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THE BLACK MALE CRISIS IN THE CLASSROOM:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF BLACK MALE STUDENTS AS PERCEIVED BY THE STUDENTS THEMSELVES, THEIR TEACHERS, AND PARENTS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education of The Ohio State University

By

Frances L. James-Brown, B.S., M.S.W.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University

1995

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Co-Adviser, College of Education
DEDICATION

A significant role of education is to provide learners with a panoply of dreams to which they can aspire. As Kerber (1968) suggests, in providing this array of possibilities for students’ life-long endeavors, educators must attend to the development of learners who possess "an ever more profound consciousness of consciousness" (p. 20). Beyond this purpose, educators must take the act of consciousness enhancement to the level of consciousness enactment, such that students are empowered to effect the betterment of themselves, of others, and of the institutions of learning they attend. For a disproportionate number of our nation’s Black male learners, these educational goals have not and are not being fulfilled. These young men, their parents, and teachers, are without question engulfed in a crisis in the classroom. I hereby dedicate the pages of this study to America’s Black boys who, every day of their academic lives, experience their dreams being deferred. As I do so, I ask readers of this study to ponder with me the question considered by African American poet Langston Hughes in his poem, "A Dream Deferred":

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over—

like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags

like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

(quoted in Holt, 1990)
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study is the culmination of the dedicated, diligent, and forthright efforts of many. My sincere appreciation is first extended to many of my colleagues in the field of education. I offer special appreciation to Susan K. Ford, E. A. Parham, Dorothy Turnbout, and Normia Young. During my pilot study year, these elementary and middle school educators graciously afforded me the opportunity to interview them as well as observe their classroom teaching methods. Additionally, they shared their opinions, views, and self-reflective thoughts on working with the Black male child in the contemporary classroom setting. I am also particularly grateful to Beverly Gordon, Patti Lather, and Charles Ross, the exemplary scholars who comprised my dissertation committee. As my research advisor, Patti guided me to the novel demonstration project focusing on the learning needs of African American boys that was taking place at the study site. She encouraged me to submit to the school’s home district the proposal that led to my being allowed to conduct the research that led to this study. She also lent her editing skills to this document while allowing and encouraging me to toy around with my own creative writing style. My academic advisor, Beverly Gordon, served throughout this process as mentor, patiently lending an active listening ear during numerous face-to-face consultations and lengthy telephone conversations about my research directions, aspirations, and doubts. Always challenging and grounding me in the realities of the
world, Beverly acted as my alter ego in preparing this manuscript. Charles Ross shared with me much valuable advice from the male's perspective about specific issues raised in this study. To these three committee members, I am forever grateful.

Deep appreciation goes as well to the school that allowed me to conduct this study: First, to its principal, who, though inundated with media scrutiny and with "those folk" whom she noted "were interested just because it was popular to be interested" in the kinds of endeavors the school was undertaking, allowed me to walk her school's academic halls. I sincerely thank her. I thank also her support staff, particularly the school secretaries, who were initially somewhat reluctant and suspicious of my presence. Over the days and months of my tenure at the study site, they eventually warmed up to me and became extremely instrumental in helping me meet some of my research objectives. I thank the teachers, who all gave unselfishly of their time and opened up their classroom doors to me. Particular thanks goes to the study's two primary teacher respondents for meeting with me beyond their workday hours, on weekends, and long after my on-site activities were accomplished. Understandably, I cannot adequately express how grateful I am to the study's eight Black boys and their parents, who so graciously allowed me to enter their worlds, to probe, to challenge their thoughts and emotions, and seek in conjunction with them solutions to the crisis at hand. Without their voices, there would be no study.

Appreciation goes as well to my close friends and colleagues, among them Susan C. Cooper, who "partnershiped" with me throughout this entire process; Mary Jane Frank, who stood steadfastly beside me, giving me encouragement as well as constructive
feedback; and Deborah E. Lloyd, who started this journey with me and later passed the torch to Victoria A. Robinson, for tirelessly typing and retyping until they met my specifications. Posthumously, I give thanks to Thomas and Louise James, my deceased parents, who reared me in a home environment that fostered love and evolved around Christian teachings and who taught me that, with God, all things are possible. I am eternally grateful for the spiritual foundation they provided me. Finally, there are no adequate words to express the profound appreciation I have for Eugene L. Brown, my helpmate, soulmate, and spouse. Without his emotional, psychological, and monetary support, my dream too would have been deferred. Thank you all.
VITA

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1978–present .................................................. Mental Health, Retardation, and Chemical Dependency Professor, Columbus State Community College, Columbus, Ohio

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Education

Studies in Curriculum Design, Dr. Beverly M. Gordon;
Research Methods, Dr. Patti Lather
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In the late sixties, a twelve-year-old Black girl sat attentively in front of the television while her mother "ran" a straightening comb through her thick mass of dark hair. As the pair watched the rioting on the screen and witnessed scores of Black individuals being beaten and taunted by police with menacing attack dogs, the girl's expression turned strangely solemn. After a few moments of silence, she looked up at her mother and said, "When I get big, I wanna change the world." Smiling wisely, the older woman bent down to look into her daughter's eyes, and asked her, "How?" (Author's journal entry)

As a qualitative inquirer operating from a participatory, emancipatory, and critical research platform, the simplistic question above—asked of me by my mother in response to my youthful idealism—remains a lingering concern. In the years since I first made clear my intent to foment world revolution, I have often asked myself how can I make a difference in my community? Where do I start? Which problem should I attempt to tackle? I would be the first to admit that throughout my development and growth, my fervor to effect some kind of change has escalated and ebbed depending on my own personal state of affairs as well as those at the local, national, and worldwide levels. However, a strong desire has long burned within me to make some type of contribution
to improving my community and society as a whole.

My quest to achieve my ultimate purpose in life eventually led me to the doctoral program in education at The Ohio State University. Initially, I believed that the dissertation process of selecting a specific research concern would provide me the answer to my overriding life question. I was well aware that my greatest interest lay in issues related to the educational well-being of the Black community. Like so many doctoral students, however, I quickly became engrossed in the quest for the one true, correct, and precise research problem to examine. I sought diligently to identify an area of study that would hold the greatest passion for me, one that would continue to spur me on once my soul’s fire turned to embers, one that would have the most significance for the Black community and its cognitive, cultural, emotional, psychological, and social advancement.

I discovered the answer to my quest on a cold evening in January 1990. I was a first-year doctoral student completing my second quarter of residency. As I sat alongside my husband, sipping Vienna coffee and watching television, Cable News Network announcer Bernard Shaw caught my attention as he announced some troubling statistics with an equally troubled expression on his face. As Shaw noted, between the ages of 20 and 31, fully 23% of the Black male population is in the custody of the U.S. correctional system compared to 10% of the Hispanic male population and 6% of the male Anglo-Saxon population. That next day, I began searching for and reading any and all documents I could get my hands on concerning the academic, political, economic, and social plight of Black males in the United States.
My research uncovered even more disturbing statistics than those I had heard on television. I learned from my reading of Kunjufu's (1989) work that 47% of the U.S. prison population at the time was comprised of Black males, while only 3.5% of Black males were enrolled in college. Kunjufu also indicated that Black children comprised 17% of all children in public schools nationwide but 41% of all children in special education, and of the latter group, 85% were Black males. I began to see a clear and significant pattern and a definite problem.

I began framing new questions: Why do Black men disproportionately fill the nation’s jail cells? Why are so few Black men college students? What is going on in our nation’s educational system to warrant such a large majority of Black male children being placed in special education classes? As an educator, I intrinsically believed that the answer to the third question would unearth the root from which the other two atrocities sprouted. I now realize that I was wrong. However, at the time I dared ask myself the unthinkable: Why is it that Black boys do not achieve in school? Are they genetically inferior? Are they, as suggested by so many uncaring individuals—from educators to policy makers, politicians to employers, practitioners to police—dumb, slow, or dull-witted?

An immediate “No!” came to my lips. I began a new line of inquiry. I turned to the literature on special education. I read numerous articles; I met and talked with special education consultants such as Brenda Pullien and Betsy Moreno from the Columbus (OH) Public Schools. I "went native" by doing volunteer work in that system’s special education classrooms. New themes emerged. One in particular was the alarming dropout
and suspension rates for Black males in the public schools. My attention was directed to yet another question: Where do these young Black males go? My answers were harsh and devastating: They go to the streets. They go to gangs. They go idle and end up in penal systems across the U.S. They become the forgotten ones.

More specific research questions emerged: What are the factors contributing to the disproportionate rate of suspensions and school dropout among Black male children? Are the schools' curriculum objectives meeting the needs of Black male students? Is the problem the result of negative teacher attitudes toward these students, or is it the product of poor self-concept on the part of Black male youth? Could ecological factors such as poverty, drugs, and single-parent, female-headed homes be at the core of the Black male's academic crisis? Might it have to do with the incongruity between these students' preferred learning styles and their teachers' preferred instructional approaches? Lastly, could the root of the crisis rest solely within the ethos of the educational system itself, in the form of institutional racism?

Surprisingly, the process of selecting and narrowing my research topic, while it takes only a few pages to discuss, took three years to shape. After conducting a thorough pilot study, I began a two-year, on-site research project at an Afrocentric school in the Midwest that entailed a broad spectrum of ethnographic work aimed at identifying and explicating the precipitating cause or causes of the social problem under investigation—namely, the educational crisis being experienced by African American males in U.S. public schools. What is unique about this investigation is that I sought solutions to the phenomenon at hand in the perspectives of those who are immersed in
it on a daily basis. My primary objective was to allow these voices full reign to express their views, to theorize, and to actively seek ways to change their current plight. Toward this end, I structured my interviews and other contacts with the participants around discussions of their opinions, feelings, suspicions, and theories regarding the reasons for the Black male's academic crisis. I engaged with the participants in structured and unstructured individual and group sessions aimed not only at initiating their emancipatory thinking processes but at motivating them to enact and participate in emancipatory endeavors.

The pages that are about to unfold present an ethnographic analysis of the a priori constructs and data stories of the major stakeholders involved in the education of African American males—the students themselves, their parents, and teachers. For these stakeholders, this study afforded them the first opportunity to have someone earnestly listen to them and to philosophically as well as pragmatically discuss ways to effect change. Their too-often forgotten voices have been raised and duly noted. Whether or not their insights and recommendations will become part of the solution for ameliorating the crisis of African American male academic underachievement remains to be seen.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY: CRISIS IN THE CLASSROOM

A crisis exists in the back rows of America's public school classrooms. It has so far eluded the full attention of the much-bruited education reform movement of the 1980s. Yet its threat to our economic future, and to the lives of millions of American youth, is present, grave, and sure to become more costly to meet the longer we delay in addressing the issue. (Clark et al., 1988, p. 2)

We are convinced that the most formidable barriers to [assisting] African American males do not concern lack of money but failure to perceive them as in need of specific long-term attention, resistance to institutional change at the state and local levels, and an absence of genuine leadership at the federal level. (Clark et al., 1988, p. 5)

Background

African American children today are the focus of a major academic conflict (Shade, 1990). On one side are those who believe that an educational system designed to assimilate the European immigrants of the early 1900s can provide the type of schooling needed by African American children in the 1990s and beyond. On the other
side are those who suggest that this type of education is inappropriate and has done little more than enslave African American minds. In the debate over what are appropriate or inappropriate educational experiences for African American children, the plight of African American males has been foregrounded. As European American and African American educators and scholars alike have noted, a majority of African American males are experiencing what can best be described as a crisis in the classroom. The symptoms of this crisis are manifested in the disproportionately low grade point averages and the appallingly high rates of absence, tardiness, suspensions, and dropout experienced by this group. Reporting on recent studies from school districts in Milwaukee, New Orleans, Dade County (Florida), and elsewhere that highlight the critical nature of Black male students' predicament, Whitaker (1991) laments, "To say that Black males are performing poorly in school is a gross understatement of the current crisis" (p. 17). A partial picture of the dismalness of the African American males' educational crisis is revealed in the following:

- Black children (black boys and girls) represent 17% of the U.S. public school enrollment, but 41% of these Black students are in special education. Of this latter group, 85% are males (Kunjufu, 1986).

- Black male youths score lower than any of their counterparts (e.g., Black girls, White males/females) on standardized tests and are three times more likely than students of other racial/ethnic and gender groups to be placed in special education classes (Kunjufu, 1986).
• The African American male student dropout rate is 46% higher than that of African American females. Black males are 51% more likely to drop out than are White males. The corresponding differential between Black and White females is only 20%. The African American male dropout rate is 7% higher than that of Hispanic males, while the dropout rate for African American females is 26% lower than that of Hispanic females (Kaufman, 1989).

• Black students are twice as likely as Whites to be suspended from school, physically punished by school officials, or labeled mentally retarded (National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 1988).

Kantrowitz (1990), upon exploring the academic plight of African American males in a midwestern U.S. school district, reports data representative of the above-cited national findings. She notes that more than 80% of the 5,716 Black males enrolled in the city’s public high school earned less than a C average; only 2% of the school’s Black male students had grade point averages of 3.0 or higher. Additionally, more than 11% of the Black males had been retained in grade at least once, and Black males accounted for 50% of all students suspended from the school. Arnez’s (1978) study reveals that in 505 school districts in Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, Mississippi, and Arkansas that offered classes for students labeled as “educable mentally retarded,” over 80% of the students so labeled were Black, although less than 40% of the total school district populations were Black. Noting that the biased IQ test was a major factor producing racial disproportions, she reports that the vulnerability of Black children to the labeling
process persisted into subsequent classification stages in these districts. Disproportionately more of the "eligible" Black children, a large percentage of whom were males, were actually recommended for placement into special education classrooms, while disproportionately fewer eligible White children were recommended for such placement.

Study Focus and Need

Only rarely and to but a limited extent have efforts to identify and investigate some of the critical factors contributing to the phenomenon of Black male educational underachievement included or lent credence to the opinions of those most affected by this dilemma: the young Black males themselves. The perceptions of Black male learners about their educational experiences have not been adequately examined in the literature; nor have the opinions of their parents and teachers been thoroughly tapped for relevant information and solutions in this regard. The present study represents a departure from this norm by advancing the notion that in order to gain fuller insight into the reasons why African American male students are not deriving maximum benefit from their educational experiences, educators need to listen to the voices of those who are themselves immersed in the phenomenon. This study thus makes an effort to extract the pertinent data emanating from these voices and from their accounts of the academic situation. It attempts to do so via the recounting of their lived experiences within the schooling institutions they attend, serve, and support. From these data stories, qualitative researchers seek to make "imaginative connections among events and people, imaginative
renderings of these connections, and imaginative interpretations of what they have rendered" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1990, p. 153). Through the collection and analysis of relevant information gleaned from individual interviews, group sessions, structured and unstructured activities, and classroom observations, this research delineates the factors that play a significant role in the success or failure of African American male schoolchildren.

Eight African American male elementary school students (the respondents), their parents, and teachers were selected as research participants. The respondents attended a public school whose academic program had been reformulated to provide an educational experience specifically designed to address African American male academic underachievement. Located in a midwestern city, this school had an innovative charge: to enhance African American males' cognitive, emotional, and psychological functioning within the classroom and in their community. Emphasis was placed not only on revising teaching strategies to enhance the success of these students but also on developing positive self-concepts. Strengthening interactions between the students' parents and the school as well as engaging more community support from both the surrounding African American and European American communities were additional goals of the program.

Problem Statement and Research Questions

The following overarching research questions guided this study:

- What are the perceptions of African American male students about their educational experiences?
- What are the perceptions of their parents and teachers?
Corollary research inquiries emanating from these primary questions include the following:

- To what factors do these participants attribute the underachievement of African American males?
- Why do Black male youth in particular seem to receive more disproportionately the gauntlet of illiteracy?
- Are the traditional curriculum objectives meeting the psychological, social, and cognitive needs of the Black male, or must the curriculum be revised in order to do so?
- Is the resolution of the problem within the Black male students' locus of control or is it due to factors outside their control?
- Does the problem lie within the attitudes and expectations of teachers, or does it lie within the attitudes and expectations of Black male learners themselves?
- Can it be traced to negative self-concepts held by these youths? If so, is this a result of negative images inculcated by societal structures?
- Is the academic crisis of Black male students somehow linked to their distinct learning styles or abilities, or is it a question of the way teachers disseminate knowledge?
- Does institutional racism systematically lock African American males out of successful academic achievement, and does this obstruction have any long-term effects on their economic, social, and political mobility?
Research Assumptions

Regardless of the paradigmatic stance taken by a researcher, certain assumptive premises guide and shape a study’s philosophical orientation. This study was guided by multiple notions. First and foremost is this researcher’s conviction that the academic crisis facing Black males holds serious ramifications for society as a whole. Secondly, is my belief that the action needed to rectify this crisis must be taken now. The study also purports that young Black males are not aware of the control they can have over their academic fate, and that society as a whole, including Black parents and Black and White educators, are failing these youth both academically and emotionally. Further, institutional racism functions within the U.S. educational system to actively and systematically ensure that Black males remain the "lead scorers" (as Kunjufu [1986] calls them) in school suspensions, dropout, special education referrals, and retentions in grade. Whether unconsciously or consciously, this system is structured for the "have children," not the "have-not children." It therefore behooves us as a society, as educators, parents, and community members, to actively challenge and infiltrate these barriers. Finally, this study supports the assertion that the role of education goes beyond providing learners with technical knowledge and helping them achieve intra- and interpersonal understanding. Rather, education’s ultimate role is empowerment. It should thus be a praxis-oriented political process.

These guiding assumptions address society’s lack of understanding about how African American male students, their teachers, and parents view this social dilemma. They openly challenge some of the overt and covert hegemonic forces that suppress the
advancement of Black males in schools. They also suggest ways in which the
respondents' levels of consciousness and awareness can be elevated to effect change in
themselves and in their academic institutions.

Research Approach

Our construction of the world, our values, and ideas about how to inquire into
those constructions, are mutually self-reinforcing. We conduct inquiry via a particular
paradigm because that paradigm embodies the assumptions and values that we hold to be
true. Conversely, because we hold those assumptions and values, we conduct inquiry
according to the precepts of our chosen paradigm (Schwandt, 1989). In investigating a
problem, researchers must first select a methodological platform from which to operate.
That selection often determines their approach. However, as Maguire (1987) notes, the
question is not whether researchers should take paradigmatic sides (i.e., positivist,
interpretivist, or critical)—since they inevitably will—but rather, whose side are they on?

According to Burrell and Morgan (1979):

In order to understand alternative points of view, it is important that a theorist be
fully aware of the assumptions upon which his [sic] own perspective is based.
Such an appreciation involves an intellectual journey [emphasis added] which
takes him outside the realm of his own familiar domain. It requires that he
become aware of the boundaries which define his perspective. It requires that he
become familiar with paradigms which are not his own. Only then can he look
back and appreciate in full measure the precise nature of his starting point. (p. ix)
Early in my career as an educator and researcher in the field of social work, I realized that I had an urgency to operate from a paradigm whose undergirding assumptions emulated my own perspectives as an African American. I was not completely comfortable with my profession's strong adherence to the assumptions undergirding the quantitative mode of inquiry. Indeed, my views regarding the application of quantitative methods in the field of social work were strongly aligned with those of Allen-Meares and Bruce (1990), who notes:

...its methods distort the phenomena studied; it fails to recognize the subject rather then subject-object relationship that exists between the researcher and subject; its findings do not generalize to the natural human context because they are based on observations in artificially controlled settings; and it assumes that complete objectivity is possible, when in fact all actions are subjectively based. (p. 452)

It was not until the fall of 1989, when I began my own intellectual journey as a doctoral student, that I discovered a conceptual framework that aligned with the intrinsic values upon which my own sense of reality was constructed. Upon reading the work of Kuhn (1970), Wax (1971), Lather (1986, 1988), Denzin (1988), Belenky (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986), Popkewitz (1984), and other critical scholars, I began to actualize and transform my ideas, moving from a state of ignorant activism to one of intellectual action. The knowledge that I acquired through this process framed my intellectual vision in such a way that I shall never again see the world as I once did. My intellectual journey provided me with a verstehen or awakening—in this case, an
understanding of the philosophical and methodological differences that separate positivist
and postpositivist ways of seeking truth and trustworthiness.

My aim as a researcher in the field of education was to move away from the
traditional mode of quantitative inquiry and place my allegiance in the qualitative mode
of inquiry while operating from the emancipatory platform. What does it mean to
approach the urban public school environment from the emancipatory research world
view? First, it means to reject the claims of objectivity and value-freedom presumed by
the conventional quantitative research paradigm. Although rational discourse is used to
expose unexamined ideologies that constrain human freedom and result in injustices, the
inquiry is itself construed as being value-laden and politically meaningful. Additionally,
this approach "proposes greater input into the inquiry process by those persons being
studied" (Lather, 1989, unnumbered pages). A researcher approaching a problem from
the emancipatory platform actively engages the study's participants in "problem-posing,"
which is a group process that draws upon personal experience to create social
connectedness and mutual responsibility (Shor, 1987). This group process challenges
respondents to think critically about their lives and begin to exert control over their fates.
Thus, the researcher's role often becomes that of a "facilitator who works collaboratively
with research participants, although the forms and extent of that collaboration vary"
(Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 11). Ideally, the researcher–researched relationship is
marked by negotiation, reciprocity, and willingness on the part of all participants to
change and be changed (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 11). Thus, my objective in the
present study was to have all of the stakeholders involved in a research problem, from the
participant subjects to the researcher(s), to emerge from an inquiry into that problem as more actualized and empowered agents of change. I engaged in these activities with the aim of "uncovering embedded information and making it explicit" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 201).

This study’s approach is aligned with the tenets undergirding the emancipatory critical paradigm. The overriding goal of such an approach, in conjunction with empowering the study’s participants to take an active role in improving their academic condition, is to make a contribution to academic knowledge by taking an alternative, culturally sensitive perspective (Spencer, 1990). As Donald Comstock contends, "critical social science links depersonalized social processes to its subjects’ choices and actions with the goal of eliminating unrecognized and contradictory consequences of collective action" (quoted in Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 157). The present study was constructed in such a manner as to not only elicit contextual understanding of the crisis facing African American males in the nation’s classrooms but also to evoke abilities among the participants to effect change in themselves, in others, and in the educational institutions they attend. Accordingly, I advocate within this study the participatory involvement of all those involved in the education of African American male students, to the extent that the students themselves, their teachers, parents, and concerned others not only acquire an understanding of the adverse academic situations confronting these youth but also begin to assert control over their experiences.

The purpose of this study, then, is twofold: (1) to extricate viable data and recommendations from the voices of those immersed in the Black male’s crisis in the
classroom; and (2) to empower those voices to rectify this crisis. The former was achieved by qualitative research; the latter by raising the individual and collective conscious awareness of all those involved regarding how they can effect change in themselves and in the academic institutions they attend, serve, and support.

Of necessity, the qualitative researcher operating from the critical paradigm works most effectively in a naturalistic setting. This setting permits the researcher to allow themes to emerge from the participants themselves (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Moreover, as Maguire (1987) contends, the function of the critical social scientist is to increase participant awareness so that they "see themselves and social situations in a new way, in order to inform further action for self-determined emancipation from oppressive social systems and relationships" (p. 6). This mandates the emergence of some assumptions whereby "action informs reflection" and "the dialectical relationship between inquiry and action or theory and practice" is made explicit (p. 16). Consequently, the emergent design of this study, situated as it is in both the interpretative naturalistic and critical social science paths of inquiry, was flexible and receptive to the input of all stakeholders, including the participants (the students, their teachers, and parents) and the researcher.

Because I desired to bring the fullest justice to the respondents’ views and to meet the ultimate goal of capturing the essence of their thoughts, emotions, and visions, I choose to honor the way my respondents verbally constructed their realities. Thus, excerpts of their comments are presented herein in their original grammatical context, replete with the respondents’ "ain’ts," "disses," and "dats." By so doing, I choose to challenge academic audiences as well as others to relinquish the hegemonic forces that
control their ways of speaking to allow the emergence of an alternate mode of communication. After all, the ultimate goal of this study was to listen and honor the respondents' voices. What better way than by honoring the way in which they speak? Presentation of so-called substandard speech brings a frown to the brows of many in academic circles, particularly those who would advance that such presentation serves to fester the age-old stereotypical image of African Americans as illiterate and unlettered. I would argue that the way individuals construct their communication represents their Lebenswelt, their "whoness." It engulfs their thought processes—in sum, the very essence of their being. As one operating under the banner of being an empowering researcher, who then am I to change my respondents' natural modes of expression merely to bring about a more socially acceptable form of reading? For these reasons, I challenge readers of this study to enter the sphere of understanding at a different level, honoring the respondents' words as spoken.

Limitations of the Study

Two factors posed the greatest limitations to the scope of the present study: accessibility to and the amount of time spent at the study site. Regarding the former, the distance between the researcher's home base and the research site (approximately 960 miles, round trip) made contact and follow-up with the participants difficult and at times prohibitive. Regarding the latter, although I engaged in three months of intensive on-site research at the study school site and was involved in this investigation for over three years, the findings presented herein are but "a snapshot of a field in motion" (Lather,
The respondents' lives, and their responses to their situation, are ongoing and dynamic.

Overview of Chapter Contents

Chapter I has provided an introduction to the study's problem focus, its research questions, assumptions, and approach as well as its limitations. Chapter II provides an overview of the historical dilemma of African Americans in the nation's public school systems, a brief discussion of Afrocentricity as it applies to education, and an indepth assessment of four theoretical positions that attempt to explain why African American males are experiencing such difficulties within those systems. Chapter III grounds the study within its paradigmatic framework and outlines the research design and methodology. In Chapter IV, the participants' voices are presented and analyzed in the context of the themes that emerge from their realist tales. Chapter V represents a departure from the rigidity of conventional research reporting. The evocative, narrative voice is employed in this chapter to delineate one of the study's a priori themes (ecological factors) via three data stories about the researcher's own lived experiences with the study participants. Chapter VI continues this data-storytelling journey by focusing on the theme of African American male students' self-concept, but it does so utilizing the more traditional case-study approach.

In Chapter VII, data storytelling focusing on the a priori theme of learning style and curriculum theory is presented through the teachers' and parents' voices. Transcripts from structured and unstructured encounters with the study's participants and reflexive
recorded notes from the researcher's own journaling process provided the "data" needed for construction of this chapter. Chapter VIII presents the study participants' recommendations for change and discusses the implications of these recommendations. Chapter IX brings this study to closure. In it, I introspectively ponder questions whose purpose is to evaluate and reflect on the study's findings through a critical lens. Was anything of value—that is, any viable, "doable," or innovative solutions—actually gleaned from this study, or are the findings and ensuing recommendations dated, impractical, and unrealistic? The answer to this and other questions will be revealed as the study unfolds.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The literature reviewed in this chapter embodies the range of theoretical frameworks that have been developed to explain the dire academic plight of today's African American males. Though many views voiced herein are those of White academicians, the majority are those of African American scholars who, despite their forceful and repeated warnings, contemplations, and sentiments about this pressing issue, have heretofore been silenced or called upon least to address it. This study heavily engages these scholars' perspectives because many of them have experienced adverse classroom and/or schooling situations similar to those plaguing many African American male students. These scholars, however, were able to succeed in the traditional system of knowledge acquisition in which these youth are now failing. Many of these scholars offer nontraditional, innovative, and progressive solutions aimed at realizing positive and productive schooling experiences for African American males. Additionally, the experiences and reflections of the participants in this study, who are themselves stakeholders in the struggle to ease the Black male educational crisis, offer an arena for examining and evaluating their challenging proposals for educational reform.
Historical Overview

Gill (1991) believes that many of the social and economic ills afflicting African Americans are externally induced. The growth and survival of African Americans, therefore, will be determined by a combination of external (social trends and policies) and internal (family and community support) factors. The ability to foster and to redirect these elements will depend upon the vitality of individual and collective educational systems. Historically, these factors have not come together to work successfully over time. A review of historical writings, however, does show that during some eras of African Americans’ habitation in the Western world, external and internal factors have successfully merged to effect some changes and bring about some state of betterment.

The beginnings of African American existence in the Western hemisphere began in 1619, when "a Dutch vessel landed in Jamestown, and the captain sold twenty Blacks to Virginia settlers" (Pinkney, 1987, p. 2). For more than two hundred years, this importation of Negroes continued. As a rule, slaves were not allowed to acquire literacy skills. During slavery, it was virtually impossible for Blacks to acquire even the most fundamental tools of reading and writing. The 1911 report of the sixteenth annual Atlanta Negro Conference, entitled "The Negro Common School," noted that "as a rule the imported slaves were kept in ignorance of the unwritten law of the land that Negros should receive no instruction" (Gordon, 1992, p. 14). Laws to enforce this condition were established throughout the states in which slaveholding was a legal activity. What these laws encompassed is evidenced by the following:
[South Carolina, in 1740 declared:] Whereas, the having of slaves taught to write or suffering them to be employed in writing may be attended with inconveniences, be it enacted. That all and every person and persons in whatsoever, who shall hereafter teach or cause any slave or slaves to be taught, or shall use or employ any slave as a scribe in any manner of writing whatever, hereafter taught to write, every such offense forfeit the sum of one hundred pounds current money. (Gordon, 1992, p. 15)

[Virginia, in 1819, forbade:] All meetings or assemblages of slaves or free Negroes or mulattos, mixing or associating with such slaves...at any school or schools for teaching them reading or writing, either in the day or night. Nevertheless, free Negroes kept schools for themselves until the Nat Turner insurrection, when it was enacted, 1931, that "all meetings of Negroes or mulattos at any school house, church meeting house or other place for teaching them reading and writing, either in the day or night, under whatsoever pretext shall be deemed and considered an unlawful assembly." (Gordon, 1992, p. 15)

Louisiana, Georgia, and other slaves states had similar laws that were likewise carefully endorsed. Yet, even in the midst of these laws and aversive learning conditions, some Blacks were in positions to strive for and obtain an education and even excel academically.
Gordon (1992) notes that the first known school for Blacks was established by Elias Neau in New York City in 1704. In 1774, the free Blacks of Charleston established a school, with a Black teacher, that was intended for the sons and daughters of freed men and women only; yet, some slaves managed to send their children there. The African Americans of Boston began a school for themselves in 1798. From these beginnings, private schools multiplied rapidly during the early nineteenth century for free Blacks and for fugitive slaves in the District of Columbia and the border states, and to a more limited extent among the free Blacks of the South. By the beginning of the Civil War, there were perhaps twenty schools for free Blacks in Washington, D.C., and about as many in New Orleans. In the country districts, on the other hand, where more than nine-tenths of African Americans lived, there were no schools for either free or enslaved Blacks.

During the 1860s, external and internal forces began to merge successfully to bring about an improved academic portrait for the African American. Pinkney (1987) notes that by 1870, the Black illiteracy rate had dropped to 80 percent. In each decade following the Civil War, he attests, the illiteracy rate among Blacks declined, while the differential between Blacks and Whites persisted (see Table 1).

When one assesses current conditions against the historical portrait, one sees that the existing illiteracy disparities between non-White and White population continues to reflect Pinkney's (1987) findings, even into the 1990s. These disparities were noted in an open letter to the American people from the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983). In its report, the Commission noted that our nation was "at risk": "Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological
TABLE 1
Percent of Illiterates in the United States, by Color, 1870–1980*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>NONWHITE</th>
<th>WHITE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>79.9</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>70.0</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>56.8</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940**</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Illiterates are defined as persons unable to both read and write in any language.

** Estimated

Note: Data for 1870 to 1940 are for population 10 years of age and over; data for 1947–1969 are for population 14 years of age and over.


Innovation is being overtaken by the competitors throughout the world" (p. 5). The report further identified illiteracy as a major condition confronting the United States as a whole, but claimed that specific populations, especially minorities, were severely suffering from this malady. According to the Commission, in 1983:

- Some 23 million American adults were functionally illiterate by the simplest test of everyday reading, writing, and comprehension.
• About 13 percent of all U.S. 17-year-olds could be considered functionally illiterate, with functional illiteracy among minority youth running as high as 40 percent.

• Many 17-year-olds did not possess the higher order intellectual skills expected of them. Nearly 40 percent could not draw inferences from written materials, while only one-fifth could write a persuasive essay, and only one-third could solve a mathematics problem requiring several steps.

A closer scrutiny of these educational dimensions was delineated by Kozol (1985), who explains that risk of illiteracy among the poor and Black in America is disproportionately higher. However, according to Kozol:

The largest number of illiterate adults are White, native-born Americans. In proportion to populations...the figures are higher for Blacks and Hispanics than for Whites. Sixteen percent of White adults, 44 percent of Blacks, and 56 percent of Hispanic citizens are functionally or marginally illiterate. Figures for the younger generation of Blacks are increasing. Forty-seven percent of all Black seventeen year olds are functionally illiterate. That figure is expected to climbed to 50 percent by 1990. (p. 4)

Kozol’s predictions ring appallingly true in the present day. Current national statistics show the nation’s state of learning has not improved and, if anything, it is still declining. Conditions within school systems across America reflect a decline in test scores, a greater need for remedial education beyond the usual twelve years of school, and
a continual increase in illiteracy among Blacks and the poor. Though reports are dismal for these groups, a closer appraisal shows that within these groups there exists a segment of individuals whose state is more alarming, more tragic and disproportionately higher than the body-at-large: Black male youths. As Whitaker (1991) notes:

To say that Black males are performing poorly in school is a gross understatement of the current crisis. Recent studies of school districts in Milwaukee, New Orleans, Dade County Florida, among others, highlight the critical nature of the predicament. In all cities Black males are shown to have dramatically higher suspension, expulsion, retention and dropout rates, and dramatically lower grade-point averages (p. 17).

Why do such disparities exist? Why do Black male youths in particular run the gauntlet of illiteracy more disproportionately? The media attention currently being paid the Black male crisis in the classroom has propelled many African American educators to the center stage of this debate and placed them in the challenging position of becoming overnight experts. Those who have met this challenge in their research and practice have offered several solutions deserving of consideration, many of which are described herein. The perspectives of the majority of African American scholars who have addressed the Black male crisis in the classroom can be grouped under four major theoretical constructs:

1. those who attribute the problem to ecological conditions in the Black child's home environment, primarily the preponderance of single-parent, female-headed households and poverty in which more than half the nation's African American
males are reared;

(2) those who view the problem to be the result of poor self-concept and self-esteem among African American males;

(3) those who believe the problem is one of lack of racial pride among African American males; and

(4) those who view negative teacher attitudes toward and expectations of African American males as the root of the problem.

Ecological Factors Influencing Black Male Academic Achievement

The literature contains a number of sources that illustrate how expectations of the processes of adjustment and accommodation between Black families, their children, and the children's teachers and schools are typically unidirectional. The children and families are expected to be educable, that is, to change their behaviors and lifestyles to fit the routines associated with traditional schooling (Slaughter & Epps, 1987). However, Slaughter and Epps have asserted that, to instruct effectively, "schools must make constructive accommodations to lower-income Black children's familial environments, while simultaneously preserving academic standards" (p. 2), a point that is widely corroborated by other African American scholars (Clark et al., 1988; Edelman, 1987; Hale-Benson, 1986; Kunjufu, 1989; Lacayo, 1989; Leary, 1983; Nichols, 1991).

In the executive report issued by the African American Males Task Force of the Milwaukee Public Schools, Holt (1990) advances that the family, as a support system, is vital in resolving the African American male learner's academic crisis. However, while
the task force asserts that African American parents "should be taught how to support actively their male children's interests in obtaining further education," it acknowledges that many African American families simply "do not have the resources or the experience...needed to navigate their children successfully through the present educational system" (p. 28). This claim is countered by Kunjufu (1989), who points out that, for quite some time, a significant number of African American males have been raised in families whose incomes were below poverty levels and that were headed by single females. He also notes that Black males have long been associated with neighborhood groups that would be characterized as gangs. Yet, these families and neighborhoods reared productive citizens—attorneys, educators, physicians, and so on—and encouraged them "to seek an education in order to improve their conditions" (p. 14). Kunjufu (1989) in particular, is leary of this type of research because, as he states:

I have been involved in debates with too many of my White female/male colleagues who as educators believe in the ecological theories of income, one-parent homes, gangs, and who say, "the literature stresses this...," "the literature says that...," and "it is not our fault because the documents have proven a child's achievements are determined by income and parent encouragement." I'm not naive. I'm not trying to sell poverty. I'm not trying to ignore how significant income or having two parents in the home is. But I also like research that shows schools with low-income students and single-female parents can produce high-achieving students. (pp. 9–10)
Gilbert and Gay (1985) echo Kunjufu's sentiments and argue for an end to educators' use of ecological issues as excuses for Black students' academic plight:

In striving to help Black children become academically successful we must stop using a student's home environment or social status as an excuse for poor achievement...[and seek instead to] understand the real importance of the school system, the classroom environment and our own teaching activities...[and] get on with the business of creating classroom environments and school learning climates that promote high achievement. (p. 2)

Environmental circumstances, Gilbert and Gay and others claim, are not the sole reasons for Black males' educational problems. If this were so, Black females, who face and are affected by the same environmental stimuli, would be suffering a similar crisis. However, they fare on the whole far better than their Black male counterparts.

Gill (1991) proposes seven strategies to alleviate the Black male's crisis in the classroom:

(1) All African Americans must focus on developing in Black male youth a sense of positive self-worth, self-image, and self-concept that is based on a firm and accurate knowledge of the culture and heritage of people of African descent.

(2) African American parents must not be indifferent to education and must look upon themselves as their children's primary teachers.

(3) African American parents must be conscientious of their role as models.

(4) All African American adults should become involved with at least one community
or civil rights organization.

(5) African American churches must "bring religion out of the sky, and show how good behavior can be used for growth and survival" in school and out (p. 13).

(6) African American parents and community organizations must come together to press school boards to implement the use of ethnically relevant curricula and learning styles.

(7) White Americans must be encouraged to set good examples in race relations for other White Americans.

Black Male Self-Concept and Academic Achievement

Mark and Paul, two ten-year-old African American males, aimlessly walked through their neighborhood throwing stones at buildings outlined with graffiti as they talked. Mark suddenly inquired of Paul, "Man, what makes you feel good?" Paul studied his words for a brief second and replied, "Me makes me feel good."

"Hm-hm," said Mark, "Well man, what about you? What makes you feel good?" Mark replied, "Being looked up to and respected by others as the toughest gang leader." Paul's response: "Man that's sad." (Author's journal entry)

Hale-Benson (1986), Nichols (1991), and Gordon (1992) are but a few educators who advance that self-concept is an essential factor in Black children's academic success. They are quick to point out that much research is still needed in this area, however. They have also noted that conflicting evidence exists regarding the self-concept of minority children, especially Black children. Some studies indicate that Black children tend to have poor self-concepts compared to those of White children; others suggest they have relatively more positive self-concepts (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 1987). Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman point out that much of the evidence supporting the former conclusion emanated from studies conducted from the mid-1930s to the early 1960s such as Clark and Clark's (1952) famous doll study. In that study, Black children aged three to seven years were shown a pair of dolls, one Black and one White, and asked a series of questions "designed to gain insight into their social awareness, especially as it related to self-concept" (p. 93). The children's responses seemed to indicate that they preferred White dolls, a finding Clark and Clark suggested meant that Black children held negative self-concepts regarding their race. Other studies employing more refined methodologies have drawn similar conclusions (McAdoo, 1977; Morland, 1966).

Research indicating that Black children have high self-concepts has been offered by Bachman (1970), Baughman (1971), Taylor (1976), Kunjufu (1989), and Hale-Benson (1986). Additional studies report that the self-concept and self-esteem of Black children seem to be increasing (Fish & Larr, 1972; McAdoo, 1977). Many African American educators, however, quickly point out that much research is still needed in this area. These educators voice reflections such as those noted by Gill (1991), who claims, "Much
of the research on self-concepts of nonwhite ethnic children is contradictory and inconclusive. There is desperate need for more research before definitive statements can be made about the self-concept of special learning audiences" (p. 2).

Why then does such a discrepancy exist within the literature regarding Black children’s self-concept and self-esteem? African American educators such as Kunjufu (1989), Asante (1991), Gill (1990), Ogbu (1988), Gordon (1994), Peavy (1990), and Wise and Miller (1983) offer several explanations for this. They contend that many of the contradictions are due to methodological shortcomings that lead to faulty conclusions. Many have questioned whether the scope of variables and all the complexity that go into shaping a person’s self-concept be measured adequately by the simplistic techniques utilized in studies of African American and other minority children. Kunjufu, for example, argues that the Clark and Clark doll study failed to consider that American children of all races are conditioned from an early age to prefer lighter colors over darker ones. He and other scholars further suggest that White researchers, teachers, and school administrators working with minority students—Black male youth in particular—have failed to address the impact of racial prejudice on the development of self-concept among African American students their own ethnocentricity with regard to self-concept. This has prevented them from realizing that children from diverse cultural backgrounds manifest their self-confidence and self-concepts in different ways.

Additionally, Lee and Lindsay (1985) claim that the "success formula" in U.S. schools "revolves around the acceptance of White middle class culture, generally at the expenses of divergent cultures" (p. 228). With minor variations, they note, non-White
students must adopt the attitudes, behaviors, values and realities of the White middle class in order to achieve academic success. Thus, with regard to self-concept development for African American students, they suggest the following:

...a primary function of school counselors working with Black children should be promoting a positive sense of self as Black persons...for it is only when children accept themselves and their realities with a sense of pride that tangible educational gains are possible. (p. 229)

The African American Males Task Force of the Milwaukee Public Schools submitted among many recommendations a component for the development of a strong self-concept among African American male learners:

The focus of any program for African American male achievement must be to stress emphatically developing a proud sense of self-concept and a positive self-esteem resulting in high expectations, aspirations, and responsibilities. This will require: a positive environment of high expectations, appropriate level of demands, structured multiple opportunities for success, positive reinforcements, and multiple, tangible, and intangible rewards. (Holt et. al, 1990, p. 27)

To develop this sense of self-worth, the task force advocates the "creation of structured opportunities for success in leadership roles, both academic and extracurricular" (p. 27).
A mother looked at her son and said: "Son, what did you learn in school today?"

The son simply responded, "Nothing." The mother then said, "Son, I ask you this question every day, and every day you say the same thing: 'Nothing.'" The son then looked at his mother with tears in his eyes and said, "That's because I don't understand what's going on." (Author's journal entry)

Conversations like the one above frequently take place between African American mothers and their sons all across the United States. Are Black boys exceptionally dumb, stupid, mentally retarded and/or ill as statistical pronouncements would lead us to believe? Or are we as educators or administrators exceptionally dumb, stupid, mentally retarded and/or ill because we do not know how to effectively meet the learning needs of Black male students? African American scholars such as Hilliard (1989), Gordon (1985), Nichols (1991), Smith (1986), Cummins (1986) are among those who would propose that the flaw lies not within the character make-up or cognitive, emotional, and psychological domains of Black males. Instead, they argue, the deficits are inherent in the teaching system itself. The way educators talk, teach, give tests, and evaluate—none harmoniously align with the talking, deciphering, thinking, and behavioral skills of the majority of Black male students.

In examining the role that learning style and curriculum theory play in the phenomenon under study, several issues should be explored:

(1) Do Black children, males in particular, learn differently than their White
female/male counterparts?

(2) Is matching teaching styles to African American students' cultural learning styles a answer to their low achievement, an excuse not to teach all students in effective ways, or both?

(3) Is it legitimate to evaluate the ways in which teachers disseminate knowledge—whether it be via their use of traditional, interpretative, or emancipatory classroom pedagogical techniques—when examining the Black male's academic crisis?

Is matching teaching styles to African American student's cultural learning styles the answer to their low achievement, an excuse not to reach all students in effective ways, or both? Hilliard (1989), for one, remains "unconvinced that the explanation of the low performance of minority group students will be found in student's learning styles" (p. 67). He contends instead that "no matter what their cultural learning style, [African American children] are failing primarily because of systematic inequalities in the delivery of whatever pedagogical approach the teachers claim to master, not because students cannot learn from teachers whose styles do not match their own" (p. 68). If stylistic differences are interpreted as evidence of capacity rather than as an expression of preference, he claims, a long chain of abuses is set in motion. A strong focus on cultural learning and behavioral styles can create and perpetuate the following four misunderstandings of among educators: (1) mistakes in estimating a student's or a cultural group's intellectual potential, errors that can lead to mislabeling, misplacement, and inappropriate teaching
approaches; (2) misreading of students' academic achievement; (3) misjudgments about students' language abilities; and (4) difficulty in establishing rapport and communication with students.

All African American educators do not agree with or support Hilliard's views regarding cultural learning styles. Smith (1986), Kunjufu (1989), and Nichols (1991), for example, while they would not argue with Hilliard's overarching concern that too much emphasis on cultural learning style can shade the basic problem of systematic inequalities in schools, strongly promote the importance of cultural learning styles to teaching and learning.

Do Black male children learn differently than their White female/male counterparts? Smith (1985) contends that they do. Whereas public schools are historically and operationally left-hemisphere, or left-brain oriented, institutions, Black students, regardless of social class or economic status, are predominantly right-hemisphere, survival-oriented learners. However, right-hemisphere functions are not valued in school; thus, many Black children have little opportunity to succeed. Blakeslee (1984) notes the following: "Educational theory has developed through endless discussions, introspections, and observations in words. It is not surprising, then that the nonverbal side of knowledge has been almost totally ignored" (p. 54). He continues:

There is a decadence in the field of higher education that is the natural result of ignorance of the "unconscious" side of the brain. A sort of academic dream world has been created in which purely left-brain thinkers admire each others' scholarliness. Many students who earn their Ph.D’s become so habitually
"left-brained" that they are unable to do anything but become scholars themselves. The system thus feeds itself and becomes more and more scholarly and less and less intuitive. The left-brain take-over of higher education would be less harmful if it did not totally dominate the field of elementary education...most policy makers of primary and secondary education have doctor's degrees. The result is a selection process that eliminates intuitive thinkers from high positions in education. People who started out with a good intuitive feel for education often have it "educated out" of them in the process of getting their doctorates. (p. 55)

Kunjufu (1985b) examined the scores of 20 Black male students on a standardized reading test at the beginning of the third grade and five academic years later at the end of the seventh grade (see Table 2). Reporting on these scores, Kunjufu noted the following:

Fourteen [scores] decreased, four improved, and two remained constant. The median beginning percentile was 52, the ending was 29. The median change in reading was 3.1 years. Only one child was able to improve his reading by five years or more during the sample period. There were two children who started at 98 and 92, and dropped to 35 and 24 respectively. We had two geniuses, only to lose them five years later. The boy who started at 63 and dropped to 4 could have stayed at home and watched Sesame Street. (p. 10)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beginning 3rd Grade (Percentile)</th>
<th>Ending 7th Grade (Percentile)</th>
<th>Reading Progress (years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>98</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>4.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Kunjufu (1985b)

Nichols (1991) contends that African Americans view the world from a distinctly different epistemological framework than Whites. African Americans, subsequently African American schoolchildren, first see the whole; then, if necessary, they attend to the parts. Teachers, however, generally teach using the European model which focuses
on the parts rather than the whole. Making the transition from one epistemological framework to another in order to accommodate and negotiate the U.S. schooling process is thus a difficult one for Black students. Nichols contends that making this transition is easier for Black female students than for Black male students, the latter of whom become frustrated with the parts-to-whole orientation and subsequently, usually by about the fourth grade, become restless and discontented with school and act out in the classroom.

How do paradigmatic stances affect the way students learn? How do curriculum theory and methods of teaching affect the African American male student? African American educators such as Edmonds (1979a, 1979b), Morgan (1980), Patton (1990), Gordon (1985), Cummins (1986), Hale-Benson (1986), Gill (1991), and Banks and McGee-Banks (1989) are among many who advocate that the traditional-technical worldview of teaching be supplanted with an emancipatory, critical worldview. According to Gill, emancipatory pedagogy addresses the dynamics of the classroom as well as those outside factors affecting the teacher–student dyad. He further suggests that choosing such an approach is emancipatory not only for teachers and students but also for school administrators and parents. The teachers' role would thus extend beyond the classroom. They would enter into dialogue with administrators about their visions, expectations, and aspirations for themselves and their practice as well as for their students. They would enter the lives of their students and parents and bridge the gap between the classroom and the home front. Gordon (1985) describes how such a pedagogy might be implemented:
Emancipatory pedagogy requires the reconceptualization of knowledge into new forms of ideology, paradigms, and assumptions that can help illuminate and clarify African American reality. Emancipatory pedagogy also requires counter-indoctrination against the blind acceptance of the dominant culture’s concepts and paradigms. Emancipatory pedagogy is the freeing of one’s mind to explore the essence and influence of the African American race throughout the world, and the ability to pass on that information to the next generation as a foundation upon which to build....In teacher education courses, this type of critical awareness can also be taught. For example, in teaching social studies, student teachers (and the children they teach) can be taught to critically examine the descriptive language and the knowledge in elementary school history books that is presented as objective fact and unbiased. (p. 17)

Inherent in the emancipatory view of classroom teaching is the reflective action of praxis, or doing. According to Gordon:

...returning to the African American categories of self-help, economic autonomy, political power, nationalism, and service, I postulate that citizenship education for African American children, in fact for all children, must shift away from models based on rationalizations of colonialism, and emphasize instead the emancipation of the mind and spirit....[I]nstead of teaching children with negative imagery, we must allow students to speak with their own authentic voices...and then engage them in formal classroom work which uses their own culture capital as a bridge
between their own lifeworld and classroom experience. (p. 18)

**Teachers' Attitudes and Expectations**

When teachers walk into a classroom, what do they see? Do they see a Ralph Bunche, Martin Luther King, Colin Powell, Jesse Jackson, Douglas Wilder, or David Dinkins, or do they see a drug addict? What you see is what you will produce. Teachers should have high expectations for African American males because they, like others, can excel. (Willie Washington, vice president for academic affairs, Central State University, quoted in The Office of Black Affairs, 1990, p. 5)

Are behavioral traits the only factors that affect teacher expectations? For some years research has been accumulating which shows that teacher expectations about students are often shaped by seemingly irrelevant pupil characteristics. For example, children's physical attractiveness, the kinds of homes they come from (that is, whether both parents are present in the home), even the kinds of names they bear, have been shown to influence teachers' presumptions about their students (Haller, 1985). Banks and McGee-Banks (1989) note that teacher training and textbooks have tended to attribute educational failures to student "deficiencies" such as social class background, ethnicity, language, or behavior. Persell (1977) found that teachers held lower expectations for lower-class children than for middle-class children, even when those children had similar IQ scores and achievement. Rist (1970) notes: "As early as the eighth day of
kindergarten—a long time before we play additional games like advanced placement, honors, basic, gifted and talented, and so on—teachers make permanent decisions about who is going to be in the highest, middle, and lowest groups of students" (p. 410). Continuing, Rist claims that teachers "rely on the parental registration form, the social worker's interview, and how the child dresses. Children that do not dress neatly, do not sit among those in the highest group, do not smell well, speak Black English, do not have a father living in their home, and are not verbal with authority figures, are not placed with the highest group" (p. 411). Moreover, "Teachers chose children for the highest group who looked like their children: they dressed neatly, were well-groomed, smelled nice, spoke standard English, were verbal with adults, had fathers living in their home, and were from middle-income families" (p. 412).

On the whole, Black females are seen in a more positive vein then their Black male counterparts. The results of Ross and Jackson's (1991) study indicate that even when Black female and male students have equivalent qualities, teachers consistently hold more negative expectations for Black males than Black females and give them lower ratings. Teachers had the lowest expectations for nonsubmissive, independent Black males and preferred them least.

If one subscribes to the theoretical premise that teachers' attitudes and expectations are affected by what they see, hear and smell, that they are affected by their affinity to sameness versus their acceptance of differences, and by social class, then one could quickly see why Black male students face a crisis in the classroom. The Black boy, more so than the Black girl, has a harder time meeting the mainstream standards of appearance.
Unlike the Black girl, who can straighten or perm her hair and use hair ornaments to enhance its beauty, Black boys generally do not take such drastic measures to alter their African features. The Black boy is usually more impulsive, restless, and/or active than his female counterpart. Unlike the Black girl, who is usually perceived as weak, harmless, and nonthreatening, the Black boy is seen as tough and aggressive.

Kunjufu (1989) contends that White teacher expectations for the male child of color are consistently lower than those for children of other races or genders. The Black boy who is immediately accepted and praised, he notes, is usually far brighter than both his Black or White counterparts. Kunjufu further contends that many middle-class socioeconomic teachers honestly do not believe that their expectations for Black male youth are lower. In his view, they are simply not aware of their behaviors or of the methods they use toward the child of color, nor are they aware that "within them lies an affinity toward sameness and an aversion toward difference" (p. 8). Thus, as Gill (1991) advises:

...in attempting to create bias-free classrooms, courses will have to be designed in order to develop teachers' awareness and skills in meeting students' needs in the areas of human understanding, acceptance and value. Teachers and future teachers will need to examine their existing attitudes toward minority groups, such as race, ethnicity, age, religion and sex. (p. 17)

Gay (1990) alleges that educators base their school behaviors on their performance expectations of different students. These expectations cause wide disparities in how
educators interact with White and minority students in the day-to-day operations of schools and thereby perpetuate educational inequalities among them. As she maintains:

...teachers who do not have high academic expectations for ethnic minority students ask them low-level memory, recall, and convergent questions, do not praise or encourage them as often as Anglos, use lower standards for judging the quality of their work, and do not call on them as frequently. (p. 73)

Moreover, she contends, "minority students for whom educators have low expectations are suspected of dishonesty and cheating when they defy these expectations by performing well" (p. 74). These attitudes and experiences carry over into educational enhancement programming efforts, whereas special-purpose instruction for minority students tends to focus on remediation, while for White students it focuses on enrichment.

Noting that the U.S. teacher corps includes "teachers who are racist...who are sexist...[and] who do not bond with students of different economic or social strata" (p. 3), Kunjufu (1989) proffers his TESA (Teacher Expectations Student Achievement) program. This program is a research model looking at three major areas: response opportunities, feedback and reinforcement, and personal regards. The underlying premise of this program is that a direct and positive relationship exists between academic achievement and teacher expectations. It combines in-service training with innovative instructional materials designed to address teacher bias, heighten teacher classroom sensitivity and self-awareness, and help teachers develop an appreciation for differences within each child's learning domain.
Holliday (1985) conducted a study involving 44 Black schoolchildren aged 9 and 10 from low-to-moderate socioeconomic backgrounds. Behavioral and academic ratings on these students were obtained from their teachers and school records. The children were interviewed about their perceptions of school and administered the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (Form A), the California Achievement tests, and a children’s locus of control scale. Findings from the study pointed to the critical moderating effect of teacher attitudes on Black children’s achievement. Based on the findings, Holliday maintained the following:

(1) Teacher attitudes transform some Black children’s achievement efforts into learned helplessness effects.

(2) Teachers rated the children’s interpersonal skills with high frequency and effectiveness; however, the majority did not establish the kind of positive interpersonal relationship that has been found to be associated with high student achievement.

(3) Children’s performance was affected by the overall institutional demands, which focused on competitive interplay.

Other educators who have explored this area, including Ross and Jackson (1991), Haller (1985), Kunjufu (1989), Porter and Washington (1989), Welsing (1978), Brophy and Good (1974), Banks and McGee-Banks (1989), Hale-Benson (1986), Asante (1989), Ascher (1991), and Wright (1960) have provided additional evidence supporting the importance of teachers’ attitudes toward their students.
Afrocentrism in Schooling

Kunjufu’s (1989) assertion—"You cannot teach a child you do not love; you cannot teach a child you do not respect; you cannot teach a child you do not understand" (p. 30)—is echoed by those in the African American community who contend that the American educational system has played a detrimental role in the socialization of Black youth (Madhubuti, 1990; Perkins, 1989). Many of these African American scholars are advocates for Afrocentric schools which, with their emphasis on positive teachers’ attitudes, they believe can provide the nurturing needed by African American children, particularly males (James-Myers, 1988; Oliver, 1989; Poussaint, 1983). Other Afrocentric educators, including Karenga (1988), Asante (1989), Nobles (1989), and Gordon (1992, 1994), promote the essentialness of integrating the Afrocentric concept into everyday schooling for African Americans.

Afrocentricity has been defined as a concept capable of "advancing the social, historical, cultural and spiritual development of people of African descent" (Perkins, 1989, p. 2). According to Perkins, it is also "a way of teaching youth how to look at themselves differently from the way other people may see them. Indeed Afrocentricity helps a people to better understand and appreciate themselves and show them ways of improvement" (p. 2).

Gill (1991), Kunjufu (1989), and others are among those of the African American community who advocate for Afrocentric schooling, which they believe will ultimately provide positive school climates for children of color, particularly the Black male child. Other scholars such as Oliver (1989), Poussaint (1983), and James-Myers (1990) also
promote Afrocentric curricula and programs because they believe that the tenets grounding the philosophical base of Afrocentric education enhance teachers' attitudes toward and expectations of African American students, thereby resulting in the nurturance these students need. Welsh (1989) avers that Afrocentricity "will aid the African American people on the path to centeredness and challenge the next generation to further scholarship and spirituality" (quoted in Asante, 1989, p. ix). To promote scholarship and spirituality among African American youth, educators such as Karenga (1989), Asante (1990), Nobles (1989), Gilyard, King–McCreary, Warfield–Coppock, and Moore (1989), and others promote the essentialness of integrating the Afrocentric concept into everyday schooling for African Americans.

In Perkins's (1989) view, Afrocentric education is a concept that advances "the social, historical, cultural and spiritual development of people of African descent. It is a way of teaching youth how to look at themselves differently from the way other people may see them. Indeed, Afrocentricity helps a people to better understand and appreciate themselves and show them ways of improvement" (p. 2). Perkins has developed a self-inventory and discovery workbook for African American youth ages twelve to fifteen years. Addressing his comments to young African American readers of his guide, he notes that the workbook was designed to do two things:

In developing this workbook I wanted to help you, the African American youth, make an inventory of yourself as it relates to certain principles that are considered to be desirable for African American youth. And secondly, I wanted you to discover new things that should help you to better appreciate your beautiful
Many African American educators concur that Perkins's aims can be manifested through everyday teachings in the classroom and can be promoted successfully by classroom teachers whose attitudes, beliefs, and values align with those inherent to the Afrocentric concept (Gill, 1991; Kunjufu, 1989). Developmental activities that underpin the Afrocentric schooling concept focus on manhood and womanhood training, spiritual and cultural enrichment, financial management, sex education, racial awareness, physical fitness, health maintenance, and educational reinforcement. The latter developmental activity is especially emphasized by many African American educators. Many proponents of Afrocentric schools believe the nation's public schools currently do not teach African American youth to have a thorough enough understanding and appreciation of their racial/ethnic heritage and culture. Due to this lack of supportive classroom teaching, some have advocated reinforcement of educational endeavors outside the classroom sponsored by Black community organizations (i.e., community settlement houses, churches, civic committees, familial kinshipping groups, and rites of passage programs). This augmentation is needed, they claim, not only because of the presence of culturally irrelevant or nonsupportive curriculum or teaching methods, but because of the negative attitudes and expectations of African American students, especially males, held by many teachers in U.S. schools.

In Milwaukee, the African American Males Task Force was established to look into the idea of implementing Afrocentric schooling in that city's public schools. One
The major component the task force addressed was improving the attitudes and expectations of those teaching minority students. In their research, task force members found that teachers' attitudes and expectations played a significant role in the behaviors manifested by Black male youth. They reported that a focus on this aspect is essential for schools restructuring efforts. Regarding the Black male academic crisis specifically, the task force advocated that this restructuring be completed through the development of Afrocentric schooling. Its structural variation recommendations were designed to introduce new initiatives aimed at enhancing the achievement of African American males and ultimately all children in the system. These recommendations included the following:

The establishment of "Gender Socialization Courses" required of all students and designed to help students establish their gender identity in a "safe" environment;

The establishment of African American male immersion academies at the elementary, middle and secondary levels which, WHILE OPEN TO ALL STUDENTS REGARDLESS OF RACE, GENDER, NATIONAL ORIGIN, ETC., will emphasize educating African American males with an Afro-centered Immersion Specialist Program. (p. 11, original emphasis)

These recommendations have been investigated by and/or used by cities in other states (i.e., Florida, Michigan, and Ohio) to pattern their Afrocentric schooling restructuring plans.
The specific recommendations offered by the task force to develop the Afrocentric concept on a long-range and a concentrated effort for broad system-wide revisions include:

- developing strong self-images/self-concepts among African American male students;
- developing alternative discipline programs;
- revising curriculum in all disciplines to include the true story of African Americans;
- enhancing family support for African American males;
- increasing parents and caregivers’ abilities to support their children’s education;
- increasing the involvement and support of both the African American and white communities in the education of African American males;
- providing adequate resources to implement this proposal; and
- establishing mechanisms to evaluate the implementation of the recommendations from Phase I and Phase II. (p. 11)

Focusing its attention on teachers’ attitudes and expectations of children from diverse backgrounds, the task force recommended a second phase to address training and staff development assistance:

- understanding that students learn differently and instructional modes must
vary to accommodate these differences;

• implementing strategies to increase the number of African American teachers, especially males; and

• encouraging more active involvement and collaboration between parents and school staff. (p. 12)

In facilitating and implementing the aforementioned staff development training, the task force stresses the following:

• All school staff should be required to participate in inservice courses focusing on African American history and culture and racism in America and its negative impact on all Americans;

• A school with 90% or more African American school population should be identified as a center for professional development for teachers. (p. 13)

Many African American scholars who advocate for Afrocentric schools believe the American educational system has played a major role in the socialization of Black youth (Madhubuti, 1978; Perkins, 1989). As Oliver (1989) maintains, "The American educational system has played a major role in perpetuating negative images of Blacks by portraying them as descendants of savages and people who have failed to make significant contributions to American or world civilizations" (p. 19). They claim that the overall impact of American education on African Americans has been more detrimental than beneficial (Hale-Benson, 1986; Kunjufu, 1985a, 1986; Woodson, 1933). In his classic work, The Mis-education of the Negro, Carter G. Woodson emphasizes:
The same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other peoples. The Negro thus educated is a hopeless liability of the race. (quoted in Oliver, 1989, p. 34)

In combating this type of institutional racism and academic slavery, members of the Milwaukee task force and others advocate for the reshaping of the minds of teachers who convey their own negative attitudes and bias expectations onto African American children, particularly Black male youth. As the task force report notes:

Radical problems require radical solutions. The African American community has determined that the needs of African American males are extenuating, and bold new initiatives are required to ameliorate this situation immediately. (p. iii)

One solution is the restructuring of schools to develop Afrocentric thought, which some believe will not only enhance the attitudes and thoughts of those receiving such lessons, but also the attitudes and thoughts of those who are disseminating them.

**Conclusion**

No one of the theoretical frameworks explored in this literature review stands alone as a causative factor of the Black male crisis in the classroom. However, they have
each been scrutinized as to their shaping of the problem as it has been iterated in the corpus of educational research. After discussing the methodology of the study in the next chapter, our attention will turn to the voices of those students, teachers, and parents who are themselves immersed in this phenomenon and whose experience of an Afrocentric effort to address the problem provide firsthand perceptions of this greatest educational travesty.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Historical and Philosophical Roots of Qualitative/Postpositivist Inquiry

The concept of qualitative methodology is grounded in the German idealist school of thought (Burrell & Morgan, 1979) and grew out of concerns over the use of quantitative methods in social science research. Researchers in the social sciences, in the fields of anthropology, education, sociology, community organization, criminal justice, social psychology, and industrial relations initiated this challenge to the quantitative mode of scientific inquiry.

The three approaches to scientific research—the positivist, interpretive, and critical modes of analysis—are derived from different epistemological bases. The positivist mode is guided by a quest for certainty and absolute truth and an insistence on objectivity. Thus, the positivistic researcher acts as a passive spectator, observing and documenting the facts. Proponents of the interpretive approach, on the other hand, argue that science "is concerned not so much with gaining access to some absolute truth as with eliminating the prejudices and dogma that distort everyday common sense thinking" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 121). This approach advances that in science there are no indisputable "givens," and that science is developed by critically assessing commonsense knowledge and assumptions. This assessment can be achieved by "showing how the theories implicit in
common sense thinking lead to undesirable or unintended results, or by showing how some alternative theory either has certain advantages over common sense understanding or offers a more adequate explanation of reality" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 121). As Popper (1972) argues, "In science our starting point is common sense and our greatest instrument for progress is criticism" (p. 20). The interpretive mode advances that scientific inquiry should not take place in a social vacuum, nor can it be seen by a neutral or objective "eye." Unlike the positivist mode of inquiry, the interpretive paradigm recognizes the intersubjective dimension inherent in scientific objectivity. That is, "objective reality is itself that which corresponds to the intersubjective agreement of a community of inquirers whose deliberations are conducted in accordance with shared standards of rationality" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 122). Objectivity, therefore, is achieved through a reciprocal process between researchers and respondents via a willingness to share, critique, and debate offered perceptions.

The critical mode of analysis takes the interpretivist cause of seeking intersubjective meaning a step further by advocating praxis-oriented actions. According to Carr and Kemmis (1986), critical research aims to move the "interpretive approach beyond its traditional concern with producing uncritical renderings of individuals' self-understandings, so that the causes of distorted self-understanding can be clarified, explained and eliminated" (p. 137). They further suggest that this focus on eradicating the hegemonic forces that dominate individuals' thought processes and yield self-distortions goes beyond the "tendency of interpretive research to rest content with illuminating, rather than overcoming, social problems and issues" (p. 137). Results
emanating from this mode of research are obtained via participatory research engagement between the researcher and several research respondents. This process holds hopes of generating collective change as opposed to individual transformation only. As Bredo and Feinberg (1982) assert:

If a positivistic approach to knowledge can be characterized as monological, and an interpretive approach as dialogical, then a critical approach can properly (albeit awkwardly) be characterized as trialogical. Put simply, in critical theory, the theory of knowledge and the theory of society merge. (p. 430)

As Glesne and Peshkin (1992) note, "increased sensitivity to issues of power and control have encouraged a rethinking of research design and implementation" in recent years (p. 10). These include approaches that hold a more radical humanist orientation such as the emancipatory/critical or postmodernist paradigms (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Freire, 1989; Shor, 1987). The philosophical beliefs underpinning the former hold the researcher and his or her subjects as engaging in a reciprocal relationship that enforces collaborative partnering. Moreover, such researchers regard research as "praxis" or "reflection plus action" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 11). According to Lather (1989), "The primary goal of the inquirer aligning to this worldview is to emancipate people from distorted personal and social ideologies through their own understandings and actions" (unnumbered pages). Additionally, Lather (1986a) divides critical research into three overlapping traditions: (1) feminist, (2) neomarxist/critical ethnographical, and (3) Freirian empowering.
According to Glesne and Peshkin (1992), whether a researcher opts to utilize a traditional or nontraditional method of qualitative inquiry, his or her selection is predicated on a need to select a methodology "that is most consonant with their socialized worldview" (p. 9). Because my particular interest lies in empowering young Black males, their teachers, and parents, I selected the methodology of Freirian empowering research. This selection was guided by the work of Carr and Kemmis (1986), Anderson (1989), Anyon (1982), Gordon (1985), Gordon (1992, 1994), Grundy (1987), Horkheimer (1972), Searle (1975), Sarup (1986), Ashton-Warner (1986), Kunjufu (1989), Ladson-Billings (1990), Patton (1981), and Shade (1990), who additionally focus on emancipatory classroom efforts and point out the challenges confronting the participatory researcher in the field of education.

**Pilot Study**

During the 1989–90 academic year, I engaged four close associates, each of whom were veteran elementary and middle school teachers in the Columbus (OH) Public School System, to serve as key informants in my ethnographic research examining the academic plight of young African American males. These teachers, who taught at the fourth-, fifth-, sixth-, and seventh-grade levels, respectively, allowed me to observe their classroom interactions with their Black male students and to approach selected Black male students to ascertain their views about their learning process. During the 1992–93 academic year, I relied on what Lincoln and Guba (1989) call the "snowball effect" to expand the pool of key informants, asking each of my four initial informants to identify another teacher
whom they believed would be receptive to my research focus and who taught the same
grade level as themselves. These four additional teachers allowed me to observe their
teaching and to select two Black male students from each of their classrooms for intensive
follow-up.

This pilot investigation was not used for data analysis purposes in the strictest
sense. Rather, the findings of this preliminary research gave credence to my perceptions
that a crisis did indeed exist in the classroom for too many Black male children. They
also augmented and confirmed my suspicions of the existence of philosophical and
procedural differences between quantitative and qualitative research engagement, as well
as helped to bolster my confidence in the data collection procedures I planned to use in
the study. Further, upon the advice of my teacher informants during the pilot study, I
opted to make a significant change in my research design, expanding my respondent circle
to include the parents of the student respondents. I also restructured several of my
interview questionnaire items, deleted some open-ended interview questions, added several
new questions, revised the teacher–student interview guides, and developed a parent
interview guide. These essential changes provided the information I needed a year later
to complete the human subjects review required by The Ohio State University.

The Study Site

The student participants in this study attended an all-African American public
elementary school serving grades one through five located in the Midwest. The school
was selected because its curriculum had recently been revamped to meet the cognitive,
psychological, and social needs of African American males, who constituted three-fourths of the student populous, through creative and nontraditional classroom methods. Parent–student–teacher engagement in the learning process and the presence of extracurricular activities focusing on the Black male learner’s needs are additional features of this school’s program, as is the fact that teachers self-select assignment to the school.

Sample and Sample Selection

The African American male student respondents in the present study were selected from heterogeneous classroom settings. For example, the third-grade class roster indicated an enrollment of 15 African American males and 9 African American girls. The fourth-grade class roster listed 17 African American males and 7 African American girls.

Both of the teachers recommended to me by the curriculum specialist at the study site allowed me to announce and explain my research intentions to their classes. I began by apologizing to the African American girls for their exclusion from the study (see Appendix B for Oral Apology). I then explained the nature and purpose of my research project, focusing my attention on the African American males (see Appendix C for Oral Solicitation). I asked each African American male student in each classroom to draw a number from a bowl. Certain of these numbers were randomly predesignated by the researcher as "winners." The following notation from my research journal illustrates this process:

In Ms. Young’s class, the lucky numbers were three and nine. She had ten Black male students in her class; therefore, I wrote numbers one to ten on small pieces
of paper. These pieces were folded, placed in the bowl, and shuffled. Each Black male student then pulled a number. Child A and Child B were the fourth-grade males who selected the papers with the numbers three and nine. They were selected to participate by answering the open-ended interview questions.

This same procedure was conducted in each classroom, ultimately yielding eight Black male student respondents, four third graders and four fourth graders, ranging in age from 7 to 11 years. I gave each of the selected students a permission letter, which I asked them to take home for their parents’ signatures. This letter requested parental permission for their sons to become involved in the study as well as parents’ written commitment to participate in the study along with their sons (see Appendix D for Parental Letter of Oral Solicitation). The students were asked to return the consent forms to their classroom teacher within three days.

Eleven out of 15 African American male students were present in the third-grade class on the day I distributed the permission letters. Nine of these 11 returned their completed forms. For the fourth graders, 15 out of 17 African American males were present and received the forms. All 15 returned them. The Black male students who were absent on the day of my oral presentation (four third graders and two fifth graders) were not approached to participate in the study. Upon receiving the returned, signed forms from the boys, I randomly selected four Black male students from each grade level for the study, from the population, who returned the signed consent forms. My random selection process proceeded by designating four numbers as winners and assigning four
numbers as alternate winning numbers. These eight numbers were placed in a bowl with other numbers. Since I only needed four students per classroom, four of the numbers served as winning numbers; the other four numbers served as alternate winning numbers. Then, if one or more of the research participants decided to drop out at a later date, I could use those participants holding the alternate winning numbers as "back-ups." I did this by assigning the alternate winning numbers fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth place runner-up positions. The remaining numbers placed in the bowl served merely as a numerical pool for the selection process. The alternative system was used only for one third grader, early on, due to the lack of parental support. The remaining seven African American male participants, which brought the total to eight African American males and their parents, participated willingly throughout the study.

Those parents who authorized their children's participation in the study did so with the understanding that they too would become involved in the study. The alternate number process served the same purpose for the parent respondents. All but one of the student respondents came from single-parent, female-headed households. The parent populous was comprised of two grandmothers and six natural mothers ranging in age from 24 to 63 years.

Two veteran African American third- and fourth-grade female teachers were selected as primary teacher respondents. Initially, I sought to select two veteran fourth- and fifth-grade teachers for these roles. However, when one of the fifth-grade teachers I had originally selected declined to participate after the study began and I realized that the only other fifth-grade teacher participating in the study had but limited experience,
I was advised by the school's curriculum specialist to select more experienced teachers at another level. Between them, the two primary teacher respondents selected had 28 years of teaching experience. Both were females. Additionally, 19 male and female teachers of both African American and White American ethnicity were selected as teacher respondents. I had not planned to have such an extensive pool of teacher respondents, but the comments of the study's two primary teacher respondents compelled me to seek out and include the voices of additional teachers on the issue under question. (See Appendix A for the Teacher's Oral Solicitation and Consent Form.)

Sample Bias

Several decisions may have biased my sampling population. The African American males and parents who eventually comprised the study sample were those who returned their consent forms the earliest. My decision not to actively pursue those student or parent respondents who did not return their forms within the allotted three-day period may have prevented the inclusion of additional meaningful data from the voices of those African American males and their parents for whom procrastination is a normal way of doing things. Additionally, when my primary teacher respondents or other teachers "steered" me away from contacting certain teachers, I took their suggestions at face value and neither challenged nor approach those teachers who were not recommended. These teachers could possibly have offered meaningful data as well.
Data Collection

The data collecting methods for the study consisted of open-ended interviews, focus group sessions, persistent observations, and grounded surveys, all within an ethnographic context of prolonged engagement. These inquiries served as conceptual guideposts that allowed each participant to reflect on his or her feelings and lived experiences. The individual interviews as well as the focus group sessions were held in a designated area at the school site and in home settings utilizing the general interview guide approach and the standardized, open-ended format described by Patton (1990). These strategies provided a semi-structured interviewing and focus group process.

I conducted structured and unstructured individual and group sessions with the student, teacher, and parent respondents, interacting with the school social worker, art therapist, and recreational teacher, sharing exchanges with the curriculum design specialist, and reflecting with the school principal. Additionally, observations of teachers’ and students’ classroom interactive patterns were conducted on a daily basis.

The 20-item student survey was administered to the eight African American male student respondents. Additionally, three structured focus-group sessions were held with the student participants over the course of the study. All sessions were taped. One of these sessions was held with the third graders, the other was held with the fourth graders, while the third was a joint session that allowed other African American learners outside the respondent circle to participate. This was done for several reasons: (1) to triangulate the statements of the eight student respondents; (2) to allow those students who were not included in the research process to be heard, and (3) to honor the request of the primary
teacher respondents, who both felt it would be beneficial to hear what a collective group beyond those immediately involved in the study had to say. The following questions guided these sessions:

(1) Do the students perceive education as a worthwhile or meaningless endeavor?
(2) What rewards do the students define as deriving from an education?
(3) Do the students see themselves as having the right to active participation in their learning process?
(4) Do the way the students perceive others’ image of them affect their learning?
(5) Do they feel the subject matter delivered to them is useful?
(6) Do they like the way the teacher teaches? If so, why; if not, why?

**Grounded Surveys.** Likert-type scales were employed in the items on the study’s teacher and student questionnaires to help standardize participant responses and streamline the data analysis phase of the study. As Patton (1990) suggests, this method allows researchers "to look at the respondents' answers in a systematic way, to locate their answer to the same question rather quickly and to organize questions and answers that are similar" (p. 285). The open-ended question approach was used during the parent interviews to create a reciprocal, empowering interviewing environment that allowed me to collect thick descriptions of their data story renderings and that encouraged the emergence of themes and in-depth reflections. I was guided by the perspectives of Glesne and Peshkin (1992) in this regard:
...the interviewing process particularly provides an occasion for reciprocity. By listening to participants carefully and seriously, you give them a sense of importance and specialness. By providing them the opportunity to reflect on and voice answers to your questions, you assist them to understand some aspects of themselves better. If your questions identify issues of importance to interviewees, then the interviewees will invariably both enjoy and find useful their roles as information providers. (p. 123)

A questionnaire consisting of 25 Likert-type items was designed to elicit teachers' views on the four a priori themes addressed in this study and solicit their personal opinions about the academic plight of Black males (see Appendix E). Several of the questions on this survey were constructed to aid the teacher participants in reflecting on some of their personal issues. These questions read as follows:

(2) I engage my Black male students in one-to-one dialogue when teaching.

(3) I have experienced fear when teaching Black males in my classroom.

(6) I believe teaching is an instrument of change.

(8) I believe in social promotion.

(18) I send Black male students who act out in my classroom immediately to the office.

(20) I feel I can relate to Black male students in my classroom.
A 20-item, Likert-type scale was administered in two different group settings (see Appendix F). The third graders answered the questions as a group, as did the fourth graders. A taped individual session was followed as to solicit their feelings concerning their responses. As with the teachers' instrument, development of their inquiries was based on the aforementioned four a priori themes (see Appendix F). Questions constructed to promote interpretation outside the a priori arenas were one, three, and four. They read as follows:

(1) My teacher pays attention to me.
(3) My parent(s) do not care if I like school
(4) School is fun.

Six open-ended questions comprised the parent interview survey (see Appendix H). These questions were designed to measure parental responses about how they perceived their male children's academic experiences and to evaluate parents' participation in the schooling process.

The 25-item teacher survey was administered to each of the 21 teacher participants (see Appendix E). Follow-up interviews were held with the teachers to discuss their responses to the survey items. Additionally, one focus group session was held with the two third- and fourth-grade teachers participating in the study. The following questions provided direction for this session:

(1) What expectations do you hold for the Black male learner?
(2) Do you perceive a difference in the learning style of the Black male learner as
opposed to Black or White females and White males? If so, have you changed your teaching methods to accommodate this difference?

(3) How do you see yourself in the educational life of the Black male learner? Do you view yourself as a teacher who operates from the traditionalist paradigm, or do you see yourself as a teacher who aligns with the emancipatory worldview of teaching?

(4) As a classroom teacher, what would you identify as precipitators of the Black male learner’s classroom crisis?

Observation, Interviews, and Prolonged Engagement. Prolonged engagement activities with the student respondents involved biweekly classroom observations, weekly structured individual and group sessions, and weekly “weekend activities.” Each classroom teacher granted me one hour each week for unstructured and/or structured group sessions with students. They also allowed me to conduct impromptu interview sessions with individual students as long as this did not interfere with instructional activities. I met with third graders on Tuesdays from 10:00 am to 11:00 am, and fourth graders on Thursdays from 10:00 am to 11:00 am, for unstructured and structured group sessions. Impromptu structured and unstructured individual sessions were held Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. During these latter sessions, I often asked the students to create reflective drawings depicting, for example, their current state of mind, the type of neighborhood they wanted to live in, or simply the image of their choice. These drawings provided material for discussion during later structured individual and group sessions.
Weekends were devoted to "fun" activities with the student respondents. Each group rotated their weekend days. For example, initially the third graders chose Saturdays for their activities, which left Sundays for the fourth graders. Eventually, I decreased these activities to one weekend day (Saturday), rotating the groups weekly. Plans for the weekend were discussed and voted on by the students during the weekly group session. For all but one weekend activity (Halloween trick-or-treating), students were grouped by grade level. These activities included visits to an art museum, a bumper-car arena, and video arcade. I also took the students to the movies, to the bowling alley, to church, and gave them a party at a local pizza parlor-entertainment center. Even though these were unstructured activities, I taped students’ conversations going to or from these events. Initially, I devoted eight hours per week to classroom observations. During the first month of my research, I divided this time between the two primary teacher respondents’ classrooms. As time progressed, however, I spent less time in their classrooms and more time observing the classrooms of the 19 other teacher participants.

Each of the parents living in the households of the student respondents was contacted by phone to establish a time for their initial interview. Those parents who did not have a phone were visited personally to arrange an interview. During these initial contacts, I made an oral solicitation to each parent explaining my research intentions (see Appendix G).

Structured interviews ranging in length from one-and-a-half to two hours were held with all eight parent participants. Unlike the teachers and students, who were
administered a Likert-type survey prior to their individual interviews, parent respondents were simply asked to respond to six open-ended inquiries during their interviews (see Appendix H). My rationale for this approach was based on a culturally informed belief that Black parents would favor the "spoken-word," face-to-face approach over the written-word, questionnaire approach. I also believed these questions to be thought-provoking and generic enough to generate not only a richer interpretative analysis of the issue at hand but also empowering actions. All of these interviews were taped, as were most unstructured, impromptu discussions with parents.

The structured focus group session planned for the parents never took place. Several times over the course of the study period, a date was decided on by the parents and a meeting place was secured, but, at the last minute, more than three-fourths of the parents could not attend. However, having met with each parent individually an average of two to three times and having secured at least six hours of each parent’s views on tape (including structured and unstructured activities), I had more than enough data to ascertain patterns across individuals and decided not to proceed with this session. Instead, I held two impromptu focus-group sessions, lasting from two to two-and-a-half hours, with parent participants and other parental figures not involved in the study.

One such session occurred during a visit I made to a student respondent’s grandmother. In the middle of our discussion, as we sat drinking coffee, a neighbor arrived and became interested in our conversation about the study. Mrs. S., the grandmother, suddenly suggested, "Fran, why don’t I invite Ms. B. [one of the study’s parent participants], Ms. C., and Mrs. T. over, and we can get their views?" She did and
they came. A similar scenario unfolded in another household while I was engaged in an unstructured interview with a parent respondent. As we were talking, I asked the respondent if we could invite other parents over to discuss our issues. She agreed, and called Ms. H., Ms. A. (a study participant), and Ms. O. This time, the group was comprised of four mothers, two of whom were participants in the study. These impromptu sessions, which I taped, provided me with the opportunity to interview four of the study’s eight parents in a group setting.

Prolonged engagement with the parents occurred throughout the months, primarily on weekends, and in unstructured ways. Frequently, when picking up student participants from their homes for our weekend activities, I was afforded the opportunity to sit and chat with parents while the boys were scurrying around and getting ready for the outing. Occasionally, parents would send word by their sons, with messages like, "I would like you to stop by my house, so I can discuss Stanley’s behavior," or "Fran, I want you to come by. I have to tell you what the principal, Ms. M. did to Timothy." Consequently, I carried a tape recorder with me at all times to record these impromptu conversations, and took notes on these exchanges in my methodological and reflective journals.

Data Analysis

Both deductive and inductive procedures were used to analyze the data obtained as a result of these investigations. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) contend, deductive data analysis is usually employed in conventional quantitative investigations, where data "are usually defined a priori by virtue of some theory that has been brought to bear; the data
are to be certain characteristics of variables, or of relationships between variables, that are specified in the theory" (pp. 202-203). Implementing deductive procedures for the present study, I developed and administered (to the study's teacher and student participants) structured, Likert-type questionnaires addressing the four a priori themes that emerged from the literature base as possible causes of the African American male's academic plight. According to Patton (1990), such instruments require a deductive approach "because items must be predetermined based on some theory or preordinate criteria" (p. 45). Though I used deductive instruments to ascertain the study's teacher and student participants' perspectives, my overriding intent was to carefully listen for and then extract the commonsense knowledge shared by the study's participants. The data obtained from these sources serve only as benchmarks for comparing the respondents' views to the extant theoretical frameworks. I relied far more heavily in this study on inductive data analysis procedures to make sense of the field data that emerged from my interactions with the study's participants.

The naturalistic inquirer usually does not go into the field with an a priori platform; instead, these themes are expected to emerge from the inquiry process itself. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) note, for qualitative researchers, "data accumulated in the field thus must be analyzed inductively (that is, from specific, raw units of information to subsuming categories of information) in order to define local working hypotheses or questions that can be followed up" (p. 203). To accomplish this, I engaged in several inductive processes including open-ended interviews; open-ended observations; inquirer–respondent, reciprocal, participatory activities; unobtrusive classroom positioning;
and minimal document analysis. Lincoln and Guba also note that the inductive analysis process contains two essential subprocesses, unitizing and categorizing, processes that I refer to as "sorting" and "tagging."

Unitizing, or sorting, is the process of wading through the data to select phrases, sentences, or short three- to four-sentence paragraphs for analysis. Descriptive in nature, these units (or sorts) contain information that is considered important for determining and/or supporting analysis for the research questions under study (Glaser & Strauss, 1971; Lincoln & Guba, 1967; Holsti, 1969; Patton, 1990). Categorizing, or tagging, is the process of taking the unitizing information and organizing it into broad categories—that is, of tagging it under general thematic bases. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), "categorizing is a process whereby previously unitized data are organized into categories that provide descriptive or inferential information about the context or setting from which the units were derived" (p. 203).

Transcripts emanating from the individual and focus group sessions were coded and categorized via computer, using "The Ethnograph Program," a software program constructed specifically to work with data emerging from naturalistic inquiry. This program enables researchers to more easily identify commonalities and differences running throughout narrative text. Nonetheless, the process of coding and recoding data was tedious. Because data were compiled from interviews, observations, and survey instruments, I used Patton's (1990) proposed strategies for analyzing interviews and observations. In analyzing interview data, Patton notes that the initial question involves deciding whether to begin with case analysis or cross-case analysis. As he explains,
"Beginning with case analysis means writing a case study for each person interviewed or each unity structured," whereas beginning with cross-case analysis refers to "grouping together answers from different perspectives on central issues" (p. 376).

I chose to begin with case analysis, looking at transcripts of the structured and unstructured interviews held with each of the study’s primary participants. I wrote rough case studies for the student, parent, and primary teacher respondents. I also selected for case study development data from interviews with six of the other teacher participants, who presented a diverse sampling of gender and ethnic profiles. Three of these additional cases seemed to support the themes that emerged from the interviews with the study’s primary respondents; while the other three served as negative cases, or cases "related to the testing of alternative constructs...that do not fit within the pattern" (Patton, 1990, p. 463). I then conducted cross-case analysis of students’ and teachers’ responses to the survey questionnaires. Because the survey items addressed the a priori themes, grouping answers around each theme was a relatively simple matter. These instruments thus served as interview guides that constituted "a descriptive analytical framework" for my data analysis (Patton, 1990, p. 376).

In addition to utilizing Patton’s (1990) strategies for analyzing interviews, I also followed his suggested strategies for analyzing data obtained from observations (see Figure 1). The goal of these observations was to analyze the extent to which these teachers’ spoken words (their interview comments) and their written words (their questionnaire responses) connected with their classroom practice. For my analysis, I selected several transcripts containing observational notes about each of the two primary
teacher respondents’ classroom activities and engagement with their students. For example, in examining observed data, I described over time what I saw taking place in the two primary teacher respondents’ classrooms. I noted key events and issues that I discussed separately with each teacher during individual sessions. Because this investigation was viewed as an empowering process, I traced the teachers’ progress or lack of progress in the areas under question. For example, one of the primary teacher respondents, Mrs. Brit, had a tendency to call upon her female students more so than her male students. This was observed and pointed out to her. In return, she put forth a concerted effort to improve this aspect of her teaching practice. On the other hand, the other primary teacher respondent, Ms. Burton, was early in the study overly concerned with the way many of her Black male students slouched in their chairs. She preferred them to sit straight up, with erect body posture, and her efforts to enforce this was often observed by this researcher as being distracting to these students. Together, Ms. Burton and I sought and found the proper balance of monitoring this behavior that was conducive to both learning and correction.

Data extrapolated and organized in accordance with Patton’s framework were further analyzed using Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) design for developing grounded theory, which, they assert:

...is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. Data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other. One does not begin with a theory...instead with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge" (p. 23)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHRONOLOGY</th>
<th>Describe what was observed chronologically, over time, to tell the story from beginning to end.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KEY EVENTS</td>
<td>Present the data by critical incidents or major events, not necessarily in order or occurrence but in order of importance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VARIOUS SETTINGS</td>
<td>Describe various places, sites, settings, or locations (doing case studies of each) before doing cross-setting pattern analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEOPLE</td>
<td>If individuals or groups are the primary unit of analysis, then case studies of people or groups may be the focus for case studies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROCESSES</td>
<td>The data may be organized to describe important processes (e.g., control, recruitment, decision making, socialization, communication).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISSUES</td>
<td>The observation may be pulled together to illuminate key issues, often the equivalent of the primary evaluation questions (such as how did participants change?).</td>
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</tbody>
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**FIGURE 1**
**Patton's (1990) Strategies for Analyzing Data Obtained from Interviews**

According to Strauss and Corbin, grounded theoretical analysis involves three major types of data coding: (1) open coding; (2) axial coding; and (3) selective coding. They note that open coding is "the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" (p. 161). Axial coding is a "set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between a category and its subcategories" (pp. 96-97). Selective coding is the process wherein researchers link all major categories together "to form an overall
theoretical formulations" (p. 97). The latter coding process (selective coding) was not essential for deriving findings pertinent to the present study; thus, it was not addressed. However, as Strauss and Corbin further note, one general technique that is central to all coding procedures and that ensures flexible use of the coding procedures is "the asking of analytical questions" (p. 59). Each level of coding requires the posing of different types of questions that are likely to become "generative for the analysis itself" (p. 60).

Throughout my coding process, I continuously developed analytical questions that I believe challenged, clarified, and probed the collected data. I then performed axial coding, whereby I took a major theme such as environmental issues and connected it with a subtheme such as crime-infested neighborhoods in order to focus on "specifying a category (phenomenon) in terms of the condition that give rise to it" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 97). Figure 2 provides a schemata of a system for data analysis relating these conditions to their contexts and ultimately to their consequences (adopted from Woodbrooks, 1990). Figure 3 summarizes the data analysis steps used in this research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background Conditions</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Intervening Conditions</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action/Interaction/Strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consequences</td>
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</tbody>
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**FIGURE 2**
Schemata of Data Analysis (adapted from Woodbrooks, 1990)
Conduct Interviews & Observations/Administer Surveys

Conduct Case-/Cross-Case Analysis (interview, observation, surveys)

Code data (open-ended categories)

Peer Debriefing Session One
(review of rough data/analysis/questions developed)

Ongoing Member-checking Session
(with teachers and students)
questions structured/restructured

Peer Debriefing Session Two
(possible sub-categories discussed/debated)

Ongoing Member-checking Session
(with teachers and students)
elimination of/addition to both broad/sub-theme categories

Peer Debriefing Session Three
(focus on teacher pool of nineteen narrowed to six)

Structured Member-checking Session One
(held individually) with students and primary teacher respondents
(analysis of interview/questionnaire data)

Structured Member-checking Session Two
(held individually) with 6 teacher participants
(analysis of interview/questionnaire data)

Peer Debriefing Session Four
Researcher's Analysis: Discussion of how the data should be presented

Structured Member-checking Session Three
with 2 primary teachers and 4 teacher participants
(Feedback critique of final analysis)

Structured Member-checking Session Four
with 4 parent respondents
(Feedback critique of final analysis)

Structured Member-checking Session Five
with 2 of the 6 teachers interrogated in Session Two
(Feedback critique of final analysis)

Peer Debriefing Session Five
Identifying data stories/selecting appropriate literary forms

FIGURE 3
The Trail of Analytical Processing (adapted from Woodbrooks, 1991)
Establishing Trustworthiness

How can I trust thee? Let me count the ways... (with apologies to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, quoted in Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 289)

A major concern commonly voiced by conventional scientists regarding qualitative types of inquiry is whether or not the findings from such analyses are trustworthy. What establishes the trustworthiness of a qualitative study? In his introduction to James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941/1960), a qualitative study of a rural Alabama farm community during the Depression, John Hersey concludes with a quotation from a Mrs. Burroughs, the wife of one of the tenant farmer families portrayed in the book. Upon reading Agee's account, Mrs. Burroughs remarked: "And I took it home and I read it plumb through. And when I read it plumb through, I give it back to her and I said, 'Well, everything in there's true, what they wrote in there was true'" (quoted in Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 146). The response to concerns about the validity, reliability, and objectivity of qualitative studies can be found in Mrs. Burroughs's words. As Glesne and Peshkin point out, "Agee would have been pleased to learn that Mrs. Burroughs affirmed his interpretations of her life" (p. 146).

Whereas Lincoln (1990) notes that "typically, conventional criteria for judging the rigor of inquiries include internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity" (p. 234), naturalistic inquiry brings legitimacy to its approach by developing its own set of criteria for judging the rigor of its inquiries. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), for each quantitative methodological procedure of establishing trustworthiness, qualitative
inquiries have aligning and parallel procedures. These procedures involve examining the credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability of the data obtained.

Credibility. The credibility of qualitative inquiry is especially dependent on the credibility of the researcher because the researcher is the instrument of data collection and the center of the analytical process (Patton, 1990). The qualitative inquirer, therefore, can assess the credibility of his or her data by asking two questions: "Do the constructed realities of the participants match the realities as represented by the researcher?" (Lincoln & Guba, 1989, p. 286), and "What techniques were used to ensure the integrity, validity, and accuracy of the findings?" (Patton, 1990, p. 461). The techniques I employed to increase the likelihood of producing credible findings for this particular study were prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking.

Prolonged Engagement. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), prolonged engagement involves the "investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes; learning the 'culture,' testing for misinformation introduced by distortions either of self or of the respondents, and building trust" (p. 301). The initiating activities of my three-year study were aimed specifically at delineating my research intent to the study's prospective respondents and familiarizing myself with the culture in which the research was to take place. For four months, I lived among the study's participants—eating, talking, and working with them on a daily basis. This prolonged engagement allowed me
to challenge my own preconceptions and misinformation and test my working prepositions about the issue at hand. The nature of this intensive involvement also contributed to the establishment of trust between the respondents and myself. My daily interfacing proved to the study’s participants that I was not there to conduct "research rape" or exploit them in any way. It also assured them that I held no hidden agendas.

In most cases, my identity as an African American researcher in a predominantly African American research setting would have given me an edge in terms of establishing trust with my respondents. However, I was initially viewed with skepticism by many of the study’s participants. At the onset, several feared that I was no different from the other researchers sent by a number of academic research facilities. Because of the extensive media attention directed toward the study setting's unique and controversial program objectives, the participants expressed concern that I, like these others and regardless of my ethnicity, was simply there to "pick their brains." Prolonged engagement went a long way toward helping me to break down existing barriers of mistrust.

**Persistent Observation.** Persistent observation involves identifying "those characteristic and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued and focusing on them in detail" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 304). During my on-site tenure, I repeatedly observed my respondents in the research setting, looking at and assessing what Eisner (1975) terms "the pervasive elements—those things that really count" (p. 304). I spent many hours making classroom and hallway observations; talking with administrators; and engaging in dialogue with students, their teachers, and
parents. Daily, I embarked on a "back and forth" journey: continuously revisiting existing premises, rectifying discrepancies, and identifying emerging issues. This process was enhanced by routinely reviewing my field notes, relistening to taped interviews, and reviewing the interviews with the study's respondents.

**Triangulation.** Triangulation involves the use of multiple perspectives to receive and analyze information. The present study's primary sources of information were the 8 African American male learners and their parents (8 single female heads of households), and the 2 primary teacher respondents. The secondary sources included 17 additional teachers (including the recreational teacher and art therapist), along with the school's principal, its curriculum design specialist, its social worker, and 4 additional adults who were the parents of students not involved in the study. Other sources of information were the student respondents' merit cards, performance evaluations, and survey responses.

With all of its noteworthy benefits, triangulation does hold some cautionary ground for the qualitative inquirer, who must at all times remember that it is a process directed "at a judgment of the accuracy of specific data items" as opposed to one concerned with seeking a universal truth (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). As Woodbrooks (1991) maintains, "the purpose of triangulation is to explore differing perceptions not to determine the 'truth' of the matter under investigation" (p. 121). The present study relied on five highly labor-intensive sources of information: (1) field notes, (2) reflexive journaling, (3) interview transcripts, (4) various stages of data analysis, and (5) computerized coding.
Peer Debriefing. Lincoln and Guba (1985) define peer debriefing as the "process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit with the inquirer's mind" (p. 308). One of its major purposes is to help keep researchers "honest" by challenging the suppositions that lead to their interpretations. By so doing, peer debriefers probe basis, seek meanings, and pursue clarity of interpretation from researchers. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest, however, "debriefing is a useful—if sobering—experience to which to subject oneself; its utility, when properly engaged, is unquestionable" (p. 309).

For the present study, I engaged three peer debriefers, one African American female and two European American females, in five analytic sessions that repeatedly stripped me of my intellectual facade and forced me to confront the raw emotions that guided some of my interpretative thoughts. My peer debriefers were all experienced interviewers and experts in analyzing human dynamics; all three hold master's of social work degrees and have private clinical practices.

Our first meeting focused on reviewing transcripts of interviews with the study's primary respondents in order to decipher the themes I had earlier identified as emerging within and across interviews. In this meeting, we broke up into interracial pairings for review and discussion, convening later as a group of four. My original list of themes was compared with those emanating from these discussions. This at times heated, four-hour process brought about the elimination of some themes, the surfacing of others, and the modification of several.
During our second meeting, the peer debriefers and I focused on the data (interview transcripts) I had collected from my interfacing with teachers and parents who were not part of the study's primary respondent circle. Again, we broke off into pairs, except this time the two White debriefers formed one subgroup and myself and the African American debriefer formed the other. Each subgroup discussed the data (interview transcripts and field notes) and my draft analysis. We joined together later to discuss our conclusions. This second meeting heightened my awareness on several fronts. I saw how the cultural experiences of the researcher or observer can influence the analytical process. For instance, in examining the adverse classroom behaviors manifested by the African American male student respondents, the two European American debriefers steadfastly attributed most of the behaviors to ecological conditions, particularly that of single-parent, female-headed households, whereas the African American debriefer and I viewed areas of teachers' attitudes and expectations and curricular issues as being more significant in this regard. The White debriefers' verbalizations were prefaced by statements such as, "Well, I cannot possibly see them [Black male students] doing better. Look at their negative environments," and "It is difficult and nearly impossible for a mother to rear her children without a strong father figure living in the household." Many of our discussions as a group would focus on the two European American debriefers' perceptions (accurate and inaccurate) about Black family life in America and their failure to readily admit that, in most cases, the life experiences of African Americans are quite different from theirs.
At meeting three, the peer debriefers and I discussed the data obtained from the focus-group meetings. They critiqued my rough analysis of the earlier sessions and suggested ways of constructing questions for subsequent focus-group discussions, for soliciting feedback in future discussions, and for paraphrasing information obtained from them. During meetings four and five, we discussed my concerns about data presentation, namely: (1) determining how to allow the data to "speak"; (2) identifying the data stories that best supported the theme under study; and (3) selecting the appropriate literary form to convey the story.

Feedback from the debriefers proved to be extremely beneficial. It kept me "honest" by challenging those suppositions that led to my interpretations. This feedback repeatedly stripped me of my intellectual facades and forced me to confront the prejudices that guided some of my analyses and conclusions. Overall, the use of peer debriefers helped me to probe my biases and seek further meaning and clarification from the study's respondents.

**Member Checking.** Member checking, in Lincoln and Guba's (1985) view, is "the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" because it allows the researcher to test data, analytical categories, interpretations, and conclusions with the stakeholders from whom the data were originally collected (p. 314). It involves placing the research respondents in a key role: that of either confirm or negate the researcher's interpretations and conclusions. During the four months of my on-site fieldwork activities, I conducted many informal member-checking sessions. Daily I would relisten to each interview I had
held that day and note my interpretations of the interviewees’ comments. Within a few
days, I would return to the interviewee for an informal meeting to discuss verbally my
interpretations and/or seek clarification regarding their comments.

Unstructured member-checking sessions with the students occurred during the
weekly group sessions and while we were engaged in our weekend activities. I used
visual aids such as students’ drawings to explore, develop, or outline the themes that
emerged from the students’ interview comments and survey responses. These drawings
of desired objects or situations, friends or family members, and African American
historical figures, depicted the students’ dreams and ambitions as well as provided insights
to their emotional states and levels of racial awareness and pride. I also asked students
to record a summary of their thoughts and feelings on tape. I would also record my own
discussion of broad themes and subcategories and let the students listen to that. I would
also develop stories containing data students had shared and replay it to them. These
procedures allowed the students to reflect on their given data in diverse ways.

Member-checking sessions with the parent respondents occurred during the latter
part of my on-site visit and were more structured in nature. I provided five parents with
annotated copies of their interview transcripts, which we read over together and discussed.
I did not present transcripts to the three other parents because I questioned their reading
abilities; I simply discussed their comments with them and received feedback from them
regarding the clarity and accuracy of the transcriptions. All of the parents agreed to
participate in follow-up sessions and/or additional engagement via mail or phone after I
left the site. Four of the eight parents required follow-up sessions (one each).
Member-checking sessions with the study’s two primary teacher respondents as well as other selected teacher participants were both unstructured and structured. Interfacing with these individuals on a daily basis allowed many opportunities for unstructured review of teachers reflections and statements. One structured session with each of the study’s two primary teachers took place during my on-site stay. Since departing from the site, I have spoken twice via telephone to one of the primary teachers and have mailed transcripts containing additional coding/sub-coding themes to her for her feedback. The other primary teacher respondent, with whom I developed a special relationship, has been in consistent contact. We have met several times since I left the site to discuss the data. I returned to the site once to conduct final member-checking sessions with the primary teacher respondents together and with four of the six additional teachers individually. (Two of these teachers are no longer at the study site.)

The member-checking sessions helped the teacher respondents to continually assess their current practices, confront their limitations, and implement new teaching strategies. Member-checking sessions with the students forced them to focus on the phenomenon under question and examine their own behavior relative to the larger problem. It also helped them to realize others cared about what they have to say.

The following are comments illustrative of the common voices of the African American male student today. In response to my question, asked in a group session, "What have the group sessions and my presence done for you?" Tony², a third grader, and Martin, a fourth grader, had this to say:
[TONY]: Miss Brown, I have learned a lot. Besides getting out of class (giggle) it has helped me behave better in Mrs. B’s class. When we talked about how teachers look at us and how they want to help us, it made me feel that my teachers do care. And I know you care the way you spend money and time on us. That is why I know I am going to stay in school and become a politician! (Researcher’s log, October 16, 1992)

[MARTIN]: I like the group sessions because we can talk outside the class about what is bothering us. And you let us run the group. I l-o-v-e being the president. (Other group voices, "Yeah, man, you would!") I’m going to stay in school and become a president of my own company one day. I love telling people what to do. (Researcher’s log, November 20, 1992)

For the parent participants, the member-checking sessions served not only to solicit analytical interpretations but also to empower them through the process. As one parent noted:

[MRS. S]: Fran, it sure does mean a lots to me, you coming back here and checking with me about what I has said...its make me feels real important. I’m going to start that watch block that we was talking about... (Researcher’s log, November 14, 1992)
Transferability. The qualitative researcher's use of thick description allows readers to understand the context from which data emerge. Generalization to large populations is not the goal of such research; rather, an underlying assumption of naturalistic inquiry is that the information gathered is highly influenced by the context, which includes the researcher's interaction with the participants. As Marjorie Rawlings notes: "A man may learn a great deal of the general from studying the specific, whereas it is impossible to know the specific by studying the general" (quoted in Glesne & Peshkin, 1990, p. 148). Nonetheless, a concern voiced by adherents to the conventional, positivist, quantitative paradigm is that because qualitative research does not project its findings onto a larger mass of individuals, it is thus not scientifically sound.

A major characteristic of generalizability, as offered by the positivists, is that it "must be truly universal, unrestricted to time and space. It must formulate what is always and everywhere the case, provided only that the appropriate conditions are satisfied" (Lincoln & Guba, 1989, p. 110). Lincoln and Guba additionally note that quantitative researchers assert that if one rejects the goal of achieving generalizations, all that remains is knowledge of the particular. "What value," the conventionalists might thus ask, "could there be in knowing only the unique?" (p. 109), never realizing that research is not "an either/or proposition, that alternatives include more than deciding between normic generalizations on the one hand and unique, particularized knowledge on the other" (p. 110).

In making transferability judgments about qualitative research, the "object of the game" is first to establish the working propositions for the study, then to provide
extensive and careful descriptions of the time, place, context, and culture in which those propositions are found to be salient. The researcher, acting as interpreter, does not provide the confidence limits of the study; rather, he or she provides as complete a data base as possible to "facilitate transferability judgments on the part of others who may wish to apply the study to their own situations or situations in which they have an interest" (Lincoln & Guba, 1989, pp. 241–242).

Thus, the quantitative researcher's notion of generalizability should not and cannot be a legitimate assessor of trustworthiness for qualitative inquiry. Indeed, the concept is antithetical to those tenets that undergird the emancipatory paradigm. The concept of transferability is a suitable substitute for generalizability. According to Lincoln and Guba (1989), the degree of transferability is a direct function of the similarity between two contexts. They define this similarity or "fittingness" as the degree of congruence between the "sending" and "receiving" contexts, noting the following: "If Context A and Context B are sufficiently congruent, then working hypotheses from the sending originating context may be applicable in the receiving context" (p. 124).

The qualitative inquirer thus rejects generalizability because it suggests that researchers need not know anything about either the originating or receiving contexts in order to know the truth of their generalizations; that they need assume "only that originating and receiving contexts are in some sense part of the known population of contexts and that the generalization is based upon a study of a representative sample of contexts" (Lincoln & Guba, 1989, p. 124). Instead, qualitative researchers argue the following:
...in order to be sure (within some confidence limits) of one's inference, one will need to know about both sending and receiving contexts. We move then from a question of generalizability to a question of transferability. Transferability inferences cannot be made by an investigator who knows only the sending context. (Lincoln & Guba, 1989, p. 297)

As Lincoln and Guba (1989) further note:

The establishment of transferability by the qualitative researcher is very different from the establishment of external validity by the positivist researcher. Indeed, the former is, in a strict sense, impossible. For while the positivist researcher expects (and is expected) to make relatively precise statements about external validity (in the form of statistical confidence limits), the qualitative researcher [sic] can only set out working hypotheses together with a description of the time and context in which they were found to hold. (p. 316)

Lincoln and Guba stress that whether hypotheses "hold in some other context, or even in the same context at some other time, is an empirical issue, the resolution of which depends upon the degree of similarity between sending and receiving (or earlier and later) contexts." (p. 316). They argue that it is not the responsibility of qualitative researchers to "specify external validity of an inquiry because they cannot; he or she can only provide the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility" (p. 316).
In attending to the transferability issue within the present study, I gathered a wide range of information from individuals within the three sampling groups for inclusion in the thick descriptions. However, even though representatives within or among these groups varied in age, occupation, and ethnicity, I realized that their situations are nonetheless context-specific and not necessarily transferable. Working from the critical/emancipatory paradigm, I understood Lincoln and Guba's contention that it is "not the qualitative researcher's task to provide the database that makes transferability judgements possible on the part of potential appliers" (p. 316). As a critical theorist, my aim in this study was to examine thoroughly those historical and contextual issues that affect the lives of the study's participants. In doing so, I discovered that similarities in lived experience may exist that can then be transferable to others, but the exactness of each lived experience is nonexistent and therefore not generalizable. Even though frozen ideological concepts and hegemonic forces may affect a group of individuals (e.g., Black males), each person in that group views, responds, and adapts to these forces differently.

**Confirmability.** Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose that the qualitative research term "confirmability" parallels that of "objectivity," which is used in quantitative research. According to Scrivens (1971), in the quantitative contrast between objectivity and subjectivity, "a contrast that is the one usually intended by conventionalists, subjective refers to what concerns or occurs to the individual subject and his experiences...while objective refers to what a number of subjects or judges experience" (p. 292).
To achieve confirmability, the qualitative inquirer must ensure that the data secured from his/her individual subjects, along with the interpretations and findings emanating from the inquiry process, are "grounded in events rather than the inquirer's personal constructions" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 324). Several techniques to ensure confirmability were used in the present study. First, the data were triangulated through the compilation of multiple sources. Next, the data and all related documentation relevant to the study were organized, labeled, and filed to evaluate the source of records and sources of data. The files consisted of audiotapes and transcripts of all the individual and focus-group sessions, completed participant questionnaires, and introspective drawings done by the student respondents. The files also contained notes taken during peer-debriefing and member-checking sessions. Notes reflecting data reconstruction and showing patterns of emerging themes within and across selected transcripts are also part of the files, as are the notes from my reflective journal.

I used the journaling process as a check-and-balance vehicle. In my reflective journal, I daily recorded what Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe as essential aspects of naturalistic research—that is, "a variety of information about self and method" (p. 327). By so doing, I was able to "check" my own attitudes, beliefs, values, and suppositions and "balance" them with data obtained from the actual contexts, as voiced by the participants. Again following Lincoln and Guba's directives, this allowed me to consciously record "methodological decisions and accompanying rationales" (p. 327). Hence, systematic recordkeeping and journaling provided me as a naturalistic researcher with a means of articulating, documenting, and introspectively assessing theoretical perspectives.
Rappott, Empowerment, and Use of the Self

The structured focus-group sessions with the study's teacher and student respondents and the impromptu focus-group sessions with the parent participants facilitated an interactionary process whereby these subjects merged their individual lived experiences into a holistic, collective experience. These sessions also provided opportunities for the participants to brainstorm as a collective body and generate problem-solving strategies. As Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989) assert, these groups "are not just a convenient way to accumulate the individual knowledge of their members. They give rise synergistically to insights and solutions that would not come about without them" (p. 40).

Notwithstanding, neither these nor the other data collection methods employed in the present study provided an ethnographic researcher's panacea. Throughout my endeavors, I was made aware of Glesne and Peshkin's (1992) admonishment that "interviewing is a human interaction with all of its attendant uncertainties" (p. 63). In particular, I encountered several limitations as a result of my reliance on the tape recorder to record the details of the focus-group and individual interview sessions. These limitations can be categorized under the headings of preoccupation, intellectualization, and issue concealment.

The taped interview format posed a formidable problem during the initial stages of individual and focus-group sessions with the African American male student respondents. The majority of the students (six out of eight) were so preoccupied with the machine that they could not individually or collectively attend to the business at hand.
At first, I asked the students to hold the microphone to ensure audibility. In doing so, three students began deejay performances instead of focusing on the questions. Two others attempted to disassemble the recorder and determine the nature of its operation, while another delighted in whirling the microphone around in the air, occasionally hitting himself and the researcher in the head. The initial focus-group sessions with the students met with no better fate. During the first two sessions, I positioned the tape in the middle of the circle around which the boys sat. Repeatedly, one or more of the boys would get out of their seats and huddle around the machine, breaking into an impromptu rap song or simply talking silliness. They frequently asked me to stop the tape and replay it so they could hear themselves.

Because of this preoccupation, I secured high-power audio equipment that could record effectively even when placed unobtrusively in a corner of the room. This proved to be an invaluable move. Though the students knew they were still being taped, they were not aware of the recorder's location and soon forgot about it. All went well in future individual and focus group sessions with these students.

The fact that their interviews were being taped no doubt led 15 out of the 21 teacher respondents to over-intellectualize their comments. When the recorder was on, these teachers deliberately obscured their own opinions about the causes and implications of the African American male's crisis in the classroom. On tape, I got their augmentation of someone else's, and generally the most "acceptable," view. When the tape recorder was off, however, they presented their own views, many of which, as recorded in my written field notes, were radically different than those they espoused on tape.
Upon questioning these teachers about this discrepancy, I received comments such as, "Well, this is a pilot study, and you have to be careful what you say on tape," "As an educator, I must be careful what I say because there are political and ethical issues at hand," and "Who knows where this tape may end up?" When I explained to them that many of their comments were also being written down, all except one responded with statements similar to the following teacher's remark: "When you write, I can always deny; however, when my voice is on tape I cannot." Another teacher sheepishly asked me to "be careful where [I] put the notes."

Initially, I believed the teachers' reticence was due to a trust factor, but the more I interfaced with them, some on a daily basis, the more I realized this was not the case. What I discovered instead were issues of concealed racial strife between and among African American and White teachers, masked dislike of administrators, thinly veiled resentment of African American parents, and feelings of burn-out.

The parent participants were the most receptive to the taped interview format, even though more than half of them (five parents) expressed concerns about their communication skills. "I cannot talk good," one parent lamented. "I have poor English, and I know I will sound stupid," said another. Another asked warily, "Who will hear me talk?" Notwithstanding, once the tape recorder was on, these inhibitions vanished, and all eight parents became passionate and expressive conversationalists. Their "transformations on tape" reaffirmed my belief in the strengths of my data collection methods, and led me to agree with Kadushin's (1990) assertion that "interviewing and group work offers researchers a versatility and flexibility unlike any other method, which
makes it the procedure of choice by many" (p. 40). Like Glesne and Peshkin (1992), however, I also found that "researchers get more than data from their interview[s]" (p. 91). Interviewing these parents was "an occasion for close researcher–other interaction...[that provided] many opportunities to engage feelings because it is a distance-reducing experience" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 92). As I noted in my researcher's log on October 27, 1992:

As I walked into unkempt homes, dangerous neighborhoods, and unwholesome environments, I felt a sense of "realness" replaced my long-distance views gathered through observation of media scenes, reading of articles, and/or through academic discussions of the phenomenon. When interviewing my African American [parent] respondents, what I discovered was a "connecting of spirits" with others who shared my skin color but not my blessings.

An additional advantage of the individual and group interview formats was that it forced me to "practice what I teach" as a licensed social worker and community college instructor. My use of these data collection methods allowed me to consciously heighten what I term the "use of self," or my conscious awareness of what I was doing in the research interview process such as my attending behaviors, nonverbal communication (body language), and verbal and paralinguual communication as well as appearance (facial expressions and bodily posturing). While these data collection methods and techniques were "second nature" to me, each interview gave me the opportunity to perfect my skills. Throughout my discussions with the study respondents, I consciously evaluated, modified,
and changed my behaviors as a interviewer when I assessed it was necessary.

**Conclusion**

A man may learn a great deal of the general from studying the specific, whereas it is impossible to know the specific by studying the general. (Marjorie Rawlings quoted in Glesne & Peshkin, 1990, p. 148)

Chapter III focused on the methodological procedures used to acquire and analyze the specifics of the respondents’ lived experiences as they related to the phenomenon under study. In the chapter that follows, the respondents’ voices will be presented and analyzed in the context of the themes that emerge from their realist tales.
FOOTNOTES

1 I developed this Likert-type scale in 1992 for a course taught by Emmalou Norland at The Ohio State University.

2 To ensure participant confidentiality, I assigned a pseudonym to each of the student respondents and an initial to each of the teacher and parent respondents.

3 When not in my possession, hard copy of all documents pertaining to the study (interview tapes and transcripts, my reflective logs, and all of my peer debriefing and member-checking notes) were systematically stored in a locked file cabinet. All computer-generated documents and data files were stored on a computer belonging to my personal secretary. Only the secretary and I knew the access code to this computer. All disks and other material were locked in her desk drawer when not in use.
CHAPTER IV

INTRODUCTION TO THE VOICES: REALIST TALES'

By the time we finish reading a good ethnography, adroit rationalization has made familiar what at first seemed strange, the other, and has estranged us from what we knew, ourselves. (Shweder, 1986, p. 38)

Early in my quest to investigate the issues behind the Black male crisis in the classroom, I questioned how I could possibly enter the lives of the stakeholders involved, listen to their voices, and accurately extrapolate the essence of meaning behind their words without misconstruing their perspectives. Upon completion of the four years of pilot research and field work devoted to this quest, I was asking myself another question: How was I to transform the numerous pages of narrative discourse, interpersonal perspectives, and reflexive journal notes I had accumulated into an authoritative written account that captured my respondents' perspectives on reasons behind the Black male educational crisis, provided their visionary solutions for change, and chronicled their efforts to theorize and actively seek ways of effecting change for themselves and others? What form of ethnographic reporting would do justice to my respondents' words and life experiences? What manner of presentation would best deliver the data I had compiled?
As an African American researcher investigating the crisis of Black male educational underachievement, I continuously wrestled with the dilemma of being both a "knower" and a "teller" (Richardson, 1991, p. 15). In struggling with this issue, I found solace in Richardson's assertion that "by writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. Form and content are inseparable" (p. 2). As Lather (1988) notes, "From the use of interview data to construct a prose poem (Patai, 1988) to the 'dada data' invoked by Clifford (1988), new practices are emerging which reshape our sense of possibilities for what we do in the name of human sciences" (p. 125). Out of this awareness, I evaluated and toyed with several creative ways of presenting my data. I decided to employ various forms of analytical interpretation and presentation, each of which involved, as Glesne and Peshkin (1992) suggest, "the application of disciplined procedures and artistic creativity to [the production of] meaningful data" (p. 155).

In this chapter, I employ the use of realist tales to explicate the themes that emerged during structured and unstructured interviews with the research participants. What is emphasized via this mode of data story telling are the participants', not the researcher's, words, acts, and deeds. Van Maanen (1988) maintains that at least four conventions mark a data story-telling tale as realist. These are: (1) experiential authority, (2) typical forms, (3) native point of view, and (4) interpretive omnipotence. Discussion of these conventions may help to explain the stark differences between the realist tale and the evocative representational forms that follow in succeeding chapters.
Experiential authority revolves around the almost complete absence of the author from most segments of the finished text in that only what "members of the studied culture say and do and, presumably, think are visible in the text" (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 46). The fieldworker (researcher) vanishes behind the descriptive narrative and rarely says very much about "precisely what experience in the field consists of, letting the representation stand for itself (i.e., 'The X do this,' not 'I saw the X do this')" (p. 47). Realist tales in the convention of experiential authority thereby swallow up the fieldworker and "the text focuses almost solely on the sayings, doings, and supposed thinkings of the people studied" (p. 47). The fieldworker engaged in this convention of realist tale reporting is relegated to limited accounts of the conditions affecting the fieldwork (i.e., its location, length, entrance procedures, etc.). Van Maanen notes that this information is given in "prefatory remarks, brief methodological segments clearly set off from the report, or the subtext commentary in footnotes. In short, the diary is effaced from the account" (p. 48). In such reportage, the body of the ethnography reads "as statements about the people studied rather than what the ethnographer saw or heard (or thought) about the people studied" (p. 48). The use of first person is relegated to the background, and the data is interpreted from the third-person perspective. An example of this would be embodied in a statement like the following:

Mrs. Burton, the fourth-grade teacher, repeatedly overlooked Jonathan's outstretched arm before finally calling on him.
The second convention associated with realist tale-telling is a "documentary style focused on minute, sometimes precious, but thoroughly mundane details of everyday life among the people studied" (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 48). The fieldworker's power of observation is tapped when using this convention because from the attention to detail come "organizing precepts presented as containers for such detail—rites, habits, practices, beliefs, and generally, ways of life" (p. 48). Glimpses of the dramatic are allowed but largely in the form of exceptions or contrasts to the daily living patterns of those being studied. Documentary realist tales thus "decry the abstract and celebrate the concrete reference" (p. 48). Minute, precise descriptive details are used to pull readers of such tales more closely into the world of the subjects. An example of such accounting is shown in the following:

Mrs. Burton, tall and of sturdy build with a commanding voice, bedecked from head to toe in the elegant and colorful dress apparel of her Liberian homeland, stood confidently before her enraptured class of four African American female and nine African American male students and recited the day's agenda.

In fulfilling the third convention of the realist tale, that of presenting the native's point of view, ethnographic researchers must narrate the actual accounts and explanations, as offered by the people being studied, of their culture and events within it—particularly, if not exclusively, the routine events. Van Maanen (1988) notes that this is a "touchy business because realist ethnographers are at pains to produce the native's point of view" (p. 49). They must convey to the readers (through closely edited quotations) the views
and "authentic and representative remarks transcribed straight from the horse's mouth" (p. 49). Much debate has arisen regarding how this can best be done. One commonly used technique involves "orchestrating the voices of members of the culture in conjunction with the use of cultural slogans, cliches, and commonly heard setting-specific terms" (Van Maanen, p. 50). For example, in the present study, when two African American grandmothers discussed their distress over the academic plight of their grandsons, I noted the following exchange:

Mrs. Scarlet: Gracious me, there must be something we can do to stop what's 'happen' to our Black boys...

Mrs. Ali: [interrupting in a high-pitched tone] Yes, oh yes, there's most certainly something we can do!

Inclusion of the following conversation between 11-year-old Brad and 10-year-old Roger and the researcher also fulfills this convention:

Researcher: Good morning, Brad.

Brad: Hey, Miss J. Are you going to be our teach [teacher] for the day?

Researcher: No, I am only in the classroom this morning to observe.

Brad: Yeah. Hmm, you looking phat [nice; pronounced like "fat"] today.

Roger: Yeah, Miss J. You looking boss [nice] today.

Brad: Yeah, man, she knows she gots it going on [my behaviors are acceptable in their eyes].
I discovered throughout my tenure that African American males have developed a number of cliches and specific terms or words relative to their setting [world] which conveyed their points of views. Many of these terms were included in my narratives of their views on the various issues under discussion. Even with the use of these and other techniques, what actually constitutes native point of view remains a point of debate, and one that, in Van Maanen's opinion, "turns on how much a perspective is to be rendered in a text rather than on whether or not it belongs in one" (p. 51).

Interpretive omnipotence, the final convention characterizing realist tales deals with the "no-nonsense" ways in which realist ethnographers present the words, views, and feelings of the people being studied. As Van Maanen (1988) notes, "rare are ethnographers who question aloud (or in print) whether they got it right, or whether there might be yet another, equally useful way to study, characterize, display, read, or otherwise understand the accumulated field materials" (p. 51). Interpretive omnipotence can be addressed in three ways. One involves tying a cultural description to a theoretical problem of interest to the fieldworker's disciplinary community. "Field data, in such cases, are put forth as facts marshalled in accordance with the light they may shed on the generic topic of interest and the fieldworker's stand on the matter" (Van Maanen, p. 51). It may also involve what Clarke (1975) calls "didactic deadpan." According to Van Maanen, didactic deadpan is the device most prominent in ethnographies "in which the interpretations of the author [researcher] are made compelling by use of a string of abstract definitions, axioms, and theorems that work logically to provide explanation" (p. 51), and the elements that comprise a theoretical supposition are carefully portrayed by
empirical field data. As Van Maanen points out, however, "this form is acetic and impersonal, but is convincing insofar as an audience is willing to grant power to the theory" (p. 51).

Utilizing didactic deadpan in the context of the present study would call for explanations of the causes of African American male academic failures to be presented through the use of a predetermined theoretical construct such as the claim that Black boys are failing in school because they have low self-esteem. All field data would thus be extrapolated to support this supposition via the use of a variety of accepted theoretical sources that back up this theory.

Another means of developing interpretive omnipotence works in almost the opposite fashion. Rather than relying on predetermined theoretical constructs, the realist ethnographer rests his or her case on the words, deeds, or events entirely as presented by the respondents. The situations that comprise the field data are presented "conventionally as the events of everyday life. These situations, along with generalized renditions of the native's point of view, are collapsed into explanatory constructs, so that the fieldworker's [researcher's] analysis overlaps with, if it does not become identical to, the terms and constructs used to describe the events" (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 52). Following this convention, as an educational researcher examining the academic plight of Black boys, I would present the student respondents' classroom behaviors as I had observed them. I would present their interpretations of their own behaviors and collapse my perspectives with theirs. From that point, my own analysis would be expanded as it reflects or overlaps with the views of the respondents. In this study, the process is guided by a
priori theoretical suppositions as well as grounded theorizing.

A final device for establishing interpretive omnipotence is offered by Geertz (1973), who argues for the jettisoning of "experience-distant" concepts in favor of "experience-near" ones. In this case, the researcher works with theoretical frameworks derived from "phenomenology, face-to-face interaction, discourse analysis, symbolic interactionism, semiotics, and other "theory of meaning approaches" (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 52). Thus, applying this approach to the exploration of the causes of academic failure among Black males, face-to-face encounters—and all that they entail—would give way to "a communicative interpretive theory concerned with how people [who are being studied] achieve common understandings" (p. 52). Only after soliciting, analyzing, and interpreting the perspectives of respondents, would I, as the researcher, put forth my own theoretical suppositions.

Examining these three ways of establishing interpretative omnipotence, Van Maanen (1988) notes that "the point turns not so much on the exact basis for claiming interpretive authority as on the mere fact that it is claimed" (p. 52). As he further acknowledges:

Realist tales are not multivocal texts where an event is given meaning first one way, then another, and then still another. Rather, a realist tale offers one reading and culls its facts carefully to support that reading. Little can be discovered in such texts that has not been put there by the fieldworker [researcher] as a way of supporting a particular interpretation. (pp. 52–53)
This chapter presents realist tales that address the emergent themes embodied by the words of some of the stakeholders in the struggle to alleviate the Black male crisis in the classroom: (1) the comment, "We need to actively focus on solidification between parent and school," expressed by a school administrator; (2) the lament, "There ain't no love for God nowhere no more," articulated by an African American grandmother; and (3) the African proverb, "It takes an entire village to raise a child," voiced by a African American teacher. All three of these perspectives will be discussed as they pertain to the corresponding issue categories of parent–school reciprocalness, normative framing, and communal kinshipping.

Parent–School Reciprocalness

The idea of parents and schools actively bonding to more fully meet African American males' learning needs emerged as a particularly salient one in my structured and unstructured encounters with parents and teachers. As Ms. Benson, a parent, noted:

The teachers, as well as the parents, must work together. I have a car, but some of these mamas do not, or they have younger children. So, the teachers should come to us, see some of the homes their children come from, see some of the deficits they are dealing with on a day-to-day basis. Perhaps they would become more sensitive to the plights of the children.

Her views support the goals of Afrocentric immersion schools such as the one attended by her son. At similar schools in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, for example, teachers
are required to make 18 home visits per semester to nurture the home-school relationship, and mentors from both the professional and blue-collar community are recruited to provide each classroom with a small network of significant adults with whom the students can connect for guidance, support, and advice (Leake, 1992).

Another parent respondent, Ms. Adams, informed me that while she enjoyed playing an active part in the school's parent support network (she worked as a teacher's aide in another classroom), she was not so supportive of home visits. Instead, she noted, she preferred going to the school to discuss her son's academic performance with his teacher. Her reflections:

Well, I don't think teachers should have to come to the house. Parents should go to the classroom. You see, my house, I would not want any of the White teachers to see how Tony [her son] lives. I don't mind Mrs. Brit [Tony's teacher] because she's Black and I know she understands.

The fact that Mrs. Moss, the school's principal, had encouraged this parent to participate in the GED classes it offered for parents was another positive bonding factor, as were other programs and services offered by the school such as family and drug abuse counseling, baby-sitting services during parent-teacher conferences, bus and other transportation services to assist parents traveling to and from the school, and other strategies and incentives to enhance parent involvement. According to Ms. Adams:

I used to be afraid of people in high positions, like a principal, even a teacher. Now I am not. Mrs. Moss has told me she is here to serve me and Tony. Can
you believe that? So, I am more at ease now. I am going to take an active role in the parent association here too.¹

As another study participant, a grandparent, Mrs. Scarlet, told me before she left to attend a school conference:

Honey, this one-parent home, gangs and drugs, and low self-concept talk gots nothing to do with it. Parents need to get involved with their children’s future. The only way they can is to get off their behinds and go into that there school and work with the teacher.

This view was concurred by Mrs. Ali, another grandmother and participant in the study, who claimed:

With the drugs and gangs in our neighborhoods, we must band all forces together to combat these evils. We are in a war in our neighborhoods. And like in any war, you must pool your forces. You must build a fortress. I believe home, along with school, must snap together like snaps on jackets to fight the enemies of drugs and gangs and any other ills that prevent our African American males from learning and/or attending school.

The theme of parent–school reciprocalness also emerged as an issue among the participant teachers and school administrators. Some representative views are those voiced by Mr. Frank, a White teacher:
I do not buy into the low self-esteem and ecological issues as causative factors for this crisis. What I see is the parental and school relationship as a crucial element which can fight all these other things....If we as school officials bond with the parents through dialogue, we both become empowered. Inadvertently through this process, the African American male becomes empowered.

Mr. Frank's beliefs were augmented by a statement made by Mrs. Loads, a pre-school and kindergarten teacher at the study site:

It is vital, extremely vital...that we teachers become visiting doctors. That is one feature I love in our new Afrocentric schooling concept. We must visit the parents' homes and the parents are encouraged to engage with us on various levels. This is outreach and it provides education for both the classroom teacher and parents. I believe it enables [White] teachers to gain accurate insight about what some of these mamas are up against. I am not too worried about the African American teachers because most of us emanate from similar situations. But then again, some of us have forgotten from whence we come. Any rate, I believe by doing outreach we become and act as an entity in working with our children. We can fight drugs and gangs by having the parents and school become a united force.

The teachers' views are corroborated by those of Principal Moss:

This is an issue that represents a complexity of variables but one that can be resolved if we, as school teachers, administrators, and parents come together. I
believe this is essential. We can no longer work in separate spheres as we have been doing. Too much is transpiring in the Black community. Unlike days gone by, drugs and gangs are infiltrating our streets, and our African American girls are babies themselves having babies. The normative fiber which once webbed our communities together is quickly dissipating.

Thus, the perceptions of the school personnel participating in this study parallel those voiced by the parent respondents. The assessments of both groups further concur with those asserted in the scholarly literature. As Gilbert and Gay (1985) contend:

Educators and parents need to inform each other of their expectations for the academic success of African American males. Both parties also need to understand which aspects of these expectations are non-negotiable, and they must mutually agree on a set of compromises for those that are negotiable. (p. 20)

The participants' analyses also support the promulgations of the African American Males Task Force of the Milwaukee Public Schools, which additionally argues that parents and guardians "must be made aware of the importance of teaching their sons the value of an education" and "should be taught how to support actively their male children's interests in obtaining further education" (Holt, 1990, p. 28). According to the task force:

It is essential that in providing enhancements for the African American male learner's achievement in the classroom that focus is placed upon:
• **STRENGTHENING** partnerships between school and home in that teachers and parents should foster and nurture relationships and lines of communication which are collaborative rather than adversarial; and

• **ENCOURAGING** parents to become active participants in the education of their children by visiting the school frequently and assuring that their children are in school daily, that they are prepared to perform fully, and that they will abide by school rules and regulations. (p. 29)

Interestingly, the student respondents did not voice similar appreciation for the theme of parent–school reciprocalness. Eight-year-old third grader Jerry, for example, expressed dismay over his grandmother’s relationship with his teacher, claiming:

I don’t see why grandma has to talk to Mrs. Brit all the time. Every time she finishes, I seem to have more work to do!

Tony, age nine and a third grader, seemed to have a different motive for not wanting his teacher and his mother to get together. According to Tony:

Mama and Mrs. Brit always are talking about the olden days. Mrs. Brit reminds mama that when she acted out, she would get three hits with the yardstick. But now, Mrs. Brit says she is not allowed to do it. My mama then tells Mrs. Brit that she does not care if she paddles me and for Mrs. Brit to tell her and she will whip me when I get home.
Brad, age 11 and a fourth grader, also viewed parent–school bonding as a conspiratorial act:

Mama works 6:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Sometimes, she can’t get to the conferences with Ms. Burton [his teacher]. So, Ms. Burton either calls Mama or comes to the house. When she comes to the house, I eavesdrop. And Ms. Burton was telling Mama how smart I am, but they needed to...uhm...uhm...do something about my attitude....Every time Mama and Ms. Burton finishes talking, Mama seems all hyped up. She says, "Brad, do this. Brad, do that." I want good reports from Ms. Burton.

Normative Framing

Mrs. Scarlet’s concerns about the breakdown of religious and moral values in the home, school, and community, as typified in her comment, "Honey, there ain’t no love for God nowhere no more," sum up the sentiments expressed by both the study’s African American parent and teacher participants, all of whom spoke about the importance of belief in God and religious instruction in children’s lives and the effects of these aspects of spirituality on children’s behavior. According to Mrs. Loads, a teacher:

I remember when I was young, we all talked about God. All of the Black kids, particularly on Sundays, would be in church all day. Since we all were in church no one was stigmatized for talking about and/or going to church....What we have to do as Black people is take our children to church. This will help to build a stronger foundation in the mind, the soul, and the body and the home. Because
they took it out of school does not mean we have to forget it all together. When I came up, we had devotion every morning, said the Lord’s Prayer. We stopped and thought before we would get in trouble. There were children that hit but it was not that many because first the teacher would get you and then they would tell the parents. Yes, going back to Christ. He is the beginning, the end, and forever more.

Teacher Mrs. Wills concurred:

I do not think religion should have ever been taken out of the schools. When I was in school we had a special day for religion. I think a special teacher came in and we learned passages from the Bible. Some I remembered because in church one Sunday, there was a passage we were doing and one lady looked at me and said, "You are just talking and you do not have a Bible," and I said, "I learned it in school and I did not forget them."

These views were affirmed by those of Ms. Burton, an African American fourth-grade teacher:

We have gotten away from traditional things in the way we rear our children. Church being the dominant force, it goes back to that. Get back into the old-time way, and maybe if we do that it will make the family stronger. The values and Morales need to come back before we can make the changes. As an educator, I can only continue to stress things like we should treat people the way we want to
be treated. Also, how do you want to gain respect and that sort of thing; but things have to change first. We are getting demands for change, but you got to keep in mind that all these things must change. You must remember that we only have them a few hours a day. They leave here, they go back to their environment, and that’s why the parents must begin to put God back into the home.

The comments of Ms. Benson, one of the eight parent respondents, seemed a response to Ms. Burton’s statements:

We as African American parents, for many reasons, have stepped aside and let other factors take over the parenting duties for us. We have substituted our strong beliefs in God for other idols, such as drugs and material things. We as African American parents must rejoin our religious roots and put our children back into Sunday school and back into church.

Interestingly, none of the study’s White teacher participants made references to spiritual/religious matters in discussing the Black male educational crisis. Mr. Frank, a White teacher, attributed the crisis to a decaying normative infrastructure in the African American community:

Even though, drugs, gangs and killings are ever so present in the Black community, we must look at another issue. What has happened to the value system, morales, or norms, if you will, that one uses to guide his/her decision-making process? Who is controlling the normative framing of the young
African American male or women? The male who takes drugs, kills his Black brother, and/or joins a gang? The African American girl who gets pregnant at ages 11, 12, or 13, and so on?

Ms. Shook, a White second-grade teacher, expressed similar kinds of sentiments; however, she was cautious about discussing value systems within the Black home and community and noted that her comments could be generalized to society at large:

I am reluctant to characterize what I am about to say only for the Black community. But since we are focusing on African American males, I will direct my feelings in this area. But I would like to preface [that] there seems to be more stressors impacting the Black family today. It goes beyond the ecological issues that we discussed earlier into other domains. It seems, and I would remind you, I am a White woman looking at this issue from afar, that communication plays a large role in this. Black parents, due to other stressors [such as] job and financial worries, seem to be robbed of spending quality time with their children, particularly the African American male. I believe this then carries over into the child's classroom performance.

Communal Kinshipping

There is an African proverb that states: "It takes a community to raise a child." Toward that end, Gill (1991) notes that Afrocentric approaches such as those invoked by the school "must argue for the involvement and participation of parents as well as
part-time and para-professional instructors and African Americans from business, religious and other sectors of the community" (p. 576). The overarching belief of the parent and teacher respondents was that the African American community must exert more control over its own affairs, including, as parent Mrs. Ali noted, "monitoring as well as becoming an integral part of our children's educational processes." Indeed, all of the adult respondents indicated, in some form or fashion, that an essential ingredient for resolving the Black male educational crisis could be found in the African American family's and community's ability to restructure their lebenswelt by revitalizing the spiritual, economical, cultural, and political foundations that unite them as a people.

Ms. Brit, an African American third-grade teacher respondent, recalled some of the elements of that foundation:

When I was growing up in the South, and for a matter of fact, when I was rearing my two daughters, I always had help. My mother had eight of us, but we had three mamas, four aunts, and so on because everybody on the street was a relative, even though there was no bloodline involved. We adopted them and they adopted us.

According to another teacher, Mrs. Loads:

I had neighbors that would tell me what my children were doing and it scared them to death. My neighbors would tell on them or try to discipline them so they would think twice before doing it. Back in those times, we had help and that was not that long ago. I think now the parents are young and do not know anything
about raising their children and do not see anything positive when you try to help them. They think you are picking on them and it is not that. Our neighborhoods have fallen, and I understand how the neighbors feel about not saying too much to them because we will get in trouble.

Parent respondent Mrs. Scarlet echoed Mrs. Brit's views:

I am an old lady at 75 years of age, so I have been around. The Black community is not helping one another raise their children like we used too. And this is a sad thing...but I am scared to reprimand children nowadays....I have lived in my home over 30-somethin' years. Older people have moved, or died off. In their place, younger folks have moved in. And they don't seem to value our community family traditions.

Five of the eight African American mothers were making plans to involve their sons in the school's rites of passage organization, which is modelled upon the recommendations of Hare and Hare (1985), who note that the development of rites of passage ceremonies for African American males is essential because the socialization of these youth is left too often to the peer groups and the streets. According to Hare and Hare, "Street education is maladaptive, even antithetical, to school performance and parental teaching" (quoted in Oliver, 1989, p. 33). They also maintain that African American boys must acquire, before their 12th birthday, "an awareness and understanding of themselves as well as their immediate and extended families, a sense of discipline and
responsibility, and a commitment to service in their neighborhoods and communities" (pp. 33-34). One of my parent respondents, Ms. Benson, noted that she believed the rites of passage program would help provide the structure, discipline, exposure to positive African American male role models, and wholesome environment that her son Erin needs to counter the negative forces of drug- and gang-infested neighborhood in which they live.

The following exchanges are representative of parents’ views about this program:

Researcher: Can you elaborate on why you like the concepts which encompass the rites of passage program?

Ms. Benson: Well, yes. From what I am reading about the program one of the goals of the program is to provide history/cultural and life skills activities for the African American male to increase his self-esteem and self-concept. Erin definitely is in need of in this area.

Researcher: Is there another area?

Ms. Benson: Oh, yes, I like that the program consists of stages of mastery. In order for Erin to move from one stage of development to another, he must first master the one he is in. He needs wholesome experiences and tasks which allow him to progress in such a way.

Researcher: Well that’s two reasons [laughter]. Is there a third?

Ms. Benson: I have more than three [giggles], but I guess the last dominant reason is that this program provides Erin the opportunity to associate with decent Black men who stand for something. These men can become his mentors since his father is not in the home.
Additional comments were obtained from Ms. Adams and Mrs. Scarlet:

Researcher: Ms. Adams, you seem very excited about the prospect of getting Tony enrolled in the rites of passage program. Can you outline the reasons for your joy?

Ms. Adams: From what I read, they [the trainers participating in the program] will be exposing him to African ways of doing things. He will learn African proverbs, and more African history. Also, the gentleman I talked to said the program emphasizes the importance of family and commitment to family.

Researcher: Am I hearing you say that you believe it's important for Tony to be exposed to this type of training?

Ms. Adams: Yes, because I see this as one of the major problems in the Black community. It seems that, for the most part, or should I say it has been my experience, that the Black man is not as committed to his family as he should be. I know this is true for Tony's dad. I want him [Tony] to realize that family is more important than anything.

Mrs. Scarlet: Even though my grandson Gerald (Jerry) attends church every Sunday and I keep him involve in church activities through the week, I believe this rites of passage program will support what is going on in church.

Researcher: How so?
Mrs. Scarlet: [reading from the brochure lying on the coffee table position in front of her] Well, it says here that the process allows the child, that would be Gerald, "to gain a sense of becoming an adult, to gain a clearer sense of self and of purpose." It seems to me if this program focuses on these areas, it makes it more than worthwhile. To me this program seems to focus on the everyday ways of living, whereas the pastor at church seems to focus on the spiritual side of living. I think it would be good to provide Gerald with both these experiences. Don't you?

Mrs. Ali's comments paralleled those of the above-noted parents. As she noted:

From my understanding of the offerings of the rites of passage program much of what is stressed is already tempered in our religious doctrine. Like the Muslim faith which stresses having positive interpersonal relationship, developing self-sufficient skills, promoting a spirituality based upon one's oneness with his roots, and encouraging opportunities to foster self-discipline skills, I believe the rites of passage program as well promotes these things. Unlike Akin, who fortunately is exposed to these values through his Muslim upbringing, many African American boys are not. Since many cannot receive this psychological, emotional, and spiritual training at home or through a religious affiliation, I believe the rites of passage program becomes an essential avenue in helping to prepare our children for productive citizenry.
These parents' opinions corroborated the objectives of the developers of the school's rites of passage program, who see it as a process that "punctuates an African American male's psyche with a commitment for family, race, community, and nation with a motivation for responsibility along with mastery of self" (Columbus Rites of Passage Kollective, 1992, p. 1.1). Their voices also reveal a commitment to a program that "sets in motions the ceremony and method to divest children of their childhood and begin a development of full citizenship as a responsible and productive adult in the African American community" (p. 1.1).

The Voices of the Students: Young African American Males’ Perceptions of Their Educational Dilemma

When queried about what they believe to be the causative factors behind African American males' academic crisis, the student respondents predominantly referred to teachers' attitudes and teaching strategies. Their responses, solicited in structured group sessions as well as structured individual interviews and during unstructured weekend activities, were consistent across various interview settings. Nine-year-old third-grader Erin's words, voiced during a group interview, are typical: "A lot of teachers don't like us Black boys. They say we are too bad." His comments were echoed by Brad, an 11-year-old fourth-grader, who asked, "Who wants to be in classroom where the teacher is only dogging you out? I want some 'spect [respect] from the teach [teacher]"; and Jerry, an 8-year-old third-grader, who noted, "My grandma told me if I respect myself, then other people will respect me. But this is not always true in school."
The theme of "wanting teachers' respect" surfaced repeatedly in the interviews and conversations I held with the student respondents. All eight shared stories about situations when they felt they did not receive the respect they thought they deserved. Many of their sharings dealt with disciplinary activities, feelings of being treated differently from girls, and instances of verbal and/or perceived metacommunication cues sent them by their teachers. Erin's words capture the collective feeling:

I remember my second-grade teacher fronted on me all the time. Sometimes I stutter, and she would holler at me and tell me I was not trying when I was. She made me feel dumb in front of my friends....I hated to come to school so I started acting out, I guess.

Many of the students noted that they had acted out in their previous school classrooms for various reasons related to their respect issues, claiming, like 10-year-old, fourth-grader Roger, "I didn't like the teacher 'cause the teacher didn't like me." Brad was more forceful: "I know how to move my ass from a situation [when] I am not being treated right." As 9-year-old Tony reflected: "Why treat someone nice who doesn't treat you nice or makes you feel dumb?" These perspectives corroborate the findings of the research literature. According to Shade (1990) African American male youth are perceptive, extremely relational-oriented, and acutely aware of nonverbal messages. They have also been shown to be group-oriented as opposed to individualistic in their interactions with others; thus, they are very sensitive about how they appear in front of others, particularly their peers (Shade, 1990).
Students’ remarks about issues related to their classroom performance (i.e., grades, completion of work, and overall achievement) were similarly revealing. As Brad noted, "I can do anything I put my mind to. But, if I don’t, I won’t." During his structured interview, he complained that school work was boring to him. He went on to provide a very detailed description in response to the question, "Tell me how your day in the classroom would be if you had to plan it":

First, I would recite the African American pledge like we do. I like that. Then I would go for a recess...uhm...maybe for an hour, then I would come back and do some math problems. Then after I do my math problems, I would walk around and help other people...uhm...like Roger, who is not good in math. Then it would be time for another recess. This time the recess can be for, oh, around 15 minutes because we can then come back and talk about African American history. And then there is lunch time after that.

Brad further noted that, during his perfect day, when students returned from lunch they would then have spelling, English, and social studies instruction. Because he was not good in social studies, he noted, he would get one-on-one attention, either from a teacher or a peer, who, in Brad’s words, "knew what he was talking about."

Each student was asked this question, and each of their responses yielded daily schedules with surprisingly similar characteristics and structure. The following six features were consistently iterated in their projections:
• Start the day unstructured and informally.
• Make the first structured activity of the day a subject that is liked by the student.
• Alternate unstructured and structured activities throughout the day.
• Provide frequent recesses throughout the day.
• Provide opportunities for students to help one another in the areas that they excel.
  (Even Roger, who was the slowest academically, indicated he would like to teach Mark, a classmate, how to draw better.)
• Include Afrocentric and African American history in each day’s learning. (All but one student placed this element on their morning classroom agendas, and that student did so because he claimed it gave him "something to look forward to.")

All eight students indicated their pleasure with the school and its double focus on Afrocentric concepts and African American male self-esteem and achievement. Several reasons were noted by these students as sources of their pleasure. Nine-year-old Jerry’s comments are representative of those of his peers. As he reflects:

I have enjoyed this school year [this far] because it seems like there is a lot of love in our classroom this year. Ms. Brit is talking to us every day about respecting each other as Black children. She says that this is important for everybody, but particularly Black boys, who are killing one another. Ms. Brit’s really working hard to teach us respect. She ends our rap sessions with stories that she has made up about Black children who honor one another. In her stories, those who honor one another grow up and become successful, and those who do
not respect each other grow up to become failures.

Jerry went on to discuss how Ms. Brit lets her Black male students sit in a circle during the afternoons and "rap" about issues that bother them. Jerry, along with his classmates Erin and Tony were quick to note that the boys themselves usually took charge of these sessions. In Jerry's words:

The Black girls do not have too much to say. It seems that they are not bothered by anything but we [Black boys] talk about, a lot of [bad and good] things, like shootings in our neighborhoods, drugs being pushed by the corner man, and family problems we are having. We also talk about sports, things we are going to do and what we have done for fun.

While the students had other, less-than-rosy things to say about their new Afrocentric school, they generally concluded, like Mark, that "Things seem to be getting better." Tony noted his approval of the changes at the school compared to their former school setting, at which Black male students were not allowed to address issues of importance to them in the classroom. According to Tony, "All we did was write and answer questions on a sheet of paper. We could not talk aloud very much and we did not talk about ourselves at all."

The four fourth-grade student respondents stressed their appreciation for the focus on African American history in their school. As 11-year-old Brad remarked: "I love hearing about what Black people have done." He also said he "loved" learning, reading,
and talking about African proverbs. His classmate Mark noted: "We take an African saying like 'Wisdom outweighs strength,' and Ms. Burton has us discuss it, and we go over its meaning and how it applies to our situations." Several of the boys claimed that they memorized the proverbs they learned during the African story-telling sessions with their teacher, Ms. Burton. They also noted in their group sessions that prior to the school's adoption of the Afrocentric curriculum and instructional program, they were not even familiar with the concept of African proverbs.

All of the student respondents concurred in their belief that their teachers were really interested in them and wanted to see them succeed. In Akin's words, "I know in my heart that Ms. Brit cares for all of us. She acts like she our mom away from home." As Brad stated,

Even though, Ms. Burton is strict and I think too structured sometimes, I know she is looking out for my best interest. And even though she gets on my last nerve sometimes, I know she cares about me. The teachers who did not want to work in this school could leave. And those teachers who didn't care about us left. I had a teacher last year and she left. I am glad because she did not like Black kids anyway.

Through their discussions of teachers' attitudes and/or expectations as well as teaching strategies, these eight African American male youth seem to be sending educators a direct message. This message is one that is corroborated by recent research literature. As Moody (1986) contends, everybody who is involved in the schooling
process should view Black boys as important; education should not be used as a means of sorting and shifting these youngsters out of an education but as a tool to assist them in reaching their fullest potential. Any group—parents, teachers, school administrators, community members, and so forth—who fails to consciously and systematically examine the cries of Black male students about distasteful situations transpiring within the learning walls simply elevates the vulnerability of these children, promotes their discontinuity, and worse, establishes an arena for their potential demise.

Chapter V represents a departure from the rigidity of conventional research reporting. The evocative narrative voice employed in that chapter delineates the study’s a priori theme of ecological factors through the voices of the parent participants.
Pseudonyms are used throughout Chapter IV to protect the confidentiality of the study's stakeholders. As well, one documented voice may represent a fusion of collective thought(s). The reader is reminded, however, that all dialogue represented was taken from transcripts and/or tape recordings of structured and unstructured, individual and group sessions and/or weekend activities.

1 Ms. Adams is referring to the Site-Based Management Council, a school group that welcomes and supports parental input and allows parents to take active roles in decision making about the school's direction.

2 In talking with the African American males about this issue, I concluded that either these African American males are shrewd enough to know the importance of parent and school working together, but because of their own agendas did not want these two fronts to connect on a consistent basis. Or, they really did see the coming together of these forces as a negative thing. In which case, I noted they needed to be advised of the importance of parent-school reciprocalness as seen by their parents and teachers.

3 Metacommunication is a term coined by the late Virginia Satir, family therapist, which refers to "body language" having ramifications without the spoken words.

4 Additional student recommendations for improvements are noted in Chapter VIII.
CHAPTER V

EVOCATIVE REPRESENTATIONS OF PARENTS' VIEWS
ON ECOLOGICAL FACTORS AFFECTING THE ACADEMIC PLIGHT
OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES

Introduction

In this chapter, I have chosen to present the views of the study's participants using an experimental method of analysis that Richardson (1991) refers to as "evocative representation." According to Richardson, this genre allows the qualitative researcher to "deploy literary devices to recreate lived experience and evoke emotional response" (p. 16). Moreover, these devices "display interpretative frameworks that demand analysis of themselves as cultural products and as methods for rendering the sociological" (p. 16). They allow ethnographers to go against established conventions of writing and explore nontraditional landscapes.

Richardson identifies five forms of evocative writing: narratives of self, ethnographic fiction, poetic representations, ethnographic drama, and mixed genres. I have selected the first form for the presentation of data that follows in this chapter. This genre employs dramatic recall and subtexts to construct a sequence of events—a plot of sorts—which, while withholding interpretation, asks readers "to emotionally relive the events with the writer" (p. 17). In short, the researcher allows his or her subjects to "tell stories" about their own lived experience. The presentation of data stories use only participants' words. Consequently, researchers may present subject views that entertain.
make points without tedious documentation, and generally say what might be "unsayable" in other circumstances. In presenting these frankly subjective narratives, an ethnographer is relieved of the problem of speaking for the "other" because they are the "other" in the text (p. 17).

The veering away from the more traditionally accepted forms of dissertation writing (e.g., in qualitative research, a reliance on realist tales) is risky for a doctoral student for several reasons. Using a highly personalized text to present one's analysis and research findings may not be readily accepted by one's committee members, particularly a member unfamiliar with qualitative research reporting. Another factor is the acceptability of one's dissertation findings by the scientific research community. Doctoral students who want their research findings accepted by this community are typically encouraged to follow more traditional forms of dissertation writing. At this entry level into the research community, those who want their study findings to be respected are admonished not to venture too far from the traditional way of reporting research. In the interest of bringing to the forefront the voices of the major stakeholders involved in ameliorating this crisis of Black male academic underachievement, I have decided to take the risk and attempt this method of data representation.

Throughout this chapter, pseudonyms are used to protect the confidentiality of the study's stakeholders. As well, one documented voice may represent a fusion of collective thoughts. The reader is reminded, however, that all dialogue represented is taken from transcripts of structured and unstructured individual and group sessions. In addition, all interactions were documented in the researcher's fieldwork notebook.
Evocative Tales

On a breezy but sunny autumn day, the gray four-door sedan crept down the street as the driver gazed at the large homes lining the avenue. One could imagine that these stately mansion-sized structures, now surrounded by overgrown weeds and dying shrubbery, were once elegant and dignified homes with well-manicured lawns. However, their grandeur long since faded, their beautiful landscaping a relic of the past, many of these houses stood boarded up, others windowless, and some in the process of being torn down. Many, however, were occupied. As I drove down the street to begin my day's appointments with three of the eight parents participating in my research study, I could not help but think (as I later recorded in my field notes) that these homes, this street, once held vast potential. Could that potential be reborn, I wondered? Could the beauty of these neighborhoods be recaptured?

My first home visit was scheduled with Ms. Adams, the 25-year-old mother of two boys, one of whom, Tony, age 9, was a third-grader attending the elementary school at which I was conducting my field research. I was anxious but eager to begin the interview. Ms. Adams greeted me at the door with a smile and graciously asked me to enter their home, a single-occupancy duplex. The exterior of the house was well-constructed. The interior told a dramatically different story.

Before I could say anything, Ms. Adams began profusely apologizing for her surroundings. "Please, please forgive my living room, Mrs. Brown, but I have been after the landlord for months about the hole in the ceiling and the loose floor planks." I assured her that I was not offended. I had prepared myself to encounter some pretty stark
home environments. Looking about the large, sparsely furnished living room for someplace to sit, I noticed a makeshift couch made of metal milk carts stacked one on top of another. In another corner, a dilapidated, oversized chair leaned against the wall. The room held nothing other than an old floor-model television. Again, Ms. Adams cautioned, "Mrs. Brown, please be careful. Do not put your bag on the floor. I have roaches and I do not want them to crawl in your bag." As I later recorded in my field notes, "Where other homes may have a computer, a typewriter, books, educational toys, everyday playthings, materials that could promote intellectual stimulation—in this house there is nothing, only roaches, peeling wallpaper, holes in the ceiling, and makeshift furniture."

Ms. Adams and I situated ourselves, she in the overstuffed chair and I on the "couch." She gave me permission to tape the interview and we proceeded to talk. After first scheduling future meeting times, we focused on the day's agenda. I explained to her that there were four theories I wanted to discuss with her over the next several months as possible causes for the Black male crisis in the classroom. I also stressed to her that I was most interested in hearing her thoughts and views about this problem, as well as her recommendations for change. She listened carefully and nodded her understanding and willingness to cooperate.

Preliminaries completed, we turned our attention to the first a priori theme, that of ecological reasons for the crisis. I kept my questions short and direct. Her responses, by contrast, were full and indepth. What follows are Ms. Adams's transcribed responses to some of the questions presented to her that day.
Researcher: Ms. Adams, please tell me how you feel about the influences of guns and/or drugs on your son’s classroom performance?

Ms. Adams: Well...uh, uhm...I really don’t believe they influence...well, let me put it this way. Ms. Brown, you can see how we live. I think the inside of this house is more important on Tony’s school performance than guns or drugs.

Researcher: Specifically, what do you mean about the “inside of this house”?  
Ms. Adams: What I mean is the roaches, the holes in the ceiling, the loose floor planks. I mean the leak from the ceiling that messed up my furniture. I am talking about...

She went on at length, describing the many problems of her dwelling, and our discussion soon turned to tenants’ rights issues and organizations that provided advocacy interventions for housing consumers. Using this discussion to ease into a discussion of individual, collective, and parental empowerment, I suggested that perhaps she and some of the other parents whom I had yet to meet might want to form a group to address these types of concerns. Obviously excited by this idea, Ms. Adams listened attentively, occasionally interrupting to ask a question or share an opinion. We agreed to make a special appointment to focus on her tenant concerns. I redirected the focus of our conversation back to the matter of Tony’s school performance.

Researcher: So, I am hearing you say that guns or drugs do not influence Tony’s performance in school?
Ms. Adams: Well, I guess what I am saying is that if I can provide him and his
brother with a nice home, I can fight those guns and gang
influences.

Researcher: Hmm, how so?

Ms. Adams: Well, I kinda of do it now. Hell, no I does it now! I don’t allow
Tony out in the street after 5:30 p.m. in the autumn and winter
months because it gets dark early. I question him all the time
about gangs around here, and I have my brother talk to him about
the use of drugs and what to do if anyone approaches him about
drugs.

Researcher: Are there active gangs in the neighborhood?

Ms. Adams: There are not any that I know of. I pretty sure there are not any
because Tony would tell me. Even though he is only nine, he and
his friends know everything that’s happening.

Researcher: Are there a lot of drugs in the neighborhood?

Ms. Adams: Hell, yeah...oh, excuse me, Mrs. Brown, I don’t mean to show you
disrespect....You know, if we get this group together that you
talked about earlier, I would be glad to lead discussions on ways
to help our children deal with the drug man on the street. And my
brother, who was on drugs and went to jail, is now out. He is the
one that talks to Tony every weekend. I am sure we can get him
involved. Right now, he’s doing great. He learned a trade when
he was in the joint, and now he presses shirts for a Chinese man on Walnut Street.

Researcher: I am then hearing you say that you do not believe that guns and drug-infested neighborhoods or gang-related activities can or do influence your son’s school performance?

Suddenly becoming very circumspect, Ms. Adams requested me to repeat the last question, so I played it back on the tape recorder. She relistened to the question twice and reflected:

No...uhm...no, that’s not what I am saying. What I am saying is that if I can keep control over Tony and talk to him every day, and have my brother, his father, and other people talk to him, then we can fight the influence these things may have on him. See, I talks to my son every day about this crap. I tell him my dreams about leaving this house and getting a good job. I want to go back to school, get my high school degree, and get off welfare.

Throughout our discussion, Ms. Adams shared many of her dreams with me: being able to find a pretty home, having her children become well-educated, and finding a nice man. This latter mention gave me the opening to focus on yet another ecological issue, that of the impact of single-parent, female-headed households on Black male academic achievement:
Researcher: Ms. Adams, many are saying that the African American child is having so much trouble in the classroom because a majority of them are coming from one-parent, female-headed households? That there is no discipline, structure, and/or male role model in these homes?

Ms. Adams: I cannot speak for everybody, but in my case, that is hogwash! My mama raised eight of us without a man in the house. There are two girls and six boys. My brother was the only one that got in drug trouble. The rest of my brothers live out of state, but they all have jobs. I was the only girl to have a child out of wedlock and at an early age. I was 17 when I had Tony. Nowadays (giggles), that's old (giggles). My sister Amber, you will meet her a little later, is one year younger than me, has a high school diploma, a nice job and no children.

Researcher: So, you are saying you do not buy into this theory?

Ms. Adams: No, I don't buy into it because I believe it is the type of mother you are that makes the difference. The same about the father. You can have a father in the house and he can be no good. I would not want Tony’s father living with us. Don’t get me wrong, he’s okay, better than most, I guess. But we would just argue. I give my son structure and discipline. He knows what’s right and wrong.
Researcher: So, you are saying it does not matter whether the home has a father in it?

Ms. Adams: Well, what I guess I am saying is, sure it is nice to have a man in the home, but it is not necessary.

Researcher: What about providing role models?

Ms. Adams: What about it? Tony sees his uncle that lives here all the time. I have a boyfriend that he likes and [who] treats him good. He also sees his father when he wants to. He only lives two streets over from this house.

Ms. Adams continued to focus on her beliefs about responsible motherhood. If she did what she was supposed to do, she noted emphatically, then her sons would be fine. Being that our time was almost up, I asked Ms. Adams to sum up her thoughts on the ecological issues affecting her son's school performance. Again, she became serious and pensive:

Well, um, I guess I have been saying that no one wants guns and drugs in the neighborhood. But the fact is that they are here. So, as a mama, I must warn my sons about how bad these things are. I must keep my own home together and make my sons happy within it. If they are happy here, then they won't turn to drugs, guns or gangs.
After recording this last comment, I ended our conversation by reviewing with Ms. Adams the schedule for our subsequent meetings and reconfirming my next visit for the following week. I said goodbye and left to visit the next parent on my itinerary.

A few streets away from the Adams home resided Mrs. Scarlet, grandmother of Jerry, age 8, another third-grader and a classmate of Tony's. As I turned onto the street leading to Mrs. Scarlet's, the scenery changed. The homes on this street, while similar to those on Ms. Adams's street in terms of size and construction, were well cared for. They were surrounded with meticulously groomed lawns, flowers, and shrubbery. A welcome sign greeted me as I drove up the driveway to Ms. Scarlet's yard. Mrs. Scarlet, expecting me, opened the door immediately after I rung the doorbell. I entered a spacious and beautiful foyer. Ms. Scarlet, wearing a full apron over her neatly pressed house dress, led me through several rooms to the dining room. As I walked, I looked at the many family pictures adorning the walls, the lovely antique furniture, silverware, and crystal vases as well as the several "what-nots" and bric-a-brac attractively placed throughout the rooms. The huge dining area held a long formal table, covered with a beautiful tablecloth of delicate lace, seating for 10, and a matching china cabinet. Mrs. Scarlet offered me a seat at the table.

I asked Mrs. Scarlet's permission to tape our conversation. Consenting, she hurriedly went to the china cabinet to get a towel to place under the recorder. "To protect the wood," she explained. Our discussion began:

Researcher: Mrs. Scarlet, thank you for allowing me in your home. I would like to focus on one area of concern today, that of how you see the
environment influencing your grandson's performance in school. You know, guns, drugs, gangs and one parent female headed homes...

Mrs. Scarlet: First of all, honey, call me "Grandmother Scarlet." You seem so nice and you are lovely and you are so far from home. I been thinking a lot about what you asked me earlier [when she first agreed to participate in the study]. I am taking care of my two grandsons and my granddaughter. The two grandsons have the same mother. My granddaughter is their cousin and belongs to my other daughter.

Mrs. Scarlet proceeded to give me pertinent information about the children in her care: their ages, mothers, and so forth. She later refocused on the topic at hand:

Mrs. Scarlet: You know, drugs and guns are nothing but Satan's demons. How can they not affect my grandsons? As you can see, this street and some around here are kept up. That's because most of us own our homes. We take pride in our homes and neighborhood. But it just makes me sick how these satanic demons are taking over.

Researcher: Mrs. Scarlet, please explain what you mean when you state "these satanic demons are taking over"?

Mrs. Scarlet: What I mean is that Lucifer [Satan] has evil forces operating to destroy our Black neighborhoods.
Researcher: Specifically who or what are the demons?

Mrs. Scarlet: The demons are Lucifer's workers. They are the dope men who are pushing the drugs. They are the gun men who are selling the guns to our young Black boys. They are the gang leaders who are teaching our young Black boys to kill each other. These people and the evil things they are pushing are all Satan's demons. I constantly talk to [my grandchildren] about these demons. I make sure they are in church activities during the week, and also all day Sunday!

Researcher: You keep them busy?

Mrs. Scarlet: I most certainly do. An idle mind is the devil's workshop.

Researcher: Well then, are you saying that drugs, guns, and gangs influence Jerry?

Mrs. Scarlet: Well, thus far—thank you, Jesus—it has not directly affected them in any way. But it has indirectly affected them in another way.

Researcher: What do you mean?

Mrs. Scarlet: [lowering her voice to a whisper and leaning forward] I am taking care of my two grandsons because their mother is in jail because of drugs. Lordy, Lordy, me. I told her to be careful and not get caught up in the wrong crowd, but she would not listen. My daughter attended the community college here for some type of medical assistant...I don't know the proper name. Anyways, she
supplied the medicine closet at the hospital. What happen was that
she stopped supplying the hospital closet and started supplying her
old boyfriend. She was caught, and you know the rest.

Researcher: How has their mother’s absence affected the children?

Mrs. Scarlet: I believe all children need their mother more so than their father,
but I believe they are lucky because they have me. I use their
mama’s bad situation to show them what happens when one goes
bad at any age!

Researcher: Do they have contact with their mom?

Mrs. Scarlet: Oh yes, because of the nature of her crime, she is not in this city.
But I have them write her and she them. All her letters tells them
about staying good and listening to their grandmother.

Researcher: Well, it seems you keep the lines of communication open with your
grandsons.

Mrs. Scarlet: Honey, we not only talk, we pray together. This is something I
have done all my life with my children.

At this point, I shifted the focus of our conversation to yet another ecological
issue:

Researcher: Mrs. Scarlet, what effects do you see a female-headed home having
on Jerry’s functioning in the classroom?

Mrs. Scarlet: None.
Researcher: Can you explain why you feel this way?

Mrs. Scarlet: Because I was raised by my mama. She had ten of us. We all turned out good and in no trouble. I had six, my husband died early, and I raised my children alone most of their lives. All of my children, except you know the one, are hard-working, God-fearing people who live in nice homes and have fairly decent jobs.

Researcher: Well, why do you think children from one-parent, female-headed homes are going astray, particularly a large portion of African American males?

Mrs. Scarlet: Hmm, I can tell you several reasons, and it ain't because they are coming just from female-run homes. It's because of the no-account mamas themselves.

Researcher: What do you mean?

Mrs. Scarlet: These young gals are babies themselves. I know of at least three on this street that were between 14 and 15 and had babies. Just the other day, my friend told me about a 13-year-old girl—13, mind you. I look outside my window every day and see Tina and Janice, switching their little behinds up and down the street. Both of them are on welfare and just had babies, and I know for a fact one is pushing drugs. These girls don't have no morals or values. So when their children grow up, they will not know how to pass values onto them. A child without values and morals turns into a
bad child. That's what you see happening in the classrooms. These are some sassy young girls having babies. They show no respect to their elders. In return, we cannot help them raise their children.

Mrs. Scarlet next began to talk about the breakdown of the traditional kinship structure of the Black community:

You know, as we talk, I thought of another reason why we are having so much trouble with our children. It used to be, when I was a single mama, I never felt alone. My neighbors were parents to my children. I sometimes worked late scrubbing White folks's floors, but I knew Miss Sarah or Mr. Harry would be watching out for my children.

Mrs. Scarlet explained that in her day, as compared to the present time, family ties were not defined by bloodlines but the sharing of similar cultural backgrounds. Miss Sarah thus became "Aunt" Sarah; Mr. Henry, "Uncle" Henry. She continued:

Mrs. Scarlet: You know, as far back as I can remember, I ran from house to house. Everyone on the street was either an aunt or uncle. If I did something bad, I would get a switching from Aunt Sarah. She would let mama know and I would get another one.

Researcher: Why do you think the tradition is disappearing? Do people still care?
Mrs. Scarlet: Oh, heavens yes. We still care, but we are scared.

Researcher: Scared how?

Mrs. Scarlet: Scared of being shot, scared of our feelings being hurt, or scared that our property will be damaged. You cannot approach these kids anymore. In my day, I better not talk back to an elder. Nowadays, they have no respect.

Mrs. Scarlet proceeded to bemoan the conditions of the neighborhood. I asked her if I could summarize her thoughts on the ecological issues we had discussed during this interview. She nodded her consent.

Researcher: I heard you saying that the issues of gangs, drugs, and guns may directly or indirectly affect the African American child, and that single female homes are not a direct factor. What overrides these issues is the mother’s ability to be a good parent. You see loose morals and values, no parental guidance and structure in the home, and the breakdown in support systems for the mother and children in the community as factors that attribute to the most harm. Is that what I am hearing you say?

Mrs. Scarlet closed her eyes, slowly leaned her head back against the chair, and sat motionless. Several minutes passed before she responded to this question. She had the following to say:
Mrs. Scarlet: Um, what you heard me say was that babies are having babies. Because of this, they don’t have the patience or know-how to be good parents. They simply ain’t ready. Since they did not get a good upbringing themselves, they don’t know how to respect their elders....So, they don’t learn a darn thing because they don’t want to listen! Then their babies suffer. When they get old enough for school, they don’t know how to act in school because they weren’t trained. The cycle begins and it’s hard to stop.

Researcher: So, you are saying it is not the guns, drugs, gangs, or one-parent, female-headed home that should concern us, but the training of the mothers and/or fathers?

Mrs. Scarlet: Yes, honey. Look, we had all these things [the conditions listed above] in the Black community when I was coming along or when my children was coming along.

I reminded Mrs. Scarlet that it seemed as if these conditions seemed significantly more prevalent now than before. She agreed, but argued:

That’s true, but they still existed in the old days, and usually, those kids who got in trouble before could not find their mamas because they were in the streets, had no grandmas in the house, or just did not listen to the neighbors. There has always been demons in the Black community working at a more visible level than the White community, but you did not see the Black children, male or female,
going to the devil like we see now. I am telling you, honey, there ain't no God nowhere, and we need to put structure back into the homes with a good mama or papa at the helm.

I thanked Mrs. Scarlet for her time and left after confirming with her my intention to return for more conversations about other theories.

My third scheduled home visit of the day was with Ms. Benson, an attractive young woman of 24, and the mother of Erin, age 9, another third grader, and a five-month-old daughter. The Bensons lived on the other side of the city's main throughway, where the homes were more contemporary and smaller than those of Ms. Adams's and Mrs. Scarlet's neighborhoods, but clean and well kept. I rang the bell and Ms. Benson pecked out at me from behind fully drawn drapes at the front window. She shouted through the closed door, "Just a minute!"

After what seemed like a 15- to 20-minute wait, the door was flung open and I was invited in.1 I entered a nicely furnished living room. In one corner a book case was displayed holding such classics as *Moby Dick*, *Alice in Wonderland*, along with works by contemporary authors like Tom Clancy, John Michener, and Maya Angelou. Ms. Benson indicated that she was renting her home from her mother, and that she eventually wanted to purchase it. Her mother, she noted, was a successful businesswoman who had relocated her residence to the other side of the city and who encouraged her daughter to continue her college education.
To break the ice, I inquired about the baby, whose name was Tashi, and about Erin’s and the baby’s father or fathers. Ms. Benson’s responses were candid:

I fell in love and had not been on birth control for a number of years. Tashi was most certainly an accident, but I do not believe in abortions. My plans are to wait until she is a year old and then put her in some type of nursery school and complete my education....I rarely see the baby’s father, and Erin’s father is in and out of jail. So I have intentionally cut off all contacts with him.

Judging from her answers to these and other of my preliminary questions, I concluded that Ms. Benson, whom I also discovered was a third-year student of child psychology at the college level, was an articulate and critical thinker. Thus, in questioning her about the a priori theories that were the focus of my research, I posed more philosophical inquiries of her than of the other two parents I had interviewed earlier that day.

Researcher: Let’s begin to focus on environmental issues such as guns, drugs, gangs and female-parent-headed households. Let’s first talk about guns and drugs. What impact do you believe they play in your son’s, as well as other African American male’s school performances?

Ms. Benson: Oh, no doubt they have a tremendous impact. If not consciously, I know subconsciously. In this neighborhood, I have seen a difference, it seems like overnight. Most of these people were like
my mom and dad: hard-working, middle-class people. Recently, a lot of them, like my mom, have sold their homes or rented them out. A younger group of people have moved in. Even though a lot of them are around my age and some are older, they seem wilder. They don’t seem to exercise any control over their children. I get up early in the morning, around 1:00 or 2:00 a.m., and kids around 12 and 13 are in the streets. I have seen these kids playing with real guns and thinking nothing about it.

Researcher: What did you do about it?


Researcher: Do you think a strong family structure can override the ill effects drugs and guns may have on a child?

Ms. Benson: I do not believe that a blanket "yes" or "no" can adequately answer this question. You would have to look at a number of variables.

Researcher: Such as?

Ms. Benson: Such as, how consistent is the structure the children are receiving in the home? Who are the significant figures that the children turn to? How quality is the time and communication offered to the children? What type of support systems are in place to augment the structure in the home? Even though I am a young parent, I believe I am a good parent because I had a good role model.
learned from my mother. She was a working mom, but I saw how she connected her systems.

Researcher: What systems did she connect?

Ms. Benson: Oh, she connected family members, neighbors, church, and school.

Researcher: Could you explain?

Ms. Benson: Well, my mom and dad divorced when I was around three years old. I visited dad occasionally, but my stronger relationship remained with mom. After the divorce, she went back to school, completed her bachelor’s degree in business, and then went on to receive a MBA.

Ms. Benson reflected on her mother’s persistent and resourceful struggle to make a good life for herself and her daughter:

Miss Nellie, I called her Grandma Nellie, lived next door. She is now dead, but she was like a grandma to me. My own grandmother died, but I always thought of Grandma Nellie as my grandmother. When Mommie worked late or could not make a play or do something with me, Grandma Nellie was there.

Ms. Benson recalled a conversation she had overheard her mother having with Grandma Nellie about the importance of being there for her child and participating in the significant events in her life, even if it meant taking off time from work and losing money. She reflected on how much her mother’s efforts meant to her:
Mommie would always explain things to me, so I knew she was doing the best and looking out for our future. But I was around 10 years old when she said those words to Grandma Nellie. Since she did not know I was listening, I guess it just confirmed for me she was telling the truth. It was like (giggle) I knew she would not lie to Grandma Nellie.

Refocusing on the present and the issue at hand, I asked Ms. Benson to share her opinions about gangs and their influences on the classroom behavior of African American males:

Ms. Benson: I perceive gangs as substitute homes for some of these African American boys. Something is lacking from their immediate home environment, so they turn to the streets to meet their needs.

Researcher: What needs do you think the street provides?

Ms. Benson: Oh, it's no doubt that the streets meet psychological, social, economical, and cultural needs for some of these kids.

Researcher: Can you "play out" your response through using a hypothetical situation?

Ms. Benson: Yes, and my situation does not have to be hypothetical. I can use my son Erin as an illustration.

Researcher: You can?

Ms. Benson: I can. Erin, I believed, had a self-image problem because of a speech problem. I perhaps waited too long before I focused on it.
In hindsight, I should have addressed it much earlier, but that's water over the damn. I am doing something about it now.

Ms. Benson delineated that Erin was held back in school one year because of his speech problem, and she believed that this retention in grade had lowered his self-esteem. She noted that at the time Erin was experiencing a lot of emotional problems as a result of his school difficulties, she had been focused on emotional problems of her own. The results were that he formed a group with three other males and they began to call themselves the Black Panther Juniors. Ms. Benson admitted that at first she had been pleased about Erin's newfound fellowship because it gave her "release time" from her motherly duties. She justified her abdication of role by rationalizing that he was "with other children" and "preoccupied." In hindsight, she conceded, she should have spent more quality time with her son:

You know, as I look back on that time and evaluate what was transpiring, I was using those other boys to babysit my son. In other words, I was allowing 8-year-old boys to look after each other. That is how I believe gangs get started in the first place.

In focusing on how this group met Erin's psychological, social, economical, and cultural needs, she shared the following insights:

Ms. Benson: Are you familiar, Ms. Brown, with Maslow's hierarchy of needs?
Researcher: (Surprised) Yes, I am.
Ms. Benson: Well, you know that the third rung deals with the concept of "belongingness." There is a need for all of us to belong to someone, something, or some group. I believe, when Erin failed in school and his former friends left him behind, he needed to find a new group association, so he developed his own. In return, this brought him a social achievement, which led to him feeling better about himself, which enhanced his psychological well-being. As an African American male, it helped him culturally because they began to mimic historical African American figures that they had read about or heard about, like Stokely Carmichael, Malcolm X...

Ms. Benson continued, eloquently articulating how the revival of interest and appreciation for these and other African American leaders and organizations had helped to give African American children, particularly males, a sense of pride:

You know, Ms. Brown, gangs are a representation of our heritage. If one studies African heritage, we all had tribes, clansman, and were divided into territorial groupings. I am not saying gangs are good, but I believe we must have a sense of origin. In fact, it is not the gang that is bad, but what the gang stands for. This should be the issue at hand.

Ms. Benson explained that the problems began when Black gang members turned their energies to making money, which often meant involvement with drugs and crime:
In many gangs, particularly the leader, does not take drugs. What they do is sell drugs to make money. The money then allows them to buy certain nice things, which gives them power. Psychologically, it makes them feel worthy. Gangs are seen as businesses by many African American males. The guns enter the picture because all businessmen, whether Black or White, need protection. The White man has his protection, the establishment, you know, formal police departments, alarm systems, and invisible firearms. The Black boy has his visible gun.

Ms. Benson digressed to explain her position and share her opinions about the National Rifle Association and the multibillion dollar gun industry, which she saw as ruled by a corrupt and greedy system headed by White men. I interrupted to redirect her comments:

Researcher: How then does all of this affect African American male’s classroom performance?

Ms. Benson: It affects them because exposure of all of this follows them into the classroom. An attitude is developed by many. I briefly saw this in Erin, but I immediately put a stop to it.

In the absence of a solid home anchor, Ms. Benson maintained, and in cases where the classroom is not addressing the needs and interests of African American males, the presence of guns, drugs, and gangs present a formidable alternative.
Turning to the issue of single-parent, female-headed homes, Ms. Benson had the following to say:

Men bring to a family a certain strength that women can’t bring. We have the emotional strength that men don’t have, but men have a strength that boys need to get that extra kick to get going. I have three brothers and I have a boyfriend. Now, I can see a difference with Erin. My brothers are not around all the time. There is a difference even when he spends time with his father. There is a difference in his attitude and behavior from day to day, the way he does his chores and everything. I can tell him to do something and I have to tell him over and over again, But if my boyfriend or brothers tell him to do something, most of the time he is on it [does it].

Ms. Benson further asserted that because most classrooms are female-headed and many times there is not a strong male at home, African American males transfer their typical home behavior and responses to the classroom setting. Depending on the female teacher, she added, it may or may not lead to problems. Wrapping up her comments, she emphasized that while she very much respected the importance of the father’s role in a household, she did not believe a male presence was essential for developing well-behaved African American males:

In assessing why African American males’ behavior are disruptive in the classroom in relation with environmental issues, I believe three factors should be examined. We must look at what’s going on in the immediate household: the
standards of discipline and structure, the amount of quality talk that is taking place between parents and children. We must examine what support systems are in place for both parents and children to take advantage of, such as community centers, social activities, neighbors, and churches. We must ask questions such as: how does the parent link with the school, or what efforts is the school making to link with parents? I believe parents must attend their children’s school activities, meet with the teacher ongoingly to monitor their children’s performance. In return, teachers must take a risk by doing home visits, calling parents up, writing performance letters...

On that note, and having run out of time, we agreed to terminate our conversation for the day. However, Ms. Benson agreed to share her views about the disproportionate numbers of suspensions and dropouts among African American males in future sessions.

Conclusion

Throughout the remainder of the week, and into the first days of the next, I continued to make home visits. While some of the parent respondents were more intellectual and others more folksy in their discussions of the impact of ecological factors on the academic plight of Black males, they shared many views in common. All seemed to have given the questions at hand some serious thought at one time or another. All concurred that guns, drugs, and gangs exerted a negative influence on Black male school performance, yet they located the crux of the problem within the home. As such, they
turned the bulk of their attention toward ameliorating and eradicating the "demons" plaguing their communities and their sons (or grandsons) at the family or household level.

In examining what they could do in their immediate home fronts, these parents generally held opinions similar to those stated by Ms. Benson, who noted: "We as Black parents must provide quality time with our children. Along with that we must provide discipline, a structured and, above all, a loving home environment." These sentiments concur with Clark's (1986) conclusion that it was neither socioeconomic status or the presence of two parents in a household, but the quality of the interaction taking place between African American parents and their children that had the most significant impact on the children's performance and outcomes as learners. My encounters with these parent respondents whose sons attended this Afrocentric school yielded ample evidence that the parents were operationalizing at least four of the five traits Clark (1986) identifies as visible characteristics of families that produce high-achieving children, which include:

- **Transmitting Hope**: Parents believe the world will be better for their children.
- **Being Consistent**: Parents supply rules which do not change from day to day.
- **Being Complimentary**: Parents praise their children because they are sensitive about what they say and its effect on their offspring.
- **Having High Expectations**: Parents expect their children to do well in school and go on to college.
- **Being Primary Educators**: Parents believe they are the primary educators of their children. They do not relegate the responsibility to the teacher. They place the major burden on themselves.
Of these traits, the last-noted behavior, that of "being primary educators" was not being significantly modelled by the parent respondents in the present study. However, many of them indicated their recognition that this was an area in which they needed to improve.
FOOTNOTES

1 I later discovered she was putting on her facial make-up.
CHAPTER VI

CASE STUDY ANALYSES: BLACK MALE SELF-CONCEPT

I ain't got no poor self-concept, they just don't know how to teach. (Tony, nine-year-old African American male)

The Approach

This chapter is devoted to making sense of the data through the eyes of my study's primary subjects: the eight African American male students. Thus, their stories, particularly their views on their own and other Black males’ self-concepts, will be conveyed using the case study approach. According to Patton (1990), this approach "becomes particularly useful where one needs to understand some special people, particular problem, or unique situation in great depth, and where one can identify cases rich in information—rich in the sense that a great deal can be learned from a few exemplars of the phenomenon in question" (p. 54).

Five of the students participating in this study—Mark, Stan, Jerry, Tony, and Brad—responded positively to the statement, "I feel good about me," on the student survey. On the other hand, Erin, Akin, and Roger noted agreement with the questionnaire statement, "I really don’t feel that good about me." These perspectives were triangulated using several sources. Responses to items on the student questionnaire addressing various
self-concept issues (see Appendix D) were compared to statements made during the structured individual interview and structured group sessions as well as during unstructured weekend activities. The students' views about this critical issue are now presented through case study profiles.

**The Voices**

**Mark Chest**

Described by his mother as a "good boy, who I ask God to bless every single day," fourth-grader Mark Chest, age 9, is the eldest of four siblings. He has a brother (age 6), a sister (age 4), and a three-month-old sister. His mother, Doris, is in her early thirties and is extremely religious. She described her husband Tim, Mark's father, as a "hard-working family man" in his mid-thirties. Tim was the only biological father of any of the student participants who resided in the home along with his family.

Mark was described by his teacher, Ms. Burton, as an "extremely well-mannered young man who excels in his class work and easily bonds with his classmates." During the period of my research tenure, he had been on the honor roll the last six grading periods and maintained a B-plus average. His school attendance was excellent, and he had never been suspended nor even sent to the principal's office for any malfeasance.

During his structured interview, Mark indicated that he felt "real good" about himself. When asked, "What does a good self-concept mean to you?" he responded simply: "It means I love me." He noted that his pastor repeatedly emphasized to him that God loves everyone and expects everyone to love themselves and each other, and that his
mother and grandmother frequently admonished him with the adage, "If you do not like yourself, no one else will." I asked Mark if he believed many of his African American male friends liked themselves. His response: "Most of my friends like themselves, from what I can tell. They do not say bad things about themselves." He described how they often called each other "smart" and talked about growing up and getting good jobs so they could buy nice cars, clothes, and a nice house for their mothers. (At the time, he confided, he himself was saving his money in a piggy bank to buy his mother "something nice.") Concluding his remarks on self-concept, he stated emphatically, "I know me and my friends love ourselves."

The views Mark expressed in the group interview were consistent with those he voiced during the individual structured interview and his responses to the survey items. In group discussions, he repeated his comments about feeling good about himself and mentioned again his pastor's, mother's, and grandmother's influence and encouragement. To questionnaire items such as "I am smart," "My teacher likes me," "I do well in most of my subjects," and "My teacher pays attention to me," he selected the most favorable choice on the scale, explaining afterwards that he always received good grades because he always completed his classwork and homework, statements his teacher corroborated. He also noted that his teacher consistently praised his work and that his father gave him money when he got A's.

Mark's behavior during weekend activities was exemplary. He was always well-groomed and well-mannered. On one outing, I commented on his neat appearance. He quickly responded, "My pastor always says cleanliness is next to Godliness."
Stan, age 10, was a fourth grader in Ms. Burton’s class at the time of the study. He resided with his mother, Ann (a young woman in her mid-twenties); his six-month-old baby sister; grandmother; and uncle in a comfortable, two-story duplex house. Stan, his mother, and sister lived downstairs while his uncle and grandmother shared the upstairs. His father, Ralph, also in his mid-twenties, lived two blocks away.

Ms. Burton described Stan, who maintained a B to C average, as "bright" and "energetic." She reported that he was an "above average thinker" who could "easily do A to B work" if and when his rambunctious behavior was redirected. Though he had been retained in the second grade and was often sent to the principal’s office, Stan had never been suspended.

Articulate and a quick thinker, Stan appeared to have given the issue of self-concept, which he defined as "how I feel about me," much thought. He stressed the importance of "not letting anyone else tell me how I should feel about me." When asked why he felt good about himself, Stan explained how his mother, grandmother, uncle, Ms. Burton, and other teachers consistently told him how smart and good-looking he was, and how they encouraged him to believe he could do anything he put his mind to.

Stan’s survey responses were consistent with his expressions of positive self-concept. Like, Mark, he indicated that he felt smart, and that he believed his teacher paid attention to him and liked him. He noted that his mother, grandmother, uncle, father, and others often told him he could "do anything as long as he set his mind to do it." Some inconsistencies in Stan’s perspectives became apparent during the group interview,
however. For example, in a group session, he noted that sometimes he did not feel good about himself. Questioned about the times and/or situations that made him feel bad, Stan discussed his former school, his feelings about having failed the second grade, and some teachers' comments he had recently overhead. Regarding the latter, Stan had apparently eavesdropped on a conversation between three White teachers about some of their African American male students. He shared some of the teachers' comments, which were quite disparaging, with the group and concluded, "I guess I really did not feel bad about me, but I got sick and tired of those people talking about Black boys."

Jerry Moore

Jerry, age eight, was in Mrs. Brit's third-grade class when I conducted my study. He, his seven-year-old brother, and their cousin Lisa resided with their grandmother, Mrs. Scarlet, in her large, elegant home while their mother was serving out a prison sentence in another state. Mrs. Scarlet often expressed pride in Jerry, describing him as "a very smart boy" who made good grades and did what he was "'sposed to do." These sentiments were echoed by Jerry's teacher, who described him as "a lovely, well-mannered young boy who holds much potential!" She indicated that he had a perfect attendance record and had never been sent to the principal's office nor suspended from school. According to Jerry: "My grandma tells me and my brother every morning to go to school and do the best we can. She says God did not give her any dumb grandkids, and we better bring home A's, B's, and C's—no D's or F's." He noted that his mother, in her phone conversations from prison, repeatedly praised his academic achievement.
Like Mark, Jerry demonstrated a strong religious influence. He was an active participant in his church, where he was often called upon to give speeches before the congregation. When asked how his church involvement and the support of the church members made him feel, he responded "Real good." This attitude of feeling good about himself was evidenced in many other aspects of his life and behavior.

Introspective, observant, and well-behaved, Jerry was one of the few student respondents who was allowed to attend all of the unstructured weekend activities. During one outing, a trip to the go-cart rink, the other boys were loudly and excitedly carrying on in the line where they waited to receive their car tokens. I was becoming somewhat disgusted and anxious about their overly zealous behavior and was about to shout "Cool it or we will all go home" when a small hand gently slipped itself into mine. It was Jerry. "Miss J.," he told me, "they are acting like a bunch of heathens. That is what my grandma says when me and my brother act that way! She says that is why White folks do not want us around." He then instructed me to stay put. He would "get them together," he said. With that, Jerry ran over to his peers and yelled, "Miss J. said be quiet, or she will take all our behinds home!" His message worked, for a while at least.

Jerry's responses to the student questionnaire were consistent with his interview statements. He noted that he did well in all his subjects. In response to the item, "My teacher likes me", he selected the most positive response, printing over the item, in big letters, an additional comment: "Mrs. Brit loves me." He also selected the most positive responses for the items: "My teacher pays attention to me," "My teacher calls on me," "I am smart," and "I do well in school."
During his structured individual interview, I asked Jerry if what the media was saying about African American males affected how he felt about himself. He thought for a moment and asked me, "What are they saying?" I told him they were saying that African American males are getting into a lot of trouble and not doing well in school. His reply: "No." When I asked him to elaborate, he responded, in an exasperated tone, "Well, they sure aren't talking about me!"

Tony Adams

Tony, age 9, was a third grader in Mrs. Brit's class. The eldest of two siblings, Tony lived with his mother (a young woman in her mid-twenties), his five-year-old brother, and baby sister in a single-family dwelling. Ms. Adams attended Tony's school as a child and was a former student of Mrs. Brit's. According to Mrs. Brit, Tony was a underachieving C-average student who demonstrated inconsistent behavior. Consequently, he was frequently sent to the principal's office for disciplinary action; however, Tony had an excellent attendance record and had never been suspended from school. "Tony is temperamental," she commented, "One day he is smart as he can be, the next day he is raising hell. But I always bring him back under control."

Though less meticulous about his appearance than were some of his peers, Tony always seemed comfortable with himself. His structured individual interview comments revealed a high self-concept, which he defined as "looking at me and saying whether or not I like me or not like me." He continued, "I like me." Tony indicated that besides his mother, aunt, and uncle, his teacher was his strongest source of self-reassurance. "Mrs.
Brit always makes me feel good," he noted, "She tells me I am smart like my mom....Mrs. Brit is always talking to us about our self-concepts. She says African American children must feel good about themselves."

Tony selected the most positive responses to the following survey items: "My teacher likes me," "My teacher pays attention to me," "I do well in most of my subjects," and "I like school." His high self-esteem was further corroborated by his comments during the group interviews and group activities. During one session, he launched into an inspirational speech on why it is important for African American males to feel good about themselves. As he told one of the other boys, "Man, you cannot go around feeling low about yourself. My mamma told me if you think you are dumb, then you're going to act like you dumb, and if you act dumb then you will end up a dummy. And man, nobody wants to be a dummy." He also commented, "I feel good about me because my mamma, aunt, and uncle all told me that I am a good and smart boy. And besides, Mrs. Brit, my teacher, says I am handsome and can become a doctor one day. Because that's what I want to do!" As I noted in my log for that day, "It was as if Tony has been a sponge, he literally soaked up all the important reasons that an individual should feel good about him/herself." During our weekend outings, Tony occasionally assumed the role of my "protector," instructing his peers when to listen to, thank, or respect me.

One outing in particular demonstrated Tony's and the other boys' reliance on near-distant appraisals of himself as opposed to far-distant assessments. On Halloween weekend, I decided to take my eight respondents trick-or-treating in a White neighborhood. Whereas Brad exclaimed, "I ain't going in those White folks'
neighborhood! They will probably try and poison us," Tony immediately retorted, "Ah, man, listen to you! They ain't going to poison us. I am just as good as anybody! I can walk and go any place I want to!" And so we went. Tony, like several of the other African American boys participating in this study, appeared to care about and listen closely to White people, such as their European American teachers, who were present in their everyday lives. The opposite was the case for those Whites with whom they did not interact regularly.

**Brad Collins**

Brad, age 11, was a fourth grader in Ms. Burton's class when I met him. An only child, he resided with his mother, Zelma, and his grandmother, Mrs. Petrie. He had failed twice, once in the first grade and the second time in the third grade. Though his attendance record was good, recurrent conflicts with authority figures had resulted in his being suspended twice from the study site school. However, Brad viewed his retention difficulties as the teachers' problems and not his own. His mother believed he had been unjustly treated by school personnel. In her words: "My son is smart and he does not let people push him around. I do not care who they are, and he knows I will support him all the way!"

Ms. Burton identified Brad as a below-average student who could "do much better" if and when he applied himself. As she noted, "Brad is one of our African American males who is extremely intelligent but his use of his IQ is misdirected. For some reason, he is carrying a chip on his shoulder. In short, he has an attitude."
Indeed, Brad was often cocky and egotistical. In describing himself to me during his structured interview, he said, "I am the greatest since Ali (giggle). I am smart, clever (giggle), and, as you can see, handsome (giggle)." When questioned about how he arrived at such a high opinion of himself, he was reflective: "Well, my grandma and mom always tell me I am handsome. In fact, don’t you remember you told me I was handsome, too? Ms. Burton told me I was real smart, but I needed to direct my smarts into my class work." When I asked who told him he was the "greatest since Ali," Brad grinned and said, "I told myself that!"

Brad’s narcissism and penchant for bravado were also evident in the group sessions where he demonstrated a mixture of negative and positive leadership skills. Bigger and older than most of his classmates, Brad oftentimes bullied other students and displayed a need to control. He wanted his peers to follow him, do as he said, and do what he said, when he said it. When others went along with his "program," he was a fair and able leader; however, if they dissented, he became dictatorial and belligerent. At one group meeting, for example, the discussion centered on planning for the next weekend’s activity. Brad wanted to see a movie, and the others wanted to play basketball and then go to McDonald’s. We agreed to hold a secret ballot. The vote was seven to one against him. After the count was announced, Brad angrily grabbed the pieces of paper on which the ballots were cast, flung them in the air, cursed us all out, and stalked from the room. Needless to say, he did not participate in weekend activities with the group for two weeks. When he was allowed to attend weekend activities, he was often sulky and temperamental.
Brad's survey responses were consistent with his group behavior and individual interview comments. Like the boys described above, he selected the most positive choices (smiling faces) in response to the statements: "My teacher calls on me," "My parent cares," and "I like school". Other questions (i.e., "School is boring," "I do good in most of my subjects," and "My teacher pays attention to me" were rated lower (indicated by either neutral or frowning faces). In our follow-up post-session, Brad explained his answers, noting that the work he received in school was irrelevant to and not challenging enough for him, with one exception: he loved the history lessons about Africa and the Egyptians kings and queens. Indeed, he believed one of his ancestors was King Tut. By contrast, he saw no relevance in learning about Columbus. His response, "Columbus probably didn’t even discover America anyway. Why should I memorize lies?"

I asked Brad if he remembered feeling bad about himself when he failed the first and third grades. The following is an excerpt of his response:

Brad: Miss Brown, I did not feel bad about myself because I did not fail because I was...uhm...uhm...uhm...dumb.

Researcher: Why did you fail both times, then?

Brad: Well, I don’t remember the first grade, but my mom said it was the teacher’s fault. She did not know how to teach a smart boy like me. I would get bored, do all my work, and then I would get into trouble. That’s what my mom says.

Researcher: Hm... What about the third grade?
Brad: Oh, I had Mrs. S., and she is a bitch—oops, I sorry. Well, she is! Even my mom says she is.

Researcher: What happened in her class?

Brad: She gave silly work. It was too easy. Besides she did not know how to talk nice. She hollered all the time. She sent me to the office even if I rolled my eyes. I did not like her and I did not complete my work.

I asked Brad whether getting below-average grades made him feel dumb and therefore bad about himself? His response: "No." Elaborating, he continued: "Because when I want to do better, like when my dad says he is going to get me a Starter jacket or Nike tennis shoes, I get good grades....I don't feel dumb because I know if I wanted to get higher grades, I could."

Erin Benson

Erin, age 9, was a third grader in Mrs. Brit's class when I was conducting this study. He lived in a ranch-style home with his mother, Corita, and his five-month-old baby sister. A below-average (D) student with a stuttering problem and a short attention span, Erin was taking Retalin as treatment for his hyperactivity. According to Mrs. Brit, Erin was the "class clown," always seeking negative attention. His attendance was good, but because of his disruptive behaviors, he was often sent to the principal's office and had been suspended once. As Mrs. Brit claimed, "I constantly keep a silent prayer on my lips
when I deal with Erin. He can push all my inner buttons. He talks back, he sasses me, and consistently is disrupting the others." However, she noted, when his behavior was under control, Erin’s work improved tremendously. Erin’s mother, a young woman in her early twenties and a full-time college student majoring in child psychology, agreed with his teacher’s assessments. Both women worked together actively to develop a rigorous school–home plan for Erin, focusing on the enhancement of his study skills and self-discipline and the completion of homework assignments.

Erin was unique among the eight African American male students in this study in that his reflections on self-concept were inconsistent across settings. When I first asked him, in his structured individual interview, what self-concept meant to him, he stumbled for the correct words and then said, "Uhm-uhm...I guess...uhm...what I feel about me...Oh, I don’t know." His survey responses reflected a poor sense of self. He selected frowning-face responses to the following items: "I feel dumb," "I do not do well in school," and "My teacher does not like me." This last answer was surprising, given that Mrs. Brit paid such a lot of attention to Erin and worked so closely with his mother to develop an individualized learning program for him. He indicated that Mrs. Brit sometimes had to send him out of the classroom because, in his own words, he acted "bad." Was he a "bad" boy, I asked him? In response, he shook his head in and replied "sometimes." Did his mother ever tell him he was smart and a good African American male, I asked? His response, "Yes, sometimes." Notwithstanding, Erin believed his teacher and mother thought he was dumb. When asked if either one had ever called him dumb, Erin responded, "Nope, they never said it, but they act like they think I am dumb."
Even though his mother and Mrs. Brit were often upset with him because of his school behavioral problems, he confided that he enjoyed the extra attention they paid him as a result. When I asked how he felt about having to take Retalin, he responded explosively: "I hate it!"

The reasons for most of Erin’s poor self-concept emanated from his speech difficulties. As he noted, "I feel dumb because I cannot say what I want to say all the time, and it comes out sounding dumb sometimes." Erin’s low positive self-regard was occasionally seen in the group sessions, especially in response to the other boys’ teasing him about his stuttering. Often, when he got stuck on a word, he would put his head down, as if waiting on laughter or derision. Only when none followed would he start talking again. By contrast, when Erin participated in the weekend activities, he often exuded confidence despite his speech impediment and his presence seemed to energize the entire group. However, his participation was sporadic because his behavioral problems often led to his involvement being restricted.

During the period of my research, Mrs. Brit devoted several class periods to discussions about students’ respecting each other more. These sessions, visits to the speech teacher, and the boys’ positive interactions with each other as participants in this study benefitted Erin greatly and contributed to his adopting a less guarded posture and becoming more at ease with himself.
Akin Ali

Akin, age 8, was another one of Mrs. Brit's third graders. He lived with his grandmother, Sarah Ali; his 6-year-old brother; and 12-year-old female cousin. His mother lived in another state, but reportedly spoke to Akin and his brother at least twice a month. At the time of the study, Akin was an "A" student with above-average communication and thinking skills. Though she contended that Akin was a mild-mannered and good-natured youngster, Mrs. Brit noted that he had periods of moodiness and contrariness that led his having to be sent often to the principal's office for 10 to 15 minutes to "cool off." According to Mrs. Brit: "Akin is an exceptional student, but like most exceptional students, he has some behavioral problems. He talks, talks, and talks because the work comes easy and he completes it quickly." For that reason, she often gave him extra work and allowed him to tutor other of his classmates who were having problems understanding their classwork.

Mrs. Brit had much more to say about Akin: "I am attempting to provide Akin with a flexible structure because I realize he is extremely bright and is in need of various challenges. His grandmother, Mrs. Ali, is extremely cooperative and goes along with any suggestions that I offer to help bring structure as well as creativity to Akin's classroom experiences." In response, Mrs. Ali, a Muslim, maintained: "Whatever Mrs. Brit says, I trust. She is the teacher. Akin best pay attention to her. If he does not, he knows I will beat his behind. End of story."

Unlike, Mark, Stan, and some of the others who also made good grades, Akin was frequently teased for being a good student, perhaps because he would not stand up to his
tormentors and would often cry when challenged about being smart and a Muslim. Akin's definition of self-concept as the "positive or negative messages one says to himself about himself" was the most involved reply to that question given by any of my student respondents. However, in response to my question about his own self-concept, he noted:

My messages are not good. My grandma, Mrs. Brit, and all my other teachers tell me I am smart. And I know I am smart, but the fellows tease me because they say I talk 'White' and because I am a Muslim. But since we are learning about our African heritage [at the study school], I am not teased like I was. Now on Share Day, everyone wants me to tell them about the Muslim religion. Now if they begin to value being smart in the books and having good diction, I will have it made.

Akin's answers to the student survey were inconsistent with his voiced self-assessment. He rated himself highly (smiling faces) to the items: "I am smart," "I love school," "My teacher calls on me," and "I do well in most all of my subjects." In our post-interview session, we discussed this inconsistency. Akin noted: "Secretly I guess I like myself, but I want to be popular...like Tony. Everyone likes Tony. I don't like being teased. Everyone calls me a cry baby, even my grandma. And Mrs. Brit calls me that, too."

Several months later, when Akin and I revisited the above conversation, the only area he felt stronger in was his religious beliefs. Over the months, he had relished being sought after as somewhat of an authority on the Muslim religion by his peers, but he was
still wrestling with accepting his cognitive and intellectual talents as assets rather than as
deficits. As he related to me: "I have enough sense to know that I am smart. It's just
I don't want to be smart right now—maybe later—'cause right now I just want to be
liked."

Roger Zachery

Roger, age 10, was a fourth grader in Ms. Burton's class while I was conducting
this study. The eldest of three siblings, Roger lived with his seven-year-old brother and
eight-year-old sister, and their mother, Delores, a woman in her late twenties. The family
resided in a duplex house.

Roger missed several days of school each month because, as his mother contended,
he was a "sickly child" whom she did not wish to force to go to school "all the time."
Described by his teacher as an even-tempered child with a tendency to follow rather than
lead, Roger was a poor student who had been retained in grade at the second-grade level.
Mrs. Burton often sent him to the principal's office for acting up in class, usually for
mimicking others' behaviors. She expressed concern about Roger's school performance,
noting, "I believe Roger is in need of testing [for special education placement]. I believe
he has a developmental delay. I have spoken with his mom several times about my
concern, but she refuses to buy into my theory." Roger's mother, on the other hand,
refused to let her child be tested. In her view, "When Roger is here at home I ask him
questions all the time and he gives me the correct answers. I believe he is just shy. You
know the way Mrs. Burton talks can scare anybody!"
Roger was extremely shy. He usually avoided eye contact when speaking with an adult, and usually spoke in a whisper. When I asked for his definition of self-concept, he was reticent. Shrugging his shoulders, he replied, "I don’t know what self-concept means." Had he not heard Mrs. Burton talk about it, I asked. He said, "I guess so." "Roger, how do you feel about yourself?" "What do you mean?" "Do you feel good or bad about yourself?" "It depends." We went back and forth like that for several minutes, with me attempting to solicit more insights into his feelings and him determined to give none. I decided not to press; rather, to wait and see how Roger would react in the group sessions.

To my surprise, Roger talked much more openly during the group sessions than during the individual interview, lending vocal support to Erin when he spoke of being teased, and discussing his feelings of dejection and humiliation about being retained in the second grade. He also noted his fears of failing again if he did not bring up his grades, but confided his belief that, "Since I am the tallest and one of the oldest, I should be the smartest."

Notwithstanding, Roger’s behavior during the unstructured weekend activities confirmed a lack of self-confidence. One such outing was especially illuminating of this. On that outing, I took the boys to a movie. I gave each one five dollars to buy their own ticket and refreshments, and instructed them to take the money and "stretch it" because there would be no more. Tony and Akin immediately went to the concession counter, asked for a napkin, and requested a pencil from me. Before buying anything, they added up what they wanted. They decided they wanted to play arcade games after the movie.
so they would split a box of popcorn and a large drink. A few feet away, Brad was shepherding Erin. I overheard him tell Erin, "Man, we ain't going to buy anything. We going to hold on to our five dollars. You sit next to Tony and eat what he gets. I will sit next to Stan and eat some of his stuff." Stan went to the concession stand, ordered his popcorn, a drink, and a candy bar. When I reminded him he would not get any more money if he wanted to play the arcade games later, he told me not to worry, he had enough money. He added, "Let me know if you want a drink, I'll treat you to a small Pepsi." As I finished up my conversation with Stan, I looked around the lobby and saw Roger standing alone holding his money. He had not moved and no one had approached him, so I joined him. He seemed immobile. When I asked him what he wanted to eat, or how much did he want to keep for the arcade games, he was indecisive. It appeared that he could not cognitively grasp what was going on. Stan, who had followed me, saw what was happening, gently nudged Roger’s elbow, and said, "Come on, man. I'll help you decide." And off they went.

Roger’s questionnaire responses were consistent with his manifested behaviors. For the items "I feel dumb," "The teacher does not pay attention to me," and "My teacher does not like me," he selected the sad-faced responses. He later revealed that he circled the sad face "because I feel dumb." In his post-survey interview, he indicated that he believed his teacher thought he was dumb, but that his mother told him he was not dumb. Roger also indicated that he did not mind taking the test for special education placement Mrs. Burton had recommended, even though his mother did not want him to take it. When I asked if he knew why his mother did not want him getting tested, he replied,
without giving me any direct eye contact and looking toward the floor, "Yeah, because the test will probably say I am dumb."

**Conclusion**

The voices of these eight African American males, as presented in this case study format, "provide more valid portrayals, better bases for personal understanding of what is going on, and solid grounds for considering action" (Stake, quoted in Patton, 1990, p. 54). My intensive involvement with these eight youth over a four-month period did not yield sufficient evidence to support claims that African American males have low self-esteem. If anything, I found the reverse was true for the majority of the students (five out of eight). In the cases of the three students whose self-esteem was found to be low, this negative disposition seemed to be related to a physical disability (i.e., Erin's case) or to somato-psychological needs (i.e., as in the case of Akin). The only case of low self-regard that seemed to emanate from a cognitive domain was that of Roger, whose poor self-concept seemed to stem from his learning disability and his inability to critically think, assess, and evaluate the situations that confronted him.

These eight young African American males did not seem to be bothered about national media reports or societal images of them. They turned instead to variables within their immediate social order. Those with the highest self-esteem (Tony, Jerry, Stan, and Brad) all had parental and teacher figures who praised them highly as well as community support (i.e., church members, neighbors, and friends) to help strengthen their self-concepts. Those with the lowest self-esteem (Erin and Roger) seemed to lack church
support and that of extended neighborhood familial networks. They did not always feel fully supported by their teachers, or, as in the case of Erin, their mothers. Akin, who himself reported having a weak self-concept, had all the makings of positive self-regard. He had tremendous support from his parental and teacher figures as well as from his religious community. In his case, his classroom peers stopped this young Black male from ascribing to a positive self-regard. For Akin as well as for the other students who participated in this study, peer acceptance seemed to be of utmost importance to self-concept development.

Five analytical suppositions about these eight African American males' self-concepts can be made based on the data obtained from this study's longitudinal assessment of students' written comments, collected transcripts of their structured individual and group sessions, and observation notes made during the unstructured weekend activities:

1. The student respondents generally disregarded stereotypical opinions about themselves and seemed to look only to immediate significant others for validation.

2. The students strongly valued their teachers' assessments.

3. The students operated primarily from the affective domain and rapidly "picked up on" the subtleties of unspoken behavioral cues sent by others. They then introspectively interpreted these transmitted cues as being negative or positive. The more distant these others were from students' immediate world, the less the students internalized their assessments; the more near to their immediate social order, the more significant the cues were to the students.
Kinship with one's peers superseded microfamilial influences and/or significance. Even though, Mom, Grandma, or Uncle So-and-So may have felt good about them, these young African American males still turned to their peers for final confirmation of their sense of worthiness.

In discussing the national concern about the plight of African American males, the students demonstrated the cognitive ability to look at the big picture as well as to separate their individual cases from those of the masses of Black men.
Children, no matter their cultural learning style, are failing primarily because of systematic inequalities in the delivery of whatever pedagogical approach the teachers claim to master—not because students cannot learn from teachers whose styles do not match their own. (Hilliard, 1989, p. 68)

Hell, oops, I mean heck....the dude is right. It ain’t got nothing to do with how the teacher teaches. What’s important is whether or not they treat you fair. (Brad, 11-year-old African American male)

The compatibility of the African American male’s preferred learning style and its relation to what is being taught in America’s classrooms—more importantly, how it is being taught—has caught the interest of many educators, particularly African Americans. Why do Black male youth seem to run the gauntlet of illiteracy and academic underachievement more disproportionately than do students of other groups or genders? Does the problem lie within the Black male’s learning style and/or abilities, or does it have to do with the ways in which teachers disseminate knowledge? Are traditional curriculum objectives meeting the learning needs of Black male youth, or do they need
to be revamped to meet the psychological, social, and cognitive needs of the Black male?
Having solicited my respondents’ thoughts on these and related questions, I seek in this
chapter to present a synthesis of the perspectives of the study’s teachers and parents on
the a priori theme of learning style and curriculum theory.

This chapter explores teachers’ perceptions on the classroom problems of African
American males in relation to teachers’ methods of knowledge dissemination. The
resulting presentation creates a composite representation of their voices. Transcripts from
structured interviews (individual/group sessions), unstructured encounters (after school and
weekend activities), and reflexive field notes provide the database for this effort. As in
other chapters, pseudonyms are used throughout this chapter to protect the identities of
the study’s stakeholders. However, all dialogue is derived from transcripts and/or tape
recordings made during the structured and unstructured individual and group sessions and
weekend activities.

The Teachers’ Voices

Throughout my tenure at the study site, I met with and observed the classroom
practice of 21 teachers, both female and male, Black and White, neophytes and veterans.
Each granted me a structured individual interview, completed a survey instrument (see
Appendix E), and gave me free reign to visit their classrooms as frequently as I liked.
I queried each of these teachers in detail about their perceptions of the African American
male as a learner. The following discussion is the product of my efforts to solicit these
teachers’ views on the African American male students’ dilemma of underachievement
in the classroom setting. It begins with the reflections of veteran teachers.

Though still in his early thirties, second-grade teacher Jim Hart was a veteran teacher with an extensive background in working with African American children. Prior to moving to the Midwest and accepting a position at the study site, Hart, who is White, taught in the inner-city public schools of Washington, D.C. He was highly respected by his colleagues, and all of the eight African American males participating in this study who had either had Hart for a class or had heard about him "through the grapevine" gave him high ratings. Hart laid the blame on the inherent injustices in the American educational system:

It is no doubt the African American male is seen by the system on a whole as being different than his counterparts. African American males' behavior is frowned upon, and for this reason, he is discriminated against, I believe, by many teachers, for a lack of a better term, who are not prepared to handle his behavior.

Over the years, Hart noted, he had observed and assessed African American males' behavior in various classroom settings. While some of these students' behaviors, he felt, were rooted in socioeconomic and other factors, others he saw as culturally bound. As he explained:

I constantly see Black males interact in the classroom with teachers and others. They have enormous energy levels. They are extremely verbal as opposed to sitting down and writing. I believe their interactional patterns reflect both their culture's present and past.
Regarding African American males’ learning styles, Hart had this to say:

The more an African American male likes the subject, the more animated he becomes. He jumps up and down, excitedly yells out the answers, and immediately partnerships with a classmate about his newfound awareness.

He further maintained that these types of behaviors are antithetical to traditional classroom norms that, in his view, represented the "White mainstream of education." This leads African American males to rebel, Hart contended. He shared the following point of view:

Black boys, on the whole, are bright. If they do not like a curriculum, they create their own. If they do not like a teacher, they will let you know. If they think you are incorrect, they will challenge you.

Hart believed that African American males’ unwillingness to accept the status quo of the classroom is manifested in their "acting out" in school. That is, the Black males’ educational crisis represents their efforts to "fight" the system in their own way. Comparing African American girls’ behavior with that of African American males, Hart was likewise candid:

Overall, I do think if we could take a leap and put these two groups (African American girls versus African American boys) side by side, without looking at individuals, that generally, from my experiences, African American females are more apt to follow and adapt into the mainstream than African American males.
In Hart’s view, much of the responsibility for bringing students, especially African American male students, back into the educational "fold" lay with teachers:

We need more committed teachers. Not only White but Black teachers as well. I say that because I believe even though the curriculum, learning styles, and all the ingredients that go into the schooling process are being addressed, the teacher remains at the heart of the process. In other words, I believe the teacher is the curriculum.

He continued:

We as teachers all know what to teach. We all know every second grader needs to know two plus two, etc., how to write in cursive, how to read...or how to figure out exclamation points, but my concern is how we do it. I believe so strongly that who I am comes through. If I am not sure of myself the children see it. If I do not value the material, they see it. And if I devalue them, they know it. I would debunk anyone, [former Secretary of Education during the Bush administration] Bill Bennett or anyone else who comes out and says what is only important is this piece of paper and what is in it. I would say "no" to this. The people who are teaching these children are important. We need to train people to be better and more sensitive, to be more knowledgeable, and to be the kind of people we want six hours per day teaching our children.
Second-grade teacher Mary Shook was another highly respected veteran White teacher at the study site. Like Hart, most of Ms. Shook's teaching experience has been with inner-city African American children. Describing herself as a disciplined teacher who believes in "structured unstructuredness" and cooperative learning techniques, Shook confided that she wrestled daily with improving the educational system. She shared her opinions on the theme of learning styles and curriculum theory relative to Black male academic achievement, noting that "the system, as we now currently know it, does not meet the needs of our more verbal and mobile child" and that it "discriminates against their instinctive behavioral traits."

Lorita Loads, a veteran African American teacher, taught prekindergarten and kindergarten at the study site. In her 30 years of teaching experience, Loads had worked in both inner-city and suburban school districts with children of diverse socioeconomic and racial groupings. Simultaneously energetic and reflective, she was widely respected by her colleagues and by the school's principal. Her views about the precipitating factors underlying the problems of African American males were congruous with those of teachers Hart and Shook, but she had some additional insights to share. In particular, Loads noted that the level of commitment on the part of teachers to teach and reach out to Black male youth had diminished over the years, particularly within the last 10 years. As she confided to me:

I do buy into what the others are saying. But I see things happening— you know, honey, I have been around—that is what we need to talk about. There is institutional racism, institutional favoritism, institutional bias,
institutional—whatever you want to call it. The bottom line is, first, we as educators tolerate the actions of African American girls, white girls, and particularly white boys more so than African American males. I have been in suburban schools where the same behaviors, mind you, manifested by our African American males are done by Anglo boys. Their behaviors are tolerated, their behaviors are accommodated, but above all, their behaviors are not banished. This is true of White girls and African American girls, who, on the whole, do not act as energetic [as African American] boys.

One of the questions asked of the teachers participating in this study was, "Are traditional methods of teaching meeting the emotional, psychological, and cognitive learning needs of African American males; or should the methods be revamped?" All 21 teachers indicated that in one way or another the traditional system had failed and was failing African American males. Some supported the notion of all-male schools for Black boys; others disagreed with it. Some felt that the Afrocentric school concept was the answer; others had their doubts.

Regarding their school’s innovative Afrocentric curriculum and its impact on the learning experience of African American males, the teachers had much to say. Among those asked to share their views on this topic was Arthur Frank, a white veteran teacher who had taught at the study site school for more than 15 years. Frank, who had traveled extensively throughout Africa and Asia, was held in high esteem by the study’s eight Black male informants. In his view, the primary task before the schools, whether
traditional (Eurocentric), Afrocentric, or all-male, was to address the behaviors underlying the causes of the Black male's academic crisis. Though he noted that the curriculum was "a major thing" among the "combination of factors" causing the African American male's crisis, Frank was somewhat skeptical of the changes that had been made thus far:

Our Afrocentric model is still in its experimental stages. Even though, as an Afrocentric model, we as a school are still expected to meet certain academic requirements, we still have to follow the IOWA basic skills test....Even though we are now working under the Afrocentric concept, the changes, thus far, have been cosmetic. We are bringing in African materials, but that is not all of what the school has to be about if it is going to be successful.

The critical element, Frank noted, was "getting our Black parents to buy into what the school is doing....If the parents do not support the program, it will fail." He maintained that a lot of work was still needed to bring African American parents "into the fold."

Another White teacher who shared her views on the Afrocentric concept was Deborah Sims. Sims was a student teacher at the study site. Though her authority was often challenged by many of the Black male students at the school, she nonetheless expressed a strong commitment to working with minority children and teachers. She viewed the Afrocentric school concept as an excellent approach:

I like the Afrocentric concept and what Mrs. Moss, our principal, is enacting here for several reasons. First, I like the self-esteem building, which seems to be the school's trademark. Second, I like the strictness here because it provides
discipline. The kids are learning to discipline themselves in positive ways. Another thing is vital in our school is parent-teacher involvement. We, as teachers must do home visits.

Because the issue of parental involvement was one raised by many of the other teachers in their interviews, I asked Sims to share her opinions about it. As she told me:

Before coming to this school, I honestly believed that African American parents were not interested and/or involved with their children’s learning. From my experience now, that simply is not true. I call parents, they come in. I have never had a parent question me. In fact, they have always backed me up. I really feel that African American parents care about their children.

I also asked my teacher respondents to discuss the concept of single-sex schools for African American males. Jeannie Bull was a new teacher with less than two years of teaching experience who was described by her peers as bright, tough, and ambitious. In her interview, she indicated her disagreement with the concept of all-Black male schools:

I, for one, as an African American female educator, do not believe in the concept of having all-male schools. If that is to be, I do not feel that the staff should be all males. I think our African American boys would benefit from certain classes being taught by males. There could be more males on the staff, but there need to be female staff. Just like the African American males need to be with African
American girls. We as a race need to bond our male–female relationships, not separate them. In what better years than the formative years can this be done? You know, people say that Black boys come to the school setting which is predominantly female. They come from environments which are predominantly female. So, I say, to eradicate this problem we must look at three fronts: home, school, and community. Therefore, let community support systems fill in the gap, develop male mentor programs, or actively engage our African American males into rites of passage programs.

Ted Day, an African American male with 25 years of teaching experience to his credit, was a strong supporter of the all-male school concept:

I am all for having all-male schools for Black boys. Spencer Holland is right when he advocates for this concept starting at kindergarten until the sixth grade. Our boys need positive male role models in a positive male environment. Many of our African American males are lacking this in their everyday lives. Hell, we have tried other ways and this might help.

Day’s views were shared by white male teacher Jim Hart:

There are some advantages and disadvantages to the all-male schooling concept. But that is true of any concept, even with the Afrocentric concept. I say, based on what is going on with the African American male, we should at least give it a try.
Indeed, Hart's commitment to this approach was extraordinary fervent, as indicated by his statement: "Even though, as a White male teacher [and] I believe I am doing a great job, I would gladly give up my position to a Black male teacher if we see that it works."

I also asked my teacher respondents to share their views on Black male students' learning styles. An African American and long-time veteran of the teaching profession, Loretta Brit was one of my two primary teacher respondents. Loved by her students and respected by most of her colleagues, Brit was a controversial and flamboyant figure, not only in her dress, mannerisms, and speech but also in her comments about her colleagues. She had some characteristically strong opinions about the Black male academic crisis:

What we are witnessing with our Black boys is a mass rebellion. Black boys are extremely relational. They group together, they play together, they learn together and they rebel together....The others [students of other races and genders, i.e., African American girls, White boys and girls] are [also] doing self-destructive behaviors. For example, African American girls are having more unwarranted pregnancies. This is a national concern. White boys are killing themselves. Look at their suicide rate. White girls the same, and they too are having babies.

Brit was similarly emphatic about the means to address this crisis:

I love cooperative learning. That is what I am mostly doing with my third graders. I teach them structure because I have to, but a lot of my teaching activities are molded around interactional learning. I think many of the teachers, both black and white, have problems in this area because they are so rooted in
traditional teaching. They say they aren’t, but they are. Many are old fogies who cannot stand the noise level.

African American teacher assistant Chandra Jack’s sentiments captured the views of the majority as well as the minority of my teacher respondents:

It’s a shame we have the answers at our fingertips. If we look at our [African Americans’] cultural aspects, many of our attributes are directly opposed to those valued in the Western civilization. African American males are dramatic and colorful in their behaviors, the traditional classroom calls for an orderliness that most African American boys view as dull, stagnant, and unstimulating. The African American male is talkative, interactional; the classroom calls for quiet, solitude. The African American male loves to talk; in the traditional classroom talk is valued less, writing more.

Teacher Evonne Burton echoed Brit’s sentiments regarding the curricular adjustments necessary to effectively educate Black males. Herself an African American, Burton offered the following comments:

The curriculum is structured and I noticed with my African American males that they do have different learning styles. They seem to need hands-on projects. Verbally they are fine, but when it comes to written work, they are weak. For the most part, African American males are extremely creative. They seem to come alive when they work with partners or in small groups.
Burton added that even though she was fond of the cooperative learning approach, the traditional classroom structure made it untenable. For cooperative learning to be successful with highly energized African American males, she recommended that each classroom be comprised of a strong teacher, a good assistant teacher, and a manageable group of students—10 to 12 students instead of the 22-to-25-student classroom typical at the study site at the time.

Teacher Jim Hart was among those who raised some concerns about cooperative learning and the African American male student. As he noted, "At times, I do like my class to be quiet because they need to learn structure and control. After all, we must train them for a world that presents more structured and disciplined work sites as opposed to creative ones." He added, however, that "an alert teacher working with African American males must know when to draw the line. It takes time and a lot of know-how, but...one must learn how to put structure into unstructured activities." He described several ways he accomplished this:

I have parameters in my classroom. When they are done with their assigned tasks, I allow them to work on various other things they like. I attempt to go around on a weekly basis to remind them of these things that are available....In class, I try different things....I allow them freedom to stand up, if they want to, in the middle of the room. I allow them to choose a partner and talk quietly, if that’s possible, with one another or in a group setting. I provide structure by revisiting their discussions and redirecting their foci.
Most of the teachers agreed that a change in the method of disseminating knowledge was mandated. Mrs. Brit confided to me that she had always "sensed that something was wrong" with traditional methods of teaching. Indeed, she felt so strongly about this issue that it was a principal focus of the research she was undertaking in pursuit of her master's degree. She noted, however, that breaking away from the traditional ways of teaching was difficult for many teachers because the old ways were so much "easier" than the innovative, nontraditional ways. Brit's assertions were corroborated by teacher Mary Shook:

I believe it is easier to stand in front of a class and have them memorize things, particularly in a formal and structured setting. One thing I can attest to is that it is better on the nerves (laughter). It is extremely hard, however, to work in a structured-unstructured setting and do it creatively and successfully with children at any grade level.

Alice Wills, a veteran African American second-grade teacher at the study site, lent a historical perspective to the educational dilemma engulfing the African American male:

We as a nation, as individual and collective school districts, are just beginning to give this issue our utmost respect in that we are just now giving it our fullest and most undivided attention. In the past, we have been blowing in the wind. On the whole, we operated individually on a trial-and-error basis. Now that we are recognizing the alarming statistics about our Black boys' performance in schools
universally, we are coming together as a nation, more important, as communities.

If you will, our initial efforts in this area reminded me of the old African proverb
which states, "If you do not know where you’re going any road will take you
there.” Thank God, we are now beyond that point. We are as a nation of
communities attempting to construct a solidified road.

The Parents’ Voices

When asked their views on the learning style and curricular issues affecting
African American males, my parent respondents shared opinions of both an intuitive and
salient nature. Ms. Benson, who was at the time of this study a college student majoring
in child psychology, offered a more scholarly response:

I have been exposed to some of the contemporary thoughts in this area, and I
wholeheartedly buy into the proposition that African American males, as do other
children, have learning styles which are not compatible to current methods of
teaching....There are various methods to helping children grasp a subject matter.
Many of our teachers are from the old school and learned one certain way of
teaching. We are heading towards the twenty-first century and the world is
changing and so should the methods of teaching!

Mrs. Ali’s reflections best representing the voice of most of the parents. As she
stated:
I am not too sure whether we need different materials for our learning styles or just different teachers teaching. I am not sure that traditional ways of teaching are all wrong for our African American boys. What I am sure is that integrating Afrocentric concepts with the traditional methods of teaching should not hurt our cause....I can see a marked difference in the curriculum this year as opposed to what they had been offering. There is much more emphasis on the black culture, there is much more engagement with pulling parents into the school setting and as well as offering various programs [such as] tutorial and recreational activities which extends the school's days.

Indeed, the Afrocentric schooling concept won unanimous approval from all eight parent respondents. According to Mrs. Ali, Afrocentric schooling provide African American children with a confidence "which seems hard to get from the traditional curriculum." However, while these parents agreed that Afrocentric schooling enhanced the academic and psycho-social functioning of African American children, particularly black boys, they were split on the issue of all-male schools. They generally saw the long-range goal of Afrocentric schools as preparing their sons—and daughters—to live, learn, and work in a culturally diverse society.

Mrs. Zachery, for example, indicated that her son did not need to go to an all-male school to get a good education, contending instead, "If he has strong female role models, like Ms. Burton, he will do just fine!" She maintained that teachers should "mind to the business" of teaching and let African American boys' uncles, ministers, fathers, and other
African American males in their homes and communities provide positive role models for them. Segregating Black boys from girls, in her view, "just does not make good sense." Concurrently, Ms. Adams did not understand the validity of having separate schools for black males:

I am not that smart, but it seems to me if we put Tony in an all-male environment, I am telling him that he does not have to deal with girls or that maybe he can't fit in....I don't know, but it seems wrong to me.

Conclusion

As the data stories presented in this chapter suggest, the need for instructional and curricular reform was held to be important by the participating parents and teachers at this school site, which had as part of its mission and raison-d'etre the addressing and resolution of the educational crisis being experienced by the African American males in the school district. In their theorizing and attempts to effect change for the African American males relegated to their charge and for themselves, the participating African American parents and teachers all seemed to suggest that teaching practices, strategies, attitudes, and expectations need to be examined. Some believed these areas needed modification; others voiced a need to totally revamp the teaching endeavors taking place within the learning walls. However, despite the presence of a general consensus that change in these areas is needed, no unified voice emerged as to how this change should occur. As the following chapter will reveal, the recommendations of these teachers and parents were decidedly diverse.
FOOTNOTES

1 Dr. Spencer Holland is the director of the Center for the Education of African American males at Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland.

CHAPTER VIII

PARTICIPANTS' RECOMMENDATIONS
AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

During the final weeks of my fieldwork, I held structured and unstructured interviews with all of my respondents focusing on the question, "Where do we go from here?" Each offered salient comments about the kinds of educational reform they believed would help to ameliorate the African American males' academic dilemma. They also shared their recommendations for effecting changes in the Black community that would support these educational reforms. While many of their recommendations overlapped in several areas, the confidence with which members of the different groups asserted their views differed. Where the African American parent respondents, all of whom were women, in some cases sheepishly offered their solutions (e.g., "This may sound silly...," and "This may not work, but..."), and the European American teachers were somewhat guarded in expressing their views (e.g., "I may not be an African American but..."), the African American teachers were extremely forceful and self-assured in voicing their insights for effecting change and improvement in the ways U.S. schools serve African American males (e.g., "I am a product of the Black community and I know it would work if...").

In this chapter, the reader is reminded that this study was intended to serve as an empowering vehicle. As noted in the Preface, I wanted the stakeholders to share their
perspectives on why the Black male academic crisis exists, to theorize and actively seek ways to remedy the situation. In fulfilling this charge, I now present the recommendations for change as theorized and offered by the study’s participants and a discussion of the implications of this study for the U.S. educational system’s relationship with African American males, their parents, and teachers. These recommendations and comments have been categorized under the a priori or emergent themes that they address.

Respondents’ Recommendations Pertaining to the A Priori Themes

Ecological Factors. Though there was disagreement about the extent of the impact negative ecological factors such drugs, guns, and gangs have on the African American male’s academic crisis, all eight of my parent respondents agreed that these factors had a negative effect on their sons’ chances of educational success. They unanimously concluded, however, that the outlook for Black communities being able to provide wholesome and healthy environments for their inhabitants looks extremely bleak unless immediate and robust action is taken. Several parents suggested that the deterioration seen in so many Black communities was the result of the breakdown of the individual family units within them. They shared several recommendations for addressing the Black male crisis in the classroom from the parent-community vantage point, including:

• establishing “block centers” and crime watch programs in partnership with local police;
• encouraging Black churches to establish neighborhood-centered educational, recreational, and social programs for Black children;
• organizing neighborhood events and activities such as Easter and Kwanzaa celebrations, neighborhood birthday parties, rites of passage, and graduation ceremonies;
• encouraging Black families to walk together to their neighborhood churches every Sunday and participate in fellowship activities after services;
• encouraging more well-off African Americans to become entrepreneurs and social change agents in communities of less well-off Blacks;
• developing strong, vocal, political, and combative tenants' rights organizations;
• organizing community seminars to address issues of importance to residents;
• supporting efforts to reform the welfare system.

Several common themes were threaded throughout these recommendations. First of all, the need was expressed for African Americans to "take charge of" or "take back" their communities, whether lawfully or unlawfully (as Malcolm X stated, "by any means necessary"). Another common call was for more successful African Americans to "revisit their roots" and assist poor, inner-city Blacks on a broader, more consistent basis. Many of the respondents noted the need for the Black church to resume its traditional central and active role in Black community affairs. Concurrently, there was the call for Black parents to join together as a collective force, as a body of one, to create a fortress of protection and edification for their African American male children. Lastly, there was across-the-board agreement on the need to instill pride in African American males and females alike. As Mrs. Scarlet noted, "These changes will not only benefit the African
American male, but the Black community as a whole," the latter of which another parent called "the family-at-large."

White and Black teachers alike noted that improvement of the classroom scene for Black male students could not be realized until corresponding improvements were made in Black family life and the Black community environment. Though they differed in their thinking about how and to what extent ecological issues affected these students' academic performance, they gained a unified voice when reflecting on the statement, "Something must be done at the African American parent-community level to help resolve this phenomenon." Their response: a resounding "Yes." The following are some of the teachers' comments:

Black parents must consciously shed the welfare mentality of "Poor me, I am a victim. I have no control over my destiny or my children’s destiny." They must become in control and literally come to believe in the concept of mind over matter. (Mrs. Brit)

African American parents in the Black community must become politically active. They must band together as an united front and approach their state representatives, congressman, senators...whoever needs their votes, and solicit help for tenant rights programs, neighborhood clean-up squads and crime-watch programs. (Mrs. Loads)
African American parents should come together and develop support groups within their community. The support groups should convene in the neighborhood’s community center or a local area library. The focus of the groups should address individual as well as collective problems that confront African American parents on a daily basis. (Mr. Frank)

African American parents should begin to take their neighborhoods back from the criminal elements through the development of neighborhood block watches or by developing small groups of local block patrols similar to the Guardian Angels. (Mr. Day)

Black parents need to unite together and develop community social gatherings for their families. These community gatherings can convene in a nearby neighborhood park, church, or a school building. Besides a spiritual bonding, these gatherings should highlight a development of cohesiveness among neighbors and a development of individual and ethnic pride. (Ms. Benton)

The students’ recommendations for change echoed those expressed by their parents and teachers. Their suggestions are captured in the following statements:

Our parents should spend time with us more. (Akin)

Parents should talk to their boys everyday and ask [us] questions about what is going on our lives. (Tony)
I wish my mom would attend our classroom open house [at which the children’s artwork, written assignments, and other products are displayed]. I know she is tired, but I wish she would not miss so many of them. (Brad)

I wish my mom could help me with my homework when I cannot do it or I do not understand it. (Roger)

We [African American boys] should do more things on the weekends, like we do with you, Miss J., as a group. (Stan)

All Black boys should have a church to go to every Sunday, like I do. Because if you have a church, you know that your pastor loves you, and you know that the church folk love you and learn that drugs are bad, and that guns are bad. And you learn that you do not need to turn to the gangs or a gang leader because your church is your gang and your preacher, the gang leader.¹ (Mark)

**African American Male Self-Concept.** Fully half of the parent respondents in this study, four out of eight, believed their sons to have a poor self-concept. However, all agreed that it would take more than changes on the "home front" to help Black boys in this regard. They agreed that a partnership between the home, the school, and the community must be forged, and that the pervasive influence of the media’s negative portrayal of Black males must be countered. The gist of the parent respondents’
recommendations are captured in the following suggestions offered by parents during structured and unstructured interviews and group sessions.

We need to really look at the Rites of Passage for African American males and integrate these developmental rituals into our community agendas. We must praise our Black boys for their accomplishments no matter how small or large; we must give our Black sons more responsibility and hold higher expectations for them. And, I believe, give them ceremonies to reward them. We must historically look at our roots and ancient things we did for our African tribesmen. (Ms. Benson)

We need to continue with the Big Brother organization. When they are consistently involved, I believe that they are a source of great benefit in helping enhance self-esteem among Black boys. The only problem is that it seems as if these men's dedication diminishes after a while. It has been my experience with Brad's mentors that after three months they lose interest. I am on the third one now. Perhaps he will be the charm. (Ms. Collins)

If the classroom teacher sees that you, as an African American parent, believe your son or grandson feels good about himself, then they as the teacher will see the same thing and work with the African American male more in this area. (Mrs. Scarlet)
The national media's institutional racism must stop because inadvertently it affects how others view the African American male and, in many cases, how the African American male views himself. (Mrs. Chest)

Teachers' responses in this area were racially divided. The majority of the White teacher respondents believed their African American male students had poor self-concepts, whereas the majority of African American teachers saw these students as having positive self-images. They generally agreed that teachers must take more individual responsibility for helping to establish positive self-regard among African American males, and they supported curricular changes to support this effort. In addition, most teachers recommended giving African American male students more verbal praise in the classroom and in front of his peers. According to Mr. Frank:

The average African American male is extremely peer-oriented. So we should watch the negative reprimanding as teachers, in front of his peers. Take him to the side and correct him. However, when praising him do it loud and do it in front of his peers.

Mrs. Spar, the school's curriculum designer, offered the following recommendation:

The integrating of African and African American history into the classroom will greatly enhance the African American male's self-concept. African history gives them a historical root of self-pride. African American history give the African American male a present-day sense of pride, a sense of hope. All these
ingredients lend themselves to helping develop strong self-regard among African American males.

Two of my student respondents consistently indicated that they held poor concepts of themselves. One student, who stated that he generally felt good about himself, was indecisive about his self-concept because of his strong desire for peer acceptance. The remaining five students consistently indicated positive self-regard. Overall, however, three themes emerge from the student respondents' comments on African American male self-concept. They are:

(1) African American male students need to voice their insecurities among their peers in safe, secured environments and not in an environment that "disses" them or others;

(2) African American males need to realize that if they have cognitive and/or physical disabilities or limitations, they should ask for and seek outside help; and

(3) somato-psychological relationships with teachers and parents are important to African American males.

My discussions in this area with the students focused on "what-if" scenarios. For example, during one group session I asked, "What if you felt bad about yourself—how would you want others to help you change your self-picture?" Brad responded that small focus-group sessions should be held with African American males who have been targeted as having low self-esteem. As he noted, with the other boys' approval:
They [African American male students] need to talk about how they feel, like we do, in small groups and then let their friends help him feel better. Just like we helped Erin and Roger feel better 'bout themselves....This should only be done once we can trust each other and show each other 'spect.

Erin, who stuttered, piped in with, "We need to get help about the thing that makes us feel bad." Stan added, "We need to hear more good things about us from our teachers and mamas and grandmas. Like they do with the girls."

**Learning Styles and Curriculum Theory.** The parent respondents had more to say about the kinds of changes they wished to have made in the curriculum than about their sons' learning styles. Many were hesitant to suggest curriculum changes based upon learning styles. The common sentiment expressed by the parents in this regard was that the teachers and school administrators knew best. However, as Ms. Benson noted:

When it comes to recommending new curriculum for our sons and/or discussing their learning styles, we as Black parents must take the time to educate ourselves in these matters. We must talk to our sons and receive insight from them. We must stop giving this power to the teacher or to the school administrator. We must participate. Through participating, we become knowledgeable and educated. We as parents become empowered. Once empowered, we then transfer that feeling onto our African American sons.
Parents were divided on the issue of which concept best addresses the African American males' academic crisis: all-male, Afrocentric, home-, or religious-based schooling. However, most recommended that education for African American males should include the following curricular and instructional elements:

• African as well as African American history;
• field trips/visits to other cities;
• apprenticeship programs;
• courses on values, spirituality, and character building;
• a focus on cooperative learning techniques.

All of my teacher respondents voiced the need for educational reform to address the African American males' academic crisis. Recommendations for change in this area were diverse, with the common denominator being the need to seek "some type of change from the traditional way of teaching." Many advocated innovative pedagogical methods and schooling concepts for teaching African American males. Most, however, both Black and White, opposed the concept of all-Black-male schooling. Those who supported this concept noted that they did so solely in an effort to address a national crisis. The majority of the teachers felt African American males' learning needs could be fully met in a desegregated school environment that offers cultural enrichment courses along with more flexible and relevant course work and activities.

The eight students had much to say about how the curriculum should be changed to accommodate their learning styles. While obviously not versed in the literature, they
simply described the ways in which they liked to learn and the kind of school day they would plan if given the opportunity to do so. All of their recommendations emphasized less structure, more flexibility, and increased interaction with their peers and teacher. They recommended more "hands-on" types of learning activities. As Tony stated, "I like it when we do role plays for...the drama teacher. Why can't we role play in our classrooms?" According to Stan: "We should do in class like we do here in our groups with you [the researcher]. We talk about things and then we go and see them. Like when we talked about Frank Lloyd Wright and then we went to the museum and saw the houses and building that he built."

Teachers' Attitudes and Expectations. The teacher and parent respondents offered very similar recommendations for change in this area. In urban schools serving large numbers of African American males, they recommended the following:

- Teacher home visits should be mandated, and teachers should make at least six home visits during a school year.
- Only those teachers who want to work in the inner city should do so, and they should be allowed to leave after a school year if they so choose without covert or overt reproach.
- Teachers should remain with their students for three consecutive grade levels.
- Teachers should engage in bimonthly focus-group sessions with their peers and principals to vent their feelings, confirm their perceptions, and/or seek help as needed.
• Teachers who find themselves becoming burnt out and depressed about the challenging academic situations they confront in educating African American males should ask to be transferred and leave.

Respondents’ Recommendations Pertaining to the Emerging Themes

School–Parent–Community Reciprocalness. The need for schools, parents, and communities to come together as a cohesive unit to address the African American males’ academic crisis was a unifying theme that emerged from every sector of the respondent base. The following actions were recommended by students, parents, and teachers alike:

• African American parents should not be afraid or ashamed to interface with teachers and school administrators in the best interests of their sons.

• School personnel should reciprocate by visiting parents’ homes, attending neighborhood church functions, and making their presence known at other community activities that involve students and parents outside of school.

• School administrators should organize meetings and events focusing solely on parental concerns. While some of these activities should be held at the school site, others can be held in the community.

• Business people in the school community should become more active in school affairs and students’ progress.

• A vehicle should be established wherein parents can take part in the decision-making process within the school setting, such as the Parent Council Board at the Afrocentric school site focused upon in this study.
Normative Framing. Regarding this emerging theme, the African American parents and teachers participating in my research recommended the following:

- The welfare system as we currently know it must be eradicated because it corrupts an important value in the Black community: the work ethic.
- Scouting organizations (i.e., Brownies/Cubs, Boy/Girl Scouts) should become actively visible in the Black community again.
- Rites of passage programs should be instituted for Black male youth in particular.
- The Black community must insulate its values from those of the society-at-large and focus on improving its own state of affairs.

Communal Kinshipping. Communal kinshipping emerged as one of the basic philosophical orientations undergirding the views of the parent and teacher respondents in this study. It is embodied in the traditional African American and African notion that "It takes an entire village to raise a child." African American parents and teachers alike suggested communal kinshipping as a primary area affecting African American males as well as the Black community as a whole. They recommended that drastic steps be taken in this area, including the following:

- The Black community must restore the power of mothering back into the hands of African American grandmothers and African American mothers worthy of the responsibility. In the words of Mrs. Brit, a third-grade teacher, "We must approach our young African American girls [who are not raising their children properly], and force them to see that they need help. If we have to do this with
bullet-proof vests on and a law enforcement official peeking around the corner, so be it. Something must be done."

- African American community members must be willing to rear those children removed from dysfunctional households.
- Black communities, families, and individuals should become both self-sufficient and supportive of each others' constructive efforts.

The participants' recommendations in this area seem to suggest that Black people must come to view themselves as pieces of the collective unit and work as parts of a greater neighborhood sphere. In doing so, they believe, African American males' performance inside and outside the learning walls would improve because they would be exposed to consistency of structure, discipline, and hopefully, love and respect.

Implications

Education is the strongest weapon next to money that the Black community can possess. (A parent respondent)

The visions for change presented by the stakeholders in this investigation of African American males' academic crisis strongly suggest that the crisis has serious ramifications for society as a whole, but more particularly for the African American community. They suggest overall that African American male students and their parents must themselves first grasp control of their destiny and take on the responsibility of
effecting positive change within their immediate environments. In the words of Mrs. Ali, a parent respondent:

We [African Americans] must take full responsibility for what is going on in America's classrooms with our sons. We must stop the projection of blame for our woes onto others, i.e., the White man. And we must not accept the role of victim and thus become self-determined people.

Notwithstanding such proclamations emphasizing the need for self- and community agency, the participants' calls for action also imply that institutional racism, as it is covertly and overtly manifested, remains a significant factor in the Black male academic crisis. Because of this, many of the participants advocated that Black parents become more politically active in school governance and related affairs. This belief mandates the development of cultural, economical, and social agendas aimed at combating the inherent injustices within the U.S. social order that daily confront and invade their lives. Moreover, their recommendations for change addressed far-reaching societal issues beyond the boundaries of the Black community, as many indicated their belief that improving the outlook and outcomes for African American males will benefit all children, regardless of race and gender.

Several implications emanate from the participants' recommendations. Overall, they imply that all of the stakeholders involved in the education of African American males must develop steadfast alliances based on meaningful, empowering relationships. Indeed, the underlying thrust of all these recommendations is that African American male
students, their parents, and their teachers must each be empowered in their own ways to prevent the academic failure of African American males in this nation's public schools. As one of my teacher respondents noted, "Once [the stakeholders] become empowered, it leads to critical thinking, to critical intervention, and to critical change." The extent to which this critical thinking, intervention, and change occurred in the lives of those who comprised the stakeholder sample in the present study will be examined in the following chapter, which presents a retrospective and introspective critique of this research and concludes my investigation.
FOOTNOTE

1 After Mark's reflections, which were offered during one of the unstructured group interviews, the students and I all laughed and said, "Amen."
CHAPTER IX

EPILOGUE: REFLECTING ON THE STUDY THROUGH A CRITICAL LENS

This final chapter is devoted to providing an analysis of the study’s ability to meet its ultimate goals. In meeting the study’s goals, I operated from both the interpretive and critical paradigms. In working from these two research platforms, I was continually confronted with the tension that exists between these two worldviews. Whereas the interpretivist researcher wants to listen and "give voice to" the research participants, the critical researcher wants to raise the subjects’ critical consciousness toward individual and collective engagement, toward "transforming the societal structures and relationships" (Maguire, 1987, p. 29). In an attempt to critically reflect upon the process of entering the life of another as a social scientist as well as give critical analysis of the study’s accomplishments and/or failures, I assessed the tension that confronted me in crossing paradigms through a self-imposed critical lens. Using sources such as Gilroy (1993) and Woodbrooks (1991) to aid in conceptualizing this examination, this epilogue takes an analytical look at the overarching concern of whether I successfully entered the respondents’ lives as another working within both the interpretive and critical frames.

In meeting this charge, a reorientation to the study’s paradigmatic stance(s) as well as its delineated aims is warranted. To reiterate, this study positioned itself in two
worldviews, those of interpretivist and emancipatory. Because of this position of crossing paradigms, the study was obligated to fulfill the varying goals, objectives, and tenets underpinning each paradigm’s worldview. In offering this self-analysis, a discussion of whether this study did or did not successfully achieve its hoped-for, proposed aims, as set forth under each philosophical orientation, now follows.

As earlier noted in the document, one primary aim of the study was to address the Black male’s crisis in the classroom by listening to those voices immersed in the phenomenon and developing a critical consciousness among the respondents. In working toward fulfilling this aim, I operated as a qualitative inquirer from both the interpretivist and critical paradigms. One major assumption that drives those working from the interpretivist worldview is that the social order consists of a multiple construction of realities. That is, people experience and interpret the reality of the world in very different ways. The construction of all social reality, from the simplest of interactions to the most complex organization is the product of these infinite interpretive actions (Cohen & Manion, 1985). In reassessing whether or not I met this aim of honoring multiple perceptions, I reread excerpts from my reflexive journal. These excerpts foregrounded my numerous encounters with the study participants, during which I clarified and reaffirmed the insights that they shared. A number of insightful sessions were held with the participants to uncover their perceptions about their relationship(s) to the phenomenon under investigation and of the phenomenon’s relationship to them. This reciprocal process of participant-to-phenomenon and phenomenon-to-participant analysis was entered into with all of the respondents. In the final analysis and presentation of their sentiments,
great care was taken to honor their words. I believe that this study stands as a testimony to an individual as well as a collective representation of the participants’ perspectives. I also believe, however, that by earnestly and zealously attempting to gain this verstehen (understanding) into the participants’ lebenswelt (lifeworld) and thereby discerning their relationship(s) to the phenomenon and vice-versa, these efforts imposed some shortcomings in accomplishing an additional goal, which I will address later in this chapter. In continuing the process of reflecting on the success and/or failure of the study’s aims, attention turns now to the more obvious successes achieved by this research.

A primary aim of a critical social scientist is to increase participant awareness as to how they "see themselves and social situations in a new way" (Maguire, 1987, p. 6). In re-examining attempts made in this area, I believe this aim was successfully met. Through the hermeneutic process of gaining insight from the structured/unstructured encounters with the participants, a penetrated focus was brought to bear upon the participants’ circumstances. These opportunities, I believe, successfully allowed them, without argument and with endless encouragement, to analyze, theorize, and offer suggestions for change. As a critical social researcher entering the lives of these others, I believe some individually oriented empowering acts did occur. What follows is a more expansive discussion of these achievements.

As a critical social scientist and as an African American researcher working and interfacing predominantly with other African American individuals, I respectfully searched for the appropriate time to solely listen, actively question, assertively challenge, and/or set aside my own perspectives. In several instances when working with African American
parents and the two primary teachers. I acted as an empowering agent by challenging the respondents to act upon their voiced concerns in order to improve their situations. There were times when I assisted my parent and teacher respondents and acted as an interventionist, such as when I relayed the concerns echoed by several parents about their sons to the study's two primary teachers; or vice versa, such as when I approached several parents to discuss concerns the teacher respondents had shared with me about the boys. All of these efforts eventually resulted in the study's two primary teachers and parents with concerns conducting face to face consultations and addressing issues of needed attention.

Additionally, in working with the student respondents, I was aware of the need to use the individual sessions with the boys to discuss their self-concepts. As I noted in my reflexive journal: "Discuss with them, on a simplistic basis, hegemonic forces (i.e., media or inappropriate somato-psychological relationships) that attempt to negatively impact their self-images"; "Discuss in the group session with the boys their feelings about African American/White relationships and how they see the element of race in the phenomenon." My journaling led me to use the individual and group sessions with the students to thoroughly explore how they saw themselves, others, and academic institutions affecting their current state of existence. With the parent respondents, I discussed the environmental circumstances (i.e., drugs, poor living standards) that seemed to be foremost in their thoughts. Reflexive notes such as, "I must locate a tenant housing list for Ms. Adams, so that she can arrange to move," or "Ms. Benson wants to find out about available monies and resources for graduate studies. I must talk to Mrs. Brit to find out
avenues for her to pursue," were scattered throughout my journal. These efforts led to
empowering actions: Ms. Adams moved her family to a new residence, and Ms. Benson
initiated plans to continue her academic journey.

Structured and unstructured encounters with administrators at the study site (the
school principal and its curriculum designer) highlighted the visionary hopes and dreams
these educators held for their African American male students and the parents and
teachers of these students. In a small way, I helped implement one feature of the
visionary dream they held for the Afrocentric schooling philosophy undertaken at the
school, namely, that of enhancing student engagement through extracurricular cultural,
social, or "just plain fun" activities on weekends. This aspect of the school's program had
not previously been implemented. These activities proved empowering in several ways.
For some of the boys, it served as a behavior modifier—that is, it provided an incentive
for them to behave in school or at home during the week because if they did not, they
could not participate in the weekend activities. Several teachers approached me during
my research stay with the remark, "Fran, so-and-so [one of the boys] is doing much better
with some of his behaviors" for this reason. These teachers reported that when asked why
they were behaving better, the students would reply, "Because I want to be good. Miss
J. is taking us to see Wesley Snipes," or "We are [going to church, playing basketball,
etc.] with Miss J." It must be noted, however, that not all the teachers viewed these
activities as empowering; some believed it was a form of "bribery." One teacher
commented that students' behaviors "should be modified through their own internal
control as opposed to external controls on such a consistent basis. Once in awhile is
okay, but every weekend...I just don’t know."

Notwithstanding such reservations, the weekend group activities afforded many of these boys new and varied experiences. Several had never before been to a museum or to a bowling alley. Some had never before been given money to shop at a major mall or listen to classical music in a library. Many had never attended a political rally (such as the time we went to hear First Lady Hillary Clinton speak) or driven a go-cart. By the time my tenure had terminated, each lad had been exposed to something that was new to him. After each event, no matter how late, I would drive the boys through an affluent area and we would discuss how someday they could live in such homes and neighborhoods. I concluded every Saturday outing with an opportunity for them to talk about their dreams. All of these interventions served in some small way as empowering measures for the respondents. Thus, I believe I can safely say that the study met its second aim, that of improving and empowering the lives of those involved in the study.

A critical examination of how I worked within and across each paradigm as an interpretivist/critical researcher reveals the study’s primary shortcoming. I realized through this analytical process that several important issues emerged out of my encounters with each respondent group. Because I was crossing paradigms, and thus many times relinquished my empowering role to one of merely listening, some issues were left underanalyzed, unquestioned, unchallenged, and unresolved. In this analytical reprieve, I have noted several significant themes emanating from discussions with each respondent group. African American parents, for example, continuously talked about the Black church’s role in their lives as well as their perceptions of how affluent, suburban African
American individuals affect the lives of those who remain in the inner city. African American and European American teacher respondents alike focused primarily on the individual struggles they were experiencing with their attitudes and expectations toward African American male learners. The student respondents frequently expressed negative and degrading opinions about their female African American classmates. As an emancipatory researcher, I could have challenged these areas more by helping the participants give analysis to their thoughts and devised strategies for change which would enable them to act upon their analytical conclusions. Since I failed to do so, I believe I would be remiss if I did not take the time now to share my thoughts on these findings. In so doing, I will refer to three terms—diaspora, double-consciousness, and misogyny—to help conceptualize (1) why I believe African American parents focused so much on the Black church’s role and on the ways affluent African Americans could invest in bettering the life of poor Blacks in the inner cities, (2) why teachers wrestled with their new teaching roles, and (3) why young African American males make degrading remarks about their African American female classmates. I would like to again offer that I am of the mind that if discursive encounters had taken place with the participants around these issues, my attempts to enable the respondents to become empowered in other areas would have been brought closer to fruition. Instead, the study fell short in meeting this aim. A discussion now follows addressing each of these unchallenged areas and what I believe should have transpired within the researcher/participant reciprocal relationship in order to actualize one of the study’s goals.
Relating to the Diaspora: Why Does the Black Church Hold Such Significance for the Study's African American Teacher and Parent Respondents?

As I read Gilroy's (1993) work, I began to piece together knowings from my own experience. Historically, Black Americans have had a love-hate relationship with the Black church. Writings of yesterday suggest that some African Americans vehemently proclaim the Black church as the sole institution that has provided the strong moral and spiritual fortress for a people in need of an anchor. Many in this camp promulgate that if it were not for the Black church, the enslaved Africans ported to the western shores would not have survived years of torture and slavery. Additionally, they advance that the Black church acted as a stabilizing force in the Black community in the decades following slavery. Others, however, have asserted that Black Americans should revisit their reverence to Christianity and their allegiance to the Black church. Individuals who advanced this position claim that Christianity used the Black church to subordinate a people. From this vantage point, the Black church was seen as a vehicle to modify behaviors, to help rationalize those evils that besought Black people, and/or to condition them toward conformity. Regardless of the view one takes, whether to the far left or right or a combination of both, all would admit that the Black church continues to play a prominent and significant role in the lives of African Americans. In modern times, the Black church's role has been redefined. New expectations of the Black church have been thrust at its doorsteps by those residing in Black communities throughout the U.S.

Throughout my field tenure, I repeatedly heard these expectations echoed in varying ways. Discussion surrounding the Black church's role in the Black community
was always voluntarily initiated by my African American respondents. While many lamented the passivity of the Black pastors and/or church members within their communities, many others shared their visionary hopes of actions they believed the Black church could implement to help relieve their plight. However, I believe my handling of these conversations is an area in which I, as an empowering researcher, fell short. Review of my reflexive logs indicate that I positioned myself solely in the hermeneutic paradigm. I simply listened, occasionally nodded an affirmative, and said "Um-hmmm, I see," while silently and secretly noting questions like, "What is it about the Black church that makes [my African American respondents] relinquish so much power to this agency?" "Why do they so faithfully attend this institution so freely, give of their time and monies, while possessing such dichotomized and agonized emotions?" "Has a tradition of believing in a God or going to church been so embedded in these Black people that questioning their relationship to this institution has become unquestionable?"

Though I noted in my reflexive journal that I needed "to explore the church theme in its entirety with the respondents," it was a note I never followed up on. Throughout my tenure, however, I was continually assessing this area in my own mind. During this process of reflection, I would like to share some of my thoughts about this subject. Had I shared these thoughts with the participants during my tenure, I believe I could have initiated some thought-provoking conversations that might perhaps have yielded emancipatory actions.

In offering these insights, I will reference the concept of "diaspora" and discuss how it underpins the words, thoughts, and actions that are the driving forces behind the
study participants' emotions in this area. Broadly speaking, this concept is a philosophical orientation that assumes a transcultural collectivity. This collectivity embraces a diversified people, regardless of ethnicity, who share several commonalties, including (1) a colored pigmentation and (2) being subjugated to subaltern, subordinate, and/or oppressed states of existence. The diasporic concept is a call to peoples of color that regardless of their hemispheric placement or displacement, they share commonalties of pain and sufferings. In relating this concept to what I observed transpiring with the study participants' spoken views about the Black church, I must streamline its scope. In re-analyzing the words of the African American teacher and parent respondents, particularly those of the parents, it becomes apparent that they view the Black church's role as going beyond its spiritual parameters and extending into social and political spheres. Comments such as the following lead me to assess that these individuals were experiencing and depicting diaspora reflections:

On Sundays, I dress up and go to church. There, I see Ms. B. or Mr. D., who used to live in the neighborhood. They are somebodies now, but they still attend church here in the ghetto every Sunday.

I never feel poor or different when I go to church. I sit next to Ms. M. who is a teacher or Mr. W. who is a principal and I realize whether we are educated Black folk or uneducated, we basically experience the same racism, regardless.
These statements and others were based on the belief widely shared by my African American respondents that regardless of their societal positions, everyday Black folk and Black intellectuals share more similarities than differences. Regardless of the perceived caste system that has been created intraculturally as well as intratextually, once assembled in church, this caste system dissipates and Blacks become a collective "we." In the words of one parent respondent:

On Sundays, it seems once the preacher ends his sermon, we all have shown our spirituality by shouting, clapping our hands, and stamping our feet, or by simply wiping a tear-streaked face. Smart Black folk and we everyday Black folk are weeping and rejoicing together. We are one, and we are united.

Such sentiments undergird the diasporic philosophy, and if they had been collectively rather than individually approached, some critical/participatory actions could have emerged during my research tenure. I could have called together the African American teacher and parent respondents for a series of discussions on the concerns inner-city African Americans have regarding Black intellectuals. This perhaps would have been a more noteworthy endeavor because all of the African American teachers in the study had done what the African American parents seemed most concerned about: they had moved out of the inner city, revisiting it, as I noted in my journal, "only to earn their paycheck or attend church on Sundays." In retrospect, these sessions would have been empowering because they would have engaged Black teachers and parents in problem-solving dialogue about issues beyond the learning walls. These talk-sessions
could have re-illuminated for the respondents the idea that Black scholars and ordinary Black folks have much more in common with each other and that barriers of socioeconomic status cannot eradicate their commonalities. They could have provided a more conceptual awareness of the diasporic philosophy held by eighteenth-century African American religious leader-scholar Alexander Crummell. According to Crummell:

Races, like families, are the organisms and the ordinance of God; and race feeling, like family feeling, is of divine origin. The extinction of race feeling is just as possible as the extinction of family feeling. Indeed race is family. The principle of continuity is as masterful in races as it is in families—as it is in nations. (quoted in Gilroy, 1993, p. 98, emphasis added)

Again, however, my failure to provide my respondents with opportunities for such discussion was due to the tensions, to be discussed below, inherent in my having positioned myself between two worldviews for the purpose of conducting this research.

Double-Consciousness: What Pedagogical Paradigm Has My Loyalty?

W. E. B. DuBois, writing in his turn-of-the-century work, The Souls of Black Folk, introduced the concept of "double-consciousness." Regarding African Americans, he notes:

One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (quoted in Gilroy, 1993, p. 126)
I observed this double-consciousness being enacted by all of my teacher respondents, both African American and European American, in one form or another. They all seemed at times torn between what their current schooling and in-service training depicted as the correct ways to interface with African American male learners and what reality was dictating. Their loyalties to the technical/pedagogical paradigm were consistently battling their newfound allegiance to the hermeneutic and critical teaching. Often, my two primary teacher respondents, as well as the other teachers, were heard to state, "This all sounds good in the classroom or in the in-service meetings, but in reality it is difficult to implement." or "It is so easy to give straight lecture, and I know it is not engaging the learner in a productive and critical way, but it is so easy." As my observations revealed, a teacher's spoken statement of what she or he would or would not do in the classroom was not conveyed behaviorally. When approached about these incongruencies, several of my teacher respondents, particularly the primary teachers, would lament that they were torn between teaching in the traditional ways and teaching in the nontraditional ways demanded by the school's innovative new curriculum. These teachers and others were torn between two warring ideals, between the old and the new. They continuously voiced their awareness of their shortcomings in this area. Many were caught in what I refer to as the "marginal (wo)man" concept—that is, they were straddling two worlds: one of utopia, one of reality. In this area, I believe I once again failed to take advantage of the participatory research platform. Instead, I positioned myself in the hermeneutic worldview: I listened, observed, and evaluated, but beyond these actions, I did nothing.
Because the majority of my teacher respondents were such willing participants, who openly recognized their limitations and struggles, I could have engaged, with the assistance of the curriculum designer, in videotaping these teachers' classroom performance. This taping could have been solicited on a voluntary basis and used for a collective group debriefing. Using perhaps the Freirian concept of "circle of culture," discussions could have evolved around alternative, reality-based ways of teaching African American males. Though this was not done, it would have been empowering for two reasons: (1) in a collective body, individual teachers could have seen that they were not the only one experiencing this double-consciousness and/or marginal (wo)man dilemma, and (2) pragmatic teaching strategies more appropriate to the lived realities of the classroom could have been generated to replace approaches that, while innovative and advocated by the Afrocentric model, are less than effective. The teachers, in return, could have implemented their own problem-solving ideas and continuously evaluated their actions through the processes of modification and/or deletion. These activities (reviewing videotapes of instruction, discussing problematic areas, and generating solutions) could have placed the teachers in a transformative progression toward actualization, which could have led to additional empowerment.

**Misogynic Issues: "He loves me....He loves me not...?"

In my discursive conversations with the eight African American male student respondents, I noted that all of them, to some degree, "bad-mouthed" their African American female classmates. The boys' frequent pronouncements that one Black girl or
another was "dumb," "stupid," or "crazy" constantly dug at my heart. However, as I wrote in my reflexive journal, "Fran, leave it alone. It is probably a developmental thing they are going through"; and "Talk to Mrs. Brit about having a lesson on respect, and do not single out the African American girl but use it as an universal issue." Now that I am in this process of revisiting my research through a critical lens, I realize that this too was an area that might have been more proactively addressed.

Again using Gilroy (1993) to organize my thoughts, I reflected that poor relationships between Black women and men have been at the core of much historical and contemporary thinking and writing. To avoid holding an encompassing discussion with these boys about their perceptions of Black girls, I jotted down excuses such as, "These African American males may not understand the themes in the complexity inherent in the writings of a [novelist Terry] McMillan [author of Waiting to Exhale] or [Shaharazad] Ali [author of The Black Man's Guide to Understanding the Black Woman]"; and "Perhaps [the Black male student respondents] will cease seeing me as their ally and [see me instead as] one who advocates for the African American girls." In retrospect, I believe I should have discussed McMillan's and/or Ali's books with the boys, or at the very least I should have ceased to rationalize that introducing them to and exposing the hegemonic forces that generate misogynistic behavior was too dense a topic for discussion. After all, they seemed to comprehend Nichols's (1976) epistemological theories, Kunjufu's (1985a, 1985b, 1986a, 1986b, 1990) philosophy of African-centered pedagogy, and Hale-Benson's (1986, 1989) developmental perspectives as well as the work of other educational thinkers. As an emancipatory researcher, I was remiss in this area.
Holding dialogical sessions focusing solely on Black boy–Black girl relationship building could have proven empowering in several ways: (1) it would have brought more intense light to bear on how these boys really saw and felt about Black girls; (2) it may have led to more interactive doings between these boys and their female counterparts. These activities could have afforded both groups with hermeneutic experiences that could have resulted in both genders gaining better insight into the others’ behaviors. As well, perhaps this study then could have provided additional data for inquiries into the following research questions: Do early experiences within the learning walls influence the emotional perceptions of Black boys toward Black girls? Are the negative attitudes held by these Black boys about Black girls a carry-over from their neighborhood and home environments? Are the boys’ early misogynistic views artifacts of a developmental stage that may or may not take on generalizations relative to gender issues characterized by society at large? These questions, though they address areas this study failed to pursue, are noteworthy areas for any emancipatory study to take on when working with participants in elementary or middle school settings. If I had done this, perhaps the study could have more completely met its transformative goals.

There was one area, however, that did illuminate an empowering process not inherently initiated by the study but observed and assessed by this researcher. I am speaking of the Afrocentric schooling concept, which was a part of the study’s investigative scope. The remainder of this chapter’s discussion will focus on this concept as an empowering vehicle.
I noted that the majority of the participants at the site—the school administrators, the teachers, the parents, and the students, particularly the males—were gradually experiencing and implementing empowering actions. Administrators felt empowered because they were at the hub of birthing innovative new teaching strategies and ways of overseeing a teaching staff and student populous. Teachers were feeling empowered because they were offered the choice of deciding whether or not they would remain at the school site when it adopted the new Afrocentric program. Those teachers who chose to stay or who elected to join the teaching staff also felt empowered because they were in the process of what I refer to as a heightening of the "consciousness of self." Almost universally, both Black and White teachers shared comments like, "I cannot believe there is so much rich history about African Americans," or "I had no idea about some of the contributions made by African Americans."

On a daily basis, I witnessed the process of empowerment taking place among the students as I walked the halls and heard Black boys and girls reciting the school’s "African Pledge"; as I walked past Mr. Day’s classroom and heard Black boys and girls echoing, "I am somebody! I am somebody!"; and as a little person dressed in a yellow-and-blue uniform would walk up to me out of nowhere, gently tug on my arm, and ask, "Miss J., do you want me to tell you what I learned today?" This is what an empowering educational process should entail. When I observed hallway and classroom walls beautifully adorned with African and African American artifacts or personal drawings, painted pictures or handcrafted items made by the students, indeed it reflected among these students a sense of pride, a sense of self, and a sense of locating one’s self both
historically and contemporarily. When I listened to and debated with my eight African American male respondents about topics such as who "discovered" Columbus, or who really invented the street light, or what courses would better enable them to become President of the United States, I realized that these youngsters, under this innovative and experimental concept of schooling, were immersed in a school setting that was bringing John Dewey’s bold educational ideals to fruition. The school, for these students and teachers was becoming a place that "should teach a child not what to think but how to think"—the epitome of empowerment.

The Black parents, too, were experiencing an empowering transformation as a result of the Afrocentric schooling concept. Remark after remark made to me by parents would center around how they felt more welcome and comfortable when going into the school to discuss their sons’ academic progress. Some parents remarked that teachers seemed to be taking a more active role, that teachers were coming to their homes and meeting them "on their own turf" to talk about their sons’ behaviors. As one parent noted, "It makes me feel good to discuss Mark’s behavior in my own home. I do not feel intimidated in my own setting." Several parents noted that even though purchasing the uniforms their children were required to wear to school initially presented some hardship, it also presented an opportunity for empowerment. In the words of another parent respondent:

When I have my son put his blue-and-yellow uniform on, it gives me a sense of pride. It’s like he is attending a private school or something. But beyond that it frees me up. It helps me have control over his destiny because I know he will not
be shot because he is wearing a gold chain, a Starter jacket, or some other type of expensive clothing.

The five features of the Afrocentric schooling concept discussed earlier in this document all lend themselves to meeting the critical curriculum worldview promulgated by Freire (1970, 1989) and others. Notwithstanding, before the concept can be deemed successful at the school site under investigation in this study, the fervent strivings toward implementing all of its features—that of allowing teachers to choose their teaching site, mandating teacher home visits, implementing cooperative learning strategies, establishing a parent council within the school, and delivering situated pedagogical techniques—must be diligently met year after year. The school cannot afford to waiver in this quest. Thus far, however, most of those involved in this school setting believe, as do I, that the Afrocentric schooling concept is the best solution among the many offered (i.e., all-Black male academies, home schooling, religious-based education, etc.) for fully meeting the African American male learner’s academic needs. Indeed, it is my belief that some of the essential offerings of this schooling concept would greatly benefit any inner-city child, regardless of gender.

Even though I have heard high and glowing accolades for the Afrocentric schooling project being implemented at the study site, I remain a realist and realize that the grade card is still out on its overall effectiveness. In terms of that grade card, on September 10, 1994, I attended a symposium held in the study site community, the purpose of which was to assess the school’s effectiveness as an Afrocentric school. At
this meeting, the participants presented their assessments of data that had been collected from observations, interviews with school staff, and the sample of students who are part of a longitudinal study. This symposium was attended by a group of nationally known experts, including Drs. Wade Boykin, Jomills Braddock, Jacqueline Irvine, and Carol Lee, who assisted the audience in an analysis of the Afrocentric schooling concept’s success and/or failure. In addressing the issues of empowerment and whether or not the school’s curriculum and programs were meeting African American males’ learning needs, these experts and other symposium participants noted that many questions are still in need of answers, and they emphasized that more time is needed to judge the pros and cons of this schooling concept.

Bringing this critical reflection process to its termination, I have offered areas in which I believe this study and my research endeavors held flaws. Could anything be actually gleaned from this study that is innovative, do-able, and that brings newfound awareness for future change? I would hope that beyond its flaws, this study has shown that those voices immersed in a phenomenon perhaps can serve as the most meaningful voices of authority. Whether one agrees with the respondents’ recommendations for change or believes them to be either dated, impractical, or unrealistic, this research provided these African American males, their teachers, and parents their first opportunity to have someone earnestly listen to them and philosophically as well as pragmatically discuss ways to effect change.

Did this study demonstrate the vital role the Afrocentric schooling concept can play in improving education across America? I certainly hope so, for this study strongly
advocates that school administrators and/or other designated officials begin to adopt those features delineated under this concept, particularly for inner-city African American male learners considered as high risks. Beyond this, this study provided no earth shattering solutions other than the notion of the importance of earnestly listening to those immersed in a phenomenon and then actively working to implement their insights. In addition, this study suggests that perhaps if a longitudinal assessment of the Afrocentric schooling concept proves to be successful, it will be because many of its espoused features emanated from cumulative meetings with school administrators, teachers and parents.

In terminating my research journey, I reflectively ask, "Was the ultimate goal of the study obtained?" To reiterate, my ultimate goal was to be involved in an empowering process that would allow the study’s voices, those forgotten voices of the African American male, his teachers, and parents, to be heard. From there, these respondents could share their perspectives as to why the Black male academic crisis exists and thus be enabled to theorize and actively seek ways to change their current plight. As a researcher, I believe this study met this overarching goal. This goal was met through the earnest attempts to tell the stories, assist the participants in their personal roads toward change, and help provide a research atmosphere for the heightening of critical self-consciousness. These endeavors were all done not just in the worthy cause of making this work more accessible, but to do the fullest justice to what I have struggled to comprehend.
I.

APPENDIX A
As an African American educator, I am concerned with the dismal statistics on Black male students relative to their dropout rate, suspension rate and/or behavioral problems manifested in the classroom. As an educator, I am not inferring that these problems emanate only because of interactions within the classroom but I am saying the research community needs to start here and listen to your voices as teachers and those of your students. I would like you to answer the questionnaire and afterwards I will meet with you individually and continue our discussions in focus group sessions.

As you know your participation is voluntary and you can cease participation at any time if you desire. All responses are confidential and no names will be used in the final documentation. I will need to meet with you approximately six hours over a three month intense period. I will meet with you one hour for an initial individual interview. I will then ask you to participate in two one and half hour focus sessions and then for another one hour debriefing individual session. Are there any questions? If not, please sign the consent form.
I consent to participating in the research study entitled: Black Male Crisis in the Classroom: A Qualitative Study of Perceived Educational Experiences. Beverly M. Gordon or his/her authorized representative has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of my participation. Possible benefits of the study have been described as have alternative procedures, if such procedures are applicable and available.

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Further, I understand that I am free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me. I also give consent to the taping of the interviews as well as video-taping of group sessions.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

DATE_________________________SIGNED______________________________
(Participant)

SIGNED_________________________SIGNED______________________________
(Principal Investigator or his/her Authorized Representative) (Person Authorized to Consent for Participant - if Required)

WITNESS_________________________
II.

APPENDIX B
As an African American teacher, I am extremely concerned about what is happening to Black boys in America’s school system. Many are dropping out, being suspended and/or acting out in the classroom. Many people are giving their opinions as to why this is taking place. I want to listen to how you as Black male students feel about your subjects; how you as Black male students feel about your teachers; how you as Black male students feel about your school and how you as Black male students feel about yourselves as learners.

Because I will be getting a lot of information in several interviews. I need only four participants. I will also ask you to ask your parent(s) to participate in my research. I need your parent’s approval to let you participate and I need their commitment of participation.

I will send you home with a letter and a consent form to give to your parents. I would like you to return the consent form to Mr./Mrs.______, your teacher by ______. I will then select four young boys who will become part of the study by pulling winning numbers from a bowl. I will ask you to answer twenty questions and we will then meet individually and as a group to discuss your responses. I will need to meet with you, if you are selected for about 6 hours over a three month period. I will meet with you one hour for an individual interview and then I would like to meet with you two times in a group with other selected Black male learners. These groups will last about one and half hours. I would then like to meet with you, again one more time for an hour to see how you feel about everything we have discussed.

Your parents will also have questions to answer. Their questions are different from your questions. Your participation and your parent’s participation is strictly voluntary. Also your names will not be used in the final write-up of my findings. Are there any questions?

(Researcher now turns her attention to the Black girls in class)

My dear African-American girls, please do not feel bad because I am not focusing on you. Right now as a student my concern is for your Black brothers who seem to be facing a lot of problems in the classroom. That is why I am giving them my attention. In the future, I shall turn my attention to you and maybe then you can become part of my study. Do you have any questions?

Now my dear children of color, I would like to have a hug from each of you, before I turn the class session back into the hands of your teacher, Mr. or Mrs.

Boy, I needed those hugs (researcher’s smile). Before, I leave, please remember this is extremely important; so be careful with the letter and consent form. Keep them in the envelope! Thank you again.

Note: Classrooms are all comprised of African American students. No other nationalities are represented.
I consent to participating in the research study entitled: Black Male Crisis in Classroom: A Qualitative Study of Perceived Educational Experiences. Beverly M. Gordon or his/her authorized representative has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of my participation. Possible benefits of the study have been described as have alternative procedures, if such procedures are applicable and available.

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Further, I understand that I am free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me. I also give consent to the taping of the interviews as well as video-taping of group sessions.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

DATE__________________________ SIGNED______________________________
(Participant)

SIGNED__________________________ SIGNED______________________________
(Principal Investigator or his/her Authorized Representative) (Person Authorized to Consent for Participant - if Required)

WITNESS________________________
III.

APPENDIX C
Dear Parent:

As an African American teacher, I am concerned about what is happening to our sons in the classroom. Many of them are dropping out, being suspended and/or acting out in the classroom. In attempting to discover why these conditions exist, I am not only interested in Black males or their teachers' responses but your response as a parent.

I would like you to allow your son to participate in my study. I will interview him individually as well as in a group to find out how he feels about his subjects, his classroom experiences, his teachers and himself. These sessions will be tape recorded and some will be video-taped. I have developed questions to help guide the interview. Other questions will develop based on information discussed by your son. All information is kept confidential and no names will be used in my final documentation.

As earlier stated, I do not only want to hear from your son or his teacher, but I need and value your comments as a parent. If you sign the consent form for your son's participation, you will also be committing yourself. If you agree to participate I will meet with you as a parent four times over a three month period. Two sessions will be individual which should last no longer than one hour. The other two times will be in focus group discussions with other selected parents for one and a half hour sessions. I will, therefore, need four hours of your time over a ninety day period of time. I will have questions which are different from those given to your son to guide our interview. Other questions will develop as we talk. Again, I would like to stress all information is confidential and as noted on your consent form, you can withdraw your participation at any given time. All names will be changed for the final documentation.

I only need eight Black male learners for my study. There will be a selection process in that the son of those parents who allow their son to participate and who has selected the winning numbers will participate. Because of my limited need of participants, even though, your son expressed an interest you may not be part of the final selection process. I am, however, thanking you in advance for your show of support.

If you are interested and would allow your son to participate as well as yourself, please sign the attached consent letter. I will contact you if you and your son were selected for my study by ________________.

If you are not interested, I thank you for taking time to read this letter.

Appreciatively,

Frances James-Brown
Ohio State University
Research Student
Student's Instrument

Oral Introduction

I really am interested in you as a Black male student. I want to know how you feel about your teacher, your subjects, your school and about yourself. Please do not be afraid to share your real feelings.

Oral Instructions

I want to know how you feel about the questions I am going to ask.

Please circle the number under the picture that best describes your feeling for each question.

Example: School is important to me

![Smiley faces representing feelings from 1 to 5]

Oral Appreciation

Again, before completing these questions, I would like to thank you for your voluntary participation in assisting me in my research. I will talk to each of you alone and then talk to you as a group about how you responded to each question. I would like to tape record the individual and group sessions.
Why I Like or Do Not Like School

DIRECTIONS: Please circle the number of the picture that best describes how you feel about the question.

Example: School is important to me

1. My teacher pays attention to me
2. The subjects are interesting to me
3. My parent(s) do not care if I like school
4. School is fun
5. My teacher does not like me
6. I do well in most of my subjects
7. My teacher does not pay attention to me
8. I am smart
9. I feel dumb
10. My "best friend" and/or most of my friends like school
11. School is not important to my future
12. My teacher calls on me
13. My teacher likes me
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>The subjects are not interesting to me</th>
<th></th>
<th>School is boring</th>
<th></th>
<th>School is important to my future</th>
<th></th>
<th>My teacher does not call on me</th>
<th></th>
<th>I do not do well in school</th>
<th></th>
<th>My parent(s) tell me I should like school</th>
<th></th>
<th>My &quot;best friend&quot; and/or most of my friends do not like school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>16.</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Dr. Emmalou Norland's Instrumentation class (Course No. 888, Winter Quarter 1992, The Ohio State University)
V.

APPENDIX E
Teacher's Instrument

Oral Introduction

I would like to assess your procedural pattern(s), instructional method(s), and encountered experience(s) as a teacher, with elementary Black male students. To complete my assessment, I have designed a Likert-type scale comprised of twenty-five items, for each of your responses.

Oral Instructions

Please keep foremost in your mind that:

The purpose of this questionnaire is to assess your teaching behaviors, procedures, and experiences with elementary school Black male students. This is not a test. There are no correct or incorrect answers. Read each item carefully and then circle the number of the response which best describes you.

(1) Almost Never (2) Rarely (3) Sometimes (4) Frequently; and (5) Almost Always

Example:

I enjoy teaching

Oral Appreciation

Again, before completing this questionnaire, I would like to thank you for your voluntary participation in assisting me in this research endeavor. I would like to tape record the individual and group sessions. I will definitely get back with each of you individually as well as collectively concerning my assessment.
10. I find Black Male Students have different learning needs than other students. (experiential domain)

11. I encourage my Black Male Students to read aloud. (methodical domain)

12. I use a lot of "skill application" versus "abstract thinking" assignments. (instructional domain)

13. I maintain a "low noise" level in my classroom. (experiential domain)

14. I designate the most aggressive Black Male Students to be classroom monitors. (methodical domain)

15. I notice that Black Male Students in my classroom sit farthest from me. (experiential domain)

16. I found Black Male Students in my classroom to be "extremely restless". (experiential domain)

17. I engage in extra-curricular activities with my Black Male Students. (instructional domain)

18. I send Black Male Students who "act out" in my classroom immediately to the office. (methodical domain)

19. I believe in using "collaborative learning groups" when teaching. (instructional domain)

20. I feel I can relate to Black Male Students in my classroom. (experiential domain)

21. I found that Black Male Students to be "creative" thinkers. (experiential domain)

22. I found that my Black Male Students have short attention spans. (experiential domain)

23. I found my Black Male Students to have poor language skills. (experiential domain)

24. I use a number of teaching methods involving "art" or "music" strategies. (instructional domain)

25. I believe Black Male Students in my classroom have high "self-esteem". (experiential domain)

Adapted from Dr. Emmalou Norland's Instrumentation class (Course No. 883, Winter Quarter 1992, The Ohio State University)
VI.

APPENDIX F
Parent's Instrument

Oral Introduction

I am interested in what you as a parent has to say about your child's classroom experiences. How you feel his educational needs are or are not being met. Please feel free to express your true feelings.

Oral Introduction

I have developed six discussion questions for you and I to talk about. Our discussion is not limited to these questions because they act just as guides for us to begin our conversation. I would like to tape record your responses. Your participation is voluntary and confidential. No names will be used in the final write up of the research.

Oral Appreciation

Again, I would like to thank you for your participation in this research. I will report back to you about your responses. I would like you also to meet with other parents of students participating in this research and discuss the responses as a group.
Directions:

These six questions are developed to guide our interview as to understand how you feel about your son's school/classroom experiences. You do not have to write out the responses. We will discuss these areas and I ask permission to tape record your responses. Your responses will be kept confidential. You will not have to indicate your name on the tape because prior to your taped responses, I will assign you an alphabetical letter. Throughout the tape I will address you with your assigned letter.

Examples:

Mrs. or Mr. P., am I hearing you say, that you believe your son's self-esteem is not being developed in the classroom?

Open-ended Interview Questions

1. What impact do you believe education can or cannot have on your son's life?

2. Are the materials and/or subject matter being taught in the classroom useful to your son?

3. Do you believe the teacher(s) involved in your child's learning process are caring and sensitive to your child's needs?

4. As a parent or parents what do you see as your role in your son's learning process?

5. How can you change condition(s) that you believe to be adversely affecting your son's learning process?

6. Why should you as a parent(s) become involved in your son's learning process?
APPENDIX G
Dear Discussion Participant:

I sincerely thank you for agreeing to participate in the discussion group that I have arranged for __________, _____________.

This discussion will begin at __________, in Room __________, Victor Berger Elementary School. As you know your son’s school is located at _________________.

As I earlier stated in the letter that your son brought home, that as an African American teacher, I am concerned about what is going on in the classroom with our Black male children. I would like to hear your opinions.

Since I have invited a limited number of parents, the success and quality of our discussion is based on the cooperation of parents who attend. Because you have accepted my invitation, your attendance is needed and will contribute greatly towards my efforts of understanding how you feel about the academic crisis of Black male learners. I need and value your ideas and input.

This session will be attended by other parents who have Black male learners in the mid-western school district. I will be discussing your attitudes about your son’s school/classroom experiences. This is strictly a research study and no sales or solicitations will be made.

The small group of which you are a part is through a process which identified only those persons who are of voluntary participation. As stated in the consent form you signed earlier, the focus group session will be tape recorded. All information is confidential and no names will be used in my final documentation as to assure anonymity. All tapes will be destroyed upon final use.

Refreshments will be provided and the session will last no longer than a hour and a half.

You will be contacted by telephone on ___________ regarding your intentions to participate on ___________. If you happen to be out when this call is made, please make your plans known to whoever may answer the phone. See you then. Thank you very much for your interest and willingness to participate.

Appreciatively,

Frances James-Brown
The Ohio State University
Research Student
Dear Discussion Participant:

I sincerely thank you for agreeing to participate in the discussion group that I have arranged for _____________. _____________. This discussion will begin at ____________, in Room ___________, Victor Berger Elementary School. As you know your school is located at ________________________________.

As I earlier stated in the classroom with you and in the letter you took home, that as an African American teacher, I am concerned about what is going on in the classroom with you. I would like to hear your opinions.

Since I have invited a limited number of Black male learners, the success and quality of our discussion is based on the cooperation of each student who attend. Because you have accepted my invitation, your attendance is needed and will contribute greatly toward my efforts of understanding how you feel as a Black male learner. I need and value your ideas and input.

This session will be attended by other Black male learners in this midwestern school district. I will be discussing your attitudes about your school, subjects, teachers and yourself. This is strictly a research study and no sales will be made.

The small group of which you are a part is through a process which identified only those persons who are of voluntary participation. As stated in the consent form you signed earlier, the focus group session will be tape recorded. All information is confidential and no names will be used in my final documentation as to assure anonymity. All tapes will be destroyed upon final use.

Refreshments will be provided and the session will last no longer than a hour and a half.

You will be contacted by telephone on ___________ regarding your intentions to participate on ___________. If you happen to be out when this call is made, please make your plans known to whoever may answer the phone. See you then. Thank you very much for your interest and willingness to participate.

Appreciatively,

Frances James-Brown
The Ohio State University
Research Student
Dear Discussion Participant:

I sincerely thank you for agreeing to participate in the discussion group that I have arranged for ____________, ____________. This discussion will begin at ____________, in Room ____________, Victor Berger Elementary School. As you know your school is located at ________________. 

As I earlier stated in the session I had with you, that as an African American teacher, I am concerned about what is going on in the classroom with our Black male children. I would like to hear your opinions.

Since I have invited a limited number of teachers, the success and quality of our discussion is based on the cooperation of the teachers who attend. Because you have accepted my invitation, your attendance is needed and will contribute greatly toward my efforts of understanding how you feel as a teacher. I need and value your ideas and input.

This session will be attended by other teachers who have Black male learners in the mid-western school district. I will be discussing your attitudes and feelings about your experiences with Black male learners in your classroom. This is strictly a research study and no sales or solicitations will be made.

The small group of which you are a part is through a process which identified only those persons who are of voluntary participation. As stated in the consent form you signed earlier, the focus group session will be tape recorded. All information is confidential and no names will be used in my final documentation as to assure anonymity. All tapes will be destroyed upon final use.

Refreshments will be provided and the session will last no longer than a hour and a half.

You will be contacted by telephone on ____________ regarding your intentions to participate on ____________. If you happen to be out when this call is made, please make your plans known to whoever may answer the phone. See you then. Thank you very much for your interest and willingness to participate.

Appreciatively,

Frances James-Brown
The Ohio State University
Research Student
VIII.

APPENDIX H
Welcome to our session. I am delighted to see each of you today. My name, as you know is Frances L. James-Brown and assisting me is Susan C. Cooper. We are attempting to gain information about how you feel about your son's school/classroom experiences.

You were selected because you expressed an interest in my area of concern. As parents of Black Male Students you have expressed a sincere interest in their schooling. Remember, as I stated in your letter, that your opinions and perceptions are not only needed but greatly valued.

Before we begin, Ms. Cooper will remind you of some ground rules.

Ms. Cooper's Voice:

This is only a study and there are no sales involved. Please speak up with only one person talking at a time. We are tape recording the session because we do not want to miss any of your comments. If several are talking at the same time, the tape will be grabbled and we will miss your comments. The tapes will be destroyed upon completion of their use.

We will be on a first initial basis and in our written reports, there will not be any names attached to comments. You may be assured of complete confidentiality.

Keep in mind that we are just as interested in negative comments as positive comments, and at times the negative comments are the most helpful.

Our discussion will last about an hour and we will not be taking a formal break. The rest rooms are just down the hall and refreshments are over near the wall. Feel free to leave the table for either of these or if you wish to stretch, but please do so quietly.

Well let's begin. We've placed cards with assigned initials on the table in front of you. Let's find out some more about each other by going around the room one at a time. We will use this procedure for just this first question. After we've each answered the first question, feel free to speak up at any time for the remainder of the discussion.

Please refer to the document in front of you for questions to be used for this session.

Script adapted with information given by Dr. Emmalou Norland (1992). [Winter Quarter for Instrumentation Course: 888]
Welcome to our session. I am delighted to see each of you today. My name, as you know is Frances L. James-Brown and assisting me is Elizabeth Peavy. We are attempting to gain information about how you feel about your school/classroom experiences.

You were selected because you expressed an interest in my area of concern. As Black Male Students you have expressed a sincere interest in your school/classroom experiences. Remember, as I stated in your letter, that your opinions and perceptions are not only needed but greatly valued.

Before we begin, Dr. Peavy will remind you of some ground rules.

**Dr. Peavy's Voice:**

This is only a study and there are no sales involved. Please speak up with only one person talking at a time. We are tape recording the session because we do not want to miss any of your comments. If several are talking at the same time, the tape will be grabbed and we will miss your comments. The tapes will be destroyed upon completion of their use.

We will be on a first name basis and in our written reports, there will not be any names attached to comments. You may be assured of complete confidentiality.

Keep in mind that we are just as interested in negative comments as positive comments, and at times the negative comments are the most helpful.

Our discussion will last about an hour and we will not be taking a formal break. The restrooms are just down the hall and refreshments are over near the wall. Feel free to leave the table for either of these or if you wish to stretch, but please do so quietly.

Well let’s begin. We’ve placed name cards on the table in front of you to help us remember each other’s names. Let’s find out some more about each other by going around the room one at a time. We will use this procedure for just this first question. After we’ve each answered the first question, feel free to speak up at any time for the remainder of the discussion.

Please refer to the document in front of you for questions to be used for this session.

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*Script adapted with information given by Dr. Emmalou Norland (1992).*

*[Winter Quarter for Instrumentation Course: 888]*
Welcome to our session. I am delighted to see each of you today. My name, as you know is Frances L. James-Brown and assisting me is Susan C. Cooper. We are attempting to gain information about how you as a teacher feel about your experiences with Black male learners in the classroom.

You were selected because you expressed an interest in my area of concern. As educators who teach Black Male Students you have expressed a sincere interest in their education. Remember, as I stated in your letter, that your opinions and perceptions are not only needed by greatly valued.

Before we begin, Ms. Cooper will remind you of some ground rules.

Ms. Cooper's Voice:

This is only a study and there are no sales involved. Please speak up with only one person talking at a time. We are tape recording the session because we do not want to miss any of your comments. If several are talking at the same time, the tape will be grabbled and we will miss your comments. The tapes will be destroyed upon completion of their use.

We will be on a first name basis and in our written reports, there will not be any names attached to comments. You may be assured of complete confidentiality.

Keep in mind that we are just as interested in negative comments as positive comments, and at times the negative comments are the most helpful.

Our discussion will last about an hour and we will not be taking a formal break. The restrooms are just down the hall and refreshments are over near the wall. Feel free to leave the table for either of these or if you wish to stretch, but please do so quietly.

Well let's begin. We've placed name cards on the table in front of you to help us remember each other's names. Let's find out some more about each other by going around the room one at a time. We will use this procedure for just this first question. After we've each answered the first question, feel free to speak up at any time for the remainder of the discussion.

Please refer to the document in front of you for questions to be used for this session.

Script adapted with information given by Dr. Emmalou Norland (1992).

[Winter Quarter for Instrumentation Course: 888]
IX.

APPENDIX I
Shortly after the Milwaukee Board of School Directors approved the establishment of an African American Immersion School, an Implementation Committee was organized to plan for it. The Implementation Committee was divided into several subcommittees, one of which was the Documentation, Evaluation and Research Committee. The Documentation, Evaluation and Research Committee was charged with describing and assessing the changes and outcomes of the school and with overseeing other research efforts conducted in connection with the African American Immersion School. The establishment of this committee reflected a recognition of the necessity to build the evaluation activities into the school from its inception.

During the summer of 1991, three members of this team, Drs. Diane Pollard, Cheryl Ajioletutu and Edward Smith, all from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, took primary responsibility for planning the actual evaluation and for seeking extra-mural funds to enhance this effort. When the African American Immersion School opened in the Fall of 1991, these individuals began collecting data on the implementation process.

The evaluation plans include a multidisciplinary approach to the collection of qualitative and quantitative data from the various constituencies involved with the school: staff, students, parents and appropriate supporting individuals. The evaluation will focus on both the process of implementing this effort and a variety of outcomes. Multiple methods will be employed in this evaluation, including interviews, observations and surveys. In addition, where appropriate, school record data will be collected. Currently, we are envisioning a longitudinal study. Throughout this evaluation, procedures for protecting human subjects and maintaining confidentiality of information will be consistently followed.

An important purpose of this evaluation is to provide feedback to the school staff regarding their efforts to establish the African American Immersion School. An additional purpose is to document the development of this model in a thorough manner so that other schools in this district as well as in other similar districts will be able to use the information gained from this effort. Therefore, this evaluation is two-pronged: to describe and assess the unique characteristics of this school and to identify those educational innovations which are "exportable" to other schools with large African American populations.

Currently, Professors Pollard, Ajioletutu and Smith are working closely with the school principal, Mrs. Moseley in our initial data gathering. We are interviewing staff regarding their perceptions of the school and are making plans to conduct some observations. In addition we are finalizing our proposal for extra-mural funding. If this proposal is funded, we will be able to expand the evaluation and to continue throughout the five year process. For further information, contract Dr. Diane Pollard at (414) 229-4795. (October, 1991)
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