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ABSTRACT

FIELD OF DREAMS: EXPLORING AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS' CAREER ASPIRATIONS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

by Traci D. Davis

Many elementary and secondary teachers across the United States have shared and heard stories about their African American male students overwhelmingly dreaming of futures filled with the fame and fortune offered by careers in professional athletics and entertainment. While these are honorable careers that students understandably find attractive, some teachers are routinely perplexed by the overwhelming number of young men who profess an interest and the apparent disengagement these particular goals seem to create between the young men and the larger curriculum of school. Perhaps this would not be of such great concern if the academic achievement data for African American male students was not so dire.

The national graduation rate of African American male students has been persistently lower than European American male students or their African American female counterparts. This trend can be seen at the state and national level. In their 2010 report, "Diplomas Count 2010: Graduation by the Numbers", Education Weekly reported that the 2007 national graduation rate was 69%. The national graduation rate for African American students was 54% compared to 77% for European American students. The Schott Foundation (2010) reports more detailed information about black male students. In their Equity Index they show that in the state of Ohio where this study was conducted the graduation rate for African American males is 49% compared to 79% for European American male students.

This study explores whether African American males are aspiring to careers in sports and entertainment at a higher rate than their European American counterparts and whether those career aspirations are related to their engagement in school. All freshmen males at two urban high school in a mid-sized Midwestern city were asked to complete a questionnaire about career aspirations. There were 137 freshmen at both high schools who completed the questionnaire. While the results of the study were mixed, there was partial support for the hypothesis that African American male students aspired in greater proportions to careers in sports and entertainment. There was no support for the hypothesis of a relationship of career aspirations with school engagement.

FIELD OF DREAMS: EXPLORING AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS' CAREER
ASPIRATIONS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to those who have been dedicated to me. My parents, Charles and Thelma Davis, have loved and guided me in all the ways God has charged them. "Instruct a child in the way that he should go and when he is old he shall not depart from it." (Proverbs 22:6) I am still on the path. Thank You. My Brother Charles Jr. (Chucky) is my fellow visionary. Thank you for helping me with the master plans for transformation. And thank you to the one person who has been my reason for existing for the past nine years. William "Donny" Davis. Thank you for making me get up every morning and "Do Something!" I love you all.

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A very special acknowledgement to all the young people who have touched my life even more than I have touched theirs. Thank you for choosing to invest your time and talent in the uplift of your community. A special shout out to all the Renaissance Men who have banded together to improve their lives and the lives of their brothers. You've proven to me that my work is not in vain.

Chapter I: Introduction

My lived experience as a teacher has allowed me to build strong relationships with young men and women who dream both vividly and cautiously. I have established relationships with young men whose talents and abilities are not developed by public schools; students who become disillusioned and frustrated with schooling because of policies and curricula that devalue their cultures and their person. My lived experience with them has led me on a quest. My current study examining whether African-American male students are more likely to aspire to careers in entertainment and sports than European-American male students is part of that overall quest; to discover, support or develop environments that offer my urban students the greatest opportunity for personal success. While there are numerous students and experiences that have collectively fueled this quest, there is one who is particularly relevant to this study.

Traylon was in the 2nd class of students we had in the academic magnet academy. He was one of a long line of young men who expressed an intense desire to pursue a career in athletics. I remember him vividly though. As the culmination of a research unit, I always assigned my freshmen Language Arts class to research two careers of interest and write a paper exploring their findings. As a requirement for the paper students included a conclusion stating which career would be most appropriate for them. That conclusion needed to highlight the criteria they used to make their decision.

Traylon came to discuss his research paper in which he was comparing being an NFL player with being an NBA player. Early in my career, this would have ultimately lead to a conversation about the likelihood of success in these arenas, which is the traditional adult response. However, with that paper my philosophical paradigm shifted. I no longer saw this issue as an isolated phenomenon of young boys having romantic daydreams. Traylon changed me. I stopped trying to convince young men to consider other careers. There were too many of them. Instead I asked them, why? I had a deep and sincere desire to know. Hence my quest.

Some would respond that the answer is simple; Money and fame. Yet, while there are many White male students who would probably love that lifestyle, are there many who would seriously respond that it was their actual career goal? It has dawned on me that one factor in the equation may be student perceptions about what careers are desirable or feasible for them. My next contemplation was a consideration of what impact these career goals actually have on their academic performance. How engaged

academically will a student be if he perceives that the curriculum or the resulting credentials are not relevant to their future goals?

Exploring the apparent disconnect for students of color between the curriculum of schools and their lives includes how their school performance is impacted by their level of engagement. Engagement (the consistent occupation of the student's interest and effort) may be impacted by many factors including career choices. I want to know if my conversations with students are anomalies or are in fact representative of greater phenomena. Why are African American male students aspiring to non-traditional careers in athletics and entertainment at such a great rate? These are large questions with many smaller sub questions. The first step is to gauge if in fact there is a difference between the career goals of African-American males students and their European-American counterparts. Hence my research questions:

Research Question 1: Are African-American male students more likely to aspire to careers in entertainment and sports than European-American male students?

Hypothesis 1: African-American male students are more likely to aspire to careers in entertainment and sports than European American male students.

Research Question 2: Are African-American male students' career aspirations related to their level of school engagement?

Hypothesis 2: African-American male students' career aspirations are related to their level of school engagement.

II. Statement of the Problem

Carter G. Woodson (1933) illuminates for us a seldom articulated reality of public education for black youth particularly African American males when he writes:

“The thought of the inferiority of the Negro is drilled into him in almost every class he enters and in almost every book he studies. If he happens to leave school after he masters the fundamentals, before he finishes high school or reaches college, he will naturally escape some of this bias and may recover in time to be of service to his people.” (pg. 23)

Since that revelation, Woodson's sentiment has been echoed by numerous scholars (Turner, 1971; Hale-Benson, 1986; Siddle-Walker, 1996; Watkins, 2001) who have recounted the detrimental impact on black children of being indoctrinated with curricula steeped in hegemonic traditions of oppression. Initially many ignored Woodson's assertion about public education not being designed for the uplift of the African American community.

In fact, a generation of African Americans during the civil rights era tried to use education as a way to propel themselves past oppression and expand the opportunities afforded to their children. There were opportunities made for a few but for a larger number of African American children, academic achievement has been stagnant or declining. Henry Louis Gates (2007) explains that this mobility has generally created “two nations of black America”; a privileged minority class that has left the larger black community still struggling with the inequities of the past.

By 1990, the black middle-class, perilous though it might feel itself to be, had never been larger, more prosperous, nor more relatively secure. Simultaneously, the pathological behavior that results from extended impoverishment engulfed a large part of a black underclass that seemed unable to benefit from a certain opening up of American society that the Civil Rights movement had long envisioned and had finally made possible. And for the first time ever, that inability to benefit seemed permanent. (Gates, 2005, p.2)

For that group left behind the obstacles are often worse than during segregation because of the stratification that William Julius Wilson (2003) explains causes a cycle of poverty. He outlines how with the migration of middle class blacks to integrated neighborhoods, black urban areas that were once strong support systems for black children became places of concentrated poverty, joblessness, drug use, and criminal activity filled with single parent homes. Before the migration of middle class blacks to integrated neighborhoods, children from impoverished households were still able to see their black school teacher who lived down the block or be mentored by the local black store owner or mortician.

In earlier decades, most of the adults in ghetto neighborhoods were employed. And black working and middle classes provided greater stability in these neighborhoods. They invested their economic and social resources by patronizing neighborhood stores, banks, churches, and community organizations, and by sending their children to the local public schools. In the process they reinforced societal values and norms and made it meaningful for the more disadvantaged in these segregated enclaves to envision the possibility of some upward mobility.(Wilson, 2003 p. 1101)

In addition to the devastating impact on large numbers of African American children, this stratification also contributed to the continued decline of public education in urban areas. Public schooling has consistently been touted as the key to black children

being successful in spite of these grim realities. (Easton-Brooks & Davis, 2007; Perkins, 2002; Wilson, 2003). However, academic achievement continues to decline for African American males and as a result so have their vital statistics as they become men. Jawanza Kunjufu, in his 2005 text *Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys*, explores the perils faced by African American males in modern public education. He explains that the labeling of African-American males begins early in their educational experiences. As early as kindergarten, preschool if they attend, black boys are identified as deficient in a variety of ways. Evidence of this is the fact that African-American male students represent about 9% of the population of public schools but constitute 35% of students in special education (Noguera, 2003).

Labeling is a factor in African American males leaving school prior to graduation which contributes to their dauntingly low graduation rates. Education Weekly reports the national graduation rate as 69% in 2007. For African American males it was 54%. This academic achievement gap is part of a domino effect that leads black men to be unemployed or underemployed at high rates. The United States Department of Labor reported that unemployment overall remains high after the 2008 recession. In January of 2011 the unemployment rate was 9%; a devastatingly high number for our economy. Yet, for African American males that number was twice as high at 18.4%. That rate is also twice that of European American male rate of 9.2%. While low academic achievement and high unemployment are of great concern, the most alarming statistic is the high incarceration rate for black males. According to the nonprofit group the Sentencing Project, one in six African American men have been incarcerated. African American men are six times as likely to be incarcerated as their European American counterparts. They also report that in 2005 more than 2% of African American men were incarcerated compared to .07% of Hispanic American men and .04% of European American men (Mauer & King 2007). In their study "Incarceration and Racial Inequality in Men's Employment", Western & Pettit (2000) contend that census data over estimate employment rates for Black males and attempt to adjust those estimates using data from jails and prisons. The researchers conclude that "...incarceration appears to shape aspects of inequality that are of traditional interest to stratification researchers. It seems likely that status attainment, school to work transitions, and family structure all are influenced by the penal system in the current period of high incarceration" (pp. 12-13)

These numbers are alarming and reinforce the idea that while some African American men have attained and enjoy a middle or upper class lifestyle, there is a great

divide between them and large numbers of African American men who have not fared as well. In the face of such bleak numbers the improving academic performance of African American boys is of great import. Despite attempts to use education as an intervention, Woodson's warning that schools were simply a tool of reification reflecting the values of the larger society haunt us today. John Hoberman (1997) sees the entrenched social and economic status of African American men as one factor in what he calls the "sports fixation" .

the sports fixation is a direct result of the exclusion of blacks from every cognitive elite of the past century and the resulting starvation for 'race heroes'; it has always been a defensive response to the assault on black intelligence, which continues to this day. That is why the sports syndrome has made athleticism the signature achievement of black America, the reigning symbol of black 'genius.'

(p. 6)

III. The Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore whether African American male students are more likely to aspire to careers in sports and entertainment than their European American counterparts. In addition the study will look at whether those career aspirations are related to students' level of engagement with school.

IV. The Statement of Significance

While African American male education and achievement is a topic of study for researchers, for millions of parents and families it means much more. As a parent of a Black male child, my experiences are full of perplexities and doubt. I struggle to find school environments that offer strong academic experiences without instilling the bias that when present is detrimental to the spirit and future success of my child. My experience is not unique . Parents, guardians, and educators around the country have seen the dangers awaiting African American males in our society. With the birth of each child there is a sense of joy, renewal, and hope. However, with every passing year the realities of the world make those hopes seem more tenuous.

The statistical data about African American men is foreboding and tells a story of a life of fewer opportunities and greater obstacles than that of other groups within our nation. Nationally we have extolled the virtues of education as a stop gap to the extreme social and economic disparity Black males continue to experience. However, the educational system seems to have reproduced the same level of disparity found in the

larger society. As educators we continue to explore ways to improve educational achievement and thereby impact the larger social and economic hardships being experienced by Black males.

This study is significant because it attempts to provide another piece to the puzzle in the search for causality. Exploring the relationships between career aspirations of African American male students in comparison to their European American male counterparts may offer some insight into the academic achievement of Black males, and the economic status of Black males.

V. Layout of Dissertation The following chapters will provide information on the study conducted as well as the conclusions and implications. In Chapter 2, related literature is reviewed in three areas: Athletics and Art as power, The Achievement Gap, and Student engagement.

Athletics and Art as power reviews the historical significance sports and entertainment have had within the African American community; particularly how it provided some of the first opportunities for black males to receive acceptance, admiration and respect from the larger society. The Achievement Gap documents the reality of an educational system that seems to have reified underachievement for all minority children but to an even greater extent African American male students. Chapter two concludes with a discussion of the research surrounding student engagement.

Chapter three outlines the research design and methodology while Chapter four provides specific information about the study and analysis of data. Finally Chapter five summarizes the study findings and discusses implications for future research.

Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature

Educators in urban classrooms may sometimes feel that African American male students' focus on sports and entertainment is inherent and immutable, but a review of history indicates the preoccupation with these careers emerged within the last century. This chapter addresses the dawn of this phenomena and its relationship to academic achievement and student engagement by reviewing three areas of literature that contribute to the development of this study. I reviewed research that explores 1) The history of athletics and art as access to wealth and power for African American Men. 2) persistent gap in educational achievement between African American male students and European American male students, 3) links between career aspiration, race and student engagement.

I: Athletics and Art as Power

*"If I wasn't in the rap game, I'd probably have a knee deep in the crack game
Because the streets is a short stop
Either you're slinging crack rock, or you got a wicked jump shot," Notorious B.I.G (1994)*

The history of African-American men In the United States is a complex and winding one. Slavery ensured that men of African descent would not only be seen as inferior men but as chattel. From emancipation until now there has been a struggle surrounding the freedom and power of Black men which is directly connected to our perceptions of what it means to be African American and specifically an African American man. Those conflicts are both internal and external including self-image and the images perceived by the rest of the society.

In the ongoing African-American struggle for freedom and civil rights, sports and entertainment were the first venues in which black men were able to win adoration and most importantly respect (Hoberman, 1997). Joe Louis and Jesse Owens are perhaps the most poignant symbols of how excelling in sports created access to the American dream not just for these individuals but for a whole race of people. They became heroes for an entire race and were perhaps the beginning of the "sports fixation" that seems to permeate the lives of African American boys and young men.

Joe Louis was not the first African American heavy weight champion, but in addition to his physical prowess he possessed some characteristics that his predecessor Jack Johnson did not. He was non-threatening to Whites. In fact his manager John Roxborough "... publicized seven commandments, which would be inoffensive to White

Americans. They included: Never be photographed with a White woman, never gloat over a fallen opponent, never engage in fixed fights, and live and fight clean” (Schwartz, 2007a, 2).

Louis’ popularity among Whites as well as Blacks became representative of the heights a Black man could reach by excelling at sports. His famous series of fights with Germany’s Max Schmeling during the World War II era in particular endeared him with the American public. He won two of three fights and became a symbol of patriotism. He appeared to transcend race. “When some called Louis ‘a credit to his race,’ sportswriter Jimmy Cannon responded, ‘Yes, Louis is a credit to his race -- the human race’ (Schwartz, 2007a, 1). His favor with white America did not escape the attention of the Black community. Every young black boy wanted to be him.

Before Joe Louis, Jesse Owens became an American hero in a way that also signaled to young African Americans that being an outstanding athlete opens the door to privileges that they could not feasibly be obtained any other way. Owens was the first to win four gold medals in track during a single Olympic games. In 1936 his victories were more poignant because they were a slap in the face of Adolf Hitler and his theory of Nazi superiority. Like Louis, Owens was a well-spoken, polite and non-threatening Black man(Baker, 1986; Schaap, 2007).

Unlike Louis his victories did not mean immediate access to wealth. Upon his return he was greeted with a ticker tape parade in New York but was forced to take the freight elevator to a reception in his honor at the Waldorf Astoria (Schwartz, 2007b). He earned money doing a series of competitions where he raced horses and dogs for money because he received no endorsements like his White counterparts. Even though he faced these continued examples of racism he was hailed by Blacks and Whites and was eventually able to earn a secure living as a speaker for corporations and opened a public relations firm. Though racism was still a harsh reality in his life, Owens would surely not have had these opportunities except for his athletic prowess; opportunities that would make the average black man of that time envious(Schwartz, 2007b).

The legacy of sports as power both economically and socially can still be seen today. Harry Edwards (1999) contended that black families had bought into the notion that sports is a way for socio-economic advancement and pushed their children towards sports career aspirations often neglecting other areas of their personal development. He points to three major reasons for this focus.

Those circumstances have developed largely because of: (1) a long-standing, widely held, racist, and ill-informed presumption of innate, race-linked black athletic superiority and intellectual deficiency; (2) media propaganda portraying sports as a broadly accessible route to black social and economic mobility; and (3) a lack of comparably visible, high prestige black role models beyond the sports arena (Edwards, 2010).

Edwards further argues that this has created a “Triple Tragedy” in the Black community. Black youth are expending large amounts of energy and talent in an obsessive pursuit of a goal most will not obtain. Those who achieve careers in the sports arena have untapped resources that are undeveloped and there is a cultural and institutional underdevelopment of Black society as a whole. The ongoing socio economic crisis in large segments of the Black community reinforce Edwards' arguments.

With the election of Barack Obama in 2008, there was great hope that his inauguration represented the end of racial bias and disparity as we know it. However, those hopes are not borne out factually. The Economic policy Institute released data that shows Black men are underrepresented in high paying jobs. Their results found that Black men were overrepresented in careers paying \$37,000 or less and underrepresented in careers paying \$50,000 and higher. These results could not be accounted for by educational attainment or occupational preference. They concluded that 87% of United States occupations could be classified as segregated (Hamilton, Austin, & Darity, 2011).

With African American men being so underrepresented in high income traditional careers it is easy to see how a career in professional athletics where African American men are overrepresented and have the potential for extremely large incomes can be so alluring to young men. In addition to earning more sports careers offer a level of influence not seen African American men rarely receive from other fields. Fame and fortune are often confused with power. While sports is a field that gives African American men the power to resist cultural assimilation by the larger society , the underrepresentation of African Americans in coaching, managing and ownership within professional athletics suggests a level of powerlessness not often acknowledged (Rhoden 2006).

Excelling in professional athletics brings a double edged sword for African American males. There is a growing scholastic discourse that acknowledges this dichotomy (Mabry, 1993; Powell, 2008; Rhoden, 2006). While affording select athletes

unprecedented economic opportunities the institution has been accused of perpetuating stereotypes that contribute to the oppression from which the African American man seeks relief. In his book *Darwin's Athlete* John Hoberman (1997) points out that a shift took place in societal thinking after sports color barriers were broken by the likes of Jessie Owens and Jackie Robinson. Prior to that time segregationist rhetoric maintained that African-Americans were inferior to white athletes and not able to compete along side them. Since that is now irrefutably false, the new discourse revolves around the "natural" black athlete who is gifted at birth with strength and speed. This is often contrasted to the "intellectual" white athlete who must use his superior intellect to counter his more agile black competitor. Hoberman (1997) surmises that,

the routine association of white athletes with attributes such as mental dexterity, integrity, tenacity and will power establishes an effective sense of difference, even in the absence of their black counter parts, because this distribution of virtues is only one recent version of a racial taxonomy that was soaked into the Western sensibility over centuries (p.50)

So while the African-American male receives accolades and wealth for excelling athletically he in many ways is still perceived as less than his white counterpart. His abilities provide entertainment for the masses but do not elevate the perception of African-American males in society in general. His accomplishments are minimized because he is perceived to have a natural talent that requires no work or effort on his part similar to the natural gifts assigned to animals, the fast cheetah or the strong ape(Hoberman 1997).

In the world of entertainment Sammy Davis Jr. is even a more extreme example of the binary existence of Black celebrities of his time. He was a member of the famed rat pack and gained acceptance from white America because of his talent as a singer, dancer and actor. He was billed as Mr. Entertainment because of his diverse talents. He was a musician, dancer, singer and actor. He began as a small child in vaudeville entertaining eventually as a part of the Will Mastin Trio. He was initially oblivious to the level of racism in the world because he had been sheltered by his father and Will. After joining the army and experiencing racism at its rawest he devised a strategy for survival. (Reid, 1963) "My talent was the weapon, the power, the way for me to fight. It was the one way I might hope to affect a man's thinking" (Davis, 2008, p. 1).

His strategy was successful. He was often the only black performer or otherwise allowed in exclusive all white night clubs and hotels. He even married white actress May

Britt in 1960. Though he received hate mail and some backlash he was still able to work and was shown great support by his circle of friends, mostly white at a time when black men were still being lynched in the south for much smaller transgressions (Reid, 1963).

The embrace from blacks was mixed. While they seemed to be proud of his ability to excel in a white domain, some saw him as coonish. "In the features that dominated his career, the rat pack movies... he alienated black movie patrons because he was too much the tagalong figure. On the surface the rat pack movies were egalitarian affairs, but underneath there was something hypocritical about their treatment of Davis" (Bogle, 2002, 214).

Despite the ambiguous feelings towards Davis in the African American community, one thing was clear. Being an entertainer had provided for Sammy Davis Jr. what sports had given Joe Louis and Jesse Owens--access and possibilities. Doors were opened for all three of these men that would not otherwise have been cracked. (Schwartz 2007b) As Davis said their talents were their way to affect the thinking of white America(Davis, 2008).

That legacy of access through sports and entertainment has not been lost. Today it is evident that black men who receive the greatest accolades in our society have excelled in sports and entertainment; whether it is Michael Jordan or Will Smith. In her study of successful African-American men, Sandra Taylor Griffin found the men in her study shared a common love and interest in sports. She posits "Thus, involvement in sports activities whether formal or informal, could be seen as giving the men who were in possession of so little materially their chance for a piece of the American dream through a scholarship for college, girls, status, pride in representing ones town, community, school, or to be sought after." (2000, p.78).

Increasingly the same is true for young Black men and entertainment, particularly hip hop. In 2008 seventeen year old DeAndre Cortez Way (Soulja Boy) uploaded his video "Crank That" onto YouTube. Within days it had millions of views and shortly after that he signed a deal with Interscope Records. His life has never been the same. He has had several hits since then and at the age of 21 is a multi-millionaire(Web Addicts, 2011). While this seems like a fairy tale to most adults, teenagers point to his success and other artists like him from DJ Unk to Master P as evidence that success in entertainment is feasible.(Oliver 2006). They don't foresee receiving college scholarships for rapping as in sports, but they do see rapping as a way to control their own fate. By getting a recording contract they are promised the possibility of money,

fame, respect and prestige; all of this without submitting to the oppression of school or conforming to societies expectations(Au, 2005).

There is a case to be made based on the literature that America's willingness to open its arms to sports and entertainment figures has skewed the interest of African-American boys in that direction. Perhaps this same history has indirectly contributed to the achievement gap that continues to plague African-American communities.

II: The Racial Achievement Gap

"Back to school and I hate it there, I hate it there, Everything I want I gotta wait a year, I wait a year. This n---- graduated at the top of my class. I went to Cheesecake, he was a ... waiter there." Kanye West (2004)

Fifty years after Brown vs. the Board of Education, schools are resegregated (Kozol 2006). Racial disparities in graduation rates and income persist, and the income disparity can be seen even for students who obtain bachelor's degrees. (Associated Press, 2006; Shapiro, 2004) While there is no scarcity of research highlighting the disparities in educational attainment between African-American male students and their White counterparts, there needs to be more effort to explore factors impacting these disparities.

Much of the research surrounding disparities in educational achievement employment levels and economic status among African American males suggests that such disparities are more a result of a deficit within minorities and risk factors within their communities than continued institutional classicism and racism (Boykin, 1984; Donmyer & Kos, 1993; Rozycki, 2004; Robinson & Levin, 2005). The most glaring and detrimental example of this discourse is the Bell Curve (Herrnstein & Murray, 1996) which argues that the Black/White IQ gap is largely genetic and therefore other social gaps such as educational attainment and economic prosperity are inevitable. The authors go on to argue that in light of these facts the elite status of White males is only logical.

Fortunately there are counter arguments (Darling-Hammond 2010; Sandy & Duncan, 2010). Arguments counter to this ideology have produced research which centers on curricula and the educational institution as keys to the disparities in educational attainment between Black students and their White counterparts. William Watkins (2001) points out that from reconstruction forward public education for Black children was designed to create a docile underclass able to fill the economic necessity of cheap labor. He writes "The task of the hegemonists and their southern supporters were to reconcile the growing Black demand for education with the political realities of

peonage and oppression” (p. 43). In other words, the current disparities between African-American academic achievement and their European American counterparts has been socially engineered. This of course refutes the work of Hernstein and Murray and their elitist contention that this gap is a result of genetic inferiority.

Noguera & Akom (2000) echo Watkins assessment when they point out that:

More often than not, explanations for the achievement gap focus on deficiencies among parents and students. Dysfunctional families, lazy and unmotivated students, and the “culture of poverty” in inner-city neighborhoods are all frequently cited as causes of the gap. Left overlooked and unaddressed are the conditions under which children are educated and the quality of schools they attend. Since popular explanations often determine the types of remedies that are pursued, it is not surprising that the renewed attention directed toward the racial gap in academic achievement has not led to calls to address the real problem: inequality in education.(p. 29)

Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) contends that the conversation should not even be about the achievement gap because that suggests a short-term solution that can not address the long-term problems she refers to as the “Education Debt.” She develops a strong analogy between the United States’ annual deficit in relation to the national debt and the achievement gap in relation to the Education debt.

By using the term “Education Debt” she places the deficit on society as a whole for what it has not provided to our children in the form of education and eliminates language that defines students as deficient or lacking in some way. She argues that generations of social, economic, political and moral exclusion as well as exploitation account for the persistent gap in academic achievement between African American students and their European American counterparts.

Policy makers and educational leaders continue to have an ongoing discourse about efforts to close the achievement gaps. The sincerity of that discourse is called into question as it becomes clearer that those gaps are reflective of the socio economic classes within the larger society. Apple (2004) explains that schools have been complicit in the larger societies reification of social and economic class distinctions “...by propagating ideologies that ultimately sanction the existing institutional arrangements which may cause the unnecessary stratification and inequality in the first place”(p. 56). Some scholars challenge whether the institution of school has any motivation to fix

disparities in achievement, while others question the legitimacy of attempts to measure knowledge and learning(Hilliard, 2003; Kozol, 2006; McLaren, 1998)

Shujaa(1993) challenges first the idea that schooling and education are synonymous. He points out that while education has proven extremely important to African Americans historically, their definitions of what it means to be educated are often unique from the dominant culture. Shujaa (1993) distinguishes schooling from education. He characterizes schooling as:

“a process intended to perpetuate and maintain the society’s existing power relations and the institutional structures that support those arrangements...Education, in contrast to schooling, is the process of transmitting from one generation to the next knowledge of the values, aesthetics, spiritual beliefs, and all things that give a particular cultural orientation it’s uniqueness”(p.15).

The space between these two definitions has potentially negatively impacted student engagement. Could it be that African American students intrinsically know that their culture, their experience, essentially their identities, are devalued by the institution that they are subjected to on a daily basis? If so how can you be actively a part of something that sees you as less than? How can you attach yourself to and excel within an institution which penalizes you for being you?

In addition to curricula being non-compatible with African-American values, Butchart (1998) points out that America’s revisionist history has left the perception that, since reconstruction, education has always been a liberating force for African-Americans. He indicates that while African-Americans have seen education as a means for opportunity, public education for Black students has been used repressively: “Thus far historians have focused overwhelmingly on the purpose for schooling-the intentions of educators, civic leaders, reformers, philanthropist, and perhaps even parents and students. They have paid much less attention to the effects of African-American schooling” (p. 106).

III: African American Students and School Engagement

*“I Walk It Out The Bank With A Lot Of Zeros
That’s What My Teachers Call Me Predictions Like They Cleo
They Make Bout 40,000
I Do That In A Month on Resorts And Islands” DJ Unk (2006)*

In considering the academic achievement of African American male students and

their individual career aspirations, I must also consider the impact of their level of engagement with the institution of school. Scholars have documented the great desire of blacks to be educated (Mitchell, 2008; Gundanker, 2007; Perkins, 2002). This is in direct opposition to the widely held ideas that Blacks are not as scholastically astute as other races or that they require a wide range of accommodations in order to be successful academically. Emancipation from poverty has always been a motivating force for African Americans in addition to human dignity and recognition.

African peoples formerly held in slavery made a direct correlation between literacy, education and freedom. According to James Anderson (1988), "...emancipation extruded an ex-slave class with a fundamentally different consciousness of literacy, a class that viewed reading and writing as a contradiction of oppression" (p. 17). The desire for education among ex-slaves was compelling, but more remarkable is how successful they were at achieving literacy when they took control of their own education. They met in churches and homes. They studied blue-black spellers, newspapers and, most of all, the Bible. Despite what seemed like overwhelming opposition to their educational campaigns, the masses of freed African-Americans persisted in becoming literate. Among these former slaves, "Their 95% illiteracy rate in 1860 had dropped to 70 percent in 1880 and would drop to 30% by 1910" (Anderson, 1988, p.24).

The leaders of the educational movement were often those who had taught themselves to read even facing the opposition of their masters and other whites. They helped spread this idea of liberation and freedom through literacy. This commitment to self-education continued through the Reconstruction. Black southerners saw being literate as a way to grow economically; literacy meant not having to be cheated out of wages, land or civil rights (Anderson, 1988).

African-American faith in education continued into the Jim-Crow era, when all black segregated schools worked hard to provide quality instruction despite oppressive conditions. (Siddle-Walker, 1996) Though the curriculum in many black schools of the time followed the controversial Hampton-Tuskegee model, emphasizing vocation and racial subservience, students still benefited from the black role models in the community that fostered pride and self-esteem among students. After integration, this educational system, which revolved around community support and nurtured the civil rights generation, was lost. These black students had the luxury of developing while being partially shielded from some of the very harsh realities of discrimination. Siddle-Walker (1996) surmises:

It is true that these schools were often treated unjustly and victimized by poor resources. But in spite of the legalized oppression, many teachers and principals created environments of teaching and learning that motivated students to excel. They countered the larger societal messages which devalued African Americans and reframed those messages to make African-American children believe in their ability to achieve. (p.219)

One of the unforeseen impacts of desegregation was that this sense of community and culture was replaced by a myriad of obstacles for African-American students, ranging from low expectations to verbal and physical abuse. (Siddle-Walker, 1996) In the absence of this community and culture within public schooling what is left to create attachment and bonding for African American students? What is there in public schools to engage these students?

Defining Engagement

In this study, the question of engagement is an important one because I speculate that African American male students' level of engagement in school is significantly related to their achievement level and subsequently their choice of careers. There is a large body of work that attempts to define and measure student engagement within all levels of schooling including elementary, secondary, post-secondary, and graduate schools.

According to Dotterer, McHale & Crouter (2007), "Student engagement describes student's feelings, behaviors, and thoughts about their school experiences..." (p. 1) . Though there are nuanced differences to their definitions, many researchers define engagement similarly. Their focus is on the general feelings that students have about school. There are those who refer to school bonding and discuss it as the connection or attachment students feel with their school (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Catalano, Haggerty, Osterle, Fleming, & Hawkings, 2004; Eisele, Zand, & Thomson, 2009; Maddox & Prinz, 2003). Other scholars refer to school bonding and associate it with the attainment of good grades (Fleming, Catalano, Haggerty, & Abbot, 2010; Jimerson, Campos, & Greif, 2003;Kuh, 2001).

While student bonding, attachment and connectedness to school are accepted definitions of student engagement, many researchers find these too general to be useful. Therefore scholars have attempted to be specific about the components of engagement, to make it more feasible to measure. This has resulted in development of three general categories of engagement when referring to school. Those categories are behavioral

engagement, cognitive engagement, and emotional engagement (Archambault, 2009; Fredricks, Blumenthal, & Paris, 2004).

Behavioral Engagement is generally defined as positive conduct such as following the rules, actively participating in academic tasks, and participation in extracurricular activities such as sports, arts, and leadership organizations (Fredricks, et al., 2004). This is possibly the easiest type of engagement to measure. It may also be the measure of engagement that identifies the most potential problems for African American male students. Statistical data show that African American male students have higher incidence of suspension and expulsion than any other group (Campbell, Voelkl, & Donahue, 1996). This disparity suggests that African American male students' behavioral engagement is lower than other groups. In their study Shernoff and Schmidt (2008) document that there is a racial/ethnic disparity in general in behavioral engagement, but that disparity is greater in studies where behavior is reported by teachers in comparison to student reported behavior. They make a clear assertion that teacher bias can explain much of the disparity in behavioral in engagement between African American males and other groups of students.

The way students feel about their school, their classroom, their teachers and the overall curriculum comprises Emotional Engagement. "Emotional Engagement refers to students' affective reactions in the classroom including interest, boredom, happiness, sadness and anxiety..." (Fredricks, et al., p. 63). Many researchers see students' feelings of belonging or being appreciated as central to defining emotional engagement. In addition, students valuing success in school activities is another key element of emotional engagement (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Linnenbrink-Garcia & Pekrun, 2011). Mueller (2009) points out that student athletes are very emotionally engaged with their sport and as a result with school. Coaches are subsequently able to funnel that engagement into a variety of positive outcomes including higher academic performance.

Cognitive Engagement is often defined as the amount of effort put into work. To be more specific cognitive engagement is seen as more than just doing the work. It involves an attempt to master the work. (Fredricks, et al., 2004). Connell and Wellborn (1991) more specifically focus on self-regulation in learning. They explain that students who are cognitively engaged love a challenge. They are creative problem solvers, prefer hard work, and in the face of failure have positive coping skills.

African American School Engagement and Academic Achievement

Research has shown a consistent positive correlations between student engagement and academic achievement(Catalano,Haggerty,Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004; Dotterer, McHale,& Crouter, 2007). Part of my research will consider whether there is any correlation between the career choices of African American male students and their level of school engagement. In general there have been positive correlations between student engagement and academic achievement. However, it is generally recognized that engagement, while significant is only one factor in student achievement (Ewell, 2002 ; Finn & Voelkl, 1993; Voelkl,1995). Furthermore, the engagement achievement correlation differs by race.

In their 2008 study, “Further Evidence of an Engagement–Achievement Paradox Among U.S. High School Students,” Schernoff and Schmidt found that there was a correlation between engagement and academic achievement among students. However it was not the same for Black and White students. There was a positive correlation between White student engagement and their grades whereas there was a negative correlation between Black student engagement and their grades. Blacks had a reported higher school engagement than their white counterparts but had lower grades. This finding was attributed to a variety of possible factors. Black students accounted for 90% of the students in poverty and White students accounted for 90% of students considered upper middle class. The researchers explained that perhaps the socio economic status (SES) of minority students created a situation where school was considered a safe haven or provided more socially positive activities than their home environments. In contrast, the students from higher SES had more opportunities for interesting and engaging activities outside of school and found the school environment more stifling.

The Shernoff and Schmidt study was not the only one that found a complex relationship between engagement among Black students versus White students. Sciarra and Seirup (2008) study found that school engagement significantly predicted students’ performance in math. It was predictive for all five racial groups examined: Latino, Black, White, Asian, and Native American. It had the greatest effect on Asian and White students and the least effect on Latino and Black students. Cognitive and Behavioral engagement seemed to have more salience than emotional engagement for Black, Native American, and Asian students. The researchers concluded that given the level

of racism in our society, racial minorities do not expect caring or supportive environments, and have learned to achieve in the absence of emotional engagement.

“Racial minority students, perhaps, have learned certain coping skills that allow them to achieve even when they attend schools that do not provide them with emotional support, where they may feel on the outside looking in....This does not mean to suggest that safe schools are unimportant. It may mean, however, that instilling certain coping mechanisms, work habits, and beliefs about academics has the potential to neutralize the negative effects of schools where caring, nurturing, and safe relationships are less obviously in existence.” (Sciarra & Seirup, 2008, p.220)

While several studies discuss African American student engagement, fewer isolate African American engagement by gender. Davis and Jordan (1994) found some significance between aspects of engagement and academic achievement specifically among African American male students. Their study used data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988. The data included information about 25,000 eighth graders in 1,000 schools. Data were also collected from the same group during their 10th grade year.

When looking at academic achievement among participants Davis and Jordan (1994) found four statistically significant factors: urbanicity, teacher absences, difficulty of student to motivate by teacher, and discipline issues. The latter two categories deal with student engagement. “Students difficult to motivate” falls within emotional engagement and “discipline issues” fall within behavioral engagement. When exploring what impacted these types of engagement, the study found a significant relationship between the number of suspensions a student received, and socio economic status. The researchers noted that “...when teachers' perception of accountability for the success or failure of their students was low, Black male performance dropped. This occurred, perhaps because of teachers' perceived inability to effect change in their students' lives”(Davis & Jordan, 1994, p. 583). Unlike the Sciarra & Seirup, (2008) study, this suggests that the lack of emotional engagement at some point can negatively impact student achievement among minority students.

During this review of student engagement one particular factor of student academic engagement and thereby student achievement became evident: self-efficacy. Barry Zimmerman (1997) develops the idea that self-efficacy, the belief that one is capable of performing in a certain manner to attain certain goals, is extremely important

to students' level of academic achievement. He explains that efficacy beliefs influence level of effort, persistence and choice of activities. Zimmerman's study showed that a student's level of self-efficacy could predict their level of academic achievement. In particular "...when studied as a mediating variable in training studies, self-efficacy has proven to be responsive to improvements in students' methods of learning (especially those involving greater self-regulation) and predictive of achievement outcomes" (p. 89).

This idea of self-efficacy is particularly intriguing in reference to the academic achievement of African American males because our society in general and our institutions in particular have historically promoted the notion of White superiority and Black inferiority. Carter G. Woodson (1933) argues that the institution of school is most guilty of this. In his groundbreaking work *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, he contends that every race and culture has been taught to value their heritage and is lauded for their accomplishments except for American Negroes. The African American student is sent to schools where society's general contempt for him is fed to him daily as fact: "The thought of the inferiority of the Negro is drilled into him in almost every class he enters and in almost every book he studies" (Woodson, 1933, p. 9).

Considering the links found between self-efficacy and both student engagement and student achievement there is a case to be made that the African American male from the outset is placed in a circumstance of disadvantage academically. Repeated images and messages that African American men are deficient academically, are prone to criminal activity, or have not contributed anything positive to society other than as entertainers, could eventually become an internalized belief about self. Woodson (1933) explains how the African American's self-efficacy has been impacted by this mis-education:

"The 'educated Negroes' have the attitude of contempt toward their own people because in their own as well as in their mixed schools Negroes are taught to admire the Hebrew, the Greek, the Latin and the Teuton and to despise the African." (p.9)

School Engagement and Career Aspirations

Self-efficacy is an element of student engagement that can also be connected to career aspirations. Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, Gian, and Pastorelli (2001) studied 272 students ages 11-15 in Rome, Italy, and examined how students' perceived efficacy in academics affected their career goals. Their conclusions were that students who had high academic self-efficacy felt confident in their abilities to be successful in a wide variety of careers:

children of high perceived academic efficacy achieve good academic progress and have high educational aspirations and a strong sense of efficacy for scientific, educational, literary, and medical pursuits. They favor career levels in these fields that require advanced educational development. In accord with the conceptual model, children's beliefs in their academic efficacy had the most pervasive direct impact on their judgments of their occupational efficacy.(p. 185) Kenny, Blustein, Haase, Jackson, and Perry, (2006) explored school engagement in a more general sense. They completed a study examining correlations between career development in school and school engagement. They built their study from a theoretical framework that career development can provide a sense of purpose, opportunity, and choice to students who are otherwise disconnected from school. They hypothesized that inadequate or absent career programming is a factor in the achievement gap between high performing suburban schools and lower performing urban districts.

The study by Kenny et al. included 416 ninth grade urban high school students, 49% male and 51% female, from two large schools in the Northeast. African-Americans represented 63% of one school and 52% of the other. Students participated in a weekly career exploration program. Results showed a significant correlation between career development and school engagement particularly feelings of belonging: "Higher levels of career planfulness and expectations at the beginning of the year were associated with increases in school engagement over the course of the year" (Kenny et al., 2006, p. 272). The researchers discussed the possibility of career development programs providing a protective element against disengagement and low achievement with urban schools and considered it one element of school reform that should be developed.

Another study examined the role that perceived barriers and relational support has on the vocational lives of urban high school students. (Kenny, Blustein, Chaves, Grossman, & Gallagher, 2003) These researchers hypothesized that, due to a documented correlation between school engagement and academic achievement, low school engagement would also translate to limited career opportunities. They state "When minority youth perceive future opportunities as limited by race, they may put less effort into their schoolwork and become academically and socially disengaged at school" (p. 144). They studied the effects of family and community support on student school engagement and career aspirations. This study reconfirmed the theory that school engagement improves academic achievement. However, it also indicated that

engagement was not simply intrinsic, but that engagement was something that could be developed with family and community support. Kenny et. al (2003) noted that 9th grade students with this type of extrinsic motivation were more likely to complete homework, attend class and pay attention while in class. These students also had very strong goals and felt confident that they would be successful in their chosen careers.

Correlations between school engagement, academic achievement, and career aspirations were substantiated by Perry, Lin and Pabian (2010). Researchers in this study argued that students will have a more successful work life if career education and academic achievement are blended together appropriately. They theorized that students who explore and become excited about possible future careers in turn become focused and more engaged in the curriculum of school because they see its relevance to their future plans.

In their study, 285 students from a Midwestern urban high school (110 male and 175 female), completed questionnaires that included items about school engagement, academic performance and career programming. The school demographics were reported as 80% black and 19% white. The researchers concluded that “Career preparation exerted a substantial and direct effect on school engagement, which in turn exerted a substantial and direct effect on grades; through the mediating effect of school...” (Perry, Liu, & Pabian, 2010, p. 286)

Interestingly, teacher support and parental career support were both significant and positive associations with school engagement. However, teacher support was more significant than parental career support. Perry et. al (2010) considered this logical, since teachers can have a detrimental effect on school engagement that they could conversely have a powerful effect on the development of engagement.

Sports Participation and School Engagement

There have been some studies that directly explore sports participation and school engagement. Dawkin, Braddock and Celaya (2008) produced an interesting qualitative study that explored cognitive academic engagement in African American males who aspired to careers in professional athletics. They consider whether sports participation improved or hindered students’ career mobility. They used a conceptual framework that identified three categories to analyze the relationship between sports and academic achievement. The maintenance model represented students doing enough academically to maintain sports eligibility. The incentive model represented students who are very interested in sports but see its participation as a way to obtain education

and career goals beyond sports as well. The integrative model placed sports and academics on an equal footing where they are both considered very important to the student.

In their conclusion, Dawkin et al. explain that school officials and other adults may assume that the odds against actually realizing the goal of becoming a professional athlete would deter more students from pursuing that goal. However, they point to other factors that adults do not consider:

(1) the high visibility of successful black professional athletes who have beat these odds, (2) the perception that the odds against realizing the goal of becoming a professional in such underrepresented fields as medicine, law and engineering are equally great, (3) the challenges of academic engagement faced by many black youth based on their early experiences of failure in fractured schools, especially in inner-city urban communities, and (4) the view among many parents that nothing is wrong with cultivating and supporting the talents of their children, whether in sports, academics or other areas.” (Dawkin et al., 2008, p. 61)

Lomax (2000) explores this last point, that families and community members place too much emphasis on athletic achievement for Black males. By default academics are often seen as important only as a way to maintain eligibility. He points out that while this may be true there are mediating factors that schools can set in place that would maintain the increased level of engagement that sports participation provides while also mediating the detrimental impact of students not having talent or opportunity for a professional athletic career.

The Disconnect Between Academic Achievement and Economic Prosperity

The most frequent rationale given to students for why they are in school is to obtain a good job with which they can support themselves and their families. (Mickelson, 1990; Ogbu, 2004). Educators see potential economic prosperity as a way to extrinsically motivate students, yet that strategy may actually backfire if the perceived benefits never materialize. For example, Troyna (1984) highlights how the life experiences of Black youth do not match the bootstrap ideology that is promoted within public education. He found no necessary relationship between education and economic advancement. Instead he contends that race and social status have as much impact on your economic position as does education. “Even worse, Black college men end up just a few dollars ahead of whites who went no further than high school” (pg. 96).

If students do not perceive education as truly improving their circumstance and providing realistic opportunities for improved socio-economic status, what motivation do they have to connect with a curriculum that is inherently foreign to them? In his study "*Differences Between Black/African American and White College Students Regarding Influences on High School Completion, College Attendance, and Career Choice*", Daire, LaMothe, and Fuller (2007) found results which indicate that future income and future status have a greater influence on the career choice of Black college students than on the career choice of White college students.

These researchers collected data from 155 students at a Southeastern University. Black/African American students represented 57% of participants. White college students represented 43% of the participants. Participants completed a questionnaire with demographic questions as well as a table with Likert scale questions about factors that influence them to complete a high school diploma, college degree, or choose a career.

The researchers found that Black/African American college students indicated that future income and future status had a greater influence on their career choice than on the career choice of their White counterparts.

School Engagement and Career Aspirations

Suzanne Lease (2006) completed a study that looked at 166 African American students in two high schools in the south. Results supported the hypotheses that African American high school youth would have less efficacy for and interest in occupations that were seen as non-representative, or White jobs and would be less likely to consider non-representative jobs as potential occupations. Some careers that were identified as non-representative include scientist, physician, engineers, etc.

The study that most directly addressed the questions being explored by this study was done by Twinet Parmer (1993). The purpose of his study was to describe the career dreams of African American males and females in urban high schools. It examined whether there are differences based on gender, grade level, athletic participation, and school attended. Parmer's study included 446 eleventh and twelfth grade African American students from three different high schools in a large urban Midwestern city. A Likert scale was used to assess questions about marriage and sports participation. Multiple choice questions were used to measure students future family structure, and open ended questions were used to assess students future dream careers.

While Parmer covers several issues including whether students wanted to be married and have children he also asked about their specific career dreams. Students were generally optimistic. Fifty three percent of participants indicated that they were “very likely” and 35% that they were “likely” to be successful in their future careers. 32% of the 445 student participants reported that they were either likely or very likely to be professional athletes in ten years. In relation to African American males one of his concluding findings was that the athletic dream persists:

“Thus the athletic dream continues to be a career dream for many African American males. Although intramural male athletes were significantly more likely to perceive themselves as athletes, percentages suggest that some non-athletes may possess the athlete dream. The obvious reason is mobility, status, and fame, however, another explanation is that in a racist and segregated society, sport affords and opportunity for the African American male to dominate on the field or court, something he is unable to do elsewhere in society” (pg. 140).

Summary

For decades, there has been a gap between the academic achievement of African American students in general and African American male students in particular vis a vis their European American counterparts. Some scholars attribute this persistent gap to deficiencies within African American students themselves and/or their culture, while others see this gap as a part of a larger issue of race and class in our society. They point to the high levels of unemployment, poverty, and incarceration among African American males and the disparities in resources placed in urban areas with high minority populations.

African American males have historically been marginalized within American culture. professional athletics and entertainment are two areas where they have been able to obtain respect from the majority population as well as financial security on par with European American males who have experienced success in corporate and civic endeavors.

Research on student engagement is mixed but generally supports the theory that school engagement positively affects student academic achievement. African American students often face disengagement from school because of issues of race as well as their socio economic condition. It has been shown that in addition to academic achievement being impacted by school engagement, there is a correlation between student career aspirations and school engagement.

This study will add another layer to this discussion by comparing the career aspirations of African American males and European American males as outlined in the following chapters.

Chapter 3

Research Design and Methodology

Onto-Epistemological Perspectives

Much of the main stream research surrounding the educational gaps between African American male students and their European American male counterparts center around the idea of student deficit, but my observations of and experiences with my young students are filtered through a critical world view.

As a critical scholar I reject the idea that my student's career aspirations are simply a result of their individual preference or aptitude. Instead, their choices are being impacted by the influences of multiple social institutions including family, media, economics and school. These institutions impact the lives of young men in very real ways and the consequences are too often detrimental.

My work as an educator, scholar and a researcher is emancipatory. It is critical in that it questions and it recognizes that the reification of certain normative ideals within these institutions has a negative effect on students. It acknowledges that through hegemony the institution oppresses all students, but students considered "other" are impacted most adversely. The ability to deconstruct hidden curriculums (the silent curricula that is being taught to students without their open knowledge or the knowledge of their parents.) is key to giving students tools for self-liberation that will ultimately help them reach their personal, academic, and career goals. Research should aid in this deconstruction. Ideally that research would be critical and incorporate interactive relationships between researchers and participants (Guba & Lincoln 1994).

Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) described the critical researcher as follows:

We are defining a criticalist as a researcher or theorist who attempts to use her or his work as a form of social or cultural criticism and who accepts certain basic assumption: that all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are social and historically constituted; that facts can never be isolated from the domain of values or removed from some form of ideological inscription; that the relationship between concept and object and between signifier and signified is never stable or fixed and is often mediated by the social relations of capitalist production and consumption(p. 142)

Many criticalist(Apple, 2004; Cherryholmes, 1992) view the use of methods that have traditionally been used to reify the power of institutions as counter to the goal of emancipation. In the absence of this ideal, I take a more pragmatic view of the

researcher participant relationship; recognizing the need to use a variety of methodologies to answer questions and deconstruct institutions. Pragmatism recognizes that methods themselves are not essential or foundational, instead they see methods as a means to an end. Pragmatists contemplate consequences and decide upon actions based on the desired consequence. John Dewey explains,

Pragmatism... does not insist upon antecedent phenomena but upon consequent phenomena; not upon the precedents but upon the possibilities of action. And this change in point of view is almost revolutionary in its consequences.... When we take the point of view of pragmatism we see that general ideas have a very different role to play than that of reporting and registering past experiences. They are the bases for organizing future observations and experiences (1931, pp. 32-33)

Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) point out that for a pragmatic researcher the research question is more important than the researchers ontology. This eliminates the need for an either/ or mentality when it comes to selection of qualitative or quantitative method. Instead it gives the researcher the philosophical freedom to select the methodology that would best produce answers to the research questions.

When I returned to the academy for graduate work I had a few professors who almost recoiled at the possibility that quantitative research could be liberatory, but as I contemplated my experiences as an educator, parent and student I realized that it would require the use of multiple methods to address the questions I grappled with. My goal as a researcher is to explore important information about current realities but it is also to spur future action that will be emancipatory. Cornel West (1999) addresses pragmatism's potential use as a tool for action when he states "American Pragmatism is a diverse and heterogeneous tradition. But its common denominator consists of a future-oriented instrumentalism that tries to deploy thought as a weapon to enable more effective action."(p.145)

Critical Pragmatism here is defined as an onto-epistemological view which questions and deconstructs existing power structures. Its goals are emancipatory and considers potential consequences of research and methods. Cherryholmes(1994) explains that we cannot ignore consequences.

In terms of research, the meaning of a research finding, say, is found in tracing out in the imagination it's conceivable, practical consequences. Of course, many of our images may turn out to be nothing but fantasies. Our beliefs, therefore,

can always be wrong due to the contingency of the world and our incomplete knowledge of it (Cherryholmes, 1994, p. 15)

Researching as a critical pragmatist makes me comfortable incorporating quantitative as well as qualitative methodology into my work as needed. In doing so I must consider that the positivist paradigm has as one of its tenets the concept of objectivity; the idea that in order to find truth, research and researchers must be without bias. Researchers within this paradigm determine objectivity by “how much the measurement instrument is open to influences by the beliefs and biases of the individuals who administer, score, or interpret it (Mertens, 2005, p. 359). The more individual bias present the less reliable the research. This paradigm has resulted in positivist researchers attempting to create experimental models that claim neutrality and autonomy as a way to strengthen the value of their work.

Under the cloak of neutrality, research in the social sciences was done to improve the human condition. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) point out however, that “This myth of beneficence was destroyed with the revelations at the Nuremberg Trials...The crisis of confidence multiplied with the exposure to actual physical harm in the Tuskegee Syphilis Study and the Willowbrook Hepatitis experiment” (p. 221).

This is the area where my critical ontology is most in conflict with this positivist research paradigm. Ani (1994) states “ Rob the universe of its richness, deny the significance of the symbolic, simplify phenomena until it becomes mere object, and you have a knowable quantity. Here begins and ends the European epistemological mode” (p. 29). This potential for doing harm is in no way limited to positivist research. Asserting that any research that deals with human participants has no impact on them is pure pretense. This pretense benefits none and is potentially dangerous in and of its self. Instead it is more valuable to consider possible impacts on participants and then endeavor to eliminate harm where possible.

My design for this study follows a pragmatist orientation as outlined by Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) in their text *Mixed Methodology*. This orientation allows me to select the most effective method to explore questions raised. There is an element of my work that seeks to explain why African American males are choosing careers in Sports and Entertainment more frequently than other careers. This question would best be addressed using a qualitative methodology which would utilize a variety of interviews.

However, before going deeply into “why” it is necessary to examine if in fact they are choosing careers in sports and entertainment at a higher rate than other careers or

at a higher rate than European American male students. This question would best be addressed using quantitative methods that can address statistically the frequency of occurrence.

There is an abundance of anecdotal information about African American male students' career choices, but there are few studies that attempt to quantify these experiences to determine if they are isolated or represent larger phenomena. Using a questionnaire allows me to measure quantitative differences in student response.

The experience of each young man is valid and significant regardless of whether that experience can be generalized. This study will not alter that fact. What this study will attempt to do is to understand the point where the private and the public intersect and whether there is/ are shared realities among certain groups of young men that influence their personal perceptions and experiences. Kaplan(1964) notes,

human beings interact, and act jointly; the locus of social action is a shared world which each individual must make his own in order to play his part effectively. Now it is experience through which private perspectives open out onto public objects. Subjectivity is held in check with the question, 'Do you see what I see?' (pg. 35)

Elizondo, White-Smith, and Allen's (2008) research explains how this private and public work together in issues of school and race. They found that integration provided new resources to minority students in a school district. Students of varied ability levels were struggling with issues of teacher and staff hostility and low expectations that were often dismissed. Individual students chose a variety of coping mechanisms to mediate the obstacles they were experiencing individually. Once those individual experiences were shared and experiential connections were made to the group, researchers were able to develop strategies to benefit the students as a group.

The ability to connect these private realities (those experiences unique to the individual person) to a public realm (those experiences shared by others within a group in this case African-American males students) may allow us to deconstruct systemic obstructions to education and personal liberty.

Method

In this causal-comparative study, freshman male high school students were asked to respond to a questionnaire (see Appendix A). The research activities consisted of students responding to questions about their career aspirations, student engagement, and demographic information. Two research questions were examined:

1. Are African-American male students more likely to aspire to careers in entertainment and sports than are European-American male students?
2. Are African-American male students' career aspirations related to their level of school engagement?

Research Site

Participants were from two separate high schools located in one of the big eight urban districts in Ohio. It is a predominately African American district. The city is approximately 45% African American but the school district is approximately 80% African American. The city has historically been semi segregated with the West side being predominately black and the East being predominately white.

High School A has approximately 650 students. The freshmen population included 242 students with about 111 of those freshmen being male. High School B has approximately 945 students. That includes 325 freshmen with about 146 of them being male.

Participants

All freshmen males inclusive of every race that may be represented at those prospective schools were asked to complete the survey. Sixty-nine freshmen at School A completed the questionnaire. Their racial composition as identified by the students was 87% African-American, 6% Biracial, 4% European-American, 1% Hispanic, and 1% Other. Sixty-seven freshmen at School B completed the survey. Their racial composition as identified by the students was 36%-African American, 36%-European American, 15% Bi-racial, 10% Hispanic, and 3% Asian.

Data Collection

The administration of the two high schools gave approval to conduct the surveys. The principal of High School A determined that completing the survey in their auditorium during their freshman male and female responsibility seminar series was ideal for completion of the survey. The week before the seminar students were given a flyer (Appendix B) and asked to participate in the study. They were instructed that they did not have to participate. On the day of the seminar those that chose not to participate went straight to their break out session. Those who chose to participate completed the questionnaire prior to reporting to their breakout sessions.

The principal of High School B determined that completing the survey in their spirit room adjacent to the cafeteria at the end of the Freshman lunch period would be ideal. The students were given flyers in homeroom (APPENDIX C) and asked to participate in

the study. The freshmen students all eat the same lunch period. The students who chose to participate went to the spirit room adjacent to the cafeteria after lunch to complete the questionnaire before going on to their next class period.

At both School A and School B the researcher distributed the surveys and read instructions from (APPENDIX D) aloud to participants. Upon completion the participants placed survey in box and researcher maintained control of them. There was no identifying information on the questionnaire.

The Survey Instrument

With this in mind, I did research in two areas. In developing my survey, I sought to find studies that used a research instrument that might be useful in my study. In addition I looked at resources that discussed how to develop your own effective survey instrument. While there are numerous studies about students and career choices, there are a limited number that compare the impact of race on career aspirations, and I have yet to find any which have specifically addressed African American male students in this realm.

There are a few studies that have instruments that were useful in the development of the research instrument used for this study. Daire, Lamothe and Fuller (2007) compared differences between Black and White college students and several factors including high school completion, college attendance and career choice. Their questionnaire included items that assessed the factors that influence the student's career decisions. In their study exploring cultural context of career choices, Arbona and Novy (2005) asked two open-ended questions that I felt should be incorporated into this instrument. In addition to identifying students' career choice it was important to have a measure of student engagement in school. The National Center for School Engagement sponsored a study by Findlay (2006) that developed this measure. I used items from these studies in developing the questions for my survey.

Career aspirations. Career aspirations were measured in two ways. First, an open-ended question asked (item 9 on the survey), "if everything was possible for you, what occupation of job would you like to have as your lifetime career?" Answers to this item were first coded into 22 discrete categories, and subsequently coded into Sports, Entertainment, or Other Careers.

Second, two questions assessed in a close-ended format what the student's aspirations were for a career (if all things were possible) and for a career that takes into account reality factors (items 11 and 12 on the survey). The close-ended responses

included as medicine, entertainment, education, professional athletics, etc. These closed end items were adapted from a study done by Parmer (1993).

School engagement. The National Center for School Engagement sponsored a study that measured student engagement. Authored by K. Finlay (2006) it measured student engagement in three school districts Houston, Seattle, and Jacksonville. The instrument divided student engagement into three categories: emotional, behavioral and cognitive engagement. Items attached to questions #16 and #17 represent these scales in the survey instrument.

The emotional subscale consisted of 16 items that assessed students emotional engagement with school. Sample items include “When I first walked into school I thought it was good” or “I am happy to be at school”. The cognitive subscale consisted of 19 items that assessed students engagement with academics of school. Sample items include “Most of my teachers know the subject well.” And “How important do you think it is to have a good job or career after finishing school?”. The behavioral subscale consisted of seven questions. Sample items include “How often have you thought of dropping out?” and “I follow the rules at school.”

The school engagement subscales were determined to be internally consistent (Finlay 2006). In every city that the instrument was used, it showed a Cronbach Alpha that exceeded .70 as indicated by Table 1: Emotional Engagement, Table2: Cognitive Engagement, and Table 3: Behavioral Engagement below.

Table 1: Emotional Engagement

Location	Sample Size	Cronbach's Alpha
Houston	57	.884
Jacksonville	39	.895
Seattle	39	.902

Table 2: Cognitive Engagement

Location	Sample Size	Cronbach's Alpha
Houston	66	.904
Jacksonville	41	.922
Seattle	43	.867

Table 3: Behavioral Engagement

Location	Sample Size	Cronbach's Alpha
Houston	72	.797
Jacksonville	46	.489
Seattle	47	.793

An instrument is considered valid when it measures what it is supposed to measure. Researchers tested validity of this scale by using convergent validity, in which constructs that are similar to the instrument are identified, valid data sources for those constructs are gathered and the relationship between the instrument and the already established valid data is assessed. Additional information on the development and validation of these scales is presented in (Finlay, 2006).

Factors that influence career aspirations. A set of eight items assessed the factors that influence the student's career aspirations (see question 10 on the survey). These items included potential income, level of training, parent's and peers opinions, prestige/fame, etc. The students responded to a 5 point Likert scale of 1) low influence to 5) high influence. Questions for this scale were partially adapted from the work of Arbona & Novy (1991) and partially constructed by the researcher.

Demographic and background questions. The survey instrument also included a series of background questions, designed to ascertain information about the student's involvement in sports (questions # 5 and 6) extra-curriculars (questions # 7 and 8), the relevance of various subjects to their future career choice (question # 13), the enjoyment of various subjects in school (question # 14), and access to career counseling (question # 15). Questions 5 and 7 were based on the survey developed by

Arbona and Novy (2005). Demographic questions included race, age, grade level, and grade point average (questions #1, 2, 3 and 4).

Ethical Considerations

Within this study I considered that the interactions with participants most likely to cause social or emotional discomfort were questions that request demographic information. Queries into student's economic status may have been useful if accurate, however, students may have been uncomfortable discussing this information and many of them did not accurately know what their household income was or even what job titles their parents have. Therefore, because of potential harm and issues with reliability, those questions were eliminated from the instrument.

Also students may have suffered harm by having their responses to questions identifiable to staff or other students. Therefore, the decision was made for participants to have complete anonymity. Questionnaires were color coded to identify which school they came from as well as a letter code for each school. No other identifying information was attached to the instrument. Participation in the survey was voluntary. The questionnaire was approved by school principals and the Internal Review Board of Miami University Oxford. To ensure the questionnaire was anonymous it had no personally identifying information. Any foreseeable discomfort arising from the student believing that their opinions would be seen or made known to staff or peers was addressed by assuring students that only the researcher would have access to the actual completed questionnaires and that only information about how the group as a whole felt would be released. Moreover, the researcher did not have names or id numbers to connect responses to individuals.

Study's Benefit to Participants

This study was potentially beneficial for students at these two schools. Administrators indicated that this study was very informative as they worked to restructure the curriculum and programming at their schools. One principal was in his second year and working to bring more electives while fighting to maintain extra-curricular programs in the midst of budget cuts. This information helped him be more decisive. The other principal was in his first year and considering huge changes for the next year as he tried to "turn around the school." As importantly, students benefited because they had an opportunity to express their opinions about the courses and activities offered at their school and the relevancy of those activities.

Chapter 4:

Analysis of Data

Data were collected from two Midwestern high schools, both part of a large urban school district. Seventy freshmen males from School A and sixty seven freshmen males from School B completed the survey for a total of one hundred and thirty seven participants. The students completed a survey instrument which included questions about demographics, career aspirations and school engagement. The purpose of the questionnaire was to test the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: African American male students are more likely to aspire to careers in entertainment and sports than European American male students.

Hypothesis 2: The career aspirations of African American male students are related to their level of school engagement.

This chapter provides the analysis of the data collected. The chapter is divided into four areas of discussion: presentation of descriptive characteristics of respondents, an analysis of research question one, an analysis of research question two, and additional analysis.

Descriptive Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic Data

A total of 137 freshmen male students completed the survey. Responses to question one indicated that 62% of the participants were African American, 20% of the participants were European American, 10% were Multiracial, 6% were Hispanic American, and 2 % were Asian American. Responses to question four indicated that the majority of students considered themselves above average students.

Thirty percent indicated that they had a grade point average (GPA) of 3.0-3.4, 28% indicated that they had a GPA of 2.5-2.9, sixteen percent indicate that they had a GPA of 2.0-2.4, and only 13% percent indicate they had a GPA of less than 2.0.

Academic Data

Question 13 asked for information about the academic courses that the participants believed were most relevant to their future career aspirations; question 14 asked for information about the academic courses that the participants enjoyed the most.

Responses were measured on a Likert scale with 1 being not relevant to career/do not enjoy at all and 5 being very relevant/enjoy very much. As seen in Table 4: Academic Course Relevance, the results indicate that the students felt all their courses were about equally important, with the exception of physical education, which had a slight advantage

both in how relevant it was to their career aspirations (mean score of 4.5) and how much they enjoyed it (mean score of 3.8).

Table 4: Academic Course Relevance

	Relevance to Career	How Much Do You Enjoy
Physical Education	4.5	3.83
Science	3.17	3.17
Music	3.67	3.83
Math	3.5	3.67
Art	3.33	3.5
Computer Courses	2.17	2.5
Social Studies	3.5	3.83
Language Arts	3.33	3.67

Analysis of Hypothesis One

Hypothesis One stated, African American male students are more likely to aspire to careers in entertainment and sports than European American male students. Recall that career aspirations were measured in two ways: 1) in an open –ended question, and 2) in closed ended questions about the “dream” career versus the “reality” career.

Open-Ended Response about Career Aspirations

Question nine of the survey instrument asked students an open ended question. “If everything was possible for you, what occupation or job would you like to have as your lifetime career?” Students then wrote their preferred careers in the blank space. Student responses to the question are represented below in Table 5: Stated Career Choice.

Table 5: Stated Career Choice

Stated Career Aspiration	African/American Participants who Chose Career	European/American Participants who Chose Career	All Others Who Chose Career	Total Participants who Chose Career
Athlete	6	1		7
Author	2			2
Architect	1			1
Baseball	2		1	3
Basketball	9	2	1	12
Business	3	2	2	7
Chef	2	1		3
Computer information	3	1	1	5
Construction/mechanics	3	3		6
Doctor	4	2	2	8
Engineer	5	3		8
Entertainer	12	2		14
Fast-food employee	3			3
Firefighter	1			1
Football	12	2	6	20
Game tester		2		2
Lawyer	4	1		5
Librarian		1		1
Military career	3			3
Teacher			1	1
Scientist	2	2	1	5
Totals	77	25	15	117
Sports/Entertainment Career %	41/77 53%	7/25 28%	8/15 53%	56/117 48%

Of the participants who responded to the open-ended career aspiration question, a larger percentage of African American participants (53%) selected careers in sports and entertainment than European American participants (28%). This difference was significant, Chi Square (1) = 4.90, $p < .05$.

Dream Versus Reality Career Aspirations

The survey instrument contained two multiple choice questions that included predetermined choices for participants to select. Question 11 asked “If all things were possible for you, which of the following occupations or job categories would you most like as a lifetime career?” Question 12 asked “Taking into account reality factors, which of the following occupations or jobs do you expect to have as your lifetime career?”

In order to analyze dream careers, a contingency table was created comparing African American participants’ dream careers with European American participants dream careers. More African American participants aspired to dream careers in sports and entertainment (58%) as compared to European American students (40%). However, no significant relationship was found between race and dream careers (Chi-Square (1)=2.163, $p > .05$). Please refer to Table 6: Dream Career Aspirations.

Table 6: Dream Career Aspirations

Chosen Careers	African American Male Students %	European American Male Students %	All Male Students %
Entertainment	26%	20%	25%
Sports	32%	20%	30%
All Others	42%	58%	45%

In order to analyze reality career aspirations, a Chi-Square was calculated comparing the African American and European American participants. A significant difference was found (Chi Square (1)=10.63, $p < .05$). African American participants were more likely to aspire to careers in sports and entertainment (58%) than were European American participants (21%). See Table 7: Reality Career Aspirations.

Table #7: Reality Career Aspirations

Chosen Careers	African American Male Students %	European American Male Students %	All Male Students %
Entertainment	24%	17%	23%
Sports	34%	4%	27%
All Others	42%	78%	50%

Thus, Hypothesis One, that African American male students are more likely to aspire to careers in entertainment and sports than European American students, was partially supported. Support was seen in an open-ended question about the dream career, and in a closed-ended question about the reality career.

Analysis of Hypothesis Two

Hypothesis Two stated, African-American male students' career aspirations are related to their level of school engagement. For this analysis, only the closed-ended assessments of reality and dream careers were used.

Hypothesis two was examined by considering participant responses to the engagement scale (questions #16 and #17) on the survey instrument. The scale had a total of 42 items which measured emotional engagement (17 items) cognitive engagement (18 items) and behavioral engagement (7 items). The highest possible total engagement score was 210 pts. Table 8: Engagement Scale summarizes what was considered high, average and low engagement by the scale developers (Findlay, 2006).

Table 8: Engagement Scale

	High Engagement	Average Engagement	Low Engagement
Emotional	85-68	67-45	44-0
Cognitive	90-72	71-46	45-0
Behavioral	35-28	27-19	18-0

The mean emotional engagement score of African American male students was 52.92 and the average engagement score for European American males was 52.66. Both means are considered average engagement. The mean cognitive engagement score for African American male students was 71.93 and European American male students 67.71. Both means fall within average student engagement. The mean behavioral engagement for African American male students was 25.03 and the mean for European American males was 28.68. While the African American student behavioral engagement levels were considered average, the European American male students' levels of behavioral engagement were considered high.

One-way analysis of variance was conducted to test whether there was a relationship between reality and dream career aspirations, and school engagement. This analysis was done for the African American students only. There were no significant

differences in these analyses. See Table 9: African American Male Students' Dream Career Aspirations and Engagement, and Table 10: African American Male Students' Reality Career Aspirations and Engagement.

Table 9: African American Male Students' Dream Career Aspirations and Engagement

	Entertainment	Sports	Other	F
Emotional	54.53	52.04	52.33	0.214
Cognitive	71.61	72.86	71.25	0.095
Behavioral	26.74	25.32	23.97	0.783

Table 10: African American Male Students' Reality Career Aspirations and Engagement

	Entertainment	Sports	Other	F
Emotional	53.00	52.05	54.32	0.183
Cognitive	69.60	73.05	73.12	0.448
Behavioral	24.93	25.55	25.79	0.062

Thus, Hypothesis Two, that career aspirations of African American male students are related to their level of school engagement, was not supported.

Additional Analyses

After testing the two research hypotheses, additional analyses were conducted. These included analysis of career counseling received; relationships between race, school engagement, and relevance and enjoyment of school subjects; and factors influencing career aspirations.

Career Counseling Received

Question 15 was a multiple choice question that asked students to indicate how much career counseling they had received. Most of the students indicated that they had

little or no career counseling regardless of race. Table 11: Career Counseling summarizes student responses by race.

Table 11: Career Counseling

Amount of Counseling	African American	European American
None	42%	48%
Very Little	18%	30%
Some	37%	17%
Large Amount	11%	.4%

Relationships between Race, School Engagement, and Relevance and Enjoyment of School Subjects

Recall that questions 16 and 17 measured student engagement. The scale had a total of 42 items which measured emotional engagement (17 items) cognitive engagement (18 items) and behavioral engagement (7 items). A two-sample t-test compared the mean engagement scores for African American males and European males in the study. The difference was not significant for emotional engagement ($t = .08$, $p > .05$). The difference was not significant for cognitive engagement ($t = 1.18$, $p > .05$). However, there was a significant difference found between African American males and European American males on behavioral engagement ($t = -2.56$, $p < .05$). African American male student's behavioral engagement was lower at 25.03 than European American male students at 28.68.

Table 12 : T- test on Race Difference means

	African American	European American	t
Emotional	52.92	52.66	.08
Cognitive	71.93	67.71	1.18
Behavioral	25.03	28.68	-2.56*
Relevance	26.39	25.76	.40
Enjoyment	22.78	22.8	-0.02

* $p < .05$

Question 13 and Question 14 asked students how relevant they felt their courses were and how much they enjoyed their courses. Each of these questions asked the students about eight different subject areas. These items were analyzed, to see whether they could form an internally consistent scale. All eight items were consistent for the relevance scale, alpha = .789, so all eight were added together to form the scale. For the items on subject enjoyment, the item analysis indicated that internal consistency would be increased by removing the item on physical education, so only the other seven items were used. Alpha for the enjoyment scale was .710.

Correlations were computed to determine if there was any relationship between how relevant and enjoyable students perceived a course to be and how engaged they were in school. Table 13: Correlations of Course Enjoyment/ Relevance with Student Engagement shows the results. The results indicated that there were significant relationships between relevance and all types of engagement. There were also a significant relationships between cognitive engagement and how much students enjoyed the course.

Table 13 : Correlations of Course Enjoyment/Relevance with Student Engagement

	Relevance	Enjoyment	Emotional	Cognitive	Behavioral
Relevance					
Enjoyment	.575***				
Emotional	.310*	.148			
Cognitive	.438***	.484***	.530***		
Behavioral	.101	-.151	.193	.108	

*p < .05

**p < .01

***p < .001

Factors Influencing Career Aspirations

Question 10 asked participants to rate eight factors that potentially influence their career aspirations. The factors were rated on a Likert scale with 1 being the factor has a “low influence” on career aspirations and 5 being the factor has a “high influence” on career aspirations. An analysis of variance was run on the eight items and participant responses to question 11 which asked students to identify their dream careers. A separate analysis of variance was performed on the eight items and participant responses to question 12 which asked students to identify their reality careers. The goal was to identify factors that had the greatest influence on career aspirations. Table 14: Mean Likert Scores of Factors Influencing Career Aspirations show the results.

The factors that had the highest mean score in relation to participants dream career aspirations were “How much you enjoy career” at 4.26 and “Your personal talent or skill” at 4.19. However, the only factor that was found significantly related to participants career aspirations was “Peers’ opinion of career;” peer opinions mattered the least to those whose had entertainment as their dream career aspiration.

The factors that had the highest mean score in relation to participants reality career aspirations were also “How much you enjoy career” at 4.41 and “Your personal talent or skill” at 4.26. “How much you enjoy your career” and “Potential income earned” were significant factors in students’ reality career aspirations, with students who aspired to a reality career in entertainment rating these two influences the lowest.

Table 14: Mean Likert Scores of Factors Influencing Career Aspirations

	Entertainment	Sports	Other	Total	F
	Dream Career				
Potential Income	3.20	3.79	3.74	3.61	1.64
Education Required	3.95	3.80	4.06	3.95	0.41
Benefit Community	3.67	3.40	3.77	3.62	1.02
Parents' Opinion	3.45	3.60	3.90	3.68	0.97
Personal Talent	4.25	4.40	4.00	4.19	0.97
Prestige of Job	3.40	3.67	3.53	3.54	0.28
Enjoyment	3.95	4.24	4.47	4.26	1.32
Peers' Opinion	2.58	3.56	3.25	3.18	3.38*
	Reality Career				
Potential Income	2.94	3.77	4.11	3.69	6.51*
Education Required	3.83	3.83	4.29	4.01	1.60
Benefit Community	3.88	3.30	3.85	3.67	2.61
Parents' Opinion	3.78	3.83	3.46	3.67	0.70
Personal Talent	4.17	4.48	4.14	4.26	0.66
Prestige of Job	3.44	3.74	3.50	3.57	0.36
Enjoyment	3.89	4.43	4.71	4.41	3.92*
Peers' Opinion	2.88	3.74	3.18	3.29	2.48

* p < .05

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

Field of Dreams began as a personal quest to understand the motivations of my male students who happened to be overwhelmingly African American. After years of listening to conversations about “going to the league” or “getting a record deal” as well as speaking to colleagues who had the same experience, I developed a passion to understand whether these experiences were purely anecdotal or part of a larger phenomena. Hence my hypotheses:

1. African American male students are more likely to aspire to careers in entertainment and sports than European American male students.
2. African American male students’ career aspirations are related to their level of school engagement.

Recall that Chapter 4 analyzed data from a Career Choice questionnaire in order to test hypothesis number one and hypothesis number two. In addition to discussing the hypotheses, Chapter 4 contained additional analysis relevant to the overall issue of African American male students’ career aspirations. Chapter 5 will discuss the findings relevant to hypothesis one, findings relevant to hypothesis two, additional findings, implications and reflections.

Findings Related to Hypothesis One

Hypothesis one asked, are African American male students more likely to aspire to careers in entertainment and sports than European American male students? Recall that career aspirations were measured in two ways: 1) in an open –ended question, and 2) in closed ended questions about the “dream” career versus the “reality” career.

The results of my analysis in relationship to hypothesis one were mixed. The data collected indicated that of the participants who responded to the open ended career choice question, a significantly larger percentage of African American participants (53%) aspired to careers in sports and entertainment than European American participants (28%). These results would support hypothesis one.

In addition, the questionnaire instrument contained two closed ended questions that included predetermined choices for participants to select. Question 11 asks “If all things were possible for you, which of the following occupations or job categories would you most like as a lifetime career?” Question 12 asks “Taking into account reality factors, which of the following occupations or jobs do you expect to have as your lifetime career?”

African American participants who responded to Question 12 were more likely to aspire to careers in sports and entertainment than their European American counterparts (58% to 21%), which is supportive of hypothesis one. More African American participants also aspired to careers in sports and entertainment in response to Question 11. However, the difference (58% to 40%) was not statistically significant and therefore was not supportive of hypothesis number one. This created a mixed result for hypothesis one.

The mixed result suggests that both African American male students and European American male students find careers in athletics alluring. The Gallup poll supports this idea. This annual survey of student careers showed that in 2005 the number one career choice for male students between the ages of 13-17 was Professional Athlete followed by doctor, architect and engineer. (Cavanaugh, 2005) This poll supports the finding that professional athletics is alluring to most teen age boys regardless of race; however our study seems to suggest a distinction between African American male students and their European American counterparts.

When considering their reality careers (careers that could realistically be obtained, taking into consideration personal talent and ability as well as educational requirements), African American participants still chose more careers in sports and entertainment whereas European American participants picked more traditional careers. The findings suggest that while all young men may dream of being the next LeBron James or Fifty Cent, African American young men are resolute in their belief that this will be their future careers. They see these careers as feasible as being a teacher or firefighter.

In their study "Cultural Context of Career Choice," Foud and Byars-Winston drew conclusions relevant to this study's findings. They saw that while there was no significant difference in career aspirations, there was a difference by race in what students felt were realistic careers.

Combined, these findings indicate that individuals' career dreams (aspirations) are similar, yet students' perceptions of the opportunity to realize these dreams differ by racial/ethnic group. Perceived opportunities and perceived career barriers are individuals' conclusions about the structure of occupational opportunity. The culturally competent career counselor must attend to these perceptions and the associated environmental realities. (Foud & Byars-Winston, 2005, p. 230)

Findings Relating to Hypothesis Two

Hypothesis two asked, are the career aspirations of African-American male students related to their level of school engagement? For this analysis, only the closed-ended assessments of reality and dream careers were used. One-way analysis of variance was conducted to test whether there was a relationship between reality and dream career aspirations, and school engagement. This analysis was done for the African American students only. There were no significant differences in these analyses. Hypothesis number two was not supported by the data collected.

Based on the literature review and my professional experience, I believed that there was a significant relationship between school engagement and career aspirations. While I do not have any definitive information as to why this is the case, I can speculate about two potential reasons. The first possibility is that this could be a reflection of a flaw in the survey instrument. Perhaps the wording of the items could be clearer as to receive a more accurate reading of students ideas.

The second possibility is that African American male students in this study could be so disengaged from school in general that regardless of their chosen field school may not hold their interest. Also because it is a self-reporting study students may have responded the way they felt they should about school regardless of their true feelings making the disengaged seem more connected to school than they truly are.

Additional Findings

There were no statistically significant responses that would suggest a correlation between school engagement and African American male career choice. However, there was some thought provoking information provided. African American participants and European American participants level of engagement was generally equivalent, but when engagement was broken into the three categories, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral, it became evident that there was a significant difference found between African American males' and European American males' behavioral engagement. African American male student's behavior engagement was lower at 25.03 than European American male students at 28.68.

These findings are aligned with numerous other studies that show African American male students are more likely to be disciplined in school for behavioral problems than their European American counterparts (Monroe, 2005; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Smith, 2005). For example, in 1987 the New Orleans Public School district established a task force whose research concluded that African

American males accounted for 58% of the non-promotions, 65% of suspensions and 80% of expulsions though they only represented 43% of the school population (Garibaldi, 1992, pg. 5). In their study of 11,001 students in a Midwestern school district, Skiba, Peterson, and Williams (1997) found that “even in a district with a high proportion of African American students, African Americans were referred to the office significantly more frequently than other ethnic group” (pg. 295).

There is no easy answer as to why African American males are over-represented in the discipline data. Based on my research, my experience as an educator, and my experience as a parent there are three factors that carry some weight in this issue. First, would be the construct of school not being conducive to male children in general. Sitting quietly for hours at a time listening to lectures or reading books about topics that seem disconnected to their lives or futures, may influence African American males students ability to meet school expectations.

Secondly, there are cultural gaps between faculty and staff in schools and the students that they serve. The problems faced by African American male students have been happening for so long that stereotypical expectations have reified and teachers, principals, and even other students have absorbed and adopted those beliefs. So much so that regardless of the factors impacting behavior it has become expected that African American male students will behave a certain way and those low expectations and labels are placed on them before their true character is revealed(Noguera 2004).

Finally, the same behaviors exhibited by White male students are seen as less threatening or harmful than when exhibited by Black male students. Kunjufu (20005) points out that it is about 4th grade that Black boys’ performance and discipline seems to decline sharply. He notes this is also about the time (age 10) when they reach adolescence and are no longer viewed as young, cute, or innocent. Instead they are associated with the menacing Black man that our society has vilified for generations.

On this questionnaire instrument, Likert scale questions associated with Question 17 measured behavioral engagement (See Appendix A). These items asked students to respond to questions such as “I follow the rules at school” and “I get in trouble at school.” The African American student responses to these questions indicate that their behavior was more often out of line with school expectations than their European American counterparts. It is apparent that as they have been chastised for their behavior more African American male students begin to see their selves as disconnected from the social framework of school. A good analogy might be the sibling

who implicitly becomes the “black sheep” after committing multiple infractions and being punished by the parent. At some point it becomes part of the family dynamic to not think twice when that child is accused of wrong doing but to give “the good child” the benefit of the doubt. The African American male student has become the “black sheep” who is disengaged from school family and fulfilling the low expectations of others.

Another interesting finding dealt with student perceptions of course relevance. The results indicated that there were significant relationships between course relevance and all types of engagement. There also were significant relationships between cognitive engagement and how much students enjoyed the course. This can be interpreted to mean that if students believed a course was germane to other aspects of their lives, including goals and career aspirations, that they were more likely to participate fully in that course. This is supported in the literature review (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris, 2004).

Another possible factor in student career aspirations was the amount of counseling they have had previously. While this has been shown to be significant in other studies, this study did not examine that issue. We were able to see that a majority of students in both races had little or no career counseling which may indicate an underutilized tool which could be used for intervention.

Implications

Though the results of the hypothesis were mixed, the study partially reinforces the anecdotal evidence that African American male students’ dreams seem to be more tied to careers in Sports and Entertainment than other careers and more so than their European American counterparts. If we accept this as the case, the future implications are varied. There remains the challenge of discerning factors resulting in these career aspirations. The subsequent challenges would be how to intervene in a way that would allow African American male students exposure to a larger number of career options and how to present those options as real and feasible for their lives.

Career Aspirations and Feasibility

Tony Sewell (1997) makes an interesting observation when he states “Black boys are angels and devils in British (and American) schools. They are heroes of a street fashion culture that dominates most of our inner cities. On the other hand they represent a disproportionate amount of punishment in our schools compared to all other ethnic groupings” (pp. 9). This is a very real truth for young African American males around our country; the same behaviors they are penalized for within the institution of

school often receive positive reinforcement in the larger community. They receive acceptance, adoration and praise not for their academic skills, but for talents in song, dance or unique style “swagger.” As mentioned in the literature review, African American males like Sammy Davis Jr. have long been able to find respect and acceptance from the larger society that shunned or dehumanized them in every other circumstance; not by displaying their intellectual acumen but by their ability to entertain and amuse. Sewell (1997) is acknowledging that this is still a reality in our communities. Today you see entertainers such as rappers, Little Wayne, and T.I., whose fame, adoration and credibility increase after brushes with the criminal justice system. We admonish them on one hand and laud them with the other.

When reflecting on the often difficult assimilation of African American students in general but Black boys in particular, it is also possible that these boys look for ways to be successful without conforming to the dominant cultures’ expectations. John Ogbu (2004) presents a strong foundation for this argument and Carter (2003) uses his work to contend that

social and economic inequality yields disparate outcomes for students of subordinate class or racial and ethnic backgrounds because such inequalities undermine some groups’ beliefs and expectations about their chances for academic success. (pp. 136)

Here the point is made that actual inequality becomes institutionalized partially because students develop the belief that their opportunities are limited because of their race or class. While parents and educators may see careers in sports and entertainment as less feasible than more traditional careers, if students see those traditional careers as not available to members of their race or class, then a career as a rapper or football players seems less out of reach.

A successful career in entertainment is an example of a career that offers the potential, regardless of how unlikely, to earn a large income while utilizing those characteristics that the larger community rewards African American adolescents for possessing. In addition they don’t have the burden of “code switching” which can be a daunting and exhausting task for adults and youth alike. This is the process of displaying the discourse, mores, and customs of the dominant culture in order to be accepted academically or professionally (Hill, 2009)

Arguably, professional sport is simply another form of entertainment, one that uses a different skill set, athletic prowess. Unlike careers in hip hop and other arts,

success in professional athletics has a built in incentive to conform to school expectations. Without achieving set standards of grades and behavior, the adolescent male will not be able to compete in school athletics.

However, the potential financial rewards received by schools for having the most outstanding players, often leads to students underperforming academically. Academic and social exceptions are made in order to insure the eligibility of star athletes. Some secondary and post-secondary schools encourage their players to take the least challenging courses so as not to risk ineligibility or to take valuable training time away by requiring additional time for studying or assignments.

The message is sent that while we say academics are important they are only important in the context of advancing your future career and providing you economic security. The priority given to athletes and the priority placed on athletics over academics sends the clear message that aspiring to a career in professional athletics or entertainment is the most feasible way to secure your future. In either case sports and entertainment represent a pathway to economic success, social respect and acceptance that many young men may not see as available or feasible for them through traditional academic means.

Career Aspirations and the Achievement Gap

The examination of the correlations between Course Enjoyment and Relevance, and Student Engagement, demonstrated that how students view their courses is significantly tied to their engagement with school. These findings are instructive, in that this relationship may be problematic for those students focused on careers in sports and entertainment. Students who don't believe that math, science, or English courses are germane to their future career plans may be less likely to excel in those areas. One could argue that an overemphasis on sports and entertainment may decrease the amount of value African American male students place on their daily academic curriculum and exacerbate already alarmingly low academic achievement.

This potential disengagement from school is more concerning as we consider the persistent achievement gap. The national graduation rate of African American male students has been persistently lower than European American male students or their African American female counterparts. This trend can be seen at the state and national level. In their 2010 report, "Diplomas Count 2010: Graduation by the Numbers," Education Weekly reported that the 2007 national graduation rate was 69%. The national graduation rate for African American students was 54% compared to 77% of

European American students. The national graduation rate for males was 66% in 2007 compared to 73% for female students.

The Schott Foundation (2010) reports more detailed information about Black male students. In their Equity Index they show that in the state of Ohio the graduation rate for African American males is 49% compared to 79% for European American males. The outlook for African American males in the job market is equally discouraging. Recent data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that in July of 2010 the white male unemployment rate was 8.2%. The African American male unemployment rate was twice that at 16.1%. While African American women are suffering with high unemployment as well they fare slightly better than their male counterparts at 14.3%. The numbers for African American teens 16-19 yrs. old are bleaker still with 44% of them being unemployed in July of 2010 compared to only 23.2% of European American teens.

As we continue to explore and hopefully address the disparities experienced by African American males throughout our larger society, including employment rates, poverty levels, and incarceration rates, we will be forced to engage the causes of these entrenched disparities more intensely. For generations we have thought of education as the best tool to erase these systemic inequities. If that system has become a tool of reification for the general society, however, we must inquire beyond test scores and even beyond classroom best practices to consider the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of those students we aim to assist.

The fact that there remains a gap in both educational attainment and career prospects for African American males is not a secret. Yet, how to reduce or eliminate this disparity does appear quite elusive. Understanding factors behind low academic achievement and its relationship to career aspirations and student engagement is a good starting place. Field of Dreams was an effort to explore these very complicated issues.

Implications for Career Counseling

Alarming, most of the young men participating in the study, regardless of race, received little or no career counseling. In reflecting on possible areas of intervention, career counseling, would be ideal. Murray and Mosidi (1993) explain how crucial career counseling is to changing the social and economic reality of African American young men: "However, for African Americans to gain access and eventually achieve in any given career they must first overcome those obstacles that account for their lower educational and economic attainment....It therefore behooves career counselors working

with this population to vigorously seek creative solutions if this negative trend is to be reversed” (p. 442).

The schools in question have been hard hit by budget cuts over the last decade. There is one counselor assigned to each of the schools studied and they both have more than 600 students. After scheduling classes and meeting the needs of seniors trying to graduate or apply for college, the counselor has no time or energy for anything else. Funding for comprehensive career counseling may be the factor that would allow many of the young men to see the purpose for school differently and engage in school differently.

Limitations, and Directions for Future Research

All research projects have limitations, no matter how well planned and executed. This study is no different. The study relied on a convenience sample of students willing to share their time and information with the researcher and based on that fact could not be generalized. Without the ability to access student records, I was forced to rely on self-reporting which requires an assumption that students are honest about their responses instead of writing what they think the researcher may want to hear. Because the survey was self-report, data on parental income, careers, and education were not collected. Therefore, no correlations could be established based on socio-economic factors.

Ideally, future quantitative work would be done with access to school records that would more accurately reflect the students achievement level, engagement factors, coursework, and counseling history. In addition to quantitative study, I believe this issue needs a qualitative examination to truly dissect student motivations, beliefs about school, and factors influencing their career aspirations.

The central question needs to be addressed with a wider more controlled sample. There needs to be exploration into the amount of counseling received by young men in addition to conversations in small groups and/or one on one interviews that address how important entertainment and sports are in the lives of African American young men and the reasons behind that import.

Final Reflections

Several months ago I watched a panel of sportscasters debate the value of 2010 NFL draft candidate Myron Rolle. The controversy was one that exposed an uncomfortable truth about our society in reference to African American athletes. The conversation did not center around his athletic prowess or around which team could use his skills most. Instead they argued endlessly about whether his decision to take a year off from football and study in England as a Rhodes Scholar made him undraftable. They argued that his career aspirations made him undesirable because he did not need football as much as other players and was less committed than they would be. Translation: He was too smart to play professional athletics. The controversy made many reflect on the issues William Rhoden (2006) raised in his book *Forty Million Dollar Slaves: Has professional sports stardom brought black athletes wealth without progress and prosperity without freedom?*. It made me reflect on something else. What choices did Traylon eventually make?

I have not been in contact with him since he transferred schools after his sophomore year. That has been more than 8 years ago. However, I am relatively certain that his dream of a career in the NFL or the NBA did not pan out. My certainty comes from the fact that success in such an arena would have caused me to read articles about him or see his face on the news. Of course I can't name every third string NFL lineman or every 6th man on the NBA teams. Yet, if a young man from my community had any position on any professional team I would have known it because it would have caused a stir greater than any of those who received a Master's degree in engineering or medicine.

The local paper would have followed his career in college and the night of his draft there would have been viewing parties at local bars and in family basements. I know this because that was the scenario when our most recent son of the city "made it". Daequan Cook was a star before he left home as a 2006 All American headed to Ohio State. In 2007 after only his freshmen year, the city stood still waiting to hear the announcement that he was drafted to the Philadelphia 76er's. Three years into his career he was traded to the Miami Heat and recently, with almost no fanfare, to the Oklahoma City Thunder. The conversation around town is that at 24 his career is essentially over and his bank account is all but drained.

I have heard no such chatter about Traylon and so I wonder what other choices he has made. Everyone in the African American community voices the importance of education. Yet, it is not always easy for an African American young man to focus on that education when the reinforcement he receives revolves around excellence in sports or entertainment. Myron Rolle made the difficult decision to study abroad for two years despite the fact that he would have to skip the NFL draft and possibly never play professional football. While his parents supported his decision, many in his community called him foolish because of his choice.

As a community we must reflect on the role on this “Sports Fixation” of which John Doberman spoke, and on the fixation with megastar Black entertainers. What role do we play in the Field of Dreams? Do we say we value education but reinforce entertainment and athletics by whom we choose to lavish our valuable praise and recognition?

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Appendix A
Career Interest Questionnaire

Please read the directions for each section before you answer

Demographic Questions

1. What Race do you consider yourself? **(Please circle only one)**
 - A. African-American/Black
 - B. Asian-American/ Pacific Islander
 - C. European-American/White
 - D. Hispanic-American/Latino
 - E. Multi-Racial _____
 - F. Other_____

2. What is your age? **(Please circle only one)**
 - a. 14
 - b. 15
 - c. 16
 - d. 17
 - e. 18
 - f. Other_____

3. What is your grade level? **(Please circle only one)**
 - a. Freshman 9th
 - b. Sophomore 10th
 - c. Junior 11th
 - d. Senior 12th

4. What is your overall grade point average? Use your previous years grades if grades have not been given this year. **(Please circle only one)**
 - a. 3.5-4.0
 - b. 3.0-3.4
 - c. 2.5-2.9
 - d. 2.0-2.4
 - e. 1.5-1.9
 - f. 1.5-below

5. Review the list of school sponsored sports below. Please circle all of the school sponsored sports that you play.
- a. None
 - b. Baseball
 - c. Soccer
 - d. Basketball
 - e. Tennis
 - f. Football
 - g. Track and field
 - h. Other_____
6. Do you play any sports outside of school? Please circle all the sports you regularly play outside of school.
- a. None
 - b. Baseball
 - c. Soccer
 - d. Basketball
 - e. Tennis
 - f. Football
 - g. Track and field
 - h. Other_____
7. Are you active in Art, Theater, or Music in school? Please circle all of the art, theater or music activities you are involved in that are school sponsored.
- a. none
 - b. Acting in school plays
 - c. Singing in school choir
 - d. Playing instrument in orchestra
 - e. Playing instrument in band (marching, jazz, etc.)
 - f. Performing in talent shows
 - g. Art or Drawing club
 - h. Entering art competitions
 - i. Performing poetry or spoken word
 - j. Entering poetry competition
 - k. Other_____

8. Outside of school, are you active in Art, Theater, or Music. Please circle all of the art, theater or music activities you are involved in outside of school.
- a. none
 - b. Acting in school plays
 - c. Singing in school choir
 - d. Playing instrument in orchestra
 - e. Playing instrument in band (marching, jazz, etc.)
 - f. Performing in talent shows
 - g. Art or Drawing club
 - h. Entering art competitions
 - i. Performing poetry or spoken word
 - j. Entering poetry competition
 - k. Other _____

Career Choices

9. If everything was possible for you, what occupation or job would you like to have as your lifetime career?

10. On a scale of 1-5 with 1) being low influence and 5) being high influence, rate how much each of the following factors influence your choice of career.

	Low Influence				High Influence
Potential Income Earned	1	2	3	4	5
How much education/training required	1	2	3	4	5
Potential to help community or world	1	2	3	4	5
Parent's opinion of career	1	2	3	4	5
Your personal talent or skill in that area	1	2	3	4	5
Prestige or fame associated with	1	2	3	4	5
How much you enjoy career	1	2	3	4	5
Peers' opinions of career	1	2	3	4	5

11.If all things were possible for you, which of the following occupations or job categories would you most like as a lifetime career?

(Please Choose only one)

- a. Customer service/ Service Industry
- b. Medicine
- c. Entertainment
- d. Law/Criminal justice
- e. Journalism / Communication
- f. Professional Athletics
- g. Education
- h. Social Work
- i. Science Engineering
- j. Construction/Trades

12. Taking into account reality factors, which of the following occupations or jobs do you expect to have as your lifetime career? **(Please Choose Only One)**

- a. Customer service/ Service Industry
- b. Medicine
- c. Entertainment
- d. Law/Criminal justice
- e. Journalism / Communication
- f. Professional Athletics
- g. Education
- h. Social Work
- i. Science Engineering
- j. Construction/Trades

13. On a scale of 1-5 with 1) being not relevant and 5) being very relevant, rate how relevant you believe the following courses offered at your school will be to your future career choice.

	Not Relevant		Very Relevant		
Physical Education	1	2	3	4	5
Science	1	2	3	4	5
Music	1	2	3	4	5
Math	1	2	3	4	5
Art	1	2	3	4	5
Computer courses	1	2	3	4	5
Social Studies/History	1	2	3	4	5
English/Language Arts	1	2	3	4	5

14. On a scale of 1-5 with 1) do not enjoy at all, to 5) enjoy very much, rate how much you enjoy the following classes at your school.

	Do Not				Enjoy
	Enjoy at All				Very Much
Physical Education	1	2	3	4	5
Science	1	2	3	4	5
Music	1	2	3	4	5
Math	1	2	3	4	5
Art	1	2	3	4	5
Computer courses	1	2	3	4	5
Social Studies/History	1	2	3	4	5
English/Language Arts	1	2	3	4	5

15. How much career counseling have you had since you have entered high school?

(Please choose only one)

- a. none
- b. I have received very little career counseling
- c. I have received some career counseling but would like more
- d. I have received a large amount of career counseling

16. Please circle one number between 1-5 for each of the following questions. 1) means that you strongly disagree. 5) means that you strongly agree

	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
When I first walked into my school I thought it was good.	1	2	3	4	5
When I first walked into my school I thought it was friendly.	1	2	3	4	5
When I first walked into my school I thought it was clean.	1	2	3	4	5
I am happy to be at my school	1	2	3	4	5
The teachers at my school treat students fairly	1	2	3	4	5
I like most of my teachers at school.	1	2	3	4	5
The discipline at my school is fair.	1	2	3	4	5
Most of my teachers care about how I'm doing.	1	2	3	4	5
Most of my teachers know the subject matter well.	1	2	3	4	5
There is an adult at school that I can talk to about my problems.	1	2	3	4	5
I respect most of my teachers	1	2	3	4	5
Most of my teachers understand me.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel excited by the work in school.	1	2	3	4	5
My classroom is a fun place to be.	1	2	3	4	5

I enjoy the work I do in class.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel I can go to my teachers with the things that I need to talk about.	1	2	3	4	5
Getting an education is important.	1	2	3	4	5
Getting good grades is important.	1	2	3	4	5
The things I am learning in school are going to be important to me later in life.	1	2	3	4	5
It is important to get a good job or career after school.	1	2	3	4	5
I am getting a good education at my school.	1	2	3	4	5
I will graduate from high school.	1	2	3	4	5
I want to go to college.	1	2	3	4	5
Most of my classes are boring.	1	2	3	4	5
Most of my teachers know the subject matter well.	1	2	3	4	5
I learn a lot from my classes.	1	2	3	4	5
I am interested in the work I get to do in my classes.	1	2	3	4	5

17. Please circle one number between 1-5 with 1-being never 2- rarely 3- sometimes 4-often 5- Always/Almost Always.

	Never		Sometimes		Almost Always
When I read a book, I ask myself questions to make sure I understand what it is about.	1	2	3	4	5
I study at home even when I don't have a test.	1	2	3	4	5
I talk with people outside of school about what I am learning in class.	1	2	3	4	5
I check my schoolwork for mistakes.	1	2	3	4	5
If I don't know what a word means I am reading I do something to figure it out I, like look it up in the dictionary or ask someone.	1	2	3	4	5
If I don't understand what I read, I go back and read it over again.	1	2	3	4	5
I try my best at school.	1	2	3	4	5
I get good grades in school.	1	2	3	4	5
How often have you thought of dropping out?	1	2	3	4	5
When I am in class, I just pretend I am working.	1	2	3	4	5
I follow the rules at school.	1	2	3	4	5
I get in trouble at school.	1	2	3	4	5
I skip (cut) classes during school.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX B

LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD

We are looking for Freshmen Boys to complete questionnaires about school and careers. The questionnaire asks you about what jobs or careers you would like to have in the future and which classes and programs at school you feel are the best.

We are asking all freshmen boys to participate and share your opinions. The questionnaire will be given at the beginning of your responsibility workshops next week. If you choose to participate you will stay in the auditorium an extra fifteen minutes to complete your survey before going to your workshop. If you do not wish to participate you will go to your workshop as scheduled.

Remember to let your voice be heard and tell us how you feel about your school, its classes, and the career goals you have for the future.

If you have any questions please ask your homeroom teacher for additional information.

APPENDIX C

LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD

We are looking for Freshmen Boys to complete questionnaires about school and careers. The questionnaire asks you about what jobs or careers you would like to have in the future and which classes and programs at school you feel are the best.

We are asking all freshmen boys to participate and share your opinions. The questionnaire will be given at the end of lunch next week in the Bison room. If you choose to participate you will go to the bison room after you eat. It will take about fifteen minutes to complete your survey . After you are finished you will be given a pass to your next class period. If you do not wish to participate you will simply follow your schedule as normal.

Remember to let your voice be heard and tell us how you feel about your school, its classes, and the career goals you have for the future.

If you have any questions please ask your homeroom teacher for additional information.

APPENDIX D (Questionnaire and Script)

Scripted instructions for completing questionnaire

Today you will be completing a career choice questionnaire. It will take you about 15 minutes to complete. If you have decided you do not wish to complete the survey please proceed to your workshop at this time.

(Pause to allow students to leave.)

Do not write your name, id number or any other personal information on the questionnaire. This is an anonymous survey so no one will know how you respond to the questions. We want you to share your true thoughts and feelings.

Some questions are multiple choice, some questions ask you to rate items from 1-5, and a few items ask you to write your opinion on a blank space. Please read the instructions carefully at the beginning of each section so that you respond in the correct way.

When you are finished please bring the questionnaire to the table and continue on to your workshop. You may begin.