s graduation rate ranked 14th out of a total of 23 high schools.

*Miami High.* For the 2008-2009 school year, Miami High met 7 out of 12 state indicators on the 10th grade state achievement tests in reading (78.2%), mathematics (75.2%), writing (89.1%), and social studies, and 11th grade state achievement tests in reading (95.7%) and writing (88.9%). Miami also met an indicator for attendance rate (93.1%). The average daily school enrollment was 643 students consisting of 92.7% Black, 3.5% White, and 2% Hispanic. The school is 85.8% economically disadvantaged, 15.9% Limited English Proficient, and 18.1% are students with disabilities. The 2007-2008 graduation rate was 71%. In the district for the 2007-2008 school year, this school’s graduation rate ranked 13th out of a total of 23 high schools.
Stanley High. For the 2008-2009 school year, Stanley High met 1 out of 12 state indicators on the 10th grade state achievement tests in writing (80.9%). The average daily school enrollment was 461 students consisting of 86.4% Black and 9.5% White. Similar to Evergreen High, Stanley High is 90.6% economically disadvantaged, but a larger number of students are students with disabilities (24%). Stanley High has the lowest graduation rate among the five schools at 49.6%. In the district for the 2007-2008 school year, this school’s graduation rate ranked 19th out of a total of 23 high schools.

Waterford High. For the 2008-2009 school year, Waterford High met 4 out of 12 state indicators on the 10th grade state achievement tests in reading (76%) and writing (81.9%), and 11th grade state achievement tests in reading (91.3%) and writing (94.4%). The average daily school enrollment was 837 students consisting of 85.2% Black, 6% Hispanic, 5.8% White, and 1.9% Asian or Pacific Islander. The school is 81.4% economically disadvantaged, 13.1% Limited English Proficient, and 16.2% are students with disabilities. The 2007-2008 graduation rate was 63.6%. In the district for the 2007-2008 school year, this school’s graduation rate ranked 16th out of a total of 23 high schools.

Watson High. For the 2008-2009 school year, Watson High met 1 out of 12 state indicators on the 11th grade state achievement tests in writing (88.1%). The average daily school enrollment was 1,014 students consisting of 51.6% White, 35.1% Black, 7.8% Hispanic, and 4.2% Asian or Pacific Islander. The school is 80.1% economically disadvantaged, 13.5% Limited English Proficient, and 19.1% are students with disabilities. The 2007-2008 graduation rate was 61.5%. In the district for the 2007-2008 school year, this school’s graduation rate ranked 17th out of a total of 23 high schools.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Indicators met</th>
<th>Designation</th>
<th>Free/Reduced lunch rate</th>
<th>Graduation rate</th>
<th>Demographics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crawford City Schools</td>
<td>6 out of 30</td>
<td>Continuous Improvement</td>
<td>81.1%</td>
<td>73.9%</td>
<td>60.9% Black; 27.4% White; 5.9% Hispanic; 3.7% Multi-racial; 1.9% Asian or Pacific Islander; and 0.2% American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baker High</td>
<td>6 out of 12</td>
<td>Continuous Improvement</td>
<td>80.4%</td>
<td>65.7%</td>
<td>62.2% White; 27.9% Black; 4.4% Asian or Pacific Islander; 4.1% Hispanic; and 1.4% Multi-racial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evergreen High</td>
<td>3 out of 12</td>
<td>Continuous Improvement</td>
<td>90.8%</td>
<td>67.9%</td>
<td>97% Black; 1.9% White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miami High</td>
<td>7 out of 12</td>
<td>Effective</td>
<td>85.8%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>92.7% Black; 3.5% White; 2% Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stanley High</td>
<td>1 out of 12</td>
<td>Continuous Improvement</td>
<td>90.6%</td>
<td>49.6%</td>
<td>86.4% Black; 9.5% White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterford High</td>
<td>4 out of 12</td>
<td>Continuous Improvement</td>
<td>81.4%</td>
<td>63.6%</td>
<td>85.2% Black; 6% Hispanic; 5.8% White; and 1.9% Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watson High</td>
<td>1 out of 12</td>
<td>Continuous Improvement</td>
<td>80.1%</td>
<td>61.5%</td>
<td>51.6% White; 35.1% Black; 7.8% Hispanic; and 4.2% Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1 Description of the district and schools status according to indicators met, designation, free/reduced lunch rate, graduation rate, demographics and school ranking* (based on 2007-08 graduation rates)

3.3.3 Participant Selection

In qualitative research, samples are selected purposefully (Patton, 2002), the researcher typically has a particular population in mind that will answer his or her research questions. The rationale for purposeful sampling lies in selecting information rich cases, with the aim of gaining insight and understanding of the phenomena under
Unlike with random sampling in quantitative research, the main goal of qualitative research is not generalizability, but to collect in-depth information regarding a specific topic of study (Patton, 2002). In qualitative research, the researcher selects people or sites that will help better understand a phenomenon (Creswell, 2005). The purposeful sampling strategy employed in this study was a criterion sample; all participants were urban high school students (a focus on African American and Latino youth) enrolled in the local urban school district. In addition, snowball sampling was used to recruit Latino students for the study.

The researcher collected data from students participating in the Upward Bound program at a large Midwestern university and students attending a Crawford City schools high school. The students participating in the Upward Bound program also attended high schools in Crawford City as non-Upward Bound participants. Students from Baker, Evergreen, Stanley, and Waterford High participated in the Upward Bound program. In addition, one student attending Miami High participated in the Upward Bound program. Prior to the study, this student transferred out of Stanley High; however, he was permitted to continue his enrollment in the Upward Bound program. For the Upward Bound participants, the researcher presented the study to the students during their lunch period during Summer Institute at the large Midwestern University. At that time, the researcher provided students with a recruitment packet containing a recruitment letter explaining the study, a parental permission form, and a student assent form to those interested in participating.

If parents were interested in having his or her child participate in the study and the student was also willing to participate, the student returned the signed parental consent
and assent forms. If a student was at least 18 years old, he or she signed and returned an adult consent form to the researcher and she was available to pick up the signed consent forms on dates and times indicated on the recruitment letter. If participants decided to take part in the study, they were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time of the data collection process without consequence.

For students who were not participants in the Upward Bound program and attended school in the local urban public school district, the researcher traveled to the participating high school and worked with the administrator, school psychologist, teachers, and students to identify and recruit Latino students. As previously stated, the researcher used a snowball sample to recruit these students. Research has found that “snowballing is sometimes the best way to locate subjects with certain attributes or characteristics necessary in a study” (Berg, 2004, p. 36). Because the Upward Bound program was predominantly African American, the researcher sought Latino students from the Crawford City high school with the largest percentage of that population.

Watson High enrolled the largest percentage of Latino students in the Crawford City schools district; recruitment began with students enrolled in the English as a Second Language (ESL) program. Due to the low return rate of consent forms and low level of English proficiency, the researcher used the snowball method to recruit other Latino students by asking a participant to identify other Latino students. To this end, the researcher spoke with several Latino students during their lunch period and successfully recruited additional participants. Students interested in the study were provided a recruitment packet with a recruitment letter explaining the study, a parental permission form, and a student assent form.
If parents were interested in having his or her child participate in the study and the student was also willing to participate, the student returned the signed parental consent and assent forms. If a student was at least 18 years old, he or she signed and returned an adult consent form to the researcher. The researcher was available to pick up the signed consent forms on dates and times indicated on the recruitment letter. If participants decided to take part in the study, they were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time of the data collection process without consequence.

In qualitative research, sample size varies; some researchers study a few individuals or cases, some study a single individual or site, and others study several cases “ranging from 1 to 2 or 30 or 40” (Creswell, 2005, p. 207). In this study, the researcher conducted 20 interviews; only those who returned consent forms were allowed to participate. The researcher did not recruit more than 20 students as saturation and redundancy in data collection occurred. The sample consisted of 12 females and 8 males. From this sample, 10 students self-identified as African American or Black, two as biracial or mixed, and eight as Hispanic or Latino. The terms African American and Latino will be used throughout this study. Of the Latino students, three identified as Dominican and two of the three were born in the Dominican Republic. One student was born in Costa Rica; one student was born in Ecuador; two students were Mexican, one was born in Mexico, the other in the U.S.; and one student identified as Mexican and white, but answered the interviews questions through her Mexican identity. The participants are described in the table below (for a more comprehensive description, see Appendix A).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chosen Pseudonym</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Free/Red. Lunch</th>
<th>Family Make-up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Biracial (African American &amp; White)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>B (89-80)</td>
<td>Baker</td>
<td>80.4%</td>
<td>Lives with mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cici</td>
<td>Multiracial (African American, White, &amp; Cherokee)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>A (100-90)</td>
<td>Stanley</td>
<td>90.6%</td>
<td>Lives with father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Latino, born in Dominican Republic</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>B (89-80)</td>
<td>Watson</td>
<td>80.1%</td>
<td>Lives with mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>B (89-80)</td>
<td>Miami</td>
<td>85.8%</td>
<td>Lives with foster father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jose</td>
<td>Latino, born in Costa Rica</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>B (89-80)</td>
<td>Watson</td>
<td>80.1%</td>
<td>Lives with mother &amp; father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>B (89-80)</td>
<td>Evergreen</td>
<td>90.8%</td>
<td>Lives with mother &amp; father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LeMarcus</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>C (79-70)</td>
<td>Waterford</td>
<td>81.4%</td>
<td>Lives with mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>Latino, born in Mexico</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>B (89-80)</td>
<td>Watson</td>
<td>80.1%</td>
<td>Lives with mother &amp; father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>A (100-90)</td>
<td>Evergreen</td>
<td>90.8%</td>
<td>Lives with mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucette</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>C (79-70)</td>
<td>Watson</td>
<td>80.1%</td>
<td>Lives with mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Latino, born in Dominican Republic</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>A (100-90)</td>
<td>Watson</td>
<td>80.1%</td>
<td>Lives with father &amp; aunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mario</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>A (100-90)</td>
<td>Evergreen</td>
<td>90.8%</td>
<td>Lives with mother &amp; father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia</td>
<td>Latino (Mexican &amp; White)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>A (100-90)</td>
<td>Baker</td>
<td>80.4%</td>
<td>Lives with mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monique</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>C (79-70)</td>
<td>Stanley</td>
<td>90.6%</td>
<td>Lives with aunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pepito</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>A (100-90)</td>
<td>Watson</td>
<td>80.1%</td>
<td>Lives with mother &amp; uncle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilar</td>
<td>Latino, born in Ecuador</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>B (89-80)</td>
<td>Watson</td>
<td>80.1%</td>
<td>Lives with mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talayah</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>C (79-70)</td>
<td>Evergreen</td>
<td>90.8%</td>
<td>Lives with father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenishi</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>A (100-90)</td>
<td>Stanley</td>
<td>90.6%</td>
<td>Lives with mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>C (79-70)</td>
<td>Baker</td>
<td>80.4%</td>
<td>Lives with mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tommy</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>A (100-90)</td>
<td>Waterford</td>
<td>81.4%</td>
<td>Lives with mother</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2 Description of participants’ race/ethnicity, gender, age, grade, grade point average, school, free/reduced lunch percentage, family make-up

3.3.4 Data Collection

In qualitative research, the researcher collects multiple types of information to answer their research questions and establish the trustworthiness of their findings. The
The following methods for gathering data were used for this study: individual interviews and document collection.

*Individual Interviews.* Semi-structured face-to-face individual interviews were conducted to gather in-depth information on the educational experiences of the students. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) state that a major benefit of collecting data through individual, in-depth interviews is that they offer the potential to capture a person’s perspective of an event or experience. All interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. Each individual interview lasted 25 to 45 minutes and focused on a variety of topics according to the 17-item interview protocol. The interview protocol (Appendix B) guaranteed that the same information was obtained from all the participants. Follow-up questions were asked when appropriate; adherence to the protocol helps the researcher from imposing his or her own interests on interviewees (Seidman, 1991).

*Interview Protocol.* The interview protocol was modified from Sanders (1997) study to fit the needs of the current study. Questions 1 through 5 were designed to gather information from the students about their school environment, the classes they were taking, the rigor of their academic curriculum, their favorite and least favorite subjects, and their current grades. Questions 6 through 8 related to a holistic perspective of the student’s lives, identifying the persons who provided them with academic support and the support they received in selecting courses, specifically examining who assisted them in their course selection and informed them of opportunities for college preparation such as Advanced Placement (AP) and honors course enrollment. In addition, these questions examined how students perceived their environment outside of school. Questions 9
through 11 addressed how students utilized their time outside of the school day, specifically, to determine how much time was spent on schoolwork.

Question 12 elicited information about student’s future goals, how they planned to reach those goals, and the support they received in accomplishing their goals. Question 13 addressed student’s perceptions of, experiences with, and the influence of racism and racial discrimination in their lives. Questions 14 and 15 concerned how students feel non-minority groups (e.g., whites) perceive their racial group and how members of their own racial group perceive their own racial group. These questions also addressed the degree to which these perceptions impact their motivation to be successful in school. Questions 16 and 17 addressed the students feeling towards President Obama, the first African American president and the degree to which it influenced their motivation to achieve success in school. Interviews were conducted privately within the respective school buildings. For the Upward Bound students, interviews were conducted in a private room on campus.

Document Collection. “A valuable source of information in qualitative research can be documents” as they provide useful information to the researcher about the site and/or participants in a study and help in better understanding the phenomena under study (Creswell, 2005, p. 219). Before each individual interview, the researcher administered a brief, biographical questionnaire to student participants (see Appendix C). These questionnaires included information regarding (a) student demographic data; (b) community demographic data; and (c) family demographic data. The data collected from the biographical questionnaire provided useful demographic information about the participants. Participants completed this form with the assistance of the researcher upon
receipt of their consent forms and prior to their interviews taking place. At that time, the students created pseudonyms to protect their identity and maintain confidentiality. The researcher also collected report card data on the school district and the six high schools (e.g., attendance rate, graduation rate, demographics, etc.) from the state department of education’s website.

3.3.5 Data Analysis

The individual interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. The transcripts from each interview were both coded and analyzed utilizing the grounded theory approach, specifically, constant comparative analysis. This qualitative technique (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) refers to collecting and analyzing data simultaneously for the purpose of developing theoretical and thematic explanations, to explain, compare, and trace the development of the researched phenomena. The constant comparative method is an inductive approach in grounded theory of generating and connecting categories by comparing cases to different cases, cases to categories, and categories to categories (Creswell, 2005). Thus, each individual interview was compared to the others, to the emerging categories, which were then compared to other emerging categories. The purpose of this process is to ground the categories in the data (Creswell, 2005).

Beginning with the first individual interview, data analysis began and continued until the last one was conducted. Each new interview was compared to previous interviews so that similar phenomena could be given the same name. Through close examination of the interview data, the naming and categorizing of phenomena occurred, a process known as open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). During open coding, the data
are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, compared for similarities and differences, and questions are asked about the phenomena as reflected in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Once the researcher identified phenomena reflected within the data, those that appeared to pertain to the same phenomena are categorized. The researcher does this to reduce the number of categories. Further, the phenomena represented by a category were given a conceptual name; this name was more abstract than the name given to concepts grouped under it. The categories pull together other groups of concepts or subcategories (Strauss & Corbin 1990).

“Open coding fractures the data and allows one to identify some categories, their properties, and dimensional locations” (Strauss & Corbin 1990, p. 97), whereas the next stage of coding, axial coding, puts data together in a new way by making connections between a category and its subcategories. The researcher developed categories based on the conditions, which give rise to it, the context, and the consequences of any action that is taken (Strauss & Corbin 1990). The researcher relied on the transcripts for analyzing the data; a procedure referred to as transcript-based analysis (Morgan, 1998). This process continued until the researcher was able to answer the research questions.

Research Partner. During this phase of analysis, the researcher and her research partner looked for patterns in the data and coded the data so themes and sub-themes could be easily identified. The research partner was an African American doctoral student in education who had experience and familiarity with urban issues in education and qualitative methodology (see Appendix D). The researcher and her research partner initially coded the data independently and, thereafter, met to discuss patterns in the data. By employing this method of peer debriefing, patterns and emergent themes were
identified, analyzed, and discussed. Throughout the data analysis process, they discussed “how” and/or “why” they identified certain themes in the data. This method of analysis again allowed the data to be constantly compared and organized as recommended by the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Once patterns and themes were identified, the researcher used direct excerpts from the transcripts to present and illustrate the themes and sub-themes. The researcher remained open to multiple or unanticipated findings that could emerge from the data (Berg, 2003), because the possibility existed for the research questions to remain unanswered.

3.4 Researcher Subjectivity

Subjectivity is consistently present throughout the research process; therefore, researchers should systematically address their subjectivities throughout their research engagement (Peshkin, 1988). When subjectivity enters a study it affects the degree to which the researcher interprets and presents their results to the public; biases are potentially introduced. Glesne (1999) asserts that awareness of subjectivities can guide the researcher to utilize strategies to monitor those perspectives that might, during data analysis and reporting, shape, skew, distort, construe, and misconstrue what the researcher makes of what they see and hear. The researcher attended urban public schools throughout her youth and witnessed many of the challenges students of color face within this educational system. Additionally, the researcher has examined the literature focusing on the issues African American and Latino students face and witnessed many of these issues through her field experiences as a school psychology graduate student and intern. These experienced influenced her assumptions for the study. These assumptions were the following:
1. African American and Latino students attending urban public schools come from low socioeconomic backgrounds and reside in impoverished communities.

2. African American and Latino students perceived minimal academic and guidance support from school personnel.

3. African American and Latino students perceived limited access to quality instruction from school personnel.

The researcher’s experience as a woman of color, who attended inner-city public schools, yet, persisted throughout her academic career despite facing barriers and challenges to success were advantageous in conducting this study. These experiences provided her with insider knowledge or a firsthand understanding of the issues students of color face in urban public schools. However, these experiences introduce subjectivities into the study evident from the assumptions; therefore, specific methods were employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the study.

3.5 Trustworthiness

Criteria for evaluating qualitative research differ from those used in quantitative research, in that the focus is on how well the researcher provides evidence that her or his descriptions and analysis represent the reality of the situations and persons studied (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Because of this difference, many critics are reluctant to accept the trustworthiness of qualitative research; however, frameworks exist to ensure the rigor of such research (Shenton, 2004). Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose four trustworthiness criteria for qualitative research to ensure reliability and validity: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.
3.5.1 Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that ensuring credibility is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness. Credibility refers to the extent to which the participant’s perceptions align with the researcher’s portrayal of them (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). In this study, prolonged engagement, triangulation, member checks, and peer debriefing were used to ensure the credibility of the research findings. Prolonged engagement required sufficient time at the research site to interact with the participants. It is important to understand the setting the researcher is in to understand the phenomena under study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The purpose of prolonged engagement is to decide whether the researcher has risen above any preconceived notions; whether misinformation has been forthcoming and whether that misinformation is deliberate or unintended; and what measures to take to combat that problem (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Additionally, the goal was to provide the researcher with an opportunity to build trust and rapport with the participants so that they felt comfortable enough to provide honest answers to the questions under study. This study began in the summer of 2009 and continued from February to May 2010. During this time, the researcher spent a considerable amount of time engaging with the participants prior to, throughout, and after the interview process (e.g., during lunch period, school-related activities, etc.), so that trust and rapport could be built and to be aware of potential misinformation.

The most common form of triangulation involves the use of multiple data collection methods; however, triangulation may also involve multiple data sources, investigators, and theoretical perspectives (Denzin, 1989, as cited in Glesne, 1999). Specifically, in this study, data, investigator, methodological, and theoretical framework
triangulation were utilized. This process ensured that the study was accurate since it pulled from multiple sources of information, individuals, and methods (Creswell, 2005). Data triangulation was implemented through the following sources: urban youth (e.g., African American and Latino students) who attended high school in the CCS district, of varying achievement levels and grades, and males and females.

Investigator triangulation was ensured through the following methods: a research partner, peer debriefing, and member checks. Research teams typically consist of individuals experienced in qualitative research methods. However, due to time constraints, the researcher had a research partner rather than a team. Nonetheless, peer debriefing was also utilized to strengthen the credibility of the results. Peer debriefing involves the support of skilled colleague(s) to discuss the results of the study; this allowed the researcher to receive input on her work, probe potential biases, and the basis for interpretations are clarified (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researchers’ dissertation co-chair served as a peer debriefer and consistently met with her throughout the data analysis process. In addition, member checks involved sharing interview transcripts with the participants to ensure accurate representation. The researcher provided students with the opportunity to discuss and review interview transcripts to ensure clarity and accuracy; discrepancies were also addressed at that time. It must be noted that two students were unable to be reached to review their interview transcripts for the member check process.

Methodological triangulation involves the use of multiple methods of data collection. In this study, the researcher collected individual interview data, student demographic information through the administration of a biographical questionnaire, and district and school report card data from the state department of education’s website. The
collection of demographic data assisted in validating interview data and the report card data assisted in understanding the contexts in which the students were educated. Finally, the researcher utilized CRT, LatCrit, and invitational education as multiple theoretical frameworks to guide the analysis of this study.

3.5.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent that the researchers’ working hypotheses about one context applies to another context (Bradley, 1993). The researcher is responsible for providing sufficient contextual information about the research site to enable the reader to transfer such methods to similar situations. The researcher “can provide only thick descriptions to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, for this study, transferability was ensured through the inclusion of thick, rich descriptions, which provides readers with a holistic view of what has occurred. In addition, a reflexive journal (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was maintained by the researcher to reflect on the study, record preliminary assumptions about the information collected throughout the study, and check for potential biases.

3.5.3 Dependability

Dependability refers to whether or not one can track the processes and procedures utilized to collect and interpret data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). An audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was utilized to ensure dependability of the study; this is a process that entails keeping records of the data and methodological decisions made in a way that another researcher can review the information (Anastas, 2004). For this study, the researcher retained raw data (e.g., interview transcripts, written field notes, biographical
student data, and school report card data); data reduction and analysis products (e.g., field notes, working hypotheses, themes, and codes); and data reconstruction and synthesis products (e.g., categories, findings, conclusions, and a final report integrating existing literature). The researcher also maintained process notes (e.g., methodological notes including procedures, designs, strategies, and rationale, trustworthiness notes including peer debriefing and member checks and audit trail notes); materials related to intentions and dispositions (including the proposal, reflexive notes, expectations and predictions); and instrument development information (e.g., interview protocol and biographical questionnaire).

3.5.4 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent to which others who read or review the research results can confirm the characteristics of the data, as posited by the researcher, (Bradley, 1993). To ensure confirmability, the researcher presented the data by using the previously mentioned techniques such as triangulation, member checking, and a reflexive journal.

3.6 Summary

This chapter addressed the research investigation and the research questions explored throughout the study. It described the research design, including the theoretical frameworks, population, participant selection, data collection, data analysis, interpretation, and methods to ensure trustworthiness. In order for educators to understand how urban youth (e.g., African American and Latinos) are affected by inequities, it is critical that these students are given a voice to tell their stories and experiences. Only after understanding the barriers to high achievement students of color
face in the public school system, can educators take a stance against them and develop solutions to address these problems. Using CRT, LatCrit, and invitational education as guiding theoretical approaches enabled this to occur.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter integrates the findings from the analysis of interviews and documents collected (e.g., biographical questionnaires, and district and school report cards). A brief description of the participants is also provided. Again, the purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the educational experiences of urban youth in public schools from the perspective of the youth themselves and examine how their experiences shape their attitudes toward achievement and school. This study explored the following research questions:

1. Which of these factors (e.g., school, psychological, and social) contribute to or inhibit urban students’ school identity and academic attitudes?
   a. Which of these factors (e.g., school, psychological, and social), if any, differentiate by academic performance (e.g., high academic performance versus low academic performance)?
   b. Which of these factors (e.g., school, psychological, and social), if any, differentiate by gender?
   c. Which of these factors (e.g., school, psychological, and social), if any, differentiate by race and ethnicity (e.g., African American and Latino students)?
d. Which of these factors (e.g., school, psychological, and social), if any, differentiate by school?

2. What individuals have the most influence on urban youth’s school identity and academic orientation?

4.2 Demographic Characteristics

The following table provides a brief description of select demographics (e.g., gender, age, grade, and race/ethnicity) of the participants:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1 Frequencies and percentages by gender, age, grade, and race/ethnicity

The majority of the participants in the study were females (60%). All of the participants were between 15 and 18 years old; 75% were 16 or 17 years of age. The majority of the participants were upperclassmen (90% of the sample were 11th and 12th graders) and 10% were tenth graders. Fifty percent of the participants identified as African American or Black, 40% identified as Hispanic or Latino, and 10% were Biracial/Multiracial. One of the Latino students (Mia) indicated she was also half-white during the face-to-face interview; however, she chose to answer the questions through her identity as a Latina.
Table 4.2 displays a fairly even distribution of student reported grade point averages (GPA) with 40% having a GPA of A (100-90) and 35% with a GPA of B (89-80). While the majority of the students self-reported GPAs were in the above average and average range, 25% of the sample reported having a GPA of C (79-70). Although not shown in the table, 100% of the participants reported receiving free/reduced lunch.

The Upward Bound students comprised 65% of the sample from Baker, Evergreen, Miami, Stanley, and Waterford. As discussed in chapter three, the Upward Bound program recruits students from four Crawford City high schools. However, the one student attending Miami High (James) transferred out of Stanley High, but he was able to remain in the program. The students at Watson High comprised 35% of the sample, and, as previously noted, these all identified as Latino. Furthermore, the researcher recruited these students from this school because the Upward Bound program only had one student representative of the Latino population.

Table 4.3 Distribution of frequencies and percentages of participants’ parent or guardian’s highest level of education attained
Table 4.3 shows the distribution of the highest level of education attained by the students’ parent or guardian. For students living in a two-parent/guardian household, the parent with the highest level of education is displayed in the table. For students in a one-parent/guardian home, the highest level of education attained by that parent/guardian they resided with is shown in the table. The table shows that forty percent of the student’s parent or guardian attained a high school diploma, 25% completed middle school, and the remaining 30% completed business/trade school, some college, a two-year college, or a four-year college. For each level of education attained, a pattern did not appear to emerge as students had GPAs of “A”, “B”, or “C”, regardless of the highest level of education attained by their primary parent or guardian.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>One-Parent/Guardian Home</th>
<th>Two-Parent/Guardian Home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4 Frequencies and percentages of students living arrangements

Table 4.4 displays the students living arrangements. Sixty-five percent of the participants lived with one-parent or guardian. More specifically, many of those students (45%) resided in a one-parent household with their mothers. Two students lived with their fathers and for the two students living with a guardian, one lived with his foster father and the other lived with her aunt. Thirty-five percent of the participants lived in two-parent/guardian homes with four students living with their mothers and fathers. For the three students with other two-parent living arrangements, one lived with his mother.
and uncle, another with her father and aunt, and the last lived with her mother and stepfather.

4.3 Theme Emergence

With the assistance of a research partner, the researcher began analysis with the assignment of open codes developed from a review of the literature, interview data, and information from documents. Following this process, axial codes were developed, organized, and put into a codebook (see Appendix E), which included definitions of each code and examples. The researcher developed the preliminary open codes, then reviewed and discussed the codes with her dissertation co-chair. The researcher then reconvened with her research partner and provided her with copies of the transcripts and the codebook. Once the research partner completed the coding of the transcripts, they gathered for a research meeting. Codes were discussed, compared, and contrasted, until 100% agreement of assigned codes was achieved. The researcher then shared drafts of chapter four with her research partner and co-chair to ensure the findings were thoroughly discussed and relevant themes were not omitted.

4.4 Presentation of Findings

In order to give participants a voice, concurrent with one of the tenets of CRT and LatCrit, storytelling (Fernández, 2002; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Milner, 2007), the researcher used thick, in-depth descriptions, such as quotes, to portray their experiences in their own words. These experiences also serve as a counternarrative to the dominant ideology expressed by society. For clarity and comprehension, the researcher removed words such as, “like” and “um” in the interview transcripts. However, the researcher did not alter the quotes or their content.
4.5 Perceived Barriers to Positive Academic Experiences

Consistent with the theory of invitational education and the five P’s (Novak & Purkey, 2001), participants in this study frequently mentioned people, places, and policies as areas that needed improvement in their schooling experiences. A lack of school and community safety, racism and racial discrimination, and immigration status also emerged from data analysis as perceived barriers to positive academic experiences.

4.5.1 “Why didn’t they choose something else? A different career”: People

As Novak and Purkey (2001) discussed in their theory of invitational education, relationships with people in the school setting communicate the value and necessity of those persons. They assert, “Educators must view other persons in the school as competent and responsive members of a professional learning community” (p. 16). Thus, school personnel should believe in the capabilities of their students and hold high expectations for learning and achievement. However, it became evident, throughout this study, that many of the students lacked positive and supportive relationships with persons inside and outside of their school community. As a way to capture this point, the relationships with people inside and outside of school are discussed in the following sections.

Teachers. All of the students in the study expressed a desire to be successful in the future. They also held high career aspirations. However, many of the participants encountered barriers that made their educational experiences, as urban youth, difficult to navigate. For instance, when asked the question, “If you could change anything about your school, what would it be and why?” Twelve of the 20 participants indicated they wanted to change the people in their school (e.g., administrators, teachers, students, and
school staff). In particular, six of the 12 students stated that they wished to change their teachers. For instance, James [African American, 11th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Miami High] stated, “I would actually change the teachers; get teachers that really care about getting what they’ve been taught to the students, getting it through their heads, and they won’t move on until the majority of the students get it.” LeMarcus [African American, 12th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Waterford High] echoed a similar statement about his teachers. More specifically, he asserted, “The teachers aren’t as involved as I hope they’d be. It’s just, ‘I’m gonna put this on the board and I’m gonna teach it and if you don’t learn it, oh well, we’re moving on.’” In addition, another student at Waterford High, Tommy [African American, 12th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Waterford High] felt comparable to LeMarcus. He shared, “…some of them just can’t teach, and they have attitude problems. Their attitude towards the students is not good.”

Lisa [African American, 12th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Evergreen High] also felt cheated by her teacher’s perceived lack of commitment to their job. She shared, “I would change the teachers because we only have a select few that actually does the right thing and complete all the materials we need to be taught. A lot of teachers there don’t get through everything for the year and we miss out on a test [state achievement test].” When the researcher asked Lisa why she thought the teachers were not getting through all the material students needed to learn, she further explained:

I would say time because it’s the way they manage their time though…each teacher has the same amount of time and some teachers get through it well and then some teachers laugh around, joke, constantly having visitors, alumni coming back speaking, interrupting, and it’s just we don’t get through it…it’s my chemistry class, we hardly ever learn anything in that class because she’s constantly talking about something that don’t pertain to what we need to be learning. Or she wants to know what happened at lunch, who was fighting, and just nosey. And if it’s
not that, we always get a visitor who comes in and she be talking to the teacher, she talks on her phone, it’s crazy.

Mario [African American, 10th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Evergreen High], who attended the same school as Lisa, shared similar views about his teachers. “Some teachers, they love what they do. They believe they are doing it right and helpful with people, but other teachers are not into their job, and they’re not into helping students. Sometimes I just wonder, other student’s wonder, why did they choose to pick this job? Why didn’t they choose something else? A different career.”

In addition to James, LeMarcus, Tommy, Lisa, and Mario, Junior [African American, 10th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Evergreen High] provided a comparable response about the teachers at his school. He stated, “Some teachers they’ll carry around an attitude with all the kids, even though it’s just that one particular student that messed with them, that made them think that. Then the teacher thinks that all the kids are like this, so now they just start treating us like we’re animals or something.” These students really felt their teachers did not care, had negative attitudes, were not adequately preparing them for the future, and did not treat them fairly. The school climate may have facilitated these students’ responses because many of these students attended the same three schools: Waterford High, Evergreen High, and Miami High. Therefore, it is quite possible that the participants’ experiences in these schools were consistent with that of other students in their schools. These students all identified as African American, and five of the six participants were high-achievers, and five of the six participants were males. Thus, this theme may be representative of the school environment itself and a prevalent experience for African American males in urban school systems.
Throughout the literature, the experience of African American males in urban public school classrooms is often characterized by low teacher expectations and discipline for perceived aggressive and hostile behavior (Ferguson, 2000; Hubbard, 1999; O’Connor, 2001). Jackson, Moore, and Leon (2010) asserted that low teacher expectations “are part of a cycle of disengagement where teacher’s low expectations will diminish student involvement that further caused teachers to have even lower expectations regarding the student’s ability creating a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure” (p. 842). In other words, due to low teacher expectations, students disengage academically, which often leads teachers to have lower expectations and students to doubt their capabilities and consequently fail.

Junior displayed disengaging behaviors that may be attributed to low teacher expectations. For instance, in reference to one of his teachers, Junior stated,

I don’t know, I think it’s because I didn’t like English so much, I think it’s that, and I think she didn’t like me so much. It seemed like she would pick on me sometimes because she had this thing called “putting us in the corner,” if you did something bad, she would put you in the corner…Yeah, you would really go to the corner. For me, it wasn’t no warning and then corner, it was warning, phone call. So that just made me, really just stop what she wanted me to do because I thought I was being picked on because everybody got put in the corner and I was getting phone calls.

Junior also felt his teacher was picking on him because of the differential treatment he received by reporting other students first received a warning, were put in the corner, followed by a phone call home if necessary, whereas, he received a warning and then a phone call home. His teachers’ discriminatory behavior led to his disengagement in the classroom because he felt that she did not like him. Based on his reported grades, it is evident that Junior is capable of obtaining above average grades; however, the
relationship he has with his teacher has made him feel like a target for discipline leading him to utilize disengagement as a coping behavior. In the end, however, he may suffer if he continues to refuse to complete his schoolwork.

Existing literature shows that students of color in urban schools often find that their teachers are incompetent, unprepared, or do not want to be there (Lewis & Moore, 2008). Teachers bring their own subjectivities into the classroom based on their earlier experiences in teaching, which may influence the way they teach and perceive their students (Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott, & Garrison-Wade, 2008). These preconceived notions place the student-teacher relationship at a disadvantage and fail to give students the chance to demonstrate their abilities (Douglas et al., 2008). Students spend a considerable amount of time with their teachers, so, if students do not feel respected by them or believe they do not want to help them learn, negative perceptions may hinder their attitudes about learning as well as their academic outcomes. Therefore, student-teacher relationships have important implications for students’ academic functioning. If students are not in school environments conducive to learning and expressing themselves, their chances of gaining the skills needed to achieve their educational goals are reduced (Booker, 2007; Sánchez, Colón, & Esparza, 2005; Wiggan, 2008). In 2003, Howard found African American urban high school students felt their teachers held low expectations for them and consequently, it influenced how they perceived their own academic ability. Thus, it is important for educators to be cognizant of how their attitudes, words, and behaviors affect student’s perceptions of their academic capabilities.

Administrators. Although not many students mentioned this issue as they did with their teachers, two students mentioned wanting to change their schools’
administrators. For instance, below is an excerpt from the researcher’s interview with Tommy [African American, 12th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Waterford High]:

Vega: So you would want better teachers, anything else you’d change?
Tommy: Probably some of the administrators.
Vega: How come?
Tommy: Some of them think…they’re just super mean; they don’t want us to do anything. They want to have us on lockdown 24/7.
Vega: When you say, “mean”, what do they do?
Tommy: Sometimes they just pull you out of class and yell at you for no reason. It’s just real stupid.
Vega: Has it happened to you before?
Tommy: No, I know people…I see it happen like everyday. Like some of my friends, they get pulled out of class for no reason.

Although Tommy had not personally experienced a similar situation from the administrators at his school, he witnessed his peers receiving this type of treatment. Because Tommy was a high-achieving student, it is quite possible that administrators did not target him for discipline. Nevertheless, the administrators’ treatment towards students bothered Tommy because he felt it created a negative atmosphere at school.

Throughout the research literature, the overrepresentation of suspension and expulsion rates for African American males has been extensively documented (Fenning & Rose, 2007). Researchers have consistently found that African American males are the target of harsher disciplinary practices in comparison to their white counterparts (Skiba et al., 2002). As an example of this literature, Tommy expressed that he has witnessed this treatment, when he said, “I see it happen everyday.” He perceived his friends being the targets of discipline by administrators without reason. Nonetheless, Tommy achieved success, despite wanting better school personnel in his school environment.
Three students mentioned having positive relationships with their administrators, but five indicated that the administrators were mostly consumed with making sure the school ran smoothly and dealing with troubled students. For instance, Mia [Latina, 11th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Baker High] stated, “They have a lot of kids on their hands…” Similarly, Mario [African American, 10th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Evergreen High] stated, “Well my principals…they’re usually busy doing other stuff, I talk to them, but I don’t talk to them that often…” Pepito [Latino, 11th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Watson High] implied that his administrators spent their time on disciplinary action. He stated, “[Because] I’m not a bad kid, I’m not a bad student or anything, I don’t know, I always get my good grades, so they really don’t say anything to me.”

Jose [Latino, 11th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High] expressed a sentiment similar to Pepito’s. He shared, “I think they’re just there to keep the kids from fighting, that’s pretty much it…They’re just there to keep the building standing, make sure the lights don’t go off.” Jose also discussed the differential treatment students received from administrators at his school. For instance, he asserted, “I see them treat different students differently, but it’s not because of race, it’s because of their academics. For example, I get good grades, I don’t go to the office because I’m in trouble, so if I don’t have a hall pass, I can walk normal and they won’t stop me. Like other kids who do bad stuff, as soon as they see them they stop them and send them to the office.” Therefore, it appears that administrators fail to develop strong relationships with students and provide instructional leadership, because they spend the majority of their time handling disciplinary matters (Lewis & Moore, 2008). As leaders of the school buildings, they...
should make greater efforts to build relationships with students and encourage positive interactions among all members of the school community.

Similarly, Douglas et al. (2008) found that the African American students felt their administrators were out of touch with students. Considering the large number of students that expressed the desire to change the teachers in their schools, this lack of approachability students felt towards their administrators does not create an environment where they can report the problems they are having with teachers. Douglas et al. also recommended that administrators have an open door policy where students can feel safe discussing issues that may arise in the classrooms.

_School Counselors._ Nine of the 20 participants indicated that they received assistance in selecting courses from their school counselors. While nine other students indicated they did not receive any assistance at all in selecting their courses. Two of these nine students explicitly stated that they selected their courses on their own because their school counselors were not helpful. For example, Lisa [African American, 12th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Evergreen High]. She stated, “They [school counselors] don’t do anything… That’s another thing that I hate because we miss out on a lot of opportunities, a lot of programs, a lot of things to do because of the counselors.” James [African American, 11th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Miami High] simply said, “[I] don’t know them [school counselors], never spoke to them.” Based on these statements, it appeared that unless the students sought out additional help, they did not receive it, and those students who did receive assistance had developed positive relationships with their school counselors. With this in mind, it seemed that their school counselors were performing their basic duties, such as scheduling classes for students.
In many American urban public schools across the country, school counselors are relegated to clerical duties and consumed with non-counseling duties (Martin, 2002). At these schools, student caseloads of school counselors tend to be higher than recommended by the American School Counseling Association (ASCA). Therefore, school counselors can only reach so many students and if students do not take the initiative to make the counselor aware of their needs, then they go unassisted.

However, there needs to be a system in place in the schools where all students receive equitable access to school counselors and their services. Too often, students, particularly urban students, are not aware of the importance of school counselors and their role in helping students with postsecondary education. For instance, in a study by Moore, Sanders, Bryan, Gallant, and Owens (2009), they found that less than half of the African American male subjects reported visiting the school counselor at least once for college preparation, career and personal, social, and emotional services. Most of the participants visited the school counselor to receive academic services; however, over half admitted being unaware of the availability of non-academic services (e.g., career, personal, social, and emotional services).

While students in this study were not plainly asked what services they sought out from their school counselors, they discussed the role their school counselors played in assisting them in selecting courses. For instance, Tommy [African American, 12th grade, A (100-90 GPA, Waterford High] stated, “She basically tells me the classes I have left to take.” Junior [African American, 10th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Evergreen High] discussed how his counselor assisted him in selecting courses. He shared, “…she kept telling me you’re gonna have to take Spanish 3 class, so you can get that out, then like there was this
technical engineering STEM technology class I had to take, so she kept saying you have to pick one of these two classes.” Maria [Latina, 12th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Watson High] stated, “She [school counselor] asks me what classes I have taken and I told her what I want to do, that I want to graduate this year.” In addition, Lucette [Latina, 11th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Watson High] discussed how she was failing a class that she dropped, but the instructor told her she was still enrolled in it:

Lucette: [Because] I got F’s in two classes right now, so I’m trying to bring that up.
Vega: What class is that?
Lucette: In first period, I dropped out, but he [teacher] said my name is still there, so he’s still giving me an F. I’m like alright.
Vega: Why don’t you go see your counselor?
Lucette: I’ve been trying to go see her, but she’s always busy and I hate waiting.

Tommy, Junior, and Maria shared how their school counselors helped to schedule their classes or informed them of the remaining courses they needed to take in order to graduate. Lucette also shared this sentiment about her school counselor, “She helps me pick the other ones [classes], you know what I mean... because I have the ones that I want, and then she helps me with ones I need.” However, the above excerpt from Lucette highlights the high caseload school counselors have when she stated, “I’ve been trying to go see her, but she’s always busy and I hate waiting.” The difficulty she reported trying to see her school counselor to find out why she was receiving an “F” in a course she thought she dropped led to a failing grade on her report card. The ultimate consequence of remaining enrolled in a course she does not attend is a steep drop in Lucette’s GPA. If school counselors are unavailable to see students, they are the ones who suffer from poor grades or a lack of access to relevant information.
Six of the nine students who reported receiving the most course selection assistance from their school counselors were Upward Bound participants. As indicated earlier in this section by Lisa and James, some students did not find their counselors to be very helpful. However, the Upward Bound students had a unique advantage over their peers because they received college preparation, so the access was present. Yet, students who did not participate in this program were disadvantaged because they were not receiving the same level of intensive preparation in their school environment. Furthermore, if all students received adequate preparation for college, programs such as Upward Bound, would not be as important.

**Peers.** Based on the data analysis, four students felt that their peers were disrespectful towards adults. Many also believed that they did not come to school to learn, and were insensitive to students from different racial/ethnic backgrounds. The below statements reflected these sentiments:

...[because] it’s like there’ll be kids there that they don’t come there to learn, they just come there to mess with somebody or to get in trouble. -- Junior [African American, 10\(^{th}\) grade, B (89-80) GPA, Evergreen High]

I believe they should be more respectful to adults, they should respect adults more, they should use less gang related stuff. -- Mario [African American, 10\(^{th}\) grade, A (100-90) GPA, Evergreen High]

I would have to say, I think the people that we have here...educate the people on some topics, it could be anything, like some people are really ignorant and they could hurt a lot of people...They’re just mean to people, anything, it could be your color, your sexual orientation, you’re short, too tall, it could be anything. -- Elizabeth [Latina, 12\(^{th}\) grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High]

Besides spending a large amount of time with their teachers, such peers constantly surround them in school. Junior stated, “They don’t come there [school] to learn” and
Mario felt his peers “should be more respectful to adults [teachers]; therefore, these students can create an environment where it is incredibly difficult for all students to learn. As discussed in the literature review, the more time teachers spend on discipline, the fewer learning opportunities exist. With this in mind, it is critical that teachers construct their classrooms and instruction in a manner that focuses less time on discipline and more time on learning. Additionally, as Monroe and Obidah (2004) discussed, teachers should work to become culturally competent and proficient in engaging diverse students in learning.

In the excerpt above, Elizabeth made a good point by asserting that students should be educated on different topics, such as multiculturalism. Both Watson High and Baker High were the most diverse schools based on representation of diverse racial and ethnic populations; however, if students do not understand how to co-exist with people different from them, racial tension may arise and negatively affect learning. Based on the research literature, it is essential that teachers address cultural issues in the classroom to ensure students feel supported and accepted unconditionally. In a study by Milner, Flowers, Moore, Moore, and Flowers (2003), they sought to replicate an earlier study that examined preservice teachers’ awareness of cultural differences. Further, the authors found that preservice teachers’ attitudes about cultural diversity had improved since the earlier study by Larke (1990). While these findings emerged, the researchers urged readers that room remains for improvement in teacher preparation. Recommendations provided by Milner et al. (2003) suggested that teacher education programs infuse elements of multiculturalism and diversity into the course curriculum, and provide preservice teachers exposure to a variety of teaching contexts from the beginning of their
programs. These opportunities allow preservice teachers to develop the cultural competence necessary to work with students from diverse backgrounds.

Three students mentioned not trusting their friends to assist them academically. For example, Lisa [African American, 12th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Evergreen High] stated, “…when it comes to my education, I’m so serious about it, I don’t let no friends. I take advice from other people, but no.” Monique [African American, 11th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Stanley High] also responded the same way by saying, “…I don’t like to go to people that is the same age as me or whatever. I want to go to someone who’s higher and knows stuff.” Similarly, Jose [Latino, 11th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High] stated, “I don’t think they’re [his friends] at that level. I wouldn’t trust their opinion that much.”

Students also mentioned the difficulties experienced from taking classes with their close friends. For example, Talayah [African American, 11th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Evergreen High] mentioned that at her high school, “…they really try to split friends up so we can learn more.” Maria [Latina, 12th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Watson High] indicated that she took classes with her friends, “…but the problem is that we talk too much...[and teachers] separate us.” Based on the aforementioned statements, it seems that some friendships may lead to poor outcomes for students; therefore, it is essential that students develop appropriate decision-making skills to make good choices for themselves. Additionally, friends can be distractions in class, so there is an effort by school personnel to separate friends from taking the same classes together or sitting together as Talayah and Maria explained.

Self-reliance. Throughout the data analysis, it became evident that participants relied primarily on themselves to make decisions, particularly school-related decisions.
Help-seeking behaviors were lacking among many of the students, regardless of achievement level. For instance, when asked to identify the individuals who provided the most assistance on their schoolwork, the majority (11) of the students indicated they primarily helped themselves, but they periodically sought help from friends, family, and teachers. For example, Tenishi [African American, 11th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Stanley High] discussed this type of help-seeking behavior. She stated, “My schoolwork…mainly I help myself. Well more than any, like 99.9% of the time, I help myself and if I don’t help myself, then I’ll ask my teachers about it, and I ask my mom about it, and my grandma about it. And they’ll be able to help me.” Similarly, Jose [Latino, 11th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High] asserted that he was, “Pretty much independent. If I have a question I just ask my teacher who gave the assignment, but as to go and ask for help, no.”

Other reasons emerged for not seeking help on schoolwork, such as teacher competency and ease of assignments (Ryan, Pintrich, & Midgley, 2001). For example, James [African American, 11th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Miami High] did not feel he could ask his teachers for help. He asserted, “Well, at Miami it was hard to understand the teachers and everything, so I would basically write down everything that they did, and then go over when I got home to get my own understanding of how to do it.” Pilar [Latina, 12th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High] on the other hand, felt her schoolwork was easy and could do it by herself, noting why she waited to complete it at the last minute. When asked who helps her the most with her schoolwork, she shared, “Myself…whenever I feel like doing my homework or I just tell myself I gotta do it before I go to sleep…and my mom…She just always be reminding me to do it…I do my
homework all of the time. I always wait until the last minute and then I always do it [because] I know it be easy.”

Additionally, when asked which persons helped the most with making course selections, nine students asserted that they mostly made those decisions themselves, but they sought the assistance of school counselors, when they could not figure something out or needed specialized expertise. For example, Amy [Biracial, 11th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Baker High] shared, “I mostly do it myself, but I’ll ask my counselor should I take it or something…I just make sure I have my classes good and I won’t have to do Credit Recovery or anything. And I just make sure that I have all my classes that I need to graduate and she just helps me with it, like the scheduling.” Talayah [African American, 11th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Evergreen High] stated that her school counselors, “…[gave] us a paper with classes to check off. Then…she tells us what classes she thinks will be good for us depending on our ranking and how good our grades are during the school year.” Elizabeth [Latina, 12th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Watson High] discussed a time when her school counselor assisted her in resolving a discrepancy in her schedule. She shared, “Two years ago, they messed up my transcript, I took Algebra one already and they made me take it again. So, she helped me. She said if you want to graduate, you have to take Algebra 2. I’m supposed to be in Pre-calculus. She did help me with that.”

Based on data analysis, it is evident that most (11) of the students were reluctant to seek academic support from others. Two African American male students expressed the difficulty that they had asking for help. As an example of this, LeMarcus [African American, 12th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Waterford High] asserted,

Vega: So now on the other hand, what’s your least favorite [subject]?
LeMarcus: My least favorite [subject] is English.

Vega: And why is that?

LeMarcus: It’s just the comprehension part. I’m not like…I can read a book, but then, maybe the next day, I can’t really discuss it with you.

Vega: Do you think that that may be a result of the teacher’s just trying to get through materials and not really teaching it?

LeMarcus: I didn’t really rely on my teachers too much, not for the simple fact that I don’t think that they’re doing good at their job, they know what they’re doing, but it’s just I don’t really like asking for help too much… I think it’s just a pride issue. I think it makes me less of a man to ask for help.

LeMarcus also mentioned that he wanted to change the teachers in his school because they were not very involved in their student’s learning. Additionally, he expressed that they did not care if students grasped the material they were teaching. Therefore, his statement above is conflicting because he stated that he thinks, “They are doing good at their job, they know what they’re doing.” It appears that he has placed the blame on himself for having difficulties with reading comprehension, although he stated his teachers were not effective instructors. LeMarcus was a low-achieving student; therefore, he was a student that could benefit from having a positive relationship with his teachers and receiving additional academic assistance; however, he did not feel he could initiate that relationship. As a way to get students to seek academic assistance, teachers should communicate to students that asking questions is strongly encouraged and welcomed, especially when they do not understand a lesson or need further help.

Similar to LeMarcus, Junior [African American, 10th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Evergreen High] stated that:

I am more of a solitary worker with schoolwork. So I rather do it on my own before I go to someone else for help. In class, they’ll say ‘I’m so smart’, that I end up getting so much pride that I don’t want to go to anyone else for help…I’d rather sink on my own than have someone else help me…like in math I have too
much pride to go ask for help. I have some other smart kids that sit behind me that make me look stupid, so I don’t want to go to anyone for help.

Two major points arose from Junior’s comments. First, he had too much pride to ask for help because his classmates believed he was very smart. It is possible that he experienced stereotype threat, thus, feeling pressure to appear smart and believing that asking for help would reduce this image. Second, Junior mentioned the “smart kids that sit behind him,” so the competition among other students in class may have made him feel inferior. As a result, he did not ask for help. It is worth noting that Junior is an extremely bright young man. However, his school setting seemed to breed competition to his detriment. Relating back to the teacher who put students in the corner for misbehavior, these experiences were both putting pressure on Junior to be successful and causing him to disengage academically. Therefore, he was not achieving to his capabilities and was at-risk of failing his classes if the relationships with the people in his school, teachers and peers, in particular, did not improve.

Finally, what also stood out were students’ perspectives on future aspirations and the persons involved in helping them to achieve those goals. All the students indicated that their families were helping them to achieve their goals. In addition to family, the majority (15) of the participants suggested external supports, outside of the school context, such as friends, mentors, and Upward Bound staff. However, only five students indicated school personnel, such as sports coaches, teachers, and school counselors, provided them with assistance towards reaching their goals. These relationships are further discussed in section 4.6.1.
Generally speaking, school personnel spend a great deal of time with students every week; therefore, it appears that it would be beneficial for each school as a whole and its students as individuals to develop supportive relationships to improve academic outcomes and success. Nonetheless, this self-reliance can also be viewed as a strength for the students because many were self-motivated and did not require help or only sought assistance when it was needed. Yet, students may also be doing themselves a disservice by not consulting with their school counselors and teachers more often because they may miss out on important opportunities. Moore et al. (2009) underscored this lack of awareness of support in their study, when they found that students did not know what resources their school counselor offered outside of academic and college preparation services.

Family. As displayed in tables 4.3 and 4.4., the majority of the students’ parents or guardians completed middle school or high school, and resided in one-parent/guardian households. Most of these adult figures in their lives lacked the social capital and the time needed to provide the students with academic assistance and college preparation because they have not had these experiences. This finding became evident when students discussed the persons that helped them the most with their schoolwork and course selection. Only three students mentioned that members of their family assisted them the most with schoolwork. For example, Amy [Biracial, 11th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Baker High] stated, “My mom never went to college, so she don’t really know the experience.” Mia [Latina, 11th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Baker High] stated, “their learning system was different I guess,” and Junior [African American, 10th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Evergreen High] lamented that, “My mom helps me with my homework…she knows a lot of stuff,
so she’ll help me. My dad, he’s not the best, he wasn’t the best at school, so [he] just leaves it alone.” Thus, overall, it seemed that many students did not and could not ask their parents/guardians for much academic help.

Jose [Latino, 11th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High] described the amount of involvement his parents had with his schoolwork, “…they see my report card, if it has a bad grade lower than a C, they would ask, but besides that, nothing much. I don’t involve them that much; they’re working and doing all that. So, there’s no point and if I can do it on my own, then there’s no need.” Linda [Latina, 12th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High] discussed the challenges that her parents faced in helping her academically. For example, she said, “My mom doesn’t speak English, so she can’t help me at all. My dad does, but he’s usually not home, so he doesn’t help me.”

Only one student, LeMarcus [African American, 12th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Waterford High], indicated he received course selection assistance from a family member, his older sister, who recently completed high school. For example, he stated, “My family in general does not really play a big role, but my sister, back to my sister, she really, she focuses on it hard. Like she’ll ask me, ‘When are ya’ll scheduling classes?’ and she’ll ask me for a copy of my transcript and she’ll make a prototype schedule for me of what she thinks I should have.” While the students mentioned that their parents were limited in their ability to assist with schoolwork or course selection for different reasons; all the students in the study stated that their family played a role in helping them to achieve their goals. Therefore, the type of involvement family members have must be examined before conclusions can be drawn about this relationship. Section 4.6.1 examines the benefits of such relationships.
Racial Representation. Specifically, among the Latino students, a salient issue mentioned was the lack of racial and ethnic representation among their school personnel. For example, there was only one Latino teacher at Watson High although this high school had the largest percentage of Latino students in the district. The lack of representative personnel impedes relationships with families and students as Shah (2009) found. Students discussed the benefits of having someone to communicate with in their native language. For example, Jose [Latino, 11th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High] asserted, “Most of the time, it’s because they speak Spanish, so you can talk to them easier. You can tell them what you think and not translating it in your head.” Similarly, Elizabeth [Latina, 12th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High] mentioned,

Well I don’t have a [Latino] teacher, but I know a friend of mine has a teacher here and I see that she’s protective towards us. She talks to us and tells us to do better...she has a little Latina group, she be talking to us. She has more students that are African American and white, yet she talks to us more than she talks to her students. I think the reason that she does that is because everyone goes to their own little group, you know what I’m saying? Black people go towards the black people and tell them to do better, then white people do the same thing, and then Latinos do the same thing. Looking out for one another from that race perspective.

Furthermore, Lucette [Latina, 11th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Watson High] stated, “We don’t really have Latino teachers here; Ms. Garcia (pseudonym) is like the only one teaching some Latinos, ESL. She really encourages us Latinos to be like, ‘come on you can do this.’” When asked about how African American teachers perceived Latino students, Lucette further stated, “More non-white people have a better perspective on us.” Therefore, it appears that the presence of persons from student’s culture and possibly other ethnic minority groups such as African Americans, pushes students to work harder
as these persons provide a great deal of support and motivation and make students feel welcomed in the school environment. As a result, a comfort level existed between Spanish-speaking students and Ms. Garcia because they could communicate more easily with each other.

4.5.2 “There would be a lot of things”: Policies

School policies also appeared to influence student’s perceptions and attitudes towards their schools as five students mentioned wanting to change some of their schools rules. Mia [Latina, 11th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Baker High] stated,

There are some really, small rules that you’ll get kicked out of school for and I don’t think it’s necessary. I remember one of my friends was wearing flip-flops one day and she got suspended for three days for it, for wearing flip-flops. So her education and record got ruined because she decided to wear flip-flops. So I was like, well that’s really crappy. And I remember it was my freshman year on the last day of school, I wore flip-flops, and I had to sit in the office for half a day. So I was like okay whatever, but that’s basically about it. I like our school and I think it’s a good school, I mean I passed all my standardized tests, so they’re teaching right or something.

Despite a dislike for this school policy that resulted in suspension for her friend and the punishment she received, Mia indicated that she did in fact like her school. Therefore, Mia felt she had a positive learning experience in her school and that she had the knowledge base needed to pass all five parts of the state achievement tests, although she felt the consequences for rule violations, such as wearing flip-flops were excessive.

Tenishi [African American, 11th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Stanley High], also felt changes in school policies were necessary. Stanley High School is a high-poverty (90.6%), predominantly African American school (86.4%) with an extremely low graduation rate (49.6%). This school also had a large presence of gang activity, which
affected the school rules enforced by administrators evidenced by Tenishi’s responses.

For this reason, Tenishi expressed,

I would have us wear red because they think [administrators or school personnel], ‘oh you wear red, you’re automatically a Blood’, when that’s not the case. I have a couple of red shirts I would love to wear to school, but I can’t because they are red and then they have people at school who wear red all the time, but they don’t say anything to them. But when someone else wears red, they’re like, ‘oh, you can’t do that’ and that’s completely unfair.

She also indicated that students could not wear hooded sweatshirts in school. Therefore, although the administrators banned red clothing in an attempt to decrease gang violence, the inability to wear hooded sweatshirts, similar to flip-flops at Mia’s school, appeared to be ludicrous to students and as a result, it affected how they perceived their school environment. Additionally, it seemed that school personnel implemented these policies differentially. For instance, Mia’s consequence for wearing flip-flops was to sit in the office for half of the day, whereas her friend received a suspension. In Tenishi’s cases, she expressed that some students wore red all the time, but did not receive any sort of consequence, but other students were disciplined, therefore, these policies appeared to be subjectively enforced.

Skiba and Knesting (2001) found that school suspension is “commonly used for a number of relatively minor offenses, such as disobedience and disrespect, attendance problems, and general classroom disruption” (p. 29). They also found that school factors strongly influenced suspension rates; factors such as teacher attitudes, teacher perceptions of student achievement, and racial make-up of school, appeared to be more predictive of school suspension rates rather than student’s attitudes and behaviors. From Mia and Tenishi’s comments, it is evident that these minor offenses of wearing flip-flops, hooded
sweatshirts, and red attire, led to suspension in many cases, whereas other consequences for these rule violations may be better suited. The way Mia and Tenishi felt in regards to their school policies is consistent with the belief that “student perceptions of the effectiveness of various school disciplinary actions are often significantly at odds with the perceptions of teachers and administrators” (Skiba & Knesting, 2001, p. 33). While administrators may believe these policies are necessary to maintain order and control of their schools, students feel differently and do not perceive these policies as effective in changing student behavior or fostering a positive school climate.

Other students also felt that their school policies were unfair including two from Watson High who indicated that three minutes to travel from one class to another in their large school building was an insufficient amount of time. The consequence for arriving to class late included getting locked out of class until the student returned with a pass excusing their lateness. However, the potential for further punishment existed if students were caught in the hallway rather than being in class, although students were locked out of class because their teachers wanted them to get a pass. Linda [Latina, 12th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High] shared this about the rule: “From one side of the building to the other on the third floor it’s crazy,” and she told the researcher that repeated lateness resulted in detention on Wednesday’s after school or Saturdays. Monique [African American, 11th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Stanley High], expressed annoyance by a similar school rule at Stanley High,

Vega: If you could change anything about your school, what would it be and why?
Monique: I would change how the teachers do hall sweeps.
Vega: Tell me about hall sweeps.
Monique: If you get caught in the hall sweep, you get automatic suspension.
Vega: When do they do hall sweeps?
Monique: It’s just random, everyday.
Vega: So during class time?
Monique: During the switches of the hallway [class periods].
Vega: So if they catch you in the hall?
Monique: You get suspended for one day.
Vega: Out of school or in school?
Monique: Out of school.

The consequence for not arriving to class on time when the class periods changed was a one-day out of school suspension. Monique disagreed with this policy and felt an alternative might be lunch detention where students missed half of their lunch period, and “We sit there for thirty minutes, and you just have to read a book or something.”

Research shows that suspension may be ineffective for at-risk students, those students most often targeted for discipline (Skiba & Knesting, 2001). Suspension is often a strong predictor of further suspension, which demonstrates the ineffectiveness of this disciplinary action in reducing undesired behavior (Skiba & Knesting, 2001). Repeated school discipline also appears to be a strong predictor of dropping out of school (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986; Wehlage, & Rutter, 1986). Additionally, when students are suspended, they are more likely to engage in risky behaviors outside of school. Talayah [African American, 11th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Evergreen High] stated the following about her administrators decreased use of out of school suspension, “They don’t try out of school suspension on most of the kids at our school, [because] they know if they’re out of school they might get into something.”

The effectiveness of these policies must be investigated, because “the idea that zero-tolerance policies contribute to improved student behavior or school safety remains unsupported by evidence” (Skiba & Knesting, 2001, p. 35). Therefore, school policies
should be re-examined so that suspension and expulsion are reserved for serious infractions, which should be outlined by school administrators and personnel. Due to the recent string of school shootings, there is pressure for schools to respond to violence and prevent it from occurring, as a result, zero tolerance policies have been implemented. However, it now seems that schools are using school suspensions for lower level infractions that students such as Mia, Tenishi, and Monique discussed, such as wearing flip-flops to school, red clothing, or being caught in the hallway during a hall sweep.

4.5.3 “The main thing about my school would be the look, because it’s all rundown and raggedy”: Places

Appearance. Novak and Purkey’s (2001) research on invitational education states that,

The landscape and upkeep of the school can announce that people care and are on top of any situation, or they can proclaim that nobody cares and no one feels responsible. Places are powerful, and they can influence the performance and satisfaction of all those who inhabit the school (p. 17).

LeMarcus [African American, 12th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Waterford High] felt strongly about the appearance of his school evidenced when discussing what he wanted to change about it. He stated, “The main thing about my school would be the look, because it’s all rundown and raggedy.” He also went on to tell the researcher, “I think if you’re in that mindset that ‘my school’s terrible’, then I should fit my school.” Although school personnel may care about their students, the overall appearance of the school often communicated to the students that they were not valued or welcomed in that setting. From speaking with LeMarcus, it was apparent that the consequence of Waterford High’s rundown appearance was students who did not take school seriously. He later stated,
“...I just come to school to get it over with for now, come do what I need to do and leave basically.” Therefore, it seemed that he did not feel appreciated in his school and as a result, went through the day and left. The lack of value and respect placed on the school building emerged when Maria [Latina, 12th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Watson High] discussed her peers behavior. She posited that she wanted to change the bathrooms at her school because they were dirty and “there always, most of the time, girls smoking and stuff.” It seemed, if students respected their schools, they would not partake in behaviors such as smoking in the bathroom.

Pepito [Latino, 12th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Watson High] felt the appearance of his school also needed an upgrade, “I’ll change the school itself; it’s not modernized enough for us... New building, new equipment, more funding for sports and stuff.” Pepito played on the baseball team and felt the school’s current equipment was not up-to-date with what players needed; therefore, he believed the school needed to be modernized. Furthermore, two students from Baker High, Amy and Thomas, felt their schools were becoming overcrowded. Amy [Biracial, 11th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Baker High] posited, “Make it bigger because we have a lot of people, it’s not small, but I don’t know, it’s kind of crowded in a way.” Thomas [African American, 11th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Baker High] shared, “I’d make it bigger because our school is starting to become overcrowded, overpopulated from all the new incoming students... A lot of people don’t have lockers and some people have to share lockers, which causes stuff to be lost and makes a big confusion for everyone.” Poor appearance such as rundown facilities, a lack of space due to overcrowding, and inadequate resources, are frequently characteristic of urban public schools, as Kozol (1991, 2005) asserted. These flaws inherent in urban
public school systems explain why students of color perform less well in school; they are educated in schools that are inadequate on measures of not only quality, but funding as well (Noguera & Akom, 2000).

*School Lunch.* Besides school appearance, food surfaced as a major issue in this study. All of the students in this study received free/reduced lunch, and seven of them identified food as something they would like to change in their schools. Specifically, they wanted to change the variety and quality of food served in their schools. The students made the following comments about their school lunch:

More food choices, [because] we always have the same food choices every other day.  
-- [Talayah, African American, 11th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Evergreen High]

The food, because lunch is not really that great, and the juices…they’re like 3 ounces, how are we supposed to drink?  
-- Pilar [Latina, 12th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High]

…probably the food, it’s really, really bad.  
-- Linda [Latina, 12th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High]

While the students did not go into depth about what they specifically disliked about their school lunches or how they would like to improve it, it was clear that the food served was not appetizing. Nonetheless, initiatives have been developed and modified to meet the nutritional needs of students receiving free and reduced lunch at school. The National School Lunch Program (NLSP) was established under the National School Lunch Act of 1946 to provide federal funding to states to supply “nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free lunches to children each school day” (http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/lunch/). In return for the funding, schools must serve lunches that meet federal nutritional requirements and offer them at free or reduced prices. The nutritional requirements recommend that the
food served have no more than 30 percent of an individual’s calories from fat, and less than 10 percent from saturated fat.

Although schools must meet these Federal nutritional requirements, local school food authorities determine the actual food served and how it is prepared (http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/lunch/AboutLunch/NSLPFactSheet.pdf). In 2003, the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) found that while schools are moving towards meeting these set requirements, there is room for improvement. The GAO national study found that more than three-quarters of schools have not yet achieved the required rate of no more than 30 percent limit of calories from fat. They also found that students have access to food sources other than from the NSLP; for instance, many schools sell Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value (FMNV) in vending machines and school stores. FMNV include carbonated beverages, water ices, chewing gum, hard candy, jellies and gums, marshmallow candies, fondant, licorice, spun candy, and candy-coated popcorn; therefore, these items are accessible to students (GAO, 2004). The dilemma schools face with having vending machines is that the profit made helps to pay for school activities not covered in their budget.

Schools also feared that adding healthier food items to their menus risked students disliking the menu and as a result, choosing not to buy lunch. The desire to provide nutritional education in schools was limited by the need for class time to be devoted to subject matter covered on state achievement tests. Bereza (2009) explored the barriers school food authorities faced in serving nutritional meals through the NSLP in a Midwestern school district. Results showed that food service employees felt the NSLP left little room for creativity as it was a tightly controlled and monitored program. The
district foodservice directors put forth the menus that meet the nutritional requirements of the NSLP. This left foodservice workers, those who actually prepare the food, without any creative liberty on the menus. Workers explained that substitutions or additions in the menu could not be made because of NSLP regulations. Therefore, workers in this study felt powerless in the decision-making process for their school lunch menus.

Nonetheless, many schools and districts have found ways to overcome these barriers by developing recipes that lowered the fat in popular foods such as pizza and enchiladas, some schools conducted taste tests of potential new menu items, others incorporated nutritional education into reading and math curricula, and others sponsored health fairs to raise nutrition awareness in the community (GAO, 2003). It seems that it is possible for schools and districts to find ways to meet NSLP standards and appeal to students; however, an investment in nutritional education is necessary.

In a study by Suarez-Balcazar, Redmond, Kouba, Hellwig, Davis, Martinez, and Jones (2007), they examined the efforts of Chicago Public Schools (CPS) to change their lunch program and food vending machines. They sought to increase access to healthy foods in this minority community. The program included a school-based nutrition program because the access to fruits and vegetables in school and the community as a whole were limited, while vending machines were easily accessible in schools. Through this reform effort, the schools offered healthy choices in their vending machines such as fruit juice and other low-fat snacks selected by the schools themselves. A salad bar was also introduced to CPS, and results showed the average number of children selecting the salad bar increased significantly after the nutrition education began. The researchers
found that at the Kindergarten and first grade levels, consumption of fruits and vegetables increased with the nutrition education sessions.

Similarly to address school lunch concerns, the Texas Public School Nutrition Policy, an unfunded mandate to promote a healthful school environment for Texas students, was implemented statewide in fall 2004 (Cullen & Watson, 2009). This policy “restricts the portion sizes of high-fat and sugar snacks to fewer than 200 kilocalories per serving package and sweetened beverages to 12 ounces or less, limits the fat content of milk offered to 1% or less, provides guidelines for the fat content of foods served, and sets limits on the frequency of serving high-fat vegetables such as French fries” (Texas Department of Agriculture/Food and Nutrition Division. Texas Public School Nutrition Policy. Austin: Food and Nutrition Division, Texas Department of Agriculture; 2004). Results of the study demonstrated that following the institution of this policy, fewer portions of foods high in fat were served to students. In addition, schools sold significantly less amounts of bags of chips following implementation.

The increased rate of childhood obesity has garnered the attention at the highest level, as the first lady, Michelle Obama is heading the Let’s Move! campaign. Children consume at least half of their daily calories at school (www.letsmove.gov/schools/index.html); therefore, it is essential that they have access to healthy nutritional meals. The NSLP has attempted to address this urgent concern; however, as previously stated, schools and districts encounter obstacles that prevent the serving of healthy nutritious meals. Thus, the Let’s Move! campaign is calling on schools to join their team and receive training on preparing and serving nutritious and appealing meals, promoting nutritional education to encourage healthy food choices, and partner
with communities to create healthy school environments (http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/team.html).

4.5.4 “There’s always fighting about gangbanging”: Safety.

School safety. Two students expressed a concern for their safety at schools. Some students discussed the presence of gangs in their schools, as mentioned earlier by Tenishi [African American, 11th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Stanley High] who was bothered by the policy banning students from wearing the color red at Stanley High. Cici [Multiracial, 11th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Stanley High] also spoke about the high rate of violence at Stanley, which could be attributed to gang fighting. She stated, “There’s always fighting about gangbanging…why would people fight over the stupidest colors like blue and red…?” Cici’s solution was to implement a uniform policy to decrease gang violence over colors. Proponents of school uniform policies believe that it will make schools safer, improve attendance rates, and student achievement (Yeung, 2009). In a mixed methods study by Alleyne, LaPoint, Lee, and Mitchell (2003), the researchers found that Black educators at an urban middle school felt that the school uniform policy implemented reduced school violence, bullying, teasing, school attendance, and increased school pride among students. They felt most students were more focused on learning, their confidence and self-esteem improved, as well as their behavior.

However, opponents contend that school uniforms do not improve the safety of schools (Brunsma, 2005). Yeung (2009) found that little evidence existed to show that school uniforms raised academic achievement. In fact, Yeung found a negative effect appeared; students in schools with mandatory school uniform policies performed worse than their peers in similar schools without these policies. Wade and Stafford (2003)
examined urban middle schools with and without uniform policies and found that
teachers from schools with uniform policies perceived significantly lower levels of gang
presence and activity. They also found students in schools without uniform policies had
higher self-perceptions; however, the effect size for this finding was small. In addition,
the researchers found that student and teacher perceptions of school climate did not vary
across uniform policy. Therefore, it is evident that findings remain inconclusive on the
issue of the positive and negative effects of school uniform policies. Brunsma and
Rockquemore (1998) suggest that school uniform policies may indirectly impact school
climate and student characteristics by being implemented as part of wider school reform
efforts (Wade & Stafford, 2003).

Mario [African American, 10th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Evergreen High] also
felt that student involvement in gangs affected school climate. Stanley High and
Evergreen High were both high-poverty schools, with over 90% of the students receiving
free/reduced lunch. They were also the least diverse schools, with over 85% African
Americans and the remaining percentage white. This highly impoverished and racially
segregated environment may create inter-group conflict, which manifests itself through
gang activity. Lack of safety in the school setting fosters an environment where students
avoid school or may perform poorly because they consistently worry about being the
target of violence, especially if they wear the wrong color to school. As previously
discussed, the administration at Stanley High sought to combat gang violence by banning
students from wearing red attire to school, but existing conflict between students is not
mediated simply by banning red clothing. Schools are supposed to be nurturing
environments that promote intellectual and social development; however, these sorts of
disruptions as mentioned by Cici, create a climate of fear that leads to school avoidance and engagement in self-protective behavior (Gagnon & Leone, 2001). Therefore, school administrators must ensure that students can learn in a safe environment; research shows that school-wide interventions, individually targeted interventions such as conflict resolution, systematic classroom management, parent involvement, and implementing individualized behavior plans are promising strategies for reducing school violence (Gagnon & Leone, 2001). Recommendations for improving school safety will be provided in chapter five.

“The worst thing about my neighborhood is my neighborhood in general”:

Neighborhood Safety. In addition to the lack of safety some students faced at schools, ten discussed the poor conditions of their neighborhoods. From hearing gunshots, the presence of gangs and violence, break-ins, and the persistent visibility of the police, many of the participants encountered these types of difficulties. When asked to describe the best part about his neighborhood, LeMarcus [African American, 12th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Waterford High] stated,

LeMarcus: Ha, the best thing about my neighborhood?
Vega: Well, do you want to start with the worst?
LeMarcus: Yeah, I can start with the worst. The worst thing about my neighborhood is my neighborhood in general. Like it’s one of the worst neighborhoods and it’s, I don’t know how I would say it, like the fighting, it’s fighting everyday, you hear shooting everyday, you get harassed everyday by random people that are by the corner store, [because] everybody stands around the corner store and they harass you like everyday.

Wilkinson, Beaty, and Lurry (2009) discussed how individuals protected themselves in unsafe neighborhoods by affiliating with others for protection and through direct
avoidance of dangerous times, places, and people. When LeMarcus finally shared the best thing about his neighborhood, he stated, “The best thing about it, I guess would be that once you know everybody, once people know you, it gets a little bit easier…Well if they know you, they’re not going to target you out as much.” This affiliation with others for protection that Wilkinson, Beaty, and Lurry (2009) mentioned does not guarantee safety as LeMarcus stated people are not targeted “as much”.

Talayah [African American, 11th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Evergreen High] engaged in avoidance of potentially dangerous situations. During the interview, she explained why she employed this behavior.

Vega: So describe your neighborhood. What’s the best thing about it?
Talayah: I really don’t look around my neighborhood, once I go home I have to stay home and stay in the house.
Vega: How come?
Talayah: [Because] when I used to, when I was little, every time I turn around I see a fight, just always somebody fighting and I’m trying to get away from that. Get away from violence, so I just stay in the house.

LeMarcus and Talayah discussed how they navigated their neighborhoods, as “C” students the lack of safety they experienced served as risk factors. The only way to stay out of trouble was to get to know the offenders in LeMarcus’ case and avoid interaction with the offenders in Talayah’s case. As Wilkinson et al. (2009) stated, “none of these strategies ensures safety with certainty” (p. 31).

It is important to note that the lack of community and school safety does not affect all students equally. Nevertheless, similar to LeMarcus, Tenishi [African American, 11th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Stanley High] had this to say about her neighborhood,
Vega: So describe your neighborhood, what’s the best thing about it?
Tenishi: Does ignorant count?
Vega: The best thing about it?
Tenishi: Yeah, there’s ignorance, there’s arrogance, there’s gunshots, there’s dogs barking, police violence. You know...all that.
Vega: So is that the best thing about it?
Tenishi: That’s the best way to describe it in my opinion. Well, for me to describe it that will be the best of the worst to describe it...I would say it’s not the best positive environment because it’s the ghetto. But positive things can come out of it; I guess that would be the best way to say it.

While it is apparent that Tenishi disliked her neighborhood and safety was a definite issue, as an “A” student, she displayed resiliency and hope in stating that positive things can emerge from what she referred to as the “ghetto.” She later discussed how her family and friends lived in the area so it was beneficial to have that support system around her.

Junior [African American, 10th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Evergreen High] also shared how gang activity impacted his feelings towards his neighborhood, he stated,

My neighbor’s house is getting robbed and we have to make sure nobody comes to ours. The neighbor across the street, he’s getting his house robbed like three times in six months. So it’s like, I don’t know where all the kids that I grew up with, most of them just ended up messing up, like one of them actually did crack and is in a gang. A lot of them became part of gangs and shootings and stuff.

Henrich, Schwab-Stone, Fanti, Jones, and Ruchkin (2004) explored the long-term effects of exposure to community violence on academic achievement and feelings of school safety among urban, middle school students. They found that sixth graders who witnessed violence felt less safe at school, and consequently, were at greater risk for lower achievement levels during the two-year duration of the study. The researchers found no buffers for the effects of witnessing violence on achievement, but results showed that parental support might help buffer boys from the adverse effects of
victimization on feeling less safe at school. It is evident from LeMarcus, Talayah, Tenishi, and Junior’s responses, that they felt unsafe in their neighborhoods due to crime, victimization, and gang activity. Although Henrich et al. (2004) found parental support served as a buffer for boys; Tenishi expressed the best part of her neighborhood as having her family nearby, thus serving as a buffer from witnessing community violence for females as well.

Howard, Budge, and McKay (2009) conducted a study examining the degree to which family and peer support moderated the negative impact of exposure to violence on academic performance and distress. The researchers found that family support served as a protective factor against exposure to violence and symptoms of distress; however, family and peer support did not moderate the impact of violence exposure and grades. It appeared that Tenishi’s family protected her from the violence she was exposed to in her community and possibly moderated its impact on her grades. More research is needed for this subject matter. Nonetheless, educators must be aware of the obstacles their students encounter outside of school in their communities and understand the effect it may have on their success in school.

4.5.5 “If you tell a person they can’t do it and you tell them enough times, they just listen to you, they’re gonna think they can’t do it”: Racism and racial discrimination

Elizabeth [Latina, 12th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High] provided the above explanation when asked whether racism and racial discrimination affected the achievement of urban African American and Latino youth. Responses varied to this question, but the majority (13) of the students felt racism and racial discrimination served as barriers to academic success. To this end, most of the students answered this question
with a “yes,” while the remainder of the students expressed uncertainty, or the perception that racism and racial discrimination today was not as bad as it was in the past. These results were interesting as some differences emerged. For example, all eight of the males in the study believed racism and racial discrimination affected the ability of African American and Latinos in the U.S. to achieve. Seven of the eight Latino students felt similarly, and these same students all attended Watson High. These differences may have occurred among all the males in the study because of an awareness of their perceived position in society as inferior. African American and Latino males tend to encounter more difficulties throughout their educational experiences. Additionally, all but one of the Latino students felt this way and discussed how they and their Latino peers were often called “illegal” and perceived as lacking English proficiency; thus treated as lower class citizens. The Latina student who did not feel like her Latino counterparts may have felt racism and racial discrimination was not a barrier to achievement because she was half white and was not raised by her Latino family. Her phenotype was also fair skinned and she could “pass” as white; therefore, she may not have been subject to the same discrimination as other Latinos.

Tenishi [African American, 11th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Stanley High] and Mia [Latina, 11th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Baker High] felt racism and racial discrimination were geographically dependent. Both stated it was more pronounced in the South than anywhere else. Tenishi experienced this firsthand, when she lived in Georgia. She stated,

Well, I grew up in the South in this little, well I guess you could say it’s a little white town, and I remember being the only black person in a class full of white people and …When I was living in Georgia, they didn’t acknowledge me for how
smart I was…until I came to the Midwest…I just think that in the South there’s more racism than there is anywhere else. I feel there is racism wherever you live, but in the South, it’s more, there’s a lot more.

Mia explained, “…it also depends on where you are, if you’re down South and you’re African American, you might have a little trouble, maybe.” Moreover, Tenishi also understood the possibility that, as an African American, a woman, and having a unique name, may prevent her from getting a job in the future. The literature supports Tenishi’s concern regarding the uniqueness of her name. In a study by Bertrand and Mullainathan (2003) examining labor market discrimination, they found significant discrimination against African American names, more specifically; persons with White names received 50% more callbacks for interviews.

Eleven students indicated when asked the question, “Do you think that racism or racial discrimination will affect your future goals?,” that it possibly could. The student’s reactions included that they may not get a job because of their race, ethnicity, or skin color. For instance, Lucette [Latina, 11th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Watson High] stated, “They’re not gonna want…I’m American, but because of my skin color, I look Mexican. [If] they’re racist, if I become a photographer, the people are not going to want me to take their pictures, [because] I’m Mexican.” Jose [Latino, 11th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High] also mentioned that people might assume he’s an illegal immigrant and not want to work with him because of his Latino heritage.

James [African American, 11th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Miami High] also felt that if he did not accomplish his career goals, he would be affected by racism or racial discrimination. He explained,
Because an African American man in the future with no degree, no college degree, I don’t think they’re really gonna get anywhere. But if I do reach my goal and everything, I don’t think it’ll affect me.

Junior [African American, 10th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Evergreen High] also expressed the potential for racism and racial discrimination to affect his future goals. He stated, “It might throw me off track, it might make me think that I can’t do that or because I’m black I’m not gonna be the smartest kid in the class compared to others.” Tommy [African American, 12th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Waterford High] expressed a degree of uncertainty of how racism or racial discrimination may affect him in the future, but appeared to understand why it might be a barrier to success. He shared, “I really don’t know, probably because I’m trying to be successful in life and maybe some people don’t feel like I should be successful, so they want to keep me where I am. They don’t want me to achieve my goals.”

From the students’ responses, it is apparent that many of them, such as Elizabeth, Tenishi, Lucette, Jose, James, and Junior, had an understanding of the consequences racism and racial discrimination had on achievement and their future goals. However, on the other hand, many students including those who believed racism affected achievement could not explain how or why this occurred. Students, such as Tommy, also expressed uncertainty regarding the effects of racism on achievement and their future goals.

4.5.6 “I think I can make something of myself, not just another immigrant working another job to make money”: Immigration status

A small number of Latino students disclosed their undocumented immigration status during the individual interviews. Despite their status, they held high aspirations and remained focused on achieving their future goals. Nonetheless, these students were
graduating at the end of the school year aware of the limitations they faced in pursuing a higher education but with no clear plan of how to achieve them or post-graduation plans. For instance, one student indicated that she might return to her country of origin to attend college, and another stated that she wanted to move to New York because she heard undocumented students could attend college there.

This uncertainty, due to immigration status, exists for many undocumented students; they held high aspirations, however, they were limited in what they could achieve without legal status or the money to attend college. Although these students persisted throughout high school, many others may drop out prematurely because they do not see the value in a high school diploma if they do not have their papers. Elizabeth [Latina, 12th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High] discussed this situation regarding a friend who wanted to drop out of school,

There was this kid who was a senior; I think I was a freshman or a sophomore. He didn’t want to graduate and he was a Latino, so I’m telling him like just graduate. He’s like, ‘no I really don’t want to do it, what’s the point if I’m an immigrant and I don’t have papers’. I told him at least you did something, at least you graduated from high school and not a lot of people do that and then I was just telling him, pushing him to do it. And he was like I’ll do it and he did it.

Research has documented the limited options undocumented students have after high school (Abrego, 2006; Perez, 2009); therefore, it is not uncommon for them to drop out before they even complete high school due to a feeling of hopelessness, similar to how Elizabeth’s friend felt. It is unfortunate that many students do not have a support system to push them to persist through school and inform them of their options as undocumented students. Although attaining a higher education may be difficult without legal status, it is not impossible; there are various resources available to help these students out. This
information must be communicated to students at a young age to prevent the risk of dropping out. This is where counselor support is most needed; otherwise, students remain unaware of their options and in some cases drop out of school. If counselors lack the resources to help these students, then they must seek out training and support to be prepared to assist this population.

An article by Gin (2010) provided recommendations for counselors in assisting undocumented youth such as making resources accessible to students without requiring them to disclose their immigrant status, being knowledgeable about college admission policies that affect these students, and identifying private scholarships and encouraging students to apply for them. Hyun and Newburn (2010) also suggested school counselors incorporate the true cost of college, college options, and the possibility of earning college credits in high school into the guidance curriculum for undocumented youth. They also proposed counseling groups that focus on planning for life after high school, or serving as a support group for immigrant students to learn their rights. School counselors can also research college/universities policies for undocumented youth to assist students in planning for the future.

Both undocumented students also discussed the impact the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act or the DREAM Act would have on their lives if signed it into law. Both stated it would give them the opportunity to attend college. However, one student went on further to say, “…it would help me to go to school and get help from the government to pay, so I don’t have to work all the money for it…I think I could make something of myself, not just be another immigrant having another job trying to make money.” The students understood that they would not have to struggle as much
or work low-paying jobs if afforded the option of attending college and becoming a citizen in the U.S. through the passage of the DREAM Act.

4.6 The Influence of Positive Relationships on Academic Experiences

Throughout the interviews, the students consistently mentioned how relationships and support from people such as school counselors, teachers, peers, family members, and Upward Bound, influenced their schooling experiences. These meaningful relationships are examined in depth in the sections that follow.

4.6.1 Meaningful relationships

School Counselors. When the researcher asked the students about course selection assistance, nine students indicated they depended on themselves. However, the remainder of the students stated they received help from other people, such as their school counselor. Nine students expressed positive relationships with their school counselors. They also discussed how helpful their school counselors were in providing useful information about opportunities and ensuring they were on track to graduate.

Student’s reactions to this question included:

My counselor, by far, Ms. Watts (pseudonym), she is genius… -- [Mia, Latina, 11th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Baker High]

She can pull up my transcripts and pull up my report cards and show me what’s an absolute necessity for me to take and what electives would be a best fit for me. -- LeMarcus [African American, 12th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Waterford High]

They tell us what we should take the next coming school year, and if we already took those classes, what we should take after that to stay on track and to get the proper learning that we need. -- Thomas [African American, 11th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Baker High]
These are basic responsibilities of school counselors at the high school level; however, most focus on scheduling classes for students. The aforementioned students seemed to appreciate the assistance they received from this relationship compared to the students who reported not even knowing their school counselor or feeling as if they did not have access to information about opportunities. Additionally, although Jose [Latino, 11th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High] said he helped himself the most when it came to selecting courses, he did discuss how helpful his school counselor had been for him:

Last year when I was filling out classes for this year, I had a free period, I wanted to take a keyboard class, so then I went and asked her. So then she helped me fill out the paperwork and told me about the possibility of giving away my lunch at least for a quarter. Then I did it and it worked well. I learned a lot...also last summer she emailed me and called me one time to make sure I had my schedule right, because she knows I’ll be back in her office figuring out my classes.

His school counselor went above and beyond her duties by emailing and calling him during the summer to ensure that his course schedule was accurate. Jose also said that she did this because she knew he would be in her office to fix his schedule. Therefore, his initiative in seeking the courses he wanted may have influenced the amount of assistance the school counselor provided to him over other students. It is quite possible that those students who seek out help receive additional benefits from the school counselor, such as knowledge about available opportunities, and getting into the courses they really want to take. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that school counselors serve many students and because of their heavy student caseload, it is difficult to reach every student.

_Teachers._ As illustrated in chapter two, student-teacher dynamics in urban schools are important to student’s attitudes toward achievement. When students believe
their teachers genuinely care about them, show respect, and hold high expectations towards them, students’ tend to have more positive academic outcomes. For instance, in a study by Reid and Moore (2008), they found that students felt the relationships they shared with school personnel helped prepare them for college. These adults provided them with encouragement to attend college and made them believe in their ability to attain success. While interviewing Amy [Biracial, 11th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Baker High], we discussed the persons she received the most help from on her schoolwork. She was one of three of students that indicated her teachers helped her the most. For example, she shared, “teachers…it’s only certain teachers that help you because you have a better connection with them. You’re kind of more comfortable with them, to ask questions to them or whatever.” The researcher also asked her what teachers she felt most comfortable in asking for help. She went on to say, “My social studies teacher…I got average grades, but then this year I got her and got straight A’s in the classroom. And well, I had another teacher for science and I did good in her classroom even though I really, I don’t know, it’s not really my favorite, but I like the teacher.”

Amy’s comments are especially important because she stated that before that school year she was getting average grades in social studies, but when she changed teachers, her grades improved to A’s. She also mentioned that, although science was not her favorite subject, she did well because of the teacher. These comments underscore the influence a teacher can have on student’s grades. If teachers engage their students in instruction and develop meaningful relationships that make student feels comfortable enough to ask for help as Amy did, students’ grades can really be positively impacted.
Students also mentioned how teachers were instrumental in recommending courses for them to enroll in such as Advanced Placement (AP) courses. For example, Mia [Latina, 11th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Baker High] stated, “For the two humanities classes I was in, they really, really recommended us to take the AP classes. Which I would have taken them either way, but that did help [because] it was like they were saying that it would really help us and if we were gonna go to college than that was the smartest thing to do.” Therefore, even though Mia already planned to take the AP course, her teacher’s recommendation of the course reassured her that it would be helpful in her preparation for college.

Elizabeth [Latina, 12th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High] also discussed the importance of student-teacher relationships when she discussed her plans for the future. She was a graduating senior, preparing to attend a small university a few hours away. Elizabeth indicated that she initially wanted to apply to the large, local state university but changed her mind. She stated, “It’s a lot of people, it’s too crowded…And you don’t have a relationship with your teachers or anything. I want to have a relationship with my teachers; it’s easier for me to do well. It’s hard for me to sit in class and not talk to them and they just teach me and it’s hard for me to connect.”

Similar to Amy’s perspective, Elizabeth believed the supportive relationships between teachers and students influenced her attitudes toward learning. For Elizabeth, she felt a smaller university would enable her to develop relationships with her professors. This is where access to information becomes important because teachers and counselors alike must discuss with students what to expect in college. Additionally, knowledge about how to seek out support in any college or university setting, small or
large, is necessary. While Elizabeth believed she needed to attend a smaller university to have a better learning experience, a larger university may provide her with more opportunities and resources.

Tenishi [African American, 11th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Stanley High] did not feel her teachers helped her very much, however, similar to Mia, she stated, “This one teacher had asked if I was going in Advanced Placement in Social Studies and I was like, ‘yes’ and he was like, ‘oh well good, because you’re smart in social studies.’” While Lisa [African American, 12th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Evergreen High] expressed she wanted better teachers, she felt, “Some of them will and they try to reach out. Like my chemistry teacher that’s all she’s good for is trying to get her name out there.” Thomas [African American, 11th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Baker High] stated, “I had a couple teachers help me throughout the year. They’d actually tutor me and help me and actually get me further ahead.” Talayah [African American, 11th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Evergreen High] shared, “In the school, it’s basically the science teachers that’s really helping me because they know that I want to become that so they push me extra hard because it got something to do with their section of experience.”

Other students indicated that their teachers supported them by providing additional help on assignments if they had questions about it, shared information about programs or different opportunities, offered tutoring, or allowed students to come see them in the morning before school begins, during lunch, or after school for extra academic assistance. It appeared that students appreciated being given extra time with their teachers and the opportunity to develop more intimate, personal relationships with their teachers. Reid and Moore (2008) found that students felt the relationships they
shared with school personnel helped them prepare for college. These adults provided them with encouragement to attend college and made them believe in their ability to achieve success. Therefore, the positive effects of these relationships are evident from students’ own voices.

Peers. Six students indicated that their friends provided them with the most help with schoolwork and with course selection. Some even mentioned the role their friends played in assisting them throughout their schooling experience. Tenishi [African American, 11th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Stanley High] described how her friends shared college information with each other. She stated, “My friends are giving me other options to colleges and stuff.” Talayah [African American, 11th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Evergreen High] stated that she and her friends pushed each other to try their best. She explained,

Because we all got the same interests really, so we all push each other like you should take this science class or this math class, go ahead take that. We make each other do challenges that we don’t like to do…We take the most advanced classes instead of signing up for the classes we supposed to that take year, if we got an extra block and we ain’t going to do nothing then but get into trouble, we normally just add an extra two classes or something.

Mario [African American, 10th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Evergreen High] also noted, “Me and my friends have this thing going on that we don’t want to leave each other behind, [so] we’ll help each other to the best of our ability.” It is evident from these statements that these supportive peer networks can provide access to information such as colleges and universities, and help students maintain focus on their academic pursuits.

Peer support in the form of academic assistance emerged as students discussed the individuals that supported them throughout their educational experience. Thomas
[African American, 11th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Baker High] described how he and his friends assisted each other with their schoolwork. He shared, “A couple of my friends help me, we would get together and do our work together and compare our answers and stuff to see what we got.” Similarly, Tommy [African American, 12th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Waterford High] received academic support from his friends, he stated, “Well, they’ll give me an example of the problem. If not, they’ll walk me through the problem and tell me how to do it.” Mia [Latina, 11th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Baker High] also shared, “If we’re in class, a lot of my friends just help me if I’m like, ‘hey, I don’t know what this is...’”

Amy [Biracial, 11th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Baker High] also felt comparable to Thomas, Tommy, and Mia. She stated, “Friends, like if you have questions, they have the same work, they get something and you don’t, they just help me with it, help you understand.” Her friends provided explanations on how to complete schoolwork as did the friends of the other students. As all these students participated in Upward Bound and all the students form Baker High felt similarly, it is possible that the UB program created an environment where students developed the skills to work collaboratively with their peers to achieve the common goal of academic success.

The students in this study appeared to surround themselves with peers who like themselves valued education. Although all the students GPA’s may not be reflective of a strong academic identity, their discussion of providing and receiving peer academic support, sharing college information, and pushing each other to be successful draws attention to their achievement orientation and motivation. Research supports this finding as it has been shown that perceived social support (e.g., from peers, family, and teachers)
facilitates motivational beliefs and as a result, enhances achievement (Ahmed, Minnaert, van der Werf, & Kuyper, 2010), and is correlated with grades, educational intentions, behaviors, and value of education (Somers, Owens, & Piliawsky, 2008).

Family. While only three students indicated that their parents/guardians were able to provide them with academic assistance, when the researcher asked the students, “Who is helping you to reach your goals?,” all 20 of the participants mentioned persons in their family. Thus, educators cannot underestimate or devalue the involvement parents/guardian’s have with their children’s schooling because they are not present or active in the actual school building. A review of the literature by Herndon and Moore (2002) found that families supported their African American students in different ways, including emotionally, socially, and financially. The students in the present study also discussed how their families provided them with help in achieving their goals; the types of support they received included emotional support and encouragement in most cases and to a lesser degree, four students received academic assistance and support.

For example, Mia [Latina, 11th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Baker High] indicated that her family provided her words of encouragement and held her to high standards by telling her, “You’re going somewhere in life, you’re gonna do this, you’re not gonna be working in McDonald’s when you’re 23 years-old.” She explained that her mom had not attended college nor had anyone else in her family, thus they wanted her to achieve more than they had. Elizabeth’s [Latina, 12th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High] mother also had similar words for her by telling her, “I’m the mirror, look at me, don’t be how I am right now. Do your work, just graduate from high school first, then go to college.” In reference to her mother, Amy [Biracial, 11th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Baker High] stated,
“She didn’t go to college, so she doesn’t know much about that kind of thing. So she says, ‘do your best’ about everything.” Therefore, even though the participants’ parents had not attended college, they did not want their children to struggle or work low-paying jobs in the future. Thus, they held high aspirations for them and offered simple words of encouragement such as “do your best.”

Four students indicated that their parents provided them with assistance in pursuit of their college goals beyond emotional support. For instance, Thomas [African American, 11th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Baker High], who was interested in becoming an Engineer, told the researcher, “My mom, she knows a couple of people who are Engineers, so I talk to them about their job and what I need to do to get there.” Tommy [African American, 12th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Waterford High] stated, “She’s [mom] the one who gave me the idea to open my own managing firm.” Junior [African American, 10th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Evergreen High] shared, “When I told her [mom] I wanted to go to Purdue [University], she started looking at Purdue’s website at their engineering stuff.” Additionally, Talayah [African American, 11th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Evergreen High] stated, “When I first told them [her parents] what I wanted to do when I get older as a career, they made me research it.”

From these responses, it is evident that some students’ families played a major role in making sure they had the information necessary for the careers and/or colleges in which they were interested. Additionally, these students, Thomas, Tommy, Junior, and Talayah, were all participants in the Upward Bound program. Their parents may have provided an increased rate of academic and college preparation assistance because the Upward Bound program required parental involvement. As a result, they may have felt
more empowered with the social capital to share with their children and assist them in preparing for college. This hypothesis is consistent with Moore’s (2006) recommendations to parents suggesting that access to information such as the importance of knowing different career options available to their children and being aware of their children’s academic progress positively influences academic success. Additionally, Tommy and Thomas’ mothers with whom they resided had completed some college and Junior’s mother and Talayah’s father obtained high school diplomas. Therefore, their parents may have more access to information than other parents with lower levels of education.

It was evident that some parents provide words of encouragement, while others assisted their children in networking and researching career and college options. In a study by Moore (2006), he found families influenced African American males’ career trajectories. He also found that families provided ongoing guidance, support, and encouragement. Regardless of the type of support provided to students by their families, it is evident that their children valued and recognized the role they were playing in assisting them to reach their future goals. The current study and previous research underscores the importance of parental involvement in their children’s schooling. It also dispels myths that parents of urban students do not care or value their children’s education (Howard, 2003).

*Upward Bound.* Upward Bound (UB) deserves mention as the majority (13) of the students in the study participated in this program. UB provided academic instruction to first-generation and students from low-income backgrounds. The students attended classes on Saturdays for five hours and had the opportunity to participate in the UB
Summer Institute for six weeks. In addition, they attended weekly in-school meetings with UB staff and participated in college visits and community service projects.

Ten of the 13 UB students from this study when asked, “Who is helping you to reach your goals?”, indicated the UB program. When the researcher asked the students, how Upward Bound helped them to reach their goals, they mentioned,

They’re getting you there. They’re pushing you, they’re like you’re gonna do this, you cannot have no free time, you need to be studying. -- Mia [Latina, 11th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Baker High]

Being in Upward Bound, I was always taught to just challenge myself…Upward Bound helps me because they believe in me; it gives me the courage to go on. They’re positive, they’re always complimenting me, they’re always, how could I put it? Keeping me up and letting me know that I’m gonna be somebody. Giving me the extra push and they prepare me for college with the work and just the schedule and everything. -- Lisa [African American, 12th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Evergreen High]

They letting me know what I need to do to get to college, to stay in college, experience, letting me know what I might encounter when I attend college. The obstacles I’m gonna have to overcome…Not partying all the time…Letting me know what kind of applications I have to fill out, sign up for financial aid, good ways to study, that’s it.
-- James [African American, 11th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Miami High]

In Upward Bound, we went on a couple of college tours, we look at colleges, and some of the colleges were engineering colleges, and Ms. Laura (program director; pseudonym) had me go to a couple of workshops and I met a couple of people who do engineering. 
-- Thomas [African American, 11th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Baker High]

From these excerpts, it is apparent that the UB program had a very strong influence on these students’ futures. Many discussed how the program pushed them to do their best and challenged them. Consistent with the purpose of the program, the students received college preparation through the courses they enrolled in, college visits, and workshops. They were also provided with information about financial aid, as well as the realities of
the college experience, such as when James [African American, 11\textsuperscript{th} grade, B (89-80) GPA, Miami High] mentioned, “not partying all time” and study skills. Although Upward Bound is considered a deficit-based program (Pearl, 2002), these students are often first-generation and/or from low-income socioeconomic backgrounds and may not have access to such intensive college preparation without it. Academic success and college preparation may depend on whether students take advantage of the resources provided by UB, among many other factors, which may explain the varying achievement levels among the participants.

4.7 Attitudes toward Learning

Despite the varying achievement levels of students in this study, they all held high aspirations for their future. In addition, 15 students were making strides towards reaching their future goals by maintaining above average and average grades. They also dedicated their time to academic activities outside of school hours, such as through their involvement with Upward Bound. However, the attitude-achievement paradox became apparent among the five low-achieving students. They explained what they needed to do to reach their goals, but were not doing those things. The 1966 Coleman report discussed this paradox later called the attitude-achievement paradox, in regards to the positive attitudes held toward education despite academic performance among African Americans (Mickelson, 1990). Mickelson (1990) stated that this paradox “centers on the positive attitudes that blacks embrace in the face of their all-too-frequent underachievement” (p. 58).

Mickelson discussed the existence of a dual belief system among black students, abstract and concrete attitudes. Abstract attitudes refer to the universal belief that
education is the vehicle to success, whereas concrete attitudes are situationally-dependent and based on experience with success among persons in one’s life. Mickelson (1990) found that concrete attitudes influenced academic outcomes amongst African American high school students. It appeared that African American students believed that education might promote success on an abstract level. However, they operated from their concrete beliefs stemming from their previous experiences with barriers to success (Butler, 2003). In addition, through the student’s discussion of their favorite and least favorite subjects, it became apparent that they based their interest on ease of the course and instruction. These findings are discussed in depth in the following sections.

Aspirations. When asked, “Imagine yourself in 20 years from now, what is your career/occupation?,” all the students knew what they wanted to do in the future. Their career aspirations included being an environmentalist, lawyer, business owner, nurse, National Football League (NFL) player, engineer, chef, architect, basketball player, baseball player, therapist, and choreographer. When the researcher asked the students what they needed to do to reach their goals, their answers varied. Mia [Latina, 11th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Baker High] stated, “Being determined and having people support you.” She understood that she was responsible for achieving her goals and needed fortitude, but she also recognized that she could not reach her goals without a support system in place to assist her. Tenishi [African American, 11th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Stanley High] asserted, “I’m gonna have to keep my 4.0 GPA up, and I’m gonna have to study really hard and work really hard and just make sure I have the money to go to the college I want to go to and everything.” It was clear that she had an idea of the work that
she needed to put in to achieve success in addition to the financial assistance necessary to attend and persist in college.

Many other students made similar comments regarding the effort, hard work, motivation, support, and dedication needed to achieve their goals. For instance, Cici [Multiracial, 11th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Stanley High] shared her thoughts on reaching her goals, she shared, “Let’s see, study hard, keep my GPA up, maintain my grades and just stay on the right track and stay in school.” Tommy, [African American, 12th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Waterford High] a graduating senior also had a clear idea of how he could achieve his goals. He stated, “Basically graduating from high school, go to college, study, get good grades. Graduate from college, get my diploma, and basically just start looking for athletes. Because before I become a coach and team owner, I want to be a sports agent and manage player’s careers.”

Monique, [African American, 12th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Stanley High], a struggling student, explained what she needed to do, “Graduate from school, get in a good college that their sports are good, and do my best on the basketball court and do my best in school, so I don’t get kicked out and I can be there.” Jose [Latino, 11th grade, B (89-90) GPA, Watson High], shared that he needed, “Lots of college, patience, that’s it, just motivation” to reach his goals. Like Tommy, Linda [Latina, 12th grade, B (89-90) GPA, Watson High], a graduating senior as well, expressed her feelings about reaching her future goals. She indicated, “I have to go to college for like four, five, six more years. It takes four years to get a bachelor’s, but I would like to get involved with another branch of nursing. Persistence too because I think it’s gonna be hard, but I really want it, really hard work.” From the students’ responses, it was evident that they all
wanted to achieve success in their lives. The high-achieving students expressed a clear plan of how to reach their goals in the next few years; however, the low-achievers were not engaging in the activities or receiving the grades necessary. The following section discusses this paradox.

**Attitude-achievement paradox.** All the students recognized the need to complete high school and attend college to reach their career goals. However, not all the students demonstrated what they stated was necessary to achieve them. Among the five students with GPAs of “C”, career aspirations included becoming a chef, engineer, forensic scientist, basketball player, and choreographer. One could argue that high GPAs are unnecessary for careers in culinary arts, athletics, and dance. However, all of these students discussed how they must attend college to achieve their goals. With increasingly competitive college admission criteria, high GPA’s may in fact be necessary regardless of area of interest. Consistent with the attitude-achievement paradox, these students, both African American and Latino, held high aspirations; however, they were not putting in the effort needed to reach their goals. These students expressed that going to college and working hard would assist them in reaching their career goals and success (concrete attitude), but they achieved low academic outcomes evident by their “C” GPA.

**Time on task.** The researcher sought to determine how students spent their time outside of school, more specifically, to understand how much time students dedicated to their schoolwork. Sixteen students indicated they completed their schoolwork after school when they arrived at home. However, four students mentioned they did not like doing homework at home, so they attempted to complete it during the school day or avoided it until before they went to sleep at night. For instance, Pepito [Latino, 11th
grade, A (100-90) GPA, Watson High] explained, “I usually do my work at school. I get it all done at school, just turn it in the next day. I’m a quick worker.” Similarly, Mario [African American, 10th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Evergreen High] shared, “I usually finish my homework before I get out of class so I don’t know why, I don’t like homework at home.” Additionally, Pilar [Latina, 12th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High] stated, “I always wait until the last minute and then I always do it because I know it be easy.”

On the other hand, LeMarcus [African American, 12th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Waterford High] and Lisa [African American, 12th grade, A (100-90 GPA, Evergreen High], who enrolled in AP courses, indicated that they often spent long hours working on their homework assignments. Lisa stated, “Man, it could take…I get out at 2:30, I get home you could say 3:30, I be finished about 9pm, sometimes on a good day, 7pm…so about 6 hours.” Comparably, LeMarcus stated, “I finish most of my work in school, but the AP class has homework that requires a couple of hours for work.” It is obvious that AP courses are more challenging than regular grade level courses, so this leads to students spending a great deal of time completing tasks outside of school. Lisa successfully maintained a 4.0 GPA, despite enrolling in AP courses; however, LeMarcus struggled, as evidenced by his “C” GPA, he also indicated he received a “C” in his AP History course.

The UB participants spent four hours on Saturdays receiving academic instruction. In addition, they attended Summer Institute over the course of six weeks in the summer of 2009 when the researcher began this study. For the first three weeks of Summer Institute, students attended classes during the day and returned home each afternoon. For the last three weeks of the program, the students stayed on the campus site.
of the UB program and attended classes as college students would; they returned home on the weekends. Therefore, these students spent a significant amount of time on academic-related activities when school was out of session.

However, when the researcher and participants discussed how they spent their time while school was in session, not all of the UB participants spent a large amount of time on task. Besides attending Saturday Academy, the majority of the students explained that they spent the remainder of the day hanging out with their friends, going to the mall, movies, or with family. Only three students, Mia, Lisa, and Amy, all “A” students, said they did homework on Saturdays following UB. For non-UB participants, three of the seven students spent the entire day at church involved with youth activities. Linda [Latina, 12th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High] explained, “I’m at church all day long. I get there around 10 am and then I teach two girls how to dance…I teach them how to dance and then I go out to eat lunch and then at 1:30 pm through 4 pm we practice the band and the dance team. Then it’s 4pm, and then around 5:30 pm my sister gives us some kind of class about the bible.” Comparably, Lucette [Latina, 11th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Watson High] discussed how she spent her Saturdays, “I have to be in church because I’m in a youth program…we dance sometimes and we don’t come out until 3 or 4 pm and have to go back at 5 pm. Saturdays is a church day for me, I have to be there most of the time.”

The other four non-UB participants engaged in behaviors comparable to the UB students such as hanging out, sleeping in, cleaning, or watching movies. For example, Maria [Latina, 12th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Watson High] stated, “I sometimes hang out with my friends; I go to the mall or go to the movies and stuff.” Pilar, [Latina, 12th grade,
B (89-80) GPA, Watson High] explained, “On Saturdays, I wake up, I go do laundry…I wait until later at night, then my friends come pick me up, I get dressed, and then we go out to the club or the bars or to a party or something. We always just go out somewhere.” Jose [Latino, 11th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High] shared, “Most days [Saturdays] we’re just around the house cleaning everything, while my mom either sews in her shop or cooks, and my dad eats outside, either working or doing anything else, it’s us working or cleaning. That’s pretty much what we’ve always done.”

Additionally, the participants discussed how they spent their Sundays, with four UB students stating they completed their homework and prepared themselves for Monday. For instance, Cici [Multiracial, 11th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Stanley High] stated, “Sometimes I go to church, not all the time. If I’m very busy, I would just stay home and do my chores or do my homework, so that Monday I could be prepared for school.” Talayah [African American, 11th grade, C(79-70) GPA, Evergreen High] also prepared for the school week. She shared her Sunday schedule, “I go to church in the morning from 10:30 to 1 pm, [and] then after that, my family has a tradition that we all go out to eat together. Whoever goes to church that day, they go out to eat together. And then, I go home and get ready for the next day.” The remainder of the UB students indicated that they completed chores, relaxed, sometimes attended church, had family day, or hung out. Five of the seven Latino students from Watson High attended church and spent time with their families on Sundays:

…on Sunday, I go to church, and then we go to eat with the family. -- Maria [Latina, 12th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Watson High]

Sunday, I wake up at 8, take my sister to church, then I go to church. [Because] she has to dance, so she has to go earlier. So then, I go to church, after we come
out of church I usually, that’s the day I have to wash the car, so I wash cars, go eat with the family and then I go play volleyball till dark. -- Pepito [Latino, 11th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Watson High]

On Sundays, I go to church in the mornings from 9-1:30, we have two services and I dance in both services. Then afterwards we go eat, have lunch, and then go to the park to play volleyball, some of the youth people and my family. -- Linda [Latina, 12th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High]

…on Sundays, in the morning, I wake up around 10, get ready, we go to church. - - Jose [Latino, 11th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High]

I go to church from 9 to 1:30, [because] it’s two services, I have to dance from 9 to 10…I go to eat with my family or with the youth people [because] Linda’s best friend is my godmother. So whenever I’m with my godmother, I be with Linda, we go out to eat or to the park, play volleyball for a little bit and just chill for a little bit. -- Lucette [Latina, 11th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Watson High]

This could be because these students were all friends and attended the same church with the exception of Jose, who attended a different church. The remaining three Latino students stated it was also family day or they simply relaxed. For example, Elizabeth [Latina, 12th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High] shared, “Sunday is more like a family day, I spend time with my mom, usually I go to her friend’s house and then we just chill.”

Therefore, overall, it appeared that the students did not spend a great deal of time on their schoolwork outside of school regardless of race, ethnicity, grade, gender, and achievement level. This may be attributed to a variety of factors such as the amount of schoolwork received, completion at school, lack of completion, and the amount of time it takes to complete homework. Lisa and LeMarcus discussed the long amount of time it took them to complete their schoolwork, but the other students did not. Many of the students said they completed their homework or as much of it as they could at school. In
addition, many of the students participated in extracurricular activities, which included study table allowing students the time to complete their work at school.

It is also possible that the students did not spend a lot of time on their schoolwork and did not complete all of it. Lastly, some students may complete their work quicker than others and not have any work left to do on the weekends. Because the researcher framed the question to understand how their time was spent outside, but did not probe specifically on the amount of time spent on schoolwork, it is not clear what factors account for the small amount of time spent on assignments outside of school. Nonetheless, the majority of the participants achieved above average and average outcomes, therefore, how the students spend their time outside of school may not provide all the pieces to the puzzle.

*Interest versus Disinterest.* To understand how students engaged academically in different subject areas, the researcher asked about their favorite and least favorite subjects. Ten students ranked mathematics as being their favorite subject, for reasons such as, “Because I’m good at it” [Lisa, African American, 12th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Evergreen High], “Because I like working with numbers” [Tommy, African American, 12th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Waterford High], and “I understand math better than everybody else” [Pepito, Latino, 11th grade, A (100-90), Watson High]. English, social studies, art, French, and engineering emerged as favorites among the remainder of students. Students selected courses as their favorite due to the ease of the course as some stated “it’s really easy for me” [Mia, Latina, 11th grade, A (100-90), Baker High] and the instruction as one students explained, “I like hands-on activities” [Mario, African American, 10th grade, A (100-90), Evergreen High].
On the other hand, when the researcher and participants discussed their least favorite subjects, science emerged as the least favorite among eight students, followed by English, social studies, math, and foreign language. The students explained,

Science is just boring. -- [Mia, Latina, 11th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Baker High]

Because I didn’t like the teacher…I guess the way he taught the class, it was kind of dull and boring and I was very, very shocked when I passed his part of the state achievement test.” -- [Tenishi African American, 12th grade, A (100-90), Stanley High]

[I’m] not too good at it and it hurts me because I don’t have a good teacher…like I could do the work, it’s just the way she explains it and manages her time is impossible for me and it’s already my least favorite subject so… -- [Lisa, African American, 12th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Evergreen High]

I don’t know why, it just to me, science is so difficult. -- [Mario, African American, 10th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Evergreen High]

Similar to the reasons students stated subjects were their favorites, students disliked courses because of ease and instruction. As indicated in the excerpt above, Mia did not find her science course stimulating. Tenishi felt her teacher did not do a good job of teaching the material to students, and was surprised she passed the state achievement test, because she felt unprepared for it. Lisa also felt her teacher was not a good instructor, and Mario found the course to be difficult affecting his interest in the subject area. These students were all “A” students, yet experienced challenges in their learning.

LeMarcus [African American, 12th grade, C (79-70), Waterford High] found English to be difficult stating, “It’s just the comprehension part… I can read a book, but…maybe the next day, I can’t really discuss it with you.” The researcher asked him whether he felt that his difficulty retaining and comprehending material was a result of poor instruction, however, he replied, “I consider it my own fault…if you can’t
comprehend something, then it’s something you’re missing, I don’t think it’s really the teachers fault.” Although he felt it was his own fault, his teacher must demonstrate appropriate learning strategies for students who experience difficulty comprehending and retaining information as this is not a basic learning skill, such as reading and writing.

Other students such as Linda [Latina, 12th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High] felt, “It’s not so hard at all because I usually get good grades in that class [math], it’s just the teacher makes it so boring.” Pepito [Latino, 11th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Watson High] stated, “Because I don’t like to write, I don’t like to read…it bores me.” The poor instruction and lack of interesting and exciting activities made the subject area their least favorite. While teachers must stick to a curriculum for the classes they teach, they must find ways to engage their students in learning activities to improve learning experiences as well as enhance academic outcomes. When instruction grabs student’s attention and involves them in learning, they tend to have better learning outcomes than when they are simply sitting in class listening to their teacher lecture for long periods of time.

4.8 Race Relations

To understand how race and ethnicity affected the academic motivation among the participants in the study, the researchers asked questions in reference to how students felt persons (e.g., students, teachers, and administrators) of other racial and ethnic groups perceived their group. Additionally, the researcher asked how students felt persons (e.g., students, teachers, and administrators) from their own racial and ethnic groups perceived their own groups. This question revealed interesting findings regarding perceived race relations in the urban public school system and the effect that these relationships have on their motivation. Results varied in that students felt others perceived their group through
stereotypes, or treated everyone the same. Concerning persons from their own racial/ethnic groups, results were wide-ranging as some students indicated equal treatment, lack of solidarity, and more support. These results are discussed in depth in the following sections.

4.8.1 “Like if you appear with baggy jeans, saggy clothes, thuggish-like, I mean you’re gonna be seen as like you’re not gonna be nobody, you’re not gonna go nowhere”:

Stereotypes

Fourteen of the students in this study felt that individuals from other racial/ethnic groups perceived them in a stereotypical way. James [African American, 11th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Miami High] is quoted above; he believed appearance played a significant role in how African Americans were perceived by their fellow students and teachers. Similarly, LeMarcus [African American, 12th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Waterford High] felt his teachers judged African American students based on their appearance. He explained:

…there could be a group of people saggin’[pants hanging low], a lot of people saggin’ in my school, and the teachers will probably take that as, ‘oh, he’s ignorant, he’s just a thug, he’s not really trying to do nothing with his life’…Or it could be just stuff written on their shirt or tattoos or anything like that and our teachers will instantly think, ‘well, he’s not doing nothing with his life, he’s just trying to be a gang banger’. When it turns out he could be like one of the top scholars in the school, but the teachers don’t look at it that far. They look at it as how you look.

James and LeMarcus shared that they felt non-African American and non-Hispanic students and teachers held these perceptions based on “our nation’s history” (James), and “in some cases, it is the students, because the way the students talk, speak to each other, gives the teachers that perception” (LeMarcus). Thus, they felt the stereotypical
perceptions stemmed from the historical positioning of African Americans as inferior to whites as well as students’ own behaviors.

Other students felt that these individuals jumped to conclusions and made assumptions about their ability based on the neighborhoods they came from. For instance, LeMarcus stated, “I’d say some of the students, like some Caucasian students at my school just jump to conclusions really fast, [because] you could look like you from the worst neighborhood ever, but you can be really smart.” Tenishi [African American, 11th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Stanley High] felt perceptions were based on a person’s upbringing and exposure to different groups of people. She shared, “They [other racial/ethnic groups] might think that we steal, like the world might just see black people as, ‘oh we’re ghetto, we’re thieves, we steal, we’re all in gangs, we all carry guns’…when that’s not even the case.” Thomas [African American, 11th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Baker High] spoke about the stereotypes held by his white peers, he stated, “They probably think most black people don’t do as well as them, they’re a bad influence, they’re thugs so called, they’re up to no good.” These students expressed views other groups held based on stereotypes such as appearance, intellectual ability, and the neighborhoods they came from.

An interesting relationship emerged when the Latino students discussed how they felt whites and African Americans perceived their ethnic group. Five of the seven Latino students at Watson High felt whites and African Americans both perceived them similarly, based on stereotypes. The Latino students spoke about how they felt whites and African Americans alike perceived them as intellectually inferior, illegal, taking over jobs, and lacking English proficiency. For example, Lucette [Latina, 11th grade, C (79-
70) GPA, Watson High] shared this about her white peers, “[They] look at us like we’re their maids or something, they see us different. They look at us like they’re better and they’re so American [because] they’re white, but black people are American too. Me, I’m Mexican-American, I’m American still. They just feel like they can overpower us.” In regards to white teachers, she felt, “they might think we don’t learn quick.” She also felt that, “Black people with us, I don’t know…I grew up with black people, so they’re cool with me, but sometimes they look at us like they’re Americans too, like white people…It’s like a bully, if you bully a bully, they grow up like, ‘my parents did this to me, I’m gonna do it to you’. That’s kind of like it.” Thus, the experience of subordination among African Americans by whites may contribute to their marginalization of Latino students.

Elizabeth [Latina, 12th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High] shared how she believed white students felt about Latinos, “They think we’re trying to take their country; we’re trying to take over, because I have heard it before like, ‘go back where you came from.’” She also felt her teachers doubted the intellectual capabilities of Latino students, Elizabeth shared, “…sometimes they just pay attention more to their kind, to white people because they think that they’re gonna be the ones who are going to be future lawyers, doctors. They don’t pay attention to us because they think we’re gonna fail regardless, because of the racism.” Comparable to Lucette, Elizabeth felt her African American peers treated Latinos as inferior. Elizabeth lamented, “I think that for some reason black people feel more, like on a higher level than us, Like [it’s] white, blacks, and then Latinos…I don’t know why they feel like that.”
Jose [Latino, 11th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High] also discussed how other students commented on the immigration status of Latino students. He explained, “Some of them might think you’re illegal, some of them might not like you, because then they say why are you guys taking all our jobs? Things like that. I don’t see why kids especially in schools should be talking about those things when they’re not even out there working.” Jose stated that he believed they felt this way, “Probably because of TV, they see it on TV or their parents grew up in that time.” Again, like his Latino peers at Watson High with regards to treatment by African Americans, he explained, “When it comes from African Americans that I’ve seen, they think the same as normal white people do. I don’t see a difference…They all think some are from Mexico, illegal, will take their jobs, I haven’t seen a difference.”

From the data analysis, six of the ten African American students felt that persons from other racial and ethnic groups perceived them negatively, primarily based on stereotypes. Based on African American students’ appearance or their neighborhood, they felt their peers and teachers believed they lacked the ability to achieve high academic success. These students felt these perceptions arose from the media and historical conceptions of African Americans. Among the Latino students, they felt their peers and teachers from other racial and ethnic groups perceived them as also lacking the intellectual capability, similar to how African American students felt. However, for Latino students, they felt these perceptions were based on assumptions about their immigration status and English proficiency. Additionally, concerning their relations with their African American peers, the students believed those peers perceived them the same
way their white peers did. Rather than banding together, Latino students felt African Americans, like white students, also marginalized them.

*Equal Treatment.* While some students felt their fellow students and teachers perceived them according to stereotypes, other students felt their peers, teachers, and administrators treated students of all races/ethnicities equally. Four students felt white teachers treated students of color the same way they treated white students. Amy [Biracial, 11th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Baker High] felt this treatment was because, “More people are open-minded.” Talayah [African American, 11th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Evergreen High] felt her white peers did not treat her differently because she was African American, she shared, “Most of the non-African American and non-Hispanics, the ones I hang out with, they treat us the same. We all treat each other the same. It’s really no racial thing right there from what I see.” Mia [Latina, 11th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Baker High] asserted, “Honestly, they [teachers] don’t treat me any different.” Thomas [African American, 11th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Baker High] also felt this way about the teachers in his school, he stated, “I never really had a teacher who treated me different because of my skin color. Every teacher I’ve had treated me the same way as everybody else.” However, he did mention that he saw teachers treat other black students differently based on their reputations. Thomas shared, “I could say, I know a couple of my friends who are black who are treated differently by the teachers. I guess the teacher judged them…Probably they heard something about them, because I know they were kind of troubled kids before, but they were getting their acts together.”

Amy, Mia, and Thomas all attended Baker High and expressed similar feelings about their perceptions of how persons from their racial/ethnic group were treated. This
finding is particularly interesting because the students all represented different racial and ethnic groups. Thomas was the only student of the three at Baker High to state that he had some friends who were treated differently by teachers, but it was based on their reputation as troubled students. Therefore, it seemed that the students at Baker High perceived the people in their school as respectful towards all races/ethnicities, unless as Thomas indicated, students act out in school. Thus, this school may represent a positive learning environment for students of all races and ethnicities, as Mia commented, “I like our school and I think it’s a good school.”

“It depends…”: Racial Affinity. A smaller number of students (2) expressed uncertainty when asked questions regarding the perceptions others held towards their racial/ethnic group. Tenishi [African American, 11th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Stanley High] felt the perceptions non-African Americans and non-Hispanic persons held towards African Americans depended on a person’s upbringing. She stated, “…I’ve had white teachers that aren’t racist whatsoever and I’ve had teachers that are white that are racist. I’ve had teachers that…I had this one teacher that was black and she thought she was better than everybody else and it just isn’t the case…at all.” As a result of Tenishi’s experiences, she felt that no one group felt the same way towards African Americans and that even those that identified as African American might not respect their own group. Tenishi continued to say, “It all depends really on how they feel towards their own race and stuff because sometimes people that are black they don’t want to be black because of all the persecution and the prejudice and the racism and all that other stuff.”

Throughout the interviews, this theme arose among a few of the students, as LeMarcus [African American, 12th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Waterford High] stated,
“...because basically no one race is solid with each other, like not all Caucasians get along, not all African Americans get along, not all Hispanics get along.” Not only did perceptions appear to be based on stereotypes, but they also depended on one’s affinity towards their own racial group as Tenishi also mentioned. In addition, LeMarcus highlighted how opinions differed because persons from all racial and ethnic groups do not necessarily get along and this may influence their perceptions towards their own group. Lisa [African American, 12th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Evergreen High] also felt a lack of solidarity among African Americans, she stated, “I think it’s like a competition thing, everybody wants to be better than somebody in my race and we can’t seem to get along and come together. It’s always somebody that wants to be on top and it’s generally everybody in my type of race, everybody wants to be on top and that’s where the problem comes in.” Talayah [African American, 11th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Evergreen High], also a student at Evergreen High, felt comparable to Lisa regarding race relations at her school,

Vega: Okay, so what perceptions do you think other African Americans and other Latino students have towards your racial group?
Talayah: Some people, like if you’re doing something good with yourself, put you down.

Vega: Other blacks or Hispanic students will put you down if you’re doing good?
Talayah: Yeah, [because] they feel they can’t do it, they don’t want nobody else to do it. So they’ll put you down in a racial kind of way.

Thus, from the students’ responses, it appeared that they believed the perceptions held by other racial or ethnic groups and their own racial or ethnic group depended on an individual’s previous experience with that group. They also shared that perceptions depended on how an individual felt about his or her own group. It is unfortunate that
students felt individual’s from their own group in addition to other groups perceived them negatively. Unhealthy relationships with teachers and peers can be detrimental to student’s attitudes and behaviors towards achievement as discussed earlier in this chapter.

“Because even though we may act a certain way or come from a certain area, they probably been in the same area or the same place we’ve been from, but they succeeded in life too”: Solidarity and support. When the researcher asked the students about how they felt African American and Latino teachers perceived their racial group, 16 of the students discussed the extra support they received from teachers of the same racial/ethnic background. This finding underscores the need for more school personnel, especially, teachers of color in the urban public school system due to their awareness of the harsh realities and challenges students of color may encounter.

Tommy [African American, 12th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Waterford High] provided the researcher with the above response; he felt that African American teachers believed in the potential of African American students because they may have experienced similar struggles during their schooling. James [African American, 11th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Miami High] also felt that his African American teachers cared about their African American students. He stated, “They basically tell them [African American students] you’re expected not to do good and succeed, so it’s up to you to prove them wrong. ‘I can’t make you learn, but I’m gonna try my best.’” When the researcher probed to understand why he believed African American teachers felt this way, he explained, “Because they know it’s reality.” In other words, James felt his teachers invested their time in doing their best to help students learn because they understood the difficulties many African American students encountered in school.
Pilar [Latina, 12th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High] also felt this way about her African American and Latino teachers. She explained, “I think they see a potential in us…they always see something in us and even though we don’t believe in ourselves and they do, we just actually end up believing afterwards and start doing better and I think they influence us to do better.” Pepito [Latino, 11th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Watson High] and Jose [Latino, 11th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High] mentioned the invaluable cultural connection shared by teachers and students from the same ethnic background. In regards to his friends and Latino teachers, Pepito stated, “I guess they got, with Latino teachers, they got more teachers that speak Spanish, they got more relationships, because they talk and joke around and stuff [in Spanish].” Jose explained the cultural connection between Latino teachers and students; however, he indicated that students had to seek those relationships out. He shared, “When I say the Latino teachers are there for you to talk to, they’re there to teach you, you can get close to them and ask them for advice. I don’t see it coming from them. If there’s a Latino teacher you have to go to them.”

4.8.2 Effects on Motivation

The researcher asked how the perceptions of other racial/ethnic groups and their own racial/ethnic group affected their academic motivation. The students’ responses to this question varied, however, the underlying theme mentioned was the desire to prove others wrong and dispel myths and stereotypes by working hard. Other students did not allow negative perceptions about their group to affect their motivation, though, some disclosed feelings of discouragement, especially when the negativity came from their
own group. Additionally, students appreciated the support they received from teachers who believed in them and expressed the motivation to push forward.

“It’s really motivation, encourage me to do good, to prove that really those are all theories and what people think, I basically have to prove them wrong”: Prove them Wrong Syndrome. Moore, Madison-Colmore, and Smith (2003) conducted a study investigating the persistence of African American males in an engineering program at a predominantly white institution (PWI). The “prove them wrong syndrome” emerged to explain the findings of this study. “The African American males assumed a more assertive academic posture and a stronger sense of purpose, commitment, and confidence in their academic persistence and performance” (p. 67); they developed this coping mechanism to persist despite adversity. The participants also felt their white faculty held negative perceptions towards them with one male stating, “You have to deal with stereotypes…you push harder...” (p. 69). Nonetheless, the participants worked harder to reach their goals and prove their critics wrong in the face of negative perceptions and doubt.

Similar to the African American males in Moore et al.’s study, 11 participants in this study demonstrated the “prove them wrong syndrome.” It seems plausible that students of color develop this personality trait early in their schooling experiences and carry this on with them to college to assist in attaining their goals. Experiences with racism and racial discrimination or being perceived as intellectually inferior may actually increase students’ academic motivation and make them want to try harder to prove others wrong rather than disengaging from their schoolwork.
For instance, Linda [Latina, 12th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High] stated, “Well towards the students, it makes me work harder to show them that I can [achieve success] because you’re not better than me. So here you go, ‘I’m going to prove you wrong.’” As many of the students in the study felt towards their peers of different races/ethnicities, Linda expressed how their perceptions made her work harder to prove that she was indeed a capable student, regardless of her ethnicity. Junior [African American, 10th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Evergreen High] also discussed how he did not want to confirm negative stereotypes, he said, “I don’t want to be one of the kids they thought was gonna end up failing or messing up. I try to do the best I can, I stay out of as much trouble as possible.” James [African American, 11th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Miami High] also explained how negative perceptions affected his motivation, he shared, “I mean, it’s really motivation, encourage me to do good, to prove that really those are all theories and what people think, I basically have to prove them wrong.”

Additionally, LeMarcus [African American, 12th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Waterford High] felt he could move forward despite what others thought of him, “It makes me think like, okay if you think this about me, let me prove you wrong.” Lucette [Latina, 11th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Watson High] also shared an upbeat attitude about overcoming stereotypes, “It makes it stronger, if they tell me I can’t do this, I’ll prove them like I can. That’s just me, if they tell me I can’t do this, yes I can, I bet. That’s just me, if they dare me to do something I’ll do it [because] I’m a person, I do the impossible. Everything’s possible with me, I make it work somehow.” Therefore, many of the students expressed the motivation they felt to prove others wrong regarding negative
stereotypes and perceptions. Although a few of the students received below average or “C” grades, their attitudes towards achievement and schooling remained positive.

However, one student expressed a feeling of ambivalence regarding her reaction to how others perceived them. Tenishi [African American, 11th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Stanley High] discussed how these perceptions may make her want to do better and prove others wrong, “but then again, I might think about it like why do I have to prove anything to them and I don’t.” She made this point because she felt others could think whatever they wanted about her and it was not her duty to prove anything to anyone. While most students indicated that negative perceptions of their racial/ethnic group increased their motivation to achieve academic success, Tenishi experienced ambivalence on this issue.

“It makes me not want to do their work”: Academic Disengagement. Three participants in this study discussed the unfavorable impact negative perceptions had on their academic motivation and attitude towards school. In regards to the treatment received from her white teachers, Pilar [Latina, 12th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High] stated, “It makes me not want to do their work. It makes me not want to listen to them, not even go to their class because I want to avoid them.” Academic disengagement and avoidance can result from negative experiences in the classroom; this underscores the influence of positive and caring teacher-student relationships on students’ achievement outcomes. Elizabeth [Latina, 12th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High] maintained that she would achieve her goals, in spite of adversity; however, she mentioned that sometimes it did affect her mood. “I know that I’m going to be successful so regardless of what they say it doesn’t…it does affect me some days like I said but it’s not gonna
affect my main goal…Sometimes I be like tomorrow is another day, I could feel bad today, but tomorrow I’m gonna wake up and feel better.”

LeMarcus [African American, 12th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Waterford High] expressed how the perceptions of non-African Americans and non-Latinos were based on the appearance of African Americans and the neighborhoods they came from. He discussed the desire to prove them wrong. However, when the researcher and LeMarcus discussed the perceptions African Americans held towards African Americans, he expressed a different feeling. He felt a lack of solidarity among all racial and ethnic groups and stated, “I could just tell you from experience that African Americans treat African Americans the same way as Caucasians would treat African Americans or just the way they perceive them from the way they dress.” Due to these perceptions, LeMarcus explained how it affected his academic motivation, “It kind of does slow me down…I don’t want to say it prevents me or stops me because either way I’m still gonna look passed it, but then it’ll make me think even more since it’s someone from my own nationality that’s saying it to me.” Although, he mentioned these negative perceptions slowed him down because they were from people in his own racial group, he said he would persevere nonetheless.

4.9 The “Obama Effect”

Marx, Ko, and Friedman (2009) conducted a study to examine the “Obama effect” or the idea that Barack Obama’s accomplishment as the first African American president boosts the exam performance of African Americans and as a result reduces race-based performance differences even under stereotype threat conditions. Over the course of elections and afterwards, the media popularized Obama as a symbol of hope and
inspiration for the African American community. However, the authors sought to demonstrate concrete evidence of the Obama effect on the academic performance of African Americans through an experimental study. In their study, Marx, Ko, and Friedman (2009) found the Obama effect potentially reduced the negative effects of stereotype threat, even in the face of persistent racial stereotypes. In other words, President Obama may serve as a role model for the African American community and as a result, buffer the academic performance of African American from the adverse effects of racial stereotypes.

4.9.1 “...if he can do it, they can do it too. Not only for African Americans but Latinos or any race, they can do it too”: Obama effect

In the current study, the researcher asked participants two questions regarding Obama’s position as president, “What are your thoughts about Barack Obama being elected president of the United States of America?” and “In your opinion, how will Barack Obama’s presidency affect or influence your motivation to be successful in school? How will affect your life in general?” The researcher posed these questions in order to gain an understanding of how the participants felt about President Obama and the relationship it had to their achievement motivation. The consensus among 18 of the students consisted of happiness and pride to have an African American president; they perceived this historic event as breaking down racial barriers. Nonetheless, the students shared varying opinions about his achievement as the first African American president including feelings of motivation and indifference. Some students also felt their future opportunities would be enhanced through the reduction of racial/ethnic barriers and policy implications, such as the DREAM Act.
“It lets me know that anything can be done, you just have to work at it”:

*Motivational.* The majority (18) of the participants discussed how Barack Obama being elected president of the United States of America motivated them to persevere regardless of challenges they encountered or despite their racial/ethnic identity. For example, LeMarcus [African American, 12th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Waterford High] felt America was not ready because of our nation’s history of racism and because, “Some people might see an African American president as inhumane or just not the way America should be.” Notwithstanding society’s feeling towards Obama, LeMarcus discussed the motivational impact of Obama’s presidency on the African American community,

When I heard it was a real motivation because if an African American person can get to the highest level position that you could possibly get in America, then there, what can’t we do? Like what can’t we do? We can do anything basically.

Similarly, Junior [African American, 10th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Evergreen High] stated,

“It’s a good influence, probably the most powerful man in the world is black and that means I can become someone that’s really powerful. It proves that black people aren’t dumb, they aren’t ghetto, they follow the law, they do the right thing.” Conversely, Junior felt the world was in fact ready for Obama to lead the nation, he said,

I think it made me see that the world doesn’t see black people just as another person going to jail; they see that a black person can obviously be their leader, be someone they can follow, someone they can trust. So it made me think that the world is not as simple minded or racist as it may have been some 50 years ago.

African Americans were not the only persons who voted for Obama, therefore, Junior felt barriers had been broken by Obama’s historic win. This sense of unity despite President Obama’s race provided Junior with a more positive outlook on the progress made in
Lucette [Latina, 11th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Watson High] also felt a sense of hope by stating, “If an African American made it to the top, a Latino can make it to the top. That’s just hope for us, we can do it...[we] are capable of getting to a higher place than what other people think. It encourages me.” Similarly, Linda [Latina, 12th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High] stated, “It motivates me to see, not only because he’s black, but because he’s a minority. It breaks the code, the routine; it makes me feel like I can do it too, nothing is impossible. So I can make a difference.” Although, Lucette and Linda identified as Latina, they felt inspired by Obama’s presidency. It appeared that Obama’s presidency influenced the lives of not only African Americans, but Latinos as well. This effect may be representative of the similar struggles and barriers these groups face.

“Just another president”: Indifference. While most students expressed excitement about Obama’s role as president, two felt indifferent like Maria [Latina, 12th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Watson High] said, “He’s just another president.” Mia conveyed her happiness and enthusiasm, however, when asked, “how will Barack Obama’s presidency affect or influence your motivation to be successful in school?,” she replied, “I mean if I was African American, I think it would have a lot to do with you know, first African American president but being Hispanic, there’s no influence really or motivation.” Jose [Latino, 11th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High] also felt comparable to Mia, stating it was a big step for African Americans. Therefore, while Lucette [Latina, 11th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Watson High] felt moved by Obama’s presidency, other Latino students felt differently. Because Jose and Maria had not been in the United States for very long, it is possible that the degree of acculturation into the United States influenced their feelings about Obama’s presidency.
4.9.2 “With a little faith and support, you could really do anything”: Implications for Future

The participants in this study expressed a feeling that due to President Obama’s achievement as the first African American that the sky was the limit for them. Although some expressed a feeling of indifference as previously discussed, most of the students felt motivated to continue to reach for their goals. As James [African American, 11\textsuperscript{th} grade, B (89-80) GPA, Miami High] stated, “With a little faith and support, you could really do anything”, he felt he could achieve his future goals as long as he stayed focus and had a strong support system around him. As discussed in section 4.5.5., Obama’s presidency had significant policy implications for undocumented students with the passage of the DREAM Act. This law would afford students the opportunity to become US citizens and attend college with federal assistance. Therefore, although, “faith and support” were important factors in achieving success, the passage of laws also played a significant role in the futures for some students. Other students also mentioned job creation and universal healthcare would affect their lives in that it would help them in the pursuit of success.

4.10 Summary

This chapter provided an in-depth description of the subthemes that emerged from data analysis by the researcher and her research partner. From these subthemes, the researcher developed the following overarching themes: (a) perceived barriers to positive educational experiences and (b) the influence of positive relationships on academic experiences. These themes/subthemes will be discussed thoroughly in chapter five.
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The following overarching themes which emerged from the data as discussed in chapter four are: (a) perceived barriers to positive educational experiences, and (b) the influence of positive relationships on academic experiences. The subsequent sections describe how these themes answer the research questions that framed this study.

5.1.1 Research Question 1

1. Which of these factors (e.g., school, psychological, and social) contribute to or inhibit urban students’ school identity and academic attitudes?

   a. Which of these factors (e.g., school, psychological, and social), if any, differentiate by academic performance (e.g., high academic performance versus low academic performance)?

With CRT (Parker & Lynn, 2002), LatCrit (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001), and invitational education (Purkey & Novak, 1996) as guiding theoretical frameworks, this study examined how urban youth, specifically, African American and Latino students, navigated their educational experiences. The researcher sought to gain a better understanding of how these students perceived their educational experiences and how they influenced their attitudes and behaviors towards achievement and schooling. CRT and LatCrit provide frameworks for exploring how race and ethnicity shapes the experiences of African Americans and Latinos. The theories also seek to understand how
race functions in society to influence a person’s experiences and outcomes (Bell, 1992). Additionally, CRT and LatCrit draw on experiential knowledge and provide marginalized persons the opportunity to have a voice through storytelling that serves as counternarratives to dominant societies perspectives (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). The theory of invitational education (Novak & Purkey, 2001) identifies five areas of application for educators- people, places, policies, programs, and processes. These “Five P’s” demonstrate how urban youth feel invited or uninvited in these areas and how they affect their attitudes and behaviors towards schooling. Specific to this study, people, places, and policies affected students’ achievement orientations.

The themes that emerged in the study can be grouped into school (e.g., school setting, school policies, and school safety), psychological (e.g., racism and racial discrimination), and social (e.g., community safety, immigration status, and relationships) factors. Data analysis revealed that many of these factors contributed to and inhibited students’ perceptions of their attitudes and behaviors towards achievement and schooling. More specifically, social factors contributed to African American and Latino youths’ school identity and academic attitudes. The relationships students developed with people, such as school personnel, peers, and family members, positively influenced their educational experiences. For example, all the students in the study asserted that their families were assisting them in reaching their future goals by providing academic and emotional support. Further, students stated that their families helped them with their homework, provided words of encouragement, and held them to high standards. Other students indicated that their families provided them with networks in their career of interest, gave them career ideas, and helped them research colleges and majors.
Therefore, familial involvement played a large role in keeping students motivated to succeed and reach their future goals in the spite of the barriers they faced. These positive relationships are further discussed in research question 2.

**Perceived Barriers to Positive Educational Experiences.** The students in this study identified several perceived challenges that influenced their educational experiences, and affected their school identity. The perceived barriers students identified included negative relationships with people in the school setting; school policies; poorly kept school facilities; lack of school and community safety; racism and racial discrimination; as well as immigration status. Despite encountering undesirable experiences, these students persisted throughout their education, and maintained high aspirations for their future careers.

Certain school factors (e.g., school setting, policies, and safety), psychological factors (e.g., racism and racial discrimination), and social factors (e.g., community safety, immigration status, and relationships) differentiated by academic performance and consequently affected students’ attitudes and behaviors towards achievement. However, school setting emerged as a perceived barrier among both high-achieving and low-achieving students. Students felt that their schools appearance needed to be updated and the quality of their school lunch was poor.

In terms of school policies, high-achieving students reported wanting to change their school policies. They felt the consequences for violating school rules did not fit the “crime” or the policies themselves were unfair. This finding is interesting since low-achieving students tend to experience more academic and social difficulties at school. Yet, the high-achieving students may have felt more apart of their school culture, and as a
result felt strongly towards issues that arose in their school buildings. Low-achieving students may not care as much about school policies or the effects of rule violations, if they do not feel apart of the school community. High-achieving students also reported feeling unsafe in their school environment due to gang activity. Again, this may be attributed to low-achieving students’ disengagement from the school culture. The literature discusses how school policies often remove troubled students from the school setting without other alternatives for success. Therefore, many turn to criminal activity (Fenning & Rose, 2007), which may include gang involvement. Generally speaking, low-achieving students may not feel unsafe if they are not engaged in the school environment, or are involved with gangs.

Racism and racial discrimination surfaced as psychological factors affecting the educational experiences of the students in the study. The majority (13) of the students felt racism and racial discrimination served as a barrier to academic success. They felt that students of color were held to lower standards and judged based on stereotypes. Six students reported experiencing racism or racial discrimination firsthand; five of them were high-achievers. Additionally, 11 students felt racism or racial discrimination could potentially affect their future goals; nine of these students were high-achievers. This finding is consistent with Sanders’ (1997) study where she found that the high-achieving students were also high awareness students, meaning they had a greater awareness of racism and racial barriers, compared to their low-achieving counterparts. The high-achieving students developed a better understanding of what could happen out in real world as a result of their race or ethnicity. They were more aware of the potential to be discriminated against regardless of their achievements. The low-achieving students on
the other hand, minimized and denied the existence of racism and racial barriers as Sanders (1997) also found. Many of them expressed uncertainty regarding the effects of racism or felt times have changed. For example, LeMarcus [African American, 12th grade, C (79-70), Waterford High] stated, “Racism isn’t really a big issue…as time progresses.”

In terms of social factors, the students perceived community safety, immigration status, and relationships as barriers to positive academic experiences. Seven of the 15 high-achieving students and three of the five low-achieving students reported their communities lacked safety. These students indicated that they often heard gunshots, saw gang activity, crime, and felt unsafe in their neighborhoods. Further analysis on this issue is addressed in question 1d as a relationship between school location and community safety existed.

Immigration status was particularly relevant for the Latino students in the study as the majority of the students were born outside of the U.S. Among these students, a few disclosed their immigration status as undocumented. These students were also high-achievers. Although the inability to attend most colleges and universities without documentation or citizenship is a hurdle for these students, they remained optimistic about their future goals. Previous research (Abrego, 2006) showed that lack of U.S. citizenship often serves as a deterrent from continuing education; as a result, many undocumented students become hopeless and drop out of high school. However, these students excelled in school and believed that one day they would be able to attend college and achieve their career goals.
While certain relationships contributed to students’ attitudes and behaviors towards achievement and schooling, other relationships, particularly those within the school environment, inhibited their academic attitudes. Only five students mentioned that school personnel (e.g., teachers, sports coaches, and school counselors) provided them with assistance towards achieving their goals; four of those five students were high-achievers. This finding is worth noting because six students indicated that if they could change anything about their schools, it would be their teachers. Five of those six respondents were also high-achieving students. It seemed that students in general did not receive much help from their teachers. However, the high-achieving students in particular felt more strongly about the poor quality teachers they encountered. These students felt their teachers held low expectations, were uninvolved, did not care if they learned, and treated them with negative attitudes. The high-achieving students understood that their teachers played a large role in their success, so having better teachers would have improved their academic experiences.

In spite of these perceived negative experiences with teachers, the students persisted academically. Nonetheless, students felt their teachers did not care about them and were not invested in their educational needs. For example, as mentioned in chapter four, Mario [African American, 10th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Evergreen High] expressed how he could not understand why teachers chose a career that they disliked. Additionally, Lisa [African American, 12th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Evergreen High] explained how she felt cheated by her teachers’ low expectations and poor time management, which resulted in a loss of valuable instruction time.
In terms of other social relationships, low-achieving students reported receiving more help with their schoolwork from their family members than high-achievers. Only three students indicating receiving help on their schoolwork from their family; however, two of the three were low-achieving students. In addition, three of the five low-achieving students reported their peers assisted them in reaching their goals and their school counselors provided them with the most help in selecting courses in comparison to only six of the 15 high-achievers. These differences can be attributed to the high achieving students being more self-sufficient and not requiring as much help from their family, peers, or school counselors. The low-achieving students required more assistance and guidance with their schoolwork, reaching their goals, and selecting courses.

The self-reliance many students displayed throughout the study in navigating their educational experiences must be addressed. The high-achieving students relied on themselves to make educational decisions, such as completing schoolwork and selecting courses. Consistent with the previous findings concerning peer, familial, and school counselor support, the low-achieving students sought out and received help from other people more often than the high-achieving students did. Finally, 10 of the 13 Upward Bound students felt the program and its staff helped them towards achieving their goals; this did not differ based on academic performance.

b. Which of these factors (e.g., school, psychological, and social), if any, differentiate by gender?

Among school factors, some gender differences arose. For instance, the male students wanted to change the appearance of their schools. They believed their schools were rundown. Although not a major issue among students as a whole in this study, it is
possible that school appearance made the male students feel invited or uninvited, and in this case, these students did not feel welcome in their schools. LeMarcus [African American, 12th grade, C (79-70) GPA, Waterford High] addressed this issue as discussed in chapter four, when he reported, “I think if you’re in that mindset that ‘my school’s terrible’, then I should fit my school.” Therefore, students may not care about learning if they are schooled in poorly funded and under resourced settings.

Six of the seven students who disliked their school lunch were female students. These students may be more concerned with the types of food they are eating compared to their male counterparts. Finally, school policies emerged as a salient issue among female students; they were the only respondents who wanted to change their schools’ rules. This finding is interesting as existing research focuses on males of color and their high discipline rates. It was surprising that the males did not mention school policies as unfair. However, the males focused on the people enforcing those rules, such as teachers, rather than the rules themselves.

Thirteen students in the study felt racism and racial discrimination affected urban African American and Latino students’ ability to achieve in the U.S. However, all eight of the males in the study were aware of racism and racial discrimination as a potential barrier to academic success for urban students of color. These 13 students explained how racism and racial discrimination often times reduced academic motivation, caused feelings of isolation, and resulted in loss of opportunities due to their racial or ethnic background. On the other hand, the five of the six students who personally experienced racism or racial discrimination were females. However, unlike previous research (Lambert, Herman, Bynum, & Ialongo, 2009), these experiences with racism did not
result in a decreased belief in their academic ability; instead the females remained resilient to the negative effects of racism and racial discrimination.

Furthermore, six of 11 students who felt racism or racial discrimination could possibly affect their future goals were males. This finding is not surprising and is consistent with existing literature concerning the overrepresentation of males of color, particularly, African American males, in special education (Skiba et al., 2005), high suspension and expulsion rates (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Skiba et al., 2002b; Townsend, 2000), poor educational outcomes (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986), and high unemployment and incarceration rates (Witherspoon, 1994). This finding is also in line with the result showing that all eight of the males in the study believed racism and racial discrimination affected urban African American and Latinos ability to achieve. It is evident that the males displayed a greater awareness of the potential for racial bias to interfere with the pursuit of their goals and dreams, despite how hard they worked.

In addition, the researcher asked students how they felt non-African American and non-Latino persons (e.g., students, teachers, and administrators) perceived their racial/ethnic group. Seven of the eight male students in the study felt non-African American and non-Latino individuals (e.g., students, teachers, and administrators) perceived their racial/ethnic group negatively and according to stereotypical views, whereas only seven of the 12 females felt this way. For instance, James [African American, 11th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Miami High] asserted, “If you appear with baggy jeans, saggy clothes, thuggish-like, I mean you’re gonna be seen as like you’re not gonna be nobody, you’re not gonna go nowhere.” Additionally, Jose [Latino, 11th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High] explained, “Some [white peers] of them might think you’re
illegal, some of them might not like you because they say ‘why are you guys taking all our jobs?’”

The researcher also examined how students believed persons (e.g., students, teachers, and administrators) from their own racial/ethnic group perceived their group. Differences between male and female students existed again. Six of the eight males felt teachers from their racial and ethnic group supported them, whereas only five of the 12 females felt this way. Students, particularly males, felt their teachers recognized the difficulties students of color in urban schools experienced, and as a result, pushed the students to work hard to prove stereotypes wrong. Because males of color are often treated differently in urban schools, this may explain why they received more support from their teachers than female students did. Teachers may have felt the males required the additional emotional support and motivation more than females.

In examining the relationship between social factors and gender, the researcher found differences existed among the relationships students had with people in their schools. For instance, six of the 12 females stated their peers were helping them to achieve their goals compared to three of the eight males in the study. The female students helped each other more often than their male counterparts did. Only a few students expressed that their peers helped them the most with their schoolwork and in selecting their courses. However, only females endorsed their peers for the most help with schoolwork and two of the three students who stated their peers helped them select their courses were females. Therefore, the females in the study appeared to work more collaboratively with their peers than the males did.
Data analysis showed that only five students mentioned that school personnel (e.g., teachers, sports coaches, and school counselors) provided them with assistance towards achieving their goals; four of these students were males. Additionally, five of the six students who wanted to change their teachers were males. These findings may appear contradictory; but, it seemed that the male students only developed positive relationships with specific school personnel such as their sports coaches. However, seven of the eight male students felt their teachers perceived them negatively. African American males in urban schools often feel their teachers hold deficit views, low expectations, and treat them based on stereotypes rather than getting to know them as individuals (Ferguson, 2000; Hubbard, 1999; O’Connor, 2001).

c. Which of these factors (e.g., school, psychological, and social), if any, differentiate by race and ethnicity (e.g., African American and Latina/o students)?

The researcher found school factors differentiated by race and ethnicity. For example, four of the seven students who disliked their school lunch were Latino. These students also were all female students. They felt the food served at their schools was not appetizing. This finding appears to be culturally related as the Latino students may prefer Latin American food versus American food. No differences between race and ethnicity existed for school policies, appearance, or safety.

Racial and ethnic differences did not exist for psychological factors. Nevertheless, all but one of the Latino participants study perceived racism and racial discrimination as a barrier to achievement for urban students. Because Latinos face added discrimination due to language (e.g., speaking Spanish, English proficiency level)
and immigration status, they may have perceived racism and racial discrimination as a greater barrier for urban students like themselves. The one Latino student who did not feel this way was born and raised in the U.S. by her Caucasian mother, therefore, she may not identify with the barriers that the other Latino students in the study do. Additionally, phenotypically, she appeared and could “pass” as white, so she may have not faced the increased level of discrimination the other Latino students in the study experienced. Among the African Americans students, six of the 10 participants also felt racism and racial discrimination affected achievement.

Of the students personally affected by racism or racial discrimination, racial and ethnic differences did not occur. In addition, of the students who felt racism or racial discrimination could possibly affect their future goals, racial and ethnic differences did not exist either. Racial and ethnic differences also did not occur when the researcher asked students how they felt non-African American and non-Latino individuals (e.g., students, teachers, and administrators) perceived their racial/ethnic group. Six of the 10 African American and seven of the eight Latino students felt non-African American and non-Latino individuals (e.g., students, teachers, and administrators) perceived their racial/ethnic group stereotypically. Students reported being judged by their appearance, perceived as inferior, thugs, wild, ignorant, not capable, and as Pilar [Latina, 12th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High] asserted, “They [teachers] just treat us like we’re slow, when we’re really not… [because] we’re not from America.”

Racial and ethnic differences existed for how students felt individuals (e.g., students, teachers, and administrators) from their own racial/ethnic group perceived their group. All of the Latino students at Watson High reported feeling supported by teachers
from their racial/ethnic group. This school only had one Latino teacher, Ms. Garcia; nevertheless, these students felt they could turn to her for support when needed. Two African American students believed the perceptions of persons from their own racial group depended on their affinity towards African Americans. Five students felt their same race teachers saw their potential and pushed them extra hard to do their best. The remaining African American students felt their African American teachers did not treat them differently from other students.

For the social factors that emerged in this study, community safety differentiated among African American and Latino students. Eight of the African American students compared to two Latino students reported lived in unsafe neighborhoods characterized by high crime. This result will be further explored in question 1d as this difference appears to be related to the students’ schools of attendance rather than achievement level, gender, or race or ethnicity. In terms of the relationships, the three students who indicated their families helped them the most with their schoolwork were African American. This difference may exist because as indicated in chapter four, 65% of the participants’ parents/guardians had obtained a high school diploma or less. In addition, many of the Latino students stated that they did not involve their family in helping them with their schoolwork or their parents lacked the English proficiency and education level to assist them.

Finally, the six students who reported wanting to change their teachers were African American. The Latino students in the study did not mention any personal problems with their teachers. Six African American and seven Latino students expressed the feeling that non-African American and non-Latino teachers held negative perceptions
towards their racial and ethnic group. Thus, this finding reflects that only a small number of students may have had a personal experience with poor quality teachers; however, most of the students felt their teachers perceived them in terms of stereotypes.

d. Which of these factors (e.g., school, psychological, and social), if any, differentiate by schools?

For school factors, some differences existed by school. However, it should be noted that only a small number of students from each school participated in the study, except for Watson High, where the researcher recruited seven Latino students. The two students who wanted to change their school’s appearance attended Waterford High and Watson High. As Kozol (1991) documented, many urban schools are old, poorly kept, and under resourced, as a result, it was not surprising that these students felt this way about their schools. Additionally, Evergreen High and Stanley High opened their newly renovated buildings in 2009; therefore, the researcher expected that students would not want to improve their schools’ appearance.

Many of the students did not like their school lunch across several of the schools, which may be characteristic of the district’s participation in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). However, the Latino students expressed a stronger opinion regarding their dislike for their school lunch. As previously mentioned, the food options may not reflect the foods that these students eat at home with their families. Students from Stanley High, Watson High, and Baker High felt their school policies were unfair. However, it is unclear why students from these three schools felt strongly about their school policies. This finding may be a result of the students status as high-achieving students as mentioned in question 1a. Finally, two students from Evergreen High and
Stanley High felt their school safety was impaired by gang activity. These schools were high-poverty schools with over 90% of the students receiving free/reduced lunch. These schools were also the least diverse, with over 85% African Americans and the remaining percentage white. As discussed in chapter four, it was possible that the high-poverty and highly racially segregated environment led to inter-group conflict, such as through gang activity. It is also likely that the areas where these schools are located have a large presence of gang activity, which is carried over into the school environment.

Students from Baker, Evergreen, Miami, Stanley, and Watson High felt racism and racial discrimination served as a barrier to achievement among urban students in the U.S. As previously stated, because Evergreen High and Stanley High are predominantly African American and high-poverty schools, students may have witnessed the effects of racism and racial discrimination on the achievement orientations of their African American peers. Latino students face increased discrimination due to language and immigration status; therefore, it was not surprising that all the Watson High students responded this way. Students from the remaining schools, except Waterford High, also felt racism and racial discrimination affected urban students’ ability to achieve. The students at Waterford High asserted that their environment was segregated so they did not perceive any discrimination, or expressed uncertainty in the effects of racism and racial discrimination on urban students’ ability to achieve.

Eleven students felt racism or racial discrimination could possibly affect their future goals. Students from all six schools felt this way; however, three of the four students at Evergreen High and four of the seven students at Watson High responded affirmatively on this question. Again, it was evident that the highly segregated
environment and low socioeconomic status of students at Evergreen High demonstrated to students the realities of being a student of color in an urban school. Additionally, for Watson High students, knowledge of the effects of immigration status or perceived immigration status, and language proficiency influenced how students felt their future goals could be impacted, regardless of their ability level.

School differences did not arise when the researcher asked students how they felt non-African American and non-Latino individuals (e.g., students, teachers, and administrators) perceived their racial/ethnic group. All students in this study attended schools with low graduation rates, ranging from 49.6 to 71%; consequently, they may have been exposed to deficit views without school personnel having knowledge of their abilities. For example, students felt white students and teachers from their schools perceived African Americans to be less capable compared to white students, and as thugs, drug dealers, and gang members. They felt their white teachers jumped to conclusions and made assumptions based on appearances, previous students they had, or the neighborhoods students came from.

Additionally, Latino students from Watson High, one of the more diverse schools in the study, experienced racism and racial discrimination from their non-Latino peers and teachers. These students reported negative perceptions from their white and African American peers, as well as from their white teachers. For instance, the Latino students stated their African American and white peers referred to them as “illegal,” taking over jobs, and inferior. They also felt their white teachers treated them as if they did not understand English and required extra assistance, when that was not the case.
School variations existed for how students felt individuals (e.g., students, teachers, and administrators) from their own racial/ethnic group perceived their group. All students from Watson High reported feeling supported by African American and Latino teachers as well as their peers. Watson High, the high school in the district with the largest percentage of Latino students, only had one Latino teacher, Ms. Garcia. All the students discussed how much they valued this teachers’ presence at their school. They believed she could relate to them on a cultural basis, especially because she spoke Spanish. This underscores the importance of students having role models, mentors, or contact with professionals from their racial and/or ethnic backgrounds, this connection is invaluable for students’ development and persistence throughout their schooling.

However, Ms. Garcia, was only one person, therefore, it was extremely difficult for her to build a relationship with every Latino students at school. It would be beneficial if schools hired staff representative of their student demographics. Students from Waterford High, Evergreen High, and Miami High perceived support from teachers of their own racial group. These students felt their African American teachers believed in them and their ability, saw their potential, and pushed them to prove stereotypes wrong, even if they clowned around sometimes.

School location played a large role in students’ perceptions of community safety. The students who lived near their schools reported feeling more unsafe than students who lived further away from school and took the bus or drove to school from different neighborhoods. Neighborhoods near high-poverty schools tend to mirror the school demographics; therefore, it was not surprising that these students felt unsafe, reported witnessing crimes, and a large police presence in their communities.
Immigration status related to ethnicity and almost all of the Latino students in the study attended Watson High, therefore, it was not surprising that the undocumented students attended school there. Baker High and Waterford High had smaller percentages of Latino students; however, the students from these schools were African American Upward Bound participants. Since Upward Bound is designed to prepare students to attend college, it would be difficult to achieve this goal with undocumented students. Nonetheless, no students were excluded from the program; however, it seems that the low percentage (5.9%) of Latinos in the district reflected their lack of representation in the program.

Students from Evergreen High, Waterford High, and Miami High reported wanting to change their poor quality teachers. It was quite possible from these findings, that the participants’ experiences from Waterford High and Evergreen High were consistent with that of many other students in those schools. As there was only one student in the study from Miami High, it is difficult to determine whether this finding was reflective of the experience of many students in the school or just of that specific student. These students all identified as African American, and the five of the six respondents were males. Therefore, this result may be demonstrative of the urban public school experience, especially, for African American males.

Ten of the 13 Upward Bound participants asserted that the program provided them with assistance towards reaching their goals. The students felt the program and its staff were assisting them in achieving their future goals. Finally, students in this study overwhelmingly relied on themselves; when the researcher asked students who helped them the most with their schoolwork and in selecting their courses, 11 of the students
completed schoolwork themselves and nine selected courses without assistance. A number of reasons may explain this behavior, for example, poor help seeking behaviors, achievement level, or because the majority of the students were upperclassmen, they may not have needed additional assistance.

5.1.2 Research Question 2

2. What individuals have the most influence on urban youth’s school identity and academic orientation?

The Influence of Positive Relationships on Academic Attitudes. Overall, students developed positive relationships with the people around them, including their families, peers, teachers, school counselor, and UB staff. These relationships affected their school identity and attitudes towards learning. The positive relationships students developed inside and outside of school appeared to have a greater effect on their school identity than the negative experiences they encountered. Students in this study held high expectations and goals for their future despite perceived unfair school policies, poor quality teachers, and racism and racial discrimination. Results showed that besides the overwhelming amount of self-help that the individuals that have the most influence on school identity and academic orientation were their families and the Upward Bound program. While students developed some positive relationships with their peers, school counselors, and teachers, the majority of the students did not identify these people as providing them with the most help or support in navigating their educational experiences.

Considering research examining the lack of parental involvement among students of color, specifically, African American and Latino students, all the students expressed the commitment their families had to their education and pursuit of their future goals.
Existing literature focuses on the lack of parental involvement among students of color and the belief that minority parents do not value education. Nevertheless, this issue remains conflicting because other researchers have found that parents want to be involved in their children’s education (Trumbull et al., 2001) but often times face barriers to being directly involved at their child’s school (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Garcia-Coll et al., 2002; Huss-Keeler, 1997; Lopez, 2001; Trueba, 1988; Vega, 2010). Research shows that parents are involved in their child’s schooling in different ways (Jacobson & Crockett, 2000; Plunkett, Behnke, Sands, & Choi, 2009). This discrepancy may also result from the various definitions of parental involvement. Students discussed how their families provided academic and emotional support throughout their educational experiences. Students felt that their parents held high expectations for them and provided words of encouragement. Other students mentioned their parents helped them network with professionals in their careers of interest and researched colleges and majors with them. The assistance families provided appeared to influence students’ attitudes towards achievement and schooling because they all recognized that their families were a source of positive support in pursuing their goals.

The Upward Bound program also appeared to be a great support system, as 10 of the 13 students felt the program played a key role in helping them achieve their goals. Students felt Upward Bound provided them with the essential tools to attain success, intensive and rigorous college preparation, instilled leadership skills and responsibility, in addition to emotional encouragement and support. Upward Bound took students on college visits and gave students the opportunity to meet and talk with professionals in their career of interest. The program is designed for students of color and low-income
students, therefore, it afforded them the opportunity to gain information they may not learn in school about college preparation. The experience of participating in the program demonstrated the investment students had in their futures and their positive attitudes towards achievement and success. If the students did not value an education, they likely would not participate in the program. Because the researcher did not examine the relationship between length of time in Upward Bound and academic outcomes, it is unclear whether the few low achieving students in the program joined the program to boost their grades and get the help they were not receiving in school or experienced other barriers leading to their low achievement outcomes.

5.2 Conclusions

Some of the researchers’ assumptions described in chapter three were validated by the findings of the study:

1. African American and Latino students attending urban public schools come from low socioeconomic backgrounds and reside in impoverished communities.

2. African American and Latino students perceived minimal academic and guidance support from school personnel.

3. African American and Latino students perceived limited access to quality instruction from school personnel.

All of the participants in the study received free/reduced lunch confirming their low socioeconomic background; however, half of the participants reported living in safe neighborhoods. Additionally, nine of the students in the study felt their school counselors provided them the most assistance when selecting their courses. However,
these students perceived that school personnel (e.g., school counselors and teachers) provided them with minimal academic and guidance support. Nine students received assistance in scheduling their classes, but beyond that support was limited. The researcher did not explicitly question students about the role their counselors played in their education, but asked them to identify the persons helping them achieve their goals. Fifteen of the 20 students did not identify school personnel as providing them with support to reach their goals. Finally, six students asserted that they would like better teachers in their schools underscoring the lack of access to quality instruction received. Nonetheless, the support students received from their families and Upward Bound may have buffered them from the negative experiences they encountered at school, and consequently, helped them maintain positive academic orientations.

5.3 Discussion and Implications

Existing literature tends to focus on the underachievement of African American and Latino youth; however, not all students have the same academic outcomes. In fact, many succeed and persist throughout their educational experiences despite encountering barriers or hardships. This study is evidence of urban youths’ academic persistence and strong school identities. There is also a dearth of literature documenting the experiences of youth of color from their points of view. Thus, it attempted to fill the void by providing students with the opportunity to share their stories and recount their experiences as urban youth in public schools. The findings in this study have the potential to improve instruction, school climate, and family and community outreach for students of color, primarily, African American and Latino youth. This study
demonstrated how students perceive their experiences inside and outside of school and its influence on their school identity.

With the state of many urban schools in disarray, educators often times find it difficult to effectively reach their students. As a result, many give up on their students or hold deficit views that impede the formation of positive relationships (Douglas et al., 2008; Howard, 2003). Issues such as poor quality schools, poverty, lack of school and community safety, racism and racial discrimination, and immigration status, often complicate the educational experiences of African American and Latino students. Yet, this study revealed that although urban students faced such barriers, they still achieved success and persevered throughout negative circumstances. Students described the people that influenced their school identities, both positively and negatively.

Students explained how experiences with poor quality teachers often resulted in loss of instructional time and lack of preparedness for state achievement tests. For example, Lisa [African American, 12th grade, A (100-90) GPA, Evergreen High] shared, “I would change the teachers because we only have a select few that actually does the right thing and complete all the materials we need to be taught. A lot of teachers there don’t get through everything for the year and we miss out on a test [state achievement test].” African American students felt strongly about the quality of their teachers, further, all were high-achieving students, and five of the six students were males. This finding speaks to the perceived inadequacy of teachers at the schools they attended, as well as their high standards and investment in a quality education they lacked. Moreover, African American males were most concerned with the education they received from
teachers. They expressed they that their teachers did not care whether they learned or not.

While African American males felt strongly regarding the quality of teachers delivering instruction in their classrooms, high-achieving females felt strongly about school policies. It is clear why low-achieving students did not feel passionately about their low quality teachers or school policies. These students were less engaged in their school culture; however, the gender differences are less clear. Research has shown that African American and Latino males are subjected to disciplinary action and lower expectations than their females counterparts, thus, it was expected that these males would perceive their school policies as unfair. Nonetheless, as mentioned earlier, African American males may take personal issue with school personnel rather than school policies.

All the males in the study felt racism and racial discrimination served as a barrier to achievement among urban youth. They also felt it was possible that racism and racial discrimination could affect the pursuit of their future goals. Further, high-achieving students believed their future goals could be affected by racism and racial discrimination. This finding was consistent with Sanders’ (1997) study where she found high achieving students had the greatest awareness of the obstacles they could face in attaining their goals due to racism and racial discrimination. Additionally, an understanding of persons from other racial and ethnic groups negative perceptions made some students want to work harder to prove others wrong, such as James [African American, 11th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Miami High] who asserted, “I mean, it’s really motivation, encourages me to do good, to prove that really those are all theories and what people think, I basically have
to prove them wrong.” While other students such as Pilar [Latina, 12th grade, B (89-80) GPA, Watson High] stated, “It makes me not want to do their work. It makes me not want to listen to them, not even go to their class because I want to avoid them.”

Nonetheless, this study shed light on how urban students managed to maintain positive achievement orientations in spite of perceived barriers to academic success. Primary support and positive relationships with family members and Upward Bound assisted students successful navigate their school experiences. Students held high aspirations and goals for their future, most understood the work they needed to put in to reach those goals, and also were aware of the potential for racial barriers to affect the attainment of their goals. However, the support students received from family and Upward Bound made students feel as if the sky was the limit.

From these results, it is important for educators to understand how their attitudes and behaviors affect students. School is a place where students spend a great deal of time, however, only three students identified their teachers, or schools counselors, as playing a role in reaching for their goals. Although these students demonstrated strong school identities, many other students may not persist academically without academic or emotional support from school personnel, especially if they do not have familial support or involvement in college preparation programs, such as Upward Bound.

5.4 Recommendations

From the results of this study, educators have a better understanding of how urban youth maintain positive attitudes towards achievement and schooling, despite encountering negative experiences. They should also be able to understand the role they play in contributing to and inhibiting the school identity of urban youth. The following
recommendations for teachers, administrators, school counselors, school psychologists, and parents can assist in meeting the needs of urban African American and Latino youth.

5.4.1 Recommendations for Teachers

1. Teachers should aim to develop positive and genuine relationships with their students. According to the findings of this study, students felt their teachers did not care if they learned, treated them poorly, and had negative attitudes towards them. Low expectations, deficit perspectives, and overall poor student-teacher relationships are commonly associated with behavioral problems, classroom management difficulties, academic disengagement, poor academic outcomes, and dropping out.

2. The development of cultural competence is necessary for teachers working in urban environments to understand the normative behaviors of African American and Latino youth. Many students felt white teachers held negative perceptions towards their racial or ethnic group. Pre-service teachers should enroll in courses in diversity or multiculturalism and seek out field experiences in urban settings. Teachers should participate in inservices and professional development to gain a better understanding of working with students from cultural backgrounds that differ from their own. Bridging this cultural gap will allow teachers to explore and put aside deficit views and develop quality relationships with their students.

3. Teachers should create a space to build peer relationships among their students. Many students, particularly at Watson High, felt other racial and ethnic groups perceived them negatively. Therefore, they should explore
these perceptions with their students in an attempt to build tolerance and embrace diversity.

4. Many students complained about the difficulty they experienced in certain courses because they felt it was boring and uninteresting. Students who enjoyed their courses felt their teachers made the courses interesting and tailored them to their needs. Therefore, teachers should develop lesson plans that capture the interests of their students.

5. Collaboration with families is extremely important in enhancing the academic outcomes of urban students. Thus, teachers should try to develop relationships and communicate frequently with student’s parents/guardians. They must also be flexible and respectful towards barriers parents/guardians may face with regards to school involvement.

6. In addition, teachers should provide materials in the parents/guardians native language for those who are non-English speaking. If teachers need to communicate with parents/guardians, they should find an interpreter.

7. Teachers should also allow students the time to ask questions or receive assistance during or outside of class time. Students felt they could not ask their teachers for help. Deficient help seeking behaviors hinder students because they are not learning. Therefore, teachers should encourage students to ask questions, when they do not understand something or need help with something.
5.4.2 Recommendations for Administrators

1. Students in this study stated their administrators were busy managing discipline problems and as a result, they did not develop a relationship. As leaders of the school, administrators should get to know their students and encourage positive interactions among all members of the school community.

2. Administrators must also make an effort to hire school personnel that are representative of their student body. Although having persons of the same race or ethnicity does not guarantee a positive relationship will occur, the Latino students in the study felt strongly about the cultural bond they developed with Ms. Garcia, the only Latino teacher at their school. These staff members often times serve as role models and mentors for students from their background.

3. Administrators should provide their staff with professional development opportunities, and/or encourage them to attend trainings to assist with developing cultural competence, improving their teaching skills, and classroom management. If administrators do not require or encourage these opportunities, much needed changes in the classroom and school climate as a whole will suffer.

4. Administrators should examine the effectiveness of school policies on the behaviors they are trying to decrease. If the behaviors are continuing to occur, administrators should re-examine and modify these policies. Skiba and Raush (2006, 2008) suggest schools move towards a prevention
model rather than utilizing suspension and expulsion. They recommend school use zero tolerance policies for the most serious infractions; implement graduated systems of discipline that fit the offense; put into place prevention measures such as conflict resolution and bullying prevention programs; and finally to evaluate their disciplinary strategies to ensure they improve student behavior as well as safety.

5. Administrators should encourage their staff to develop relationships with parents and set clear expectations for parental engagement in school activities.

6. At schools with high percentages of non-English speaking families, providing English as a Second Language (ESL) training for parents may be beneficial (Peña, Silva, Claro, Gamarra, & Parra, 2008).

5.4.3 Recommendations for Parents

1. Parents should make an effort to be more involved with their child’s schooling. All of the students felt their parents provided emotional support in helping them achieve their future goals. However, only a few felt their families provided academic support. It is recognized that not all parents may be able to provide academic help, nonetheless, emotional support is just as beneficial.

2. Parents should educate their children about their culture as well as those different from their own to promote inclusivity and acceptance.

3. Parents should make an effort to communicate with school personnel, especially their children’s teachers. This keeps parents in the know about
their child’s progress as well as knowledgeable about school activities and functions.

5.4.4 Recommendations for School Counselors

1. School counselors should ensure that all students have access to important information regarding scholarships, outreach programs, opportunities for academic growth, etc. Most students in the study stated their school counselors only helped them to schedule their classes. It is important to note that urban youth, especially African American and Latino, may not come to school with the social/cultural capital to understand how to navigate high school and prepare for college. Therefore, school counselors need to find a way to step in and fill the void.

2. In schools with immigrant students, school counselors must become familiar with the resources available for these students. School counselors must know what scholarships are available, and the colleges and universities that accept undocumented students to help students make postsecondary plans.

5.4.5 Recommendations for School Psychologists

1. School psychologists should consult and work collaboratively with teachers and other school personnel, such as school counselors and administrators, to find the best ways to help students achieve.

2. School psychologists should provide in-service presentations on diversity and multiculturalism to help school staff develop the cultural competence needed to work with urban students.
3. Like school counselors, school psychologists should be aware of the resources available for undocumented students. This collaboration could ease the workload of both professionals by sharing helpful information.

4. School psychologists should develop interventions for students experiencing difficulty in their classrooms to avoid students slipping through the cracks.

5. Additionally, many students do not know who their school psychologist is or what they do, therefore, it is important for school psychologists to make themselves known and apart of the school community. They have a multifaceted role in the school system and it should be utilized to strengthen the school environment.

6. Many students expressed a feeling of marginalization by their peers and teachers from racial and ethnic groups other than their own; therefore, school psychologists should offer individual or group counseling to explore these beliefs.

5.5 Limitations and Future Directions

This study examined the educational experiences of African American, Latino, and biracial/multiracial students. This study depended primarily on students’ self-report, prolonged engagement, and document collection, to confirm the findings of the study. Interviews with school personnel and families may have added an alternative perspective and strengthened the results of this study. Furthermore, the results of this study are representative of the participant’s experiences only. The purpose of the study was not to generalize to an entire population, but to understand the experiences of urban youth.
Nonetheless, future research should focus on collecting data from other relevant individuals involved in the student’s lives, such as teachers, school counselors, mentors, or parents/guardians. Future research should also involve conducting observations of students in their school settings (e.g., classroom, hallway, cafeteria, etc.). The researcher spent a large amount of time with the Upward Bound students during the residential portion of Summer Institute; however, this occurred in the evening following student’s completion of classes and learning activities. At Watson High, the researcher spent time with the participants during their lunch period. Therefore, observations in other settings may have been useful to gain a more complete picture in understanding the experiences of urban youth. Furthermore, for comparative purposes in examining which factors (e.g., school, psychological, social) differentiated between achievement level, gender, race and ethnicity, and school, it would be beneficial to have more students represented from each category.

5.6 Final Thoughts

This study sought to examine the educational experiences of urban youth, particularly African American and Latino youth, and understand how their experiences affected their attitudes and behaviors towards learning. Students lacked a significant amount of support within the school environment. They also were subjected to unfair school policies, unsafe schools, poor quality teachers, and under resourced settings. Additionally, the students often felt persons from other racial and ethnic groups perceived them as inferior without knowledge of their abilities. The schools environment exposed many students to racism and racial discrimination due to their skin color, country of origin, perceived ability, appearance, and the neighborhoods they came from. Thus, CRT
and LatCrit as frameworks for this study brought to light the role race and ethnicity played in the educational experiences of African American and Latino youth in urban schools. In addition, invitational education as a theoretical framework highlighted the impact relationships within the school setting, including people, places, and policies, had on urban youth.
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to the problem? *Teachers College Record, 87*(3), 374-392.


APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Extracurricular</th>
<th>Educational Goals</th>
<th>Career Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Biracial (Black &amp; White)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>B (89-80)</td>
<td>Baker</td>
<td>Basketball, track, tennis</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Architect</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cici</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Multiracial (Black, White, &amp; Cherokee)</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>A (100-90)</td>
<td>Stanley</td>
<td>Bowling</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>B (89-80)</td>
<td>Watson</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>College-psychology</td>
<td>Counselor or therapist</td>
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<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>B (89-80)</td>
<td>Miami</td>
<td>Football, baseball</td>
<td>College-Business Administration &amp; Management</td>
<td>NFL or business owner</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jose</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>B (89-80)</td>
<td>Watson</td>
<td>National Honor Society, all state orchestra, choir</td>
<td>College to study environmental engineering</td>
<td>Architect or engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>B (89-80)</td>
<td>Evergreen</td>
<td>Track &amp; Field, STEM Club, Robotics</td>
<td>College, MA in Civil Engineering &amp; Architecture</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
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<tr>
<td>LeMarcus</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>C (79-70)</td>
<td>Waterford</td>
<td>Cross country</td>
<td>Culinary College</td>
<td>Sous chef</td>
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<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>B (89-80)</td>
<td>Watson</td>
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<td>College</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
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<td>Lisa</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>A (100-90)</td>
<td>Evergreen</td>
<td>Volunteer work, volleyball, softball, cheerleading</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Business Manager &amp; Accountant</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>C (79-70)</td>
<td>Watson</td>
<td>Volleyball, church youth group</td>
<td>College- study dance and photography</td>
<td>Choreographe &amp; photographer</td>
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<td>M</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>Watson</td>
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<td>College-study</td>
<td>Doctor or</td>
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<td>Race/Ancestry</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Grade</td>
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<td>M</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>A (100-90)</td>
<td>Evergreen</td>
<td>Football, chess club</td>
<td>Engineer, business owner</td>
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<tr>
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<td>F</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>A (100-90)</td>
<td>Baker</td>
<td>Tennis, student ambassador</td>
<td>Environmentalist, fashion magazine editor</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>B (89-80)</td>
<td>Watson</td>
<td>Girl’s Leadership</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>C (79-70)</td>
<td>Evergreen</td>
<td>Cheerleading, class officer, dance team, debate team, marching band, mentor/tutor</td>
<td>Forensic scientist or veterinarian</td>
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<td>Stanley</td>
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<td>Basketball, track</td>
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<td>Parent’s Occupation</td>
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<td>Mother- Donato’s Pizzeria</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cici</td>
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<td>Father- Unemployed</td>
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<td>Mother- Warehouse/tailor Father- Painter/pastor</td>
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<td>Two Parent home</td>
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<td>Junior</td>
<td>Mother- Business/Trade school; Father- HS Diploma</td>
<td>Mother- Office assistant Father- Construction worker</td>
<td>Predominantly African American</td>
<td>Two Parent home</td>
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<tr>
<td>LeMarcus</td>
<td>Mother - HS Diploma</td>
<td>Mother- Impact</td>
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<td>Lives with one parent (Mother)</td>
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<td>Mother- Teacher Father- Factory</td>
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<td>Two Parent home</td>
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<td>Predominantly African American</td>
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<td>Mother- Unemployed</td>
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<td>Predominantly African American</td>
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<td>Mother- Office Uncle- unemployed</td>
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<td>Lives with mother and uncle.</td>
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<td>Pilar</td>
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<td>Mother- Cleans homes</td>
<td>Predominantly White</td>
<td>Lives with one parent (Mother)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Talayah</td>
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<td>Father- Mechanic</td>
<td>Evenly distributed</td>
<td>Lives with one parent (Father)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tenishi</td>
<td>Mother - 4 year college</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Predominantly African American</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Mother- Some college</td>
<td>Mother- Benefits administrator</td>
<td>Predominantly African American</td>
<td>Lives with one parent (Mother)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Mother- Some college</td>
<td>Mother- Insurance company</td>
<td>Evenly distributed</td>
<td>Lives with one parent (Mother)</td>
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APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Face-to-Face Individual Interview Protocol

1. If you could change anything about your school, what would it be? Why?
2. What courses are you currently taking?
3. How would you describe your academic curriculum? College Preparatory/Honors? General? Special Education?
4. What is your favorite subject and why? What is your least favorite subject and why?
5. What grades did you receive on your last report card?
7. When selecting your courses, who helps you the most with making these selections? What role do the following individuals play in this selection process: family, friends, school counselors, teachers, and school administrators?
8. Describe your neighborhood. What is the best thing about it? The worst?
9. Describe what you do on an average weekday.
10. Describe what you do on an average Saturday.
11. Describe what you do on an average Sunday.
12. Imagine yourself in 20 years from now, what is your occupation/job? What will it take for you to reach your goal(s)? Who is helping you to achieve your goals? And what are they doing to help you?
13. Does racism and racial discrimination affect urban African Americans’ and Hispanic/Latinos’ ability to achieve in the US? If so, how? Has racism affected you? If so, how? Do you think that racism or racial discrimination will affect your future goals? If so, how?
14. What perceptions do you think non-African American and Hispanic/Latino students, teachers, and school counselors have of your racial group? Why? How do those perceptions effect or influence your motivation to be successful in school?
15. What perceptions do you think other African American and Hispanic/Latino students, teachers, and school counselors have of your racial group? Why? How do those perceptions effect or influence your motivation to be successful in school?
16. What are your thoughts about Barack Obama being elected president of the United States of America?
17. In your opinion, how will Barack Obama’s presidency affect or influence your motivation to be successful in school? How will affect your life in general?
APPENDIX C: BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONNAIRE
Biographical Questionnaire

Directions: Please answer the following questions. Feel free to skip any questions that you may feel uncomfortable answering.

Pseudonym___________________________________________
Place of Birth___________________________________________
Parent’s Place of Birth____________________________________
Gender ______ Age ______ What grade are you currently in? ______
Race/Ethnicity: ____________________________________________
Country of origin:___________________________________________
What school do you currently attend? __________________________
How many years have you been attending your current school? ________
Are you currently receiving free or reduced lunch at your schools? Yes No

Check (√) your best estimate of your current grade point average?

_________ A (90-100)
_________ B (89-80)
_________ C (79-70)
_________ D (69-60)
_________ F (less than 60)

Check (√) the highest educational level completed by your parents:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Level</th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Father</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle School</td>
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<tr>
<td>High School Diploma/ Equivalent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Business or Trade School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two Year Degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Four Year Degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some Graduate or Professional School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graduate or Professional Degree</td>
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</table>

Please indicate your parent’s occupation/job:
Mother ________________________________
Father ________________________________

What is the make up of your community?

_________ Predominantly African American
_________ Predominantly Hispanic
_________ Predominantly White
_________ Predominantly Somali
Predominantly Other (Please specify): __________________________
Evenly Distributed with African American, Hispanic, White, and Somali
Evenly Distributed with Other (Please specify): -

Other (Please specify): ______________

Check (√) the category that best describes your family living arrangement:
Live with One-Parent/Guardian ______ Live with Two-Parent/Guardian ______ 

If you live with one-parent, whom do you stay with?:
Mother ______ Father _______ Grandmother ________ Grandfather ______
Other (Please specify): ______ 

How many older brothers and sisters do you have? ______ Younger? ______ 
How many are attending or attended college? ________________

At your school, what extracurricular activities do you currently participate in?
Athletics What sports? ________________________________
Cheerleading
Chess Club
Class Officer
Choir
Concert Band
Dance Team
Debate Team
Drama Club
Fellowship of Christian Athletes
In The Know
Marching Band
Mentor/Tutor for other students
National Honor Society
Senior Cabinet
Student Council
Church Youth Group
Volunteer Work outside of school (number of hours per week ______)
Worked for pay (number of hours per week ______)
Other ________________________________

After completing high school, what are your educational goals? 
___________________________________________
___________________________________________

After completing high school, what are your career goals?  
___________________________________________
___________________________________________

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APPENDIX D: RESEARCH PARTNER DESCRIPTION
RESEARCH PARTNER DESCRIPTION

Principal Researcher: Desireé Vega

The principal researcher of this study is of Puerto Rican descent. She is a doctoral candidate in the School Psychology program at The Ohio State University. She is currently a School Psychology Pre-doctoral Intern with the Omaha Public Schools district in Omaha, Nebraska. She has had field experience conducting assessment, consultation, counseling, and implementing interventions with African American and Latino youth in the public school system over the last four years. In addition, she has taken several courses in quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

Research Partner:

The principal researchers’ research partner of this study identifies as an African American female. She is a doctoral student in the Multicultural and Equity Studies in Education program at The Ohio State University. Over the last three years, she has had field experience working with Black, African American, Latino, and African youth on community-based projects. She is interested in working with youth toward efforts for social justice, community narratives, and youth-initiated research. In addition to her research endeavors, she has taken several courses in qualitative methodologies.
Emerging codes: Categories and Subcode Definitions

**Barriers to positive academic experiences (BPAE)**
Perceived barriers to positive schooling experiences for urban youth.
- **Challenging Relationships: People (PPL)**
  Perception that treatment by people (i.e., school personnel, peers, family, self, etc.) impacts educational experiences.
  - School counselors
  - Teachers
  - Administrators
  - Peers
  - Self-reliance
  - Family
  - Racial representation
- **Policies (PCS)**
  Student perceptions of the unfair treatment they receive in from school personnel (i.e., teachers, administrators, staff, etc) in the form of school rules/policies.
- **Places (PLAC)**
  Perception that the school building is overcrowded and aesthetically unappealing making the students feel devalued. Students also felt the quality of resources provided such as food and the facilities itself were poor.
- **Safety (SAF)**
  Responses related to the lack of safe living and learning environments.
- **Racism and Racial discrimination (RRD)**
  Perception that experiences with racism and/or racial discrimination affect educational experiences.
- **Undocumented status (UNDOC)**
  Perception that undocumented status affects academic motivation due to limited future opportunities.
- **Other**

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**The Influence of Positive Relationships on Academic Experiences (RLTN)**
Students’ perceptions of relationships that enhance academic experiences.
- **Meaningful relationship (MFLR)**
  - School counselors
  - Teachers
  - Peers
  - Family
  - Upward Bound
- **Other**

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**Attitudes toward learning (ATWL)**
Student’s expression of how they feel about learning.

- **Aspirations (ASPR)**
  Despite perceived educational barriers, students hold high aspirations for their futures.

- **Attitude-achievement paradox (AAPX)**
  Awareness of skills needed to be successful; however, student’s grades, actions, etc. do not reflect or demonstrate progress towards achieving aspirations.

- **Time on task (TOTK)**
  The amount of time students spend on schoolwork outside of the school day.

- **Interest vs. Disinterest (IVD)**
  Course engagement influenced by instruction, interest, and ease of subject matter.

- **Other**

**Race Relations (RCRL)**
Perceptions others hold towards students based on their racial/ethnic identity and students responses to these beliefs and the effects it has on their academic motivation.

- **Stereotypes (STYP)**
  Perception that students are judged according to stereotypes rather than their true academic ability or potential.

- **Erasure of racism/Equal treatment (EQT)**
  Perception that all students are treated the same by their teachers regardless of race/ethnicity.

- **Racial Affinity**

- **Solidarity and Support**

- **Prove them wrong syndrome (PTWS)**
  Stereotypes and racism/racial discrimination motivate students to prove others wrong through academic success.

- **Academic disengagement**

- **Other**

**Obama Effect (OBEF)**
Students’ perceptions of the impact Obama’s presidency has on their academic motivation and life in general.

- **Motivational** (Belief that his presidency has motivated students to work harder)

- **Indifference** (Belief that he is just another president)

- **Implications for future** (Feeling that nothing is impossible, “being black is not an excuse anymore”)

- **Policy implications** (Policies such as the DREAM Act, healthcare reform, and job creation can improve their futures)

- **Other**
APPENDIX F: IRB APPROVAL
Dear Dr. Moore,

The Behavioral and Social Sciences IRB APPROVED BY EXPEDITED REVIEW the above referenced research. The Board was able to provide expedited approval under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1) because the research presents minimal risk to subjects and qualifies under the expedited review category(s) listed below.

Date of IRB Approval: April 3, 2009
Date of IRB Approval Expiration: January 28, 2010
Expedited Review Category: 7

In addition, the protocol has been approved for the inclusion of children (permission of one parent sufficient). If applicable, informed consent (and HIPAA research authorization) must be obtained from subjects or their legally authorized representatives and documented prior to research involvement. The IRB-approved consent form and process must be used. Changes in the research (e.g., recruitment procedures, advertisements, enrollment numbers, etc.) or informed consent process must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented (except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects).

This approval is valid for one year from the date of IRB review when approval is granted or modifications are required. The approval will no longer be in effect on the date listed above as the IRB expiration date. A Continuing Review application must be approved within this interval to avoid expiration of IRB approval and cessation of all research activities. A final report must be provided to the IRB and all records relating to the research (including signed consent forms) must be retained and available for audit for at least 3 years after the research has ended.

It is the responsibility of all investigators and research staff to promptly report to the IRB any serious, unexpected and related adverse events and potential unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

This approval is issued under The Ohio State University’s OHRP Federalwide Assurance #00006378. All forms and procedures can be found on the ORRP website – www.orrp.osu.edu. Please feel free to contact the IRB staff contact listed above with any questions or concerns.

Shari R. Speer, PhD, Chair
Behavioral and Social Sciences Institutional Review Board
Dear Dr. Moore,

The Behavioral and Social Sciences IRB APPROVED the Continuing Review of the above referenced research.

Date of IRB Approval: January 6, 2010
Date of IRB Approval Expiration: January 6, 2011
Expedited Review Category: 7

In addition, the protocol has been reapproved for the inclusion of children (permission of one parent sufficient). In addition, the IRB APPROVED the amendment request to amend the protocol dated 12/27/09—Revise biographical questionnaire.

If applicable, informed consent (and HIPAA research authorization) must be obtained from subjects or their legally authorized representatives and documented prior to research involvement. The IRB-approved consent form and process must be used. Changes in the research (e.g., recruitment procedures, advertisements, enrollment numbers, etc.) or informed consent process must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented (except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects).

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Jeanne A. Clement, EdD, Chair
Behavioral and Social Sciences Institutional Review Board