ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: PERCEPTIONS OF UPWARD BOUND'S INFLUENCE

ON THE ACADEMIC OUTCOMES OF AFRICAN

AMERICAN MALE PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

AND DESCRIPTIONS OF THEIR IDENTITY STATUS

Ro'Shaun A. Bailey, Higher Education, May 2019

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of African American male Upward Bound participants to determine their identity status and to document their perceptions of Upward Bound's influence on their academic outcomes. This study examined the experiences of eight African American male Upward Bound participants at Southeastern State University, a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in a southeastern state. The participants were asked to respond to semi-structured interview questions during three separate interviews. Their interviews were analyzed and coded for common themes using Marica's Theory of Identity Status and Bush and Bushes African American Male Theory as the lenses. The themes that were developed from the code frequency chart were "Motivation to Work Harder," "Emotional Support," "Positive Influence," "Role Models," "Aspirations to Succeed," and "Participation in Extracurricular Activities." The experiences of each participant varied

slightly, and their perceptions of Upward Bound's influence on their academic outcomes were relatively consistent.

PERCEPTIONS OF UPWARD BOUND'S IMPACT ON IDENTITY STATUS AND

ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE PROGRAM

PARTICIPANTS

by

Ro'Shaun A. Bailey

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has been approved

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DISSERTATION COMMITTEE APPROVAL

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DEDICATION

Be still, and know that I am GOD.

Psalm 46:10

I dedicate my dissertation to…

My children: Anslei, Austin, and Aubrei

My parents: Floyd and Carlee

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER I:

INTRODUCTION

African American Males and Education in the Twenty First Century

African American males face enormous challenges in the educational pipeline and

continue to lag behind their African American female counterparts and other ethnic

groups (Harper, 2012; Mobley & Halcomb, 2008). Harper and Wood (2015) suggested,

"For no other community of individuals is the importance of access to high-quality

education and opportunities more essential than for Black boys" (p. 2). For instance, in

2002, African American males comprised only 26.3% of the students enrolled in college

(National Center of Education Statistics, 2016). This percentage has since grown to

34.1%, an increase of 7.8% (National Center of Education Statistics, 2016). Recent data

also revealed that only 47% of African American males graduated from high school on

time in 2008 compared to 78% of their White male counterparts (Schott Foundation for

Public Education, 2010).

African American male students have been identified perhaps more often than any

other ethnic group as facing formidable struggles concerning education (Cokley, 2006).

Some scholars have argued that academic challenges faced by African American males

are due to negotiations of identity and environment (Irving & Hudley, 2008). Identity in

this context is defined as "the struggle between an individual (personal) and social

(collective) self-concept" (Alexander, 2011, p. 15). While they may actively identify as

African Americans, they may not necessarily have a self-concept that is conducive to

academic success primarily because their knowledge of self is rooted in misperceptions

of their environment (i.e., stereotypes). This argument, then, suggests the need to further examine the relationships between environmental factors, African American male students' self-concepts and academic aspiration/achievements.

One does not have to look far to identify an example of poor academic performance by African American males. African American male students who enroll in U.S. institutions of higher learning fail to graduate after six years of study (Casselman, 2014). According to Tate (2017), only 40 percent of African American males graduate within six years of enrolling in a U. S. institution of higher learning. Thus, a closer examination of some of the pre-college factors that likely influence the graduation rates of African American males should provide some clues as to why the college completion rates are abysmal.

Colleges and universities in the U.S. have implemented programs and services to improve the graduation rates of minorities, particularly, services to assist African American males, but the results have been disappointing (Seidman, 2005). Traditionally, research geared at understanding student success among African American males in college has examined to such factors as high school grade point averages, standardized test scores, and financial aid, but recent research indicates that there is more to the story (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). Social stereotypes, perceived academic abilities, culture, and identity among other things play a critical role in the academic success of African American males (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). Understanding this, the Upward Bound Program was created.

The Upward Bound Program was developed during President Lyndon B. Johnson's administration. Upward Bound is a federally funded pre-college program that provides academic and support services to first-generation and low-income students (students whose family's taxable income does not exceed 200% of the poverty level amount) who aspire to attend to college (United States Department of Education, 2015). The Upward Bound program receives funding under the Title IV Education Act of 1965. Any institution of higher learning is eligible to apply for federal funds to operate an Upward Bound program during the competitive grant cycle. The goal of the program is to increase the rate at which participants attend and complete secondary education from postsecondary institutions.

Research on the impact of Upward Bound on student success provides mixed results. For example, Seftor, Mamun, and Schirm (2009) found that "Upward Bound increased post secondary enrollment or completion rates for some students by as much as 12 percent" (p. xvi). The services afforded to program participants can be of great benefit. According to Seftor, et al. (2009), "participants in Upward Bound receive an intensive set of precollege services and have positive educational outcomes" (p. xx). Similarly, research by Thayer (2007) concluded that the Upward Bound program, did have a positive influence on African American males and aided the students in attending college. Conversely, research by Mathematica Policy Research Inc. (2009) suggested that the Upward Bound program was ineffective in meeting the goals and objectives of the program. Despite conflicting research findings, the U.S. Department of Education (2009) reported, "Upward Bound had no detectable effect on the overall postsecondary

enrollment for the average eligible applicant" (p.41). This position does not take into account the students' perceptions and individual experiences. Furthermore, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2016), only 34.1% of African American males enrolled in post-secondary institutions following high school. Since the 1980s, the declining economic, social, and educational status of African American males has been a highly discussed and debated issue in our society (Garibaldi, 1992). Concerns surrounding the education, interracial and intraracial social interactions, employment, and effects of the criminal justice system on African American males have been examined in both the press and in academia (Cuyjet, 2006).

This researcher's experience with the Upward Bound program over the course of 12 years has provided him with a more in-depth understanding of the program's mission. While all program participants receive the same services, the results of those services vary among students. Personal observations of African American males in Upward Bound coupled with the above-mentioned research by Seftor, Mamun and Schirm (2009), fueled a desire for this study. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of African American male Upward Bound participants to determine their identity status and to document their perceptions of Upward Bound's influence on their academic outcomes.

Background of the Study

The United States prides itself on being a diverse nation (Morrison, 2010). Yet, it remains one of the most divided countries in regards to race, class, privilege, and power. For example, Borrego (2008) stated, "class shapes individual lives, social policy, and

educational opportunity. Nowhere is there a more intense silence about the reality of class difference than in educational settings" (p. 1). Researchers (Milner, 2008; Rogalsky, 2009; Rury, 2005; Weiner, 2003) have discovered disparities to be evident throughout the K-16 educational system. For example, African American males' students are among those most likely to be negatively impacted by such disparities (Harper, 2009).

African Americans and the American Educational System. As it pertains to the American educational system's ability to educate African Americans, the Schott Foundation (2015) stated, "it is creating a chasm of denied opportunities that consigns them to limited chances to succeed in life" (p. 6).

While public education in the United States has helped to overcome many barriers for some, the academic achievement of African American students has suffered (Talley, 2009). The ubiquitous underachievement of African American children is a well-known and documented problem (Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, & Weinfield, 1966; Craig & Washington, 2001; Jencks & Phillips, 1998). For entirely too many African American students matriculating at one of America's estimated 98,817 public schools, it appears that barriers are in place to prevent them from excelling academically (NCES, 2013). Research by Burkam and Lee (2002), Ferguson (2003), Fryer and Levit (2002, 2004), Patrick and Turner (2004), and Talley (2009) illustrated that such barriers are limited educational experiences, and impoverished academic environments or classroom setting. This is an apt description of the kinds of barriers confronted by students who are the subject of this study.

African Americans Males and the American Educational System.

According to Harper and Wood (2015),

> For low-income, Black boys in particular, we must optimize opportunities early
> on to close achievement gaps and to ensure that they are prepared to begin
> elementary school ready to learn. Students who begin elementary school without
> access to high quality early learning programs and support services have a
> tendency to remain behind throughout their academic careers. (para. 3)

A failure to address the gap as mentioned above can have significant implications for the
life (i.e., high school graduation, post-secondary academic success, employment) of
many minority students, who are also low income (Harper & Wood, 2015). The Schott
Foundation (2015) reported, "the American education system is systematically failing
Black Males" (para. 1). Research by Toldson (2008), has shown that merely half of the
black male students in high school graduate in four years. Additionally, data from the
Schott Foundation for Public Education (2015) revealed that "just 59% of Black males
graduated on time in 2013 compared with 80% of white males" (p. 7). One year later, the
percentage of African American males who graduated on time had only increased by 5%,
according to Toldson (2014). The above referenced increase was achieved by
implementing and meeting a multi-sector approach (i.e., student centered learning needs,
positive support needs, & school climate needs). According to Prager (2011), "In
ghettos, rural villages and midsized townships across America, schools have become
holding tanks for Black boys who have a statistically higher probability of walking prison
corridors than college halls" (p. 1).

Furthermore, the high school dropout statistics indicated that 8% of African American males do not finish high school (NCES, 2014). While this percentage is considered low, the manner in which the statistics are compiled should be noted. "The dropout rate represents the percentage of 16 through 24- year olds who are not enrolled in school and have not earned a high school diploma or General Educational Development certificate" (NCES, 2014, para. 1). Such statistics fail to consider the quality of education being provided to African American males and the possible role oppression has played in their decision to discontinue their pursuit of education. Moreover, quantitative research has highlighted the negatives associated with African American males and their education (Cushion, 2011; Rolland, 2011; Pigmore, 2013). Therefore, the proposed qualitative study is an attempt to enrich the research by adding the voices of African American male students to the discussion.

African American Males and Academic Success. According to Rolland (2011), "academic success is the measurement used to associate positive outcomes assessed for students" (p. 30). Statistics have shown that African American males are not achieving the same levels of academic success as that for white males. Research conducted by Educational Testing Services (2011) showed that of Black fourth grade boys, "12% are proficient in reading, and 12% of Black eighth grade boys are proficient in math, compared to 38% of White boys in reading and 44% in math" (p.2). These statistics suggest that Black male students may be behind their White peers by three full years. (Educational Testing Services [ETS], 2011).

Research by Thompson (2014) indicated, "the twelfth-grade reading scores of African American males were significantly lower than those for men and women across every other racial and ethnic group" (para. 4). The National Educational Association (2011) pointed out,

Black Boys are 2.5 times less likely to be enrolled in gifted and talented programs, even if their prior achievement reflects the ability to succeed. Black male students make up 20% of all students in the United States classified as mentally retarded, although they are only 9% of the student population. (p. 1)

In the 21st century, it is imperative that African American males achieve academic success in both high school and college (ETS, 2011). This classification (i.e., mentally retarded) might also be viewed as a barrier to academic success. That is, being labeled as mentally retarded can lead some Black male students, who are not mentally retarded to accept such labels and thereby not perform to their full academic potential.

Research has shown that there is an array of factors (i.e., teacher expectations, parent-child communication, peer associations, etc.) that can contribute to the academic success of African American males (Berry & Asamen, 1989; Hill, 2001; Howard, 2003; Kirp, 2010; Spencer, 2005; Stewart, 2007; White, 2009). Additional factors as posited by several researchers (Barnes-Butler, Estrada-Martinez, Colin, & Jones, 2016; Carey, 2016; Cokley, McClain, Jones, & Johnson, 2016; Howard, Woodward, Bavarro, Haro, Bianca, Watson, Kenjus, Adrain, & Clarence, 2016) can also contribute to the academic success of African American males. Among these factors are family influences, cultural capital, along with demographic and psychological factors. Much of the literature regarding

African American male academic success tends to focus on the need for academic remediation, but other factors make it difficult for African American males to achieve academic success in academia or coerce them to negotiate between a dominant culture and their own (i.e., institutional, structural and systemic racism factors). Specifically, student self-concept/ self-identity, academic language, family influence, institutional characteristics, student expectations, and technology readiness all impact the academic success of African American males (Award, 2007; Manning, Mayes, Vega & Hines, 2008; Okeke, 2009; Harris & Everett, 2016).

Extant research establishes that there are other obstacles facing African American males concerning their education such as nutrition, self-esteem, and teacher quality, which contribute to the lack of academic achievement (Bell, 2010; Case & Katz, 1991; Spicker, Southern & Davis, 1997). Other problems range from poor academic preparation, culturally insensitive environments for learning, to underrepresentation (i.e., school administrators, principals & teachers who are African American males) within high school and post-secondary institutions (Vinzant, 2009). Still other challenges range from a trust of teachers, and school funding to policies (Talley, 2009). Of these problems, participants in this study were more likely to experience poor academic preparation, which results from a history of inadequate funding for schools and a lack of well-qualified teachers. Such problems can be ascribed to the academic demise of African American males going from high school to college (Harper, 2009).

Conceptual Framework

Harper (2009) posits there are two interrelated concepts that are not widely studied but should be considered when researching African American males and education. These two concepts are culture and identity. Harper suggested that both culture and identity have a significant role in the academic outcomes of African American male students (Harper, 2009).

African American Culture and Identity

Culture is the beliefs and behaviors that form a way of life for a specific group of people (Macionis, 2012). Culture also is the commonality that members of a group share. "Culture is the totality of what is learned by individuals as members of a society" (Griswold, 2012, p.10). Culture plays a role in the identity of everyone, but it often goes unnoticed (Dawn, 2008). Culture plays a role in education, especially the education of African American males (Townsend, 2000). Moreover, for African American males culture does influences identity (Jones & Campbell, 2011). For example, the "culture of poverty" into which many African American males are born into can be detrimental to their education (McCabe, 2015; Wright 2009). According to Wright (2009) "social scientists have pointed to the culture of poverty as an explanation of the persistent underachievement among African American males in school" (p. 23). The "culture of poverty" impacts African American male students with respect to their education because of deprivation, disorganization, a lack of interpersonal relationships, and identity development (Lewis, 1966). This is particularly true for African Americans residing in rural and isolated areas of the United States, such as the southeastern region. For this

study, culture is inclusive of language, family and community influences, and self-concept/identity (Otto, 2006).

"The cultural influences a person is surrounded by plays a large role in the development of their identity formation," which is a developmental process in which various factors contribute (Dawn, 2008, para.1; Brittian, 2012). Said factors vary from biological to cultural contributions. According to Latterell, (2005), "the social and cultural forces that help shape our sense of identity are not neutral. Instead, they operate like a powerful lens through which we view ourselves and make decisions" (p.10). As supported by the statement referenced above, the individual (i.e., African American males) contributes to his or her sense of self. Spencer (2008) suggests that because of the conditions (i.e., poverty) in which many African American males live, they are required to develop coping strategies. Coping strategies such as problem-focused and emotion-focused, which target environment relationships and commitment patters (Bridges, 2004). These strategies, however, might inhibit academic success.

To frame the understanding of challenges faced by African American males in the educational pipeline, the study relied on two conceptual constructs: Marcia's Theory of Identity Status (Marcia, 1966; Marcia, 1980,1993; Phinney & Ong, 2007; Yip, Seaton, & Sellers, 2006) and the African American Male Theory (Bush & Bush, 2013). According to Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito (1998), "such an identity model (i.e., Marcia's) focuses on the psychosocial process of self-definition, the model is also cognitive-structural in that individuals move through stages of increasing cognitive complexity with regard to their self-identification" (p. 11). Such a theory places value on the issues faced

(i.e., relationships, aspirations) by people as their lives progress through various stages. Like Marcia's Theory, the African American Male Theory (Bush & Bush, 2013) also focuses on the psychological, social, and educational experiences of subjects; specifically the experiences of African American males. Based on their experiences, the African American Male Theory attempts to "articulate the position and trajectory of African American boys and men" (Bush & Bush, 2013, para. 1).

From a psychological view, McLeod (2008) referred to self-definition as "how someone thinks about, evaluates, or perceives themselves" (n.p.). How the students perceive themselves and their experiences are important to this study, as they are necessary for attempting to determine their identity status. Kinchin and Hay (2000) refer to cognitive-structural as "patterns or stages of human thinking" (n.p.). This too is significant to this study as it is imperative to understand how the students move through the stages of identity status. Like the African American Male Theory, Marcia's theory also assumes that a person is affected by their environment (Ekimyan, 2008). Such effects can influence an individual's decision (i.e., stay in school, achieve) making skills concerning their education. Research by Julie Adams (2015) supports Marcia's Theory. Adams (2015) suggested, their "environment is far more important to student success than genetics" (np.).

Marcia's Theory of Identity Status. Identity status can be a complex concept defined in a number of ways (Marcia, 1966). To better understand identity status, one must first understand identity. According to Fearon (1999), "Identity can be used to refer to personal characteristics or attributes that cannot naturally be expressed in terms of a

social category" (para. 6). Furthermore, in other studies (Gecas, 1982; Stets & Burke, 2003; Schafer, 2009) related to identity, identity is viewed as one's perception of self. Of various measures for indicating identity, Marcia's theory of identity status is one of the most useful for determining how firmly one identifies himself or herself with a particular role (Phinney & Ong, 2007; Yip, Seaton, & Sellers, 2006).

Marcia (1966) devised four distinctions of identity status that designate identity formation: 1) identity achieved—individuals who have experienced commitment after exploration; 2) moratorium—individuals who are currently in a state of exploration, but have not made commitments; 3) foreclosure–individuals who have consciously adopted the values prescribe by significant others, such as parents or peers, without having examined alternatives; and 4) diffuse--individuals who have neither experienced crisis nor made a commitment.

Marcia's research on psychological development is well documented and used across disciplines (Hardy & Kisling, 2006). As Schachter (2005) explained, one may be categorized by multiple identity statuses, each applying to a particular area of his or her life. For example, one may have achieved identity status as a student after having explored different options for major studies and committed to a chosen field of study, and yet that same person may have foreclosed status in reference to his or her religious beliefs to which that individual might adhere because of how he or she was raised.

Understanding identity status as a context-specific measure is essential. It suggests the complexity of the human personality and helps guide the scholarly investigation, which

focuses on the meaning of identity status within an academic context as opposed to measuring a student's identity status in other settings (Chorba, Was, & Isaacson, 2012).

Applying Marcia's paradigm, several studies examined the relationship between identity status and academic performance. Was and Isaacson (2008) found identity status to have a significant impact on academic achievement. Specifically, those who had gone through the stages of evaluating options and then firmly committed to their mission, as students with a clear sense of what they wanted to accomplish tended to complete assignments promptly and subsequently earned higher GPAs. Shanahan and Pychyl (2007) expounded on the applicability of Marcia's identity status paradigm. They found that students who were identified as having a moratorium and diffuse identity statuses had a greater tendency to not complete tasks in a timely fashion. Chorba et al. (2012) also observed that among adolescent and young adults, there was a correlation between academic identity status and academic behaviors. Those who achieved identity status tended not to engage in self-handicapping behaviors (i.e., procrastination, time mismanagement) that jeopardized academic performance.

Further application of the importance of identity status achievement based on commitment is evident in the research of Bliuc, Ellis, Goodyear, and Hendres (2011). Bliuc et al. found that students who had a stronger social identification demonstrated significant academic achievement. Students found to have weaker social identification were inclined to make minimal approaches to academic tasks and showed significantly less academic achievement. The lesson suggested here is that students' robust conception of themselves may foster active student behavior. Marcia's Theory and its constructs of

commitment and exploration as determinants of identity status provided a student

development lens that allowed for the questioning of the research participants in how

they view themselves (Jelenic, 2013). Specifically, the researcher will be looking for

evidence of identity status as outlined by Marcia in the transcripts. Marcia's Theory was

combined with the African American Male Theory to provide a better means of exploring

the phenomenon under study. While Marcia's Theory (1966) is capable of capturing

such data, it is not oriented toward African American males. Therefore, it was necessary

to incorporate the African American Male Theory (Bush & Bush, 2013) in this study.

Bush and Bush's African American Male Theory (AAMT). Research on the

experience(s) of African American males in higher education has concluded that this

group has a distinctive and unique sociocultural position (Wood & Palmer, 2015). Such a

theory also places value on the background characteristics (i.e., identity, family,

environment, school, beliefs, and perceptions) of African American males. Moreover,

Wood and Palmer (2015) stated, "Researchers have largely ignored extant frameworks,

models, and theories that were designed specifically for Black male populations in

exchange for more predominant higher education theories" (p. 38). The African

American Male Theory (AAMT) introduced by Bush and Bush (2013) aids in

understanding the lives of African American males from a meta-level, a level that goes

beyond the typical (i.e., surface level) understanding of African American males. The

fundamental foundation of the AAMT is "to articulate the position and trajectory of

African American boys and men in society'' (Bush & Bush, 2013, p. 6). Specifically, the

tenants of inner/outer microsystem and inner macrosystem of the AAMT were used for

this study. The tenant of inner microsystem consists of the personality, beliefs, intellect, and perceptions. The tenant of outer microsystem consists of family, peer groups, neighborhood, church, and school. The macrosystem tenant consists of cultural hegemony, racism, hip-hop, and the youth environment. This theory also allowed the researcher to contextualize the research as seen through the eyes of the African American male Upward Bound students.

The Upward Bound program and many schools (K12 and postsecondary) recognize that freshmen in high school and college are in a transition phase. Therefore, they offer programs and services to help the students build a foundation to meet their basic student development needs (i.e., reading, communication, & critical thinking skills). Their basic developmental needs must be resolved before they are able to attain identity achieved. Merging Marcia's Theory and the African American Male Theory aids in understanding the participants' journey.

It is imperative that counselors, teachers, paraprofessionals, and school (K-12 and postsecondary) staff assess where African American male students are on their developmental journey. This assessment can begin by determining what classes they are taking and involving the students in student developmental activities that embrace their interests, and their career aspirations. Such developmental activities can help to determine what educational approach is best or necessary in educating African American male students. An individual academic plan comprised of data from the student development activities and services is then created to help establish students' social identity.

Statement of the Problem

The Schott Foundation (2010) reported that in 2008, only 47% of Black males graduated from high school with their graduating class. Harper and Davis (2012) identified "unfavorable psychological and educational outcomes" as two contributing factors to this issue. Consequently, the rate of African American males graduating from high school has also had an impact on higher education as only 16% of Black males earned a bachelor's degree or higher (U. S. Census, 2011). Afterschool and educational programs have been developed to address the issues surrounding African American male educational achievement. Moreover, educators have begun to recognize how the identity of African American male students can impact their educational achievement (Noguera, 2003). It has become critical to also provide access to psychological services in combination with the educational programs being offered afterschool (Becker & Luthar, 2002). The Upward Bound program is one program in particular that was created to address the aforementioned issues. The goal of Upward Bound is to increase the rate at which students from disadvantaged backgrounds graduate from high school and earn a college degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

There have been few studies (Carter, 2003; Davidson, 1996; Hanley & Noblit, 2009; McGee, 2013; Rolland, 2011; Talley, 2009; Wyatt, 2012;) that have explored the experiences of African American male Upward Bound participants to determine their identity status and document the students' perceptions of Upward Bound's influence on their academic outcomes. Moreover, research on the quality of education being provided to African American males is of concern. The need to fully understand their experiences

and perceptions is critical to understanding African American male students' success. It is commendable that the discussion of improving the pathways to success for African American males has garnered a significant amount of attention from academia and government leaders, but many resources do not provide real strategies and solutions to improve the academic outcomes of African American males (Palmer & Wood, 2015). It is of utmost importance that educators and policymakers understand how such factors as the experiences, and environment of a student can contribute to the academic outcomes of African American male students.

Research (Fashola, 2005; Ford & Moore III, 2013; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Osborne, 1999) on this topic argued that poor academic preparation, culturally insensitive environments for learning, and underrepresentation cause these issues. Numerous studies have addressed the academic success of African American males. However, only a few have focused on the role of identity status of African American male students on their academic success. More importantly, fewer studies have examined how pre-college programs (i.e., Upward Bound) may contribute to the identity status of African American male students while participating in such a program (Croizet, Despres, Gauzins, Huguet, Leyens, & Meot, 2004; Ogbu, 2003; Rolland, 2011).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of African American male Upward Bound participants to determine their identity status and to document their perceptions of Upward Bound's influence on their academic outcomes. The participants' identity status will be determined based on descriptions of their experiences in the Upward Bound program and references to factors that are commonly

associated with identity status such as commitment and self- awareness. The Upward Bound Program provides basic academic assistance to participants as they prepare for college enrollment (U. S. Department of Education, 2015). The terms Black and African American can be used interchangeably, as some literature and researchers use the term Black while others use the term African American.

Research Question

Based on the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, and conceptual framework, the following research question emerged:

Grand Tour Question: What are the experiences of African American male students who

participate in an Upward Bound Program?

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the literature by identifying factors that contribute to the academic outcomes of African American male Upward Bound participants as perceived by them. The study also fills a gap in the literature by revealing the identity status of African American male students based on personal descriptions of their experiences in the southeast region of the United States.. Little is known about African American males who participate in the Upward Bound program. Moreover, college-bound African American males are a rarity in some cases, and programs like Upward Bound are places where you can find a significant population of African American males preparing for college admission. Thayer (2006) indicated, "the TRIO Upward Bound program has a positive impact on the academic achievement and college going rate of African American male students" (p. 173).

This study was designed to gain a better understanding of this phenomenon in hopes of aiding educators and those persons who advocate for funding from the federal government on behalf of the federally funded Trio Programs (i.e., Student Support Services, Educational Talent Search, & Upward Bound). Furthermore, possible approaches and support programs to improving the academic success and college attendance rates of African American males can be developed from the research. By conducting research on identity status and the perceptions of Upward Bound's influence on academic success of African American males, educators, college administrators, government officials, and policymakers can be informed as to factors contributing to the lack of academic success of the identified group. From this information, programs and initiatives can be developed or refined to better serve and assist African American males with their matriculation.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study was limited by its examination the views of eight African American males whose experiences may differ based on their own socio-economic status (SES), their geographical locations where they were reared, and other factors (i.e., current grade level) over which the researcher had no control. Therefore, caution should be taken in making generalizations. The intent of this qualitative study was to provide a rich, in-depth, first-hand account of their perceptions of Upward Bound influence on their academic outcomes and to determine their identity status from descriptions of their experiences rather than gather general quantitative data.

A delimitation of the study was that only African American males who participated in the Upward Bound program at Southeastern State University, the selected Historically Black College and University (HBCU) could volunteer to participate in the study. Thus, the study is based on a convenient sample from one federally funded pre-college program. The ideas and perceptions of African American males in other pre-college programs may differ from those expressed by the participants in this study.

Utilizing a qualitative research approach also has delimitations which include: (a) the knowledge produced may not generalize to "other people" or settings, (b) it is difficult to make quantitative predictions, (c) it is more difficult to test hypotheses and theories, (d) it could have a lower credibility with some higher education administrators', (e) the data analysis is time consuming, and (f) the results are more easily influenced by the researcher's own personal bias (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Definition of Terms

For clarity and consistency, definitions for key terms are below:

*Academic Success***:** performing and graduating from an academic institution (i.e., K12 & Postsecondary) at a rate equal to other racial-gender groups in society (Harper, 2012).

Identity: How African American males view themselves in relation to the world around them; used interchangeably with self-concept (Was & Issacson, 2008).

Identity Negotiation: The process that helps people to determine who is whom and transforms individuals into collaborators who have common goals, mutual obligations, and a commitment to one another (Swann, Johnson, & Bosson, 2009).

Identity Status: An individual's logic of identity as determined by the commitments and

choices created in reference to particular social or personal characteristics

(Learning Theories, 2007).

Postsecondary Aspirations: "Post-secondary aspirations refers to the level of schooling

and career paths that youth hope to pursue once they have completed their

compulsory years of secondary schooling" (Hudson, p. 4).

Upward Bound: "Upward Bound provides fundamental support to participants in their

preparation for college entrance. The program provides opportunities for

participants to succeed in precollege performance and ultimately in higher

education pursuits. Upward Bound serves: high school students from low-income

families; and high school students from families in which neither parent holds a

bachelor's degree" (U. S. Dept. of Education, 2015, para. 1).

Summary

This chapter introduced the plight of African Americans and their pursuit of

education. It also provided insights into the struggles of African American males within

the American educational system concerning their identity status and academic success.

Identification and conceptualization of key terms and variables were provided. This

chapter also introduced the research topic, statement of the problem, conceptual

framework, and research questions for the study.

Focusing on how African American males develop their identity status as students

and what implications, if any, this identity has for their educational matriculation is vital.

Furthermore, recognizing the role that a student's environment plays in their education

could possibly be beneficial to both African American male students and educators in general. As an educator, the researcher is troubled by the underachievement of African American male students.

The lack of academic success of African American male students is a critical issue and well-documented problem in the American education system. Educators, policymakers and government officials should make every effort to identify why African American male students are not achieving academic success within academia. Understanding challenges African American male students face could assist the stakeholders in providing interventions to assist those African American male students who are underachieving.

In terms of the conceptual framework for this study, Marcia's Theory of Identity Status was discussed in detail. Given the intermingled relationships associated with this study, Marcia's Theory of Identity Status (1966, 1980, 1983), is most appropriate for conducting this type of investigation. This is because this models "focuses on the psychosocial process of self-definition, the model is also cognitive-structural in that individuals move through stages of increasing cognitive complexity with regard to their self-identification" (Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998, p. 11).

The chapter also provided the rationale for this study, which is informed by extant research and the need to add to the accumulation of knowledge and to fill a critical research gap. The research suggested there have been few, if any, investigations into the factors mentioned above concerning educating African American males as perceived by

the males themselves. A review of the literature found in chapter two, supports the

theoretical footings for this study.

CHAPTER II:

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Research has shown that there is an array of factors (i.e., teacher expectations, parent-child communication, peer associations, etc.) that can contribute to the academic success of African American males (Berry & Asamen, 1989; Hill, 2001; Howard, 2003; Kirp, 2010; Spencer, 2005; Stewart, 2007; White, 2009). Additional factors as posited by several researchers (Barnes-Butler, Estrada-Martinez, Colin, & Jones, 2016; Carey, 2016; Cokley, McClain, Jones, & Johnson, 2016; Howard, Woodward, Bavarro, Haro, Bianca, Watson, Kenjus, Adrain, & Clarence, 2016) can also contribute to the academic success of African American males. Among these factors are family influences, cultural capital, along with demographic and psychological factors. Much of the literature regarding African American male academic success tends to focus on the need for academic remediation, but other factors make it difficult for African American males to achieve academic success in academia or coerce them to negotiate between a dominant culture and their own (i.e., institutional, structural and systemic racism factors). Specifically, student self-concept/ self-identity, academic language, family influence, institutional characteristics, student expectations, and technology readiness all impact the academic success of African American males (Award, 2007; Manning, Mayes, Vega & Hines, 2008; Okeke, 2009; Harris & Everett, 2016).

Extant research also establishes other obstacles facing African American males concerning their education such as nutrition, self-esteem, and teacher quality, which contribute to the lack of academic achievement (Bell, 2010; Case & Katz, 1991; Spicker,

Southern & Davis, 1997). Other problems range from poor academic preparation,

culturally insensitive environments for learning, to underrepresentation (i.e., school

administrators, principals & teachers who are African American males) within high

school and post-secondary institutions (Vinzant, 2009). Other challenges range from a

trust of teachers, and school funding to policies (Talley, 2009). Of these problems,

participants in this study were more likely to experience poor academic preparation,

which results from a history of inadequate funding for schools and a lack of well-

qualified teachers. Such problems can be ascribed to the academic demise of African

American males going from high school to college (Harper, 2009).

Given the purpose of this study, the literature review is organized by prevalent

themes and begins with spotlighting how the environment of African American males can

influence their perceptions of academic success. Presented under the umbrella of

environment is a review of language, family influences, self-concept, and identity. The

review will then focus on academic success among African American males, its

significance, and contributing factors (i.e., teacher & student expectations). Finally, the

discussion will focus on student engagement and the role that institutional characteristics

may have on African American male academic success.

Cultural and Identity Influences on African American Academic Outcomes

According to Berry and Candis (2013), "identity is not a static, but rather a socio-

dynamic, racialized, and historical construct" (p. 45). It is clear that the cultural

experiences and identity of African Americans can influence their educational outcomes

(Berry, 2005). This is particularly evident among African American males in their

educational pursuits (McDonald, 2007). While, "researchers have identified several external predictors of academic achievement among African American males, scant information relates to identity factors that correlate to academic achievement" (Lloyd, 2004, para.1). For example, the 2014-2015 high school graduation rate for all students attending public high schools in the United States was 83.2% (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). This percentage decreased to 76.1% when data were disaggregated to show low-income students (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Finally, the data revealed another alarming finding; the high school graduation rate for African American males was 69% (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

The aforementioned quantitative data fail to take into account factors that may contribute to such dismal statistics; factors that numbers may be unable to capture. Research on the role of pre-college programs such as Upward Bound on the experiences and academics outcomes of program participants could provide insight into non-quantitative data that can be of great value to all stakeholders. For example, Kinney-Walker (2015) found that "Upward Bound provides an environment conducive to forming a students' identity" (para. 3). Thus, suggesting that there is more to the narrative. By providing a counter-narrative, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of African American male Upward Bound participants to determine their identity status and to document their perceptions of Upward Bound's influence on their academic outcomes, which might be viewed as a counter narrative to that informed by some of the existing research. Such a counter narrative would ensue from an examination of the influence of Upward Bound on African American male

students' coping strategies and the extent to which these have relevance for both their concept of self and academic outcomes.

Environment

Environment is referred to as the surroundings in which a person lives (Gallagher, 1993). A person's environment can influence their way of thinking, feeling, and believing (Kluchohn, 1958). In regard to the environments of African Americans, it has its own exceptional and dynamic distinctions based on past experiences (i.e., slavery, religion, segregation, and civil rights). A student's environment plays a role in their education, especially the education of African American males (Townsend, 2000). For African American males, their environment can influence behavior. Moreover, the "environment of poverty" from which a great deal of African American males are born into can be detrimental to their education. Some researchers (Bell, 2010; Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2007; Jackson & Moore, 2008) believe if schools understood the phenomenon of a student's environment, they could better serve African American male students and reverse the lower educational performance level of this group as compared to their peers. Noguera (2003) suggested,

> If we accept the idea that human beings have the capacity to resist submission to cultural patterns, demographic trends, environmental pressures and constraints, bring greater clarity to the actions that can be taken by schools and community organizations to support that academic achievement of African American males could be the key to changing academic outcomes and altering the direction of negative trends for this segment of the population. (p. 433)

If educators infuse an understanding and appreciation of the environment in which African American male students hail from, within their academic curriculum, the results could challenge many of the negative academic trends associated with this group. The need for culturally sensitive academic instruction cannot be overestimated when teach African American male students (Ellis, 2011).

Language

Language is crucial in defining one's (i.e., student) identity. According to Fisher, Rothenberg, and Frey (2008), language is how we think, process information, and remember; it's our operating system. Vygotsky (1962) suggested that thinking develops into words in a number of phases. Therefore, speech is a representation of thinking. Language, words, and phrases, utilized by a student in their home environment, which ultimately carries over into the classroom (Cole, 2008). Academic language is viewed as a cultural artifact and tool for communicating in academia in contrast to a student's language (Haynes, 2007).

In their research, Grosser and Nel (2013) found a strong correlation between academic language and critical thinking skills of first-year college students. Most cognitive acts involve language. Students must be able to think and express their logic. Research views such expressions as academic language (Amos, 2014). Several scholars have observed the need for students to become accustomed to the use, function, and purpose of academic language, which are core parts of inculcating academic values (Bizzell, 1992; Duff, 2010; Parkinson, 2013). Studies such as Silva, Weinburgh, and Smith (2013) revealed that a concerted effort to teach academic language could be

directly beneficial to students in non-humanities-based courses. Their study involved students that learned a specific academic language applicable to science instruction. In K-12 education and higher education, this approach could be appropriate.

Waterstone (2008) advocated for "rethinking of education and academic literacy not in terms of skills and effectiveness, but rather at the level of epistemology, identity, and power" (p. 53). The researcher viewed language as a means by which a student can shape their identity and perception of knowledge and the world. In essence, the academic language should not impose an identity, but rather offer a tool with which to express identity. Providing the means of self-discovery should be the business of educators. Understanding a student's environment is critical to examining their language as it can hinder them academically. Therefore, based on the studies mentioned, it is vital to this study that the role of language is recognized.

Further research in this area may yield information regarding the lack of an understanding of the importance of a student's environment (i.e., language, values, etc.) during their academic matriculation. Moreover, a better understanding of academic language may reveal ways in which educators can be proactive in fostering improved student performance. Furthermore, these studies (Duff, 2010; Fisher, Rothenberg, & Frey, 2008; Grosser & Nel, 2013), while they are relevant and useful in talking about student identity, individual experiences were not explored. There were no published studies that attempted to explain the link between students' language at home, academic language, and academic performance. While African American males can face barriers

when academic language is not part of their daily environment, the published research has failed to consider this population of students exclusively.

Familial Influences

Parents have the greatest influence on their children's academic success (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). When parents are directly involved in the education of their children, they are more likely to achieve academic success, graduate from high school and attend college (Bridgeland, 2010). Frequently perpetrated by school systems, researchers have noted that defining standards of parental engagement have been set by privileged families, and not families of color (Auerbach, 2007). Minority parents, in particular, are less likely to build an academic relationship with their children than white parents, which ultimately impacts the number of minority children who achieve academic success and decide to attend college (Cole, 2014). A parental academic relationship refers to a parent being intellectual enough to assist his/her child with academic tasks (i.e., homework, writing papers, math, reading, science projects, etc.).

High parent efficacy has been shown to be beneficial to the welfare of all children regardless of their ethnic background (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). High parent efficacy refers to parents who have high aspirations for their children and are actively involved in their child's education. It is also important to note that the educational background of parents has been found to have an impact on the level of education a child attains. Broad (2015) stated, "the level of education influences parents' knowledge, beliefs, values, and goals about childrearing, so that a variety of parental behaviors are indirectly related to children's school performance" (p. 2). Therefore, the greater the educational attainment

of the parent, the more likely it is that the child will attend college (Smith & Fleming, 2006).

Familial Influences and African Americans. Feagin, Vera, and Imani (1996) pointed out that African American parents share similar values and concerns regarding the education of their children as other ethnic groups. The researchers noted, however, that African American parents and their children frequently face racial concerns that are not a part of the experience of Caucasians. For instance, African American families are confronted with racial concerns (i.e., parental unemployment, living in communities with high crime rates, health issues, etc.) when making college choices. African American parents have experienced numerous racial challenges in their lives, and these struggles become part of the lives of their children before and after making college decisions. Fegin et al. (1996) also indicated that African American parents view their children's decision to complete high school and attend college as a symbol of achievement against racism and an indication of their hopes and aspirations.

Familial Influences and African American Males. In terms of African American males, research has shown a direct relationship between parent efficacy and academic achievement. The direct relationship mentioned above is prevalent from elementary through high school, which leaves minority males at a major disadvantage because many of them have neither the encouragement nor the family support to inspire them to reach their enormous human potential (Tierney & Auerbach, 2005). Although parent involvement cannot take the place of strong academic counseling, it can increase

the potential that African American males can be academically successful (Smith & Fleming, 2006; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005).

When viewing the state of African American families with regards to African American males, Martin and Jefferson (2011) observed,

> The lack of access is a key contributor to the opportunity gap for Black males. Foremost among those opportunity gaps are: lack of access to highly competent adults -- both in terms of experience and relevant knowledge -- that can teach and guide Black male children and youth, lack of college pathway knowledge, and lack of labor pathway knowledge. (p. 32)

The authors further noted that for African American males to navigate the educational system, explicit classroom instruction and parental guidance are needed to reach their full academic potential. Explicit instruction is direct, and the students are active participants in their learning.

The studies above are examples of how familial influences can apply to our understanding of a student's educational performance. Further studies in this area may yield information regarding the lack of understanding the importance of a student's familial influences (i.e., aspirations, education level of parents, role models, etc.) during their academic matriculation. Moreover, because of the previously mentioned research, a better understanding of familial influences is needed in hopes of revealing ways in which educators can be proactive in fostering improved student performance in regard to African American males (Barnes-Butler, Estrada-Martinez, Colin, & Jones, 2016). Thus, implying the need for this study.

While several of the studies mentioned above focus on African American male students, none take into account the perspectives of the students themselves. Furthermore, existing research does not explore possible solutions to the issue(s) based upon input from African American male students.

Student Self-Concept and Identity

Using self-concept interchangeably with self-identity, Was and Isaacson (2008) found identity status to have a significant impact on academic achievement. Their research also indicated that those who were firmly committed to their missions as students with a clear sense of what they wanted to accomplish tended to complete assignments promptly and subsequently earned higher GPAs. However, students who have responsibilities outside of school tend to be burdened with daily issues such as survival, while students with no responsibilities could solely focus on their academics and their future (Jelenic, 2013).

Chorba, Was, and Isaacson (2012), in their research of 318 undergraduates (i.e., sophomores or juniors) at a large Midwest university and a largely female sample (74% of participants were female), observed that among adolescent and young adults, there was a correlation between academic identity status and academic behaviors. For example, "achieved academic identity was positively associated with the number of days and hours spent studying and negatively associated with depression and distractedness while studying" (Chorba, Was, & Isaacson, 2012, p.5). The researchers did not provide any ethnic identifying information on their research participants. Equally, Shanahan and Pychyl (2007) noted that students, of which 67.5% were female (no ethnic identifiers

were provided), with weakly defined student identities, had a greater tendency to leave their academic tasks incomplete. Procrastination was identified by Chorba, Was, and Isaacson as being one attribute of a weakly defined student identity. Procrastination can be attributed to students not being taught or never developing academic discipline in their formative years. The abovementioned research was presented because there was a dearth amount of literature on male students in an identical or closely related setting. In addition, the proposed study differs from the research mentioned above, as it will focus on males. Thus, filling a gap in the literature.

Further application of the importance of identity achievement based on commitment is evident in the research of Bliuc, Ellis, Goodyear, and Hendres (2011). They found that students who were juniors at a large metropolitan Romania university who had a strong social identification (i.e., sense of self based on group affiliations) as students demonstrated significant academic achievement. Students found to have weaker social identification tended to make minimal approaches to academic tasks and demonstrated significantly less academic achievement. The lesson suggested here is that students' solid perception of themselves as students may foster positive student behavior. Because of the research referenced, exploring and documenting such perceptions are central to this study.

Self-Concept and Identity of African American Male Students. African American male students "have a unique background that requires the recognition of history, race, environment and society influences on their development" (Lloyd, 2013, p. 39). In the United States, African American male students are not only expected to

undergo typical developmental experiences that are the hallmark of adolescence (i.e., physical growth, independence, & development) they are also coping with a world in which the likelihood they will experience racial prejudice is high (Brittian, 2012). In the field of education, having an understanding of self-concept and identity of African American male students is critical (Harper, 2012). Several studies (Bacon, 2011; Bell, 2009; Noble, Roberts & Sawyer, 2006; Sanchez & Roda, 2003) have examined the connection between student self-concept and academic success. Research by Lewis and Moore (2014) showed that higher levels of identity development mitigated less favorably academic outcomes of African American males in PreK-12 settings. Irving and Hudley (2008), also found that for African American male students, the development of a strong identity of self was consistent with academic achievement. Even fewer qualitative researchers have investigated and documented the perceptions of Upward Bound's influence on the academic outcomes of African American male students in a southern state plagued by poverty, a lack of financial resources for educational instruction, and institutions (i.e., K-12 & post-secondary). Studies focusing on student self-concept should be of interest to those who are concerned with the matriculation of African American males in the education arena, for developing a positive self-concept has often been cited as crucial to academic success (Was & Issacson, 2008). According to Kumari and Chamundeswari (2013), such studies are of importance because, "self-concept and achievement are dynamically interactive and reciprocal" (para. 1). It is vital to their academic success that African American males have a positive reflection of their being.

The studies above are examples of how research on student identity coupled with student achievement and the effectiveness of educational programs can be useful to educators. The research indicates that identity development can be of benefit in the effort to better educational outcomes for students (Bauman, Bustillos, Bensimon, Brown, & Bartee, 2005). Unfortunately, these studies failed to explore oppressed African American male students.

Academic Success of African American Males

Academic success is important for African American males because education is often viewed as hope, or referred to as the great equalizer. The achievement gap between African American males and their White counterparts measured by data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress 2011 Mathematics Grade 8 Assessment displayed, Black students normally scored lower than White students (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2012). Additionally, Feireman (2014) added, "Black males ages 18 and older make up just 5.5% of all college students and of that number, only one in six will receive a college degree (para. 2). Huggins (2015) further explained, "as a result of their academic shortcomings, African American males find themselves at an increased risk for unemployment and poverty and have become the most represented racial group in the United States prison system" (p. iii). Former Mississippi Governor William Winters said it best, "the only road out of poverty runs by the schoolhouse door" (Mississippi Center for Education, 2008, para. 4). According to Witters and Liu (2015), "the unemployment rate of African American men is 51.4 percent" (para. 1). Such a high unemployment rate is not unusual when only 59% of African American male's graduate

from high school nationally (Schott Foundation, 2015). Based on the percentages above, it is clearer as to why 28.1% of African American families live in poverty (Pavelcik, 2012). Further evidence by Toldson and Lewis (2012) suggested, education is the key for African American males in their effort to overcome many social, economic, and racial disparities within the United States.

As evidenced above, "research on African American males in education is generally relegated to explorations of the quantitative indicators of enrollment and attrition" (Davis, 1994, p.620). Several researchers (Wright, 2009; Henfield, 2011; Moore, III. & Flowers, 2012) have looked at changing the negative perception associated with African American male academic achievement and providing possible solutions to increase the academic achievement of African American males. Moreover, little is known about the qualitative experience(s) of African American males or their success, especially those who participate in the Upward Bound program. Furthermore, even less is known about their perceptions of academic success. Therefore, there is a need to qualitatively explore and document the educational experiences of African American males who participate in the Upward Bound program. Finally, Frederick Douglass said it best, "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men" (Blow, 2014, p. A19).

It is necessary to identify factors and approaches that can contribute to the academic success of African American males. The results from Huggins' study suggested a need for African American males to develop a sense of school connectedness and to foster meaningful relationships with their teachers. Additionally, Huggins (2015)

found, that participation in sports was perceived as being a part of a family, with shared goals for African American male students. Not only was the role of sports revealed, but also it was discovered that teachers who had high expectations, caring attitudes, and offered support were vital to the academic success of African American males. Research by Rolland (2011) discovered, factors (i.e., caring teachers, positive learning environments, parent, peer, & community support) that influenced student success. African American mentors, teachers, and coaches would also be of benefit to African American male students. Of particular importance, Huggins' research discovered self-efficacy as being of utmost importance in the academic success of African American males. The connectedness between parental involvement, participation in sports, and knowing a teacher's expectations can be nurtured to build confidence leading to efficacy for African American male students.

Teacher Expectations

A critical area of concern related to student achievement refers to the expectations of students. For years, the relationship between expectations and achievement has been predominant in the educational research literature. The overarching theme of that investigation is that high expectations for students by their teachers tend to yield high student performance outcomes (Smith & Fleming, 2006; Tkatchov & Pollnow, 2008), and a lack of high expectations tend to foster low-performance outcomes (Strayhorn, 2010). A key to such success ties into the communication of high expectations of educators to students. Tkatchov and Pollnow (2008) found that teachers' high

expectations for all students and their differentiation of instructions addressing multiple learning styles can increase academic success in all instructional settings.

There must be a sharing of these high expectations between teachers and students. To that end, recent research has examined the alignment of student expectations and teacher expectations. Koslow (2010) studied the alignment of students' academic, social, and career-related expectations with teacher expectations of student success at a small four-year college. The participants (i.e., traditional students who resided on campus) in Koslow's research revealed similar if not identical expectations between students and teachers. The study also revealed the value of setting and communicating reasonable expectations for students. Teachers who have reasonable expectations of students present an invaluable phenomenon within academia because it demonstrates that the students are central to their own learning process (Gutierrez, 2016).

Student Expectations of African American Males. The body of data from research by Liu, Cheng, Chen, and Wu (2009), suggested that educators must be mindful of the expectations that African American male students, in particular, bring with them to the academy, the expectations that we as educators hold, and, most importantly, how these expectations are communicated by individual educators and by the institution as a whole (Brophy, 2004). Of prime importance is having high expectations and ensuring that the African American male students adopt those same hopes. In the real world, society has created and maintained a negative perception of African American males that eventually spills over into the classroom.

Harper (2012) summarized the importance of studying how low student expectations and other social factors have adversely impacted the success of African American males in education,

> For nearly a decade, I have argued that those who are interested in Black male student success have much to learn from Black men who have actually been successful. To increase their educational attainment, the popular one-sided emphasis on failure and low-performing Black male undergraduates must be counterbalanced with insights gathered from those who somehow manage to navigate their way to and through higher education, despite all that is stacked against them—low teacher expectations, insufficient academic preparation for college-level work, racist and culturally unresponsive campus environments, and the debilitating consequences of severe underrepresentation, to name a few. (p. 2)

One focus of the low expectations of African American males is the "stereotype threat" (Chavous, Bernat, Schmeelk, Caldwell, Kohn, & Zimmerman, 2003). Chavous and his colleagues noted that one scholar perceived the stereotype threat as "occurring when negative group stereotypes are salient in a particular situation or context" (p. 1077). A threat in this context represents the individuals' expectations of being viewed in ways that are consistent with stereotypes

Most stereotypes are reflective of a group's environment and/or culture. However, as Strayhorn (2010) pointed out,

> African American males continue to be described with words that have negative connotations such as dysfunctional, at-risk, developmentally disadvantaged,

uneducable, enraged, and an endangered species. Some Black men internalize

these messages, which become self-defeating and self-threatening and which may

undermine their academic performance. (p. 311)

The studies mentioned above demonstrate that there is without question an

expectation issue within academia about African American male students and their

matriculation. Each of the referenced studies provides insight into the scholarly research

surrounding this topic. However, the research again focuses on some variables (e.g.,

teachers, communication, etc.) and omits the student. In order words, the research does

not take into account the perspective(s) of the research participants themselves (i.e.,

African American male students). Therefore, there is a gap in the literature surrounding

this topic.

Student Engagement

"If you don't engage students, you quickly lose them" (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh &

Whitt, 2005, p. 70). "Students learn more when they are intensely involved in their

education" and have opportunities to reflect and apply what they are learning in various

setting" (NSSE, 2015, para. 1). Schools across the country are creating innovative,

informed data programs that have become models for increasing student engagement

(Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2012). The concept of student

engagement differs from social identity, and student development in that student

engagement relates to students' direct involvement in learning. In other words, student

engagements primarily concerned is with student experiences as they become actively

involved in school (i.e., K12 & Postsecondary) and or extracurricular activities.

Recent literature provided several definitions and descriptions of student engagement, many of which take into account social identity and student development. For example, Trowler (2010) indicated that student engagement has primarily focused on optimizing student experiences and learning outcomes based on connections between efforts and resources invested by both the students and their institutions. Coates (2007) asserted that student engagement is a broad construct that encompasses students' academic and non-academic experiences. Specific examples of student engagement identified by Coates included active and collaborative learning, participating in extracurricular activities, communicating with teachers, getting involved in clubs, and feeling connected to and supported by the school. Similarly, Quaye (2009) noted that although student engagement is rooted in student involvement, it entails more than involvement or participation. That is, engaged students, learn along with their feelings, sense-making, and activity. When students act without these feeling, they become disassociated.

Engaging students in learning draws on what educators know about human motivation (Brophy, 2004; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). In contrast to social identity and student development, student engagement addresses how schools can increase students' intrinsic motivation. Specifically, student engagement focuses on influencing students' thoughts, feelings, and decisions about school. The goal is to increase the positive thoughts and feelings and help students to develop coping strategies that lead to academic success. For students who face difficulty along the way, the responsibility of the school

is to identify and minimize experiences that increase avoidance motivation (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2008).

Like both social identity and student development, the concept of student engagement has psychosocial roots. Drawing on Bloom (1956), Fredricks, Blumenfield, and Paris (2004), postulated three dimensions to student engagement:

- Behavioral Engagement: consists of involvement or participation in extracurricular activities and is essential to achieving academic success.

- Emotional Engagement: encompasses positive and negative feelings towards learning, classmates, instructors, and the school that influences the student's motivation to do work.

- Cognitive Engagement: involves the willingness to invest the time and energy needed to comprehend difficult tasks and master skills.

Marcia's paradigm has roots in psychosocial theory; therefore, the aforementioned psychosocial roots as presented by the researchers (Bloom, 1956; Fredricks, Blumenfield & Paris, 2004) are of value in understanding the phenomena under study. It is important to point out that the above dimensions can be either positive or negative as they relate to student engagement. For instance, in the behavioral engagement dimension, complying with policies, norms, and practices could indicate that the student internalizes and approves of a student organization. This form of behavioral engagement is a productive student outcome. On the other hand, behaviors that challenge organizational policies and procedures and become disruptive can be counterproductive (Trowler, 2010).

To illustrate the differences in behaviors, Coates (2007) organized student behaviors into typologies—not found in social identity or student development. The four typologies include: (a) intense (students highly involved in university study who see their learning environment as responsive and supportive), (b) independent (students who are academically engaged with fewer social interests), (c) collaborative (students who are more interested in social activities than cognitive forms of interaction), and (d) passive (students who only engage in general activities connected to productive learning). It is essential that student personnel become knowledgeable of the various typologies to enhance students' social identity, offer programs and services to foster positive growth and development, and ultimately motivate students to become engaged in a manner that leads to positive student outcomes.

A common feature of student engagement, also found in social identity and student development, is that both the student and the school (i.e., K12 & Postsecondary) play a key role in ensuring positive outcomes. Although the school may offer programs and services to motivate students, students are ultimately responsible for acting upon their learning experience. "Student engagement has two key components that contribute to student success" (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2010, p.9). The first component focuses on the dedication (i.e., time & effort) of students to their academic work and other experiences that promote student success (Bureau, Ryan, Ahren, Sharp, & Torres, 2011). The second component is the way in which a school allocates its resources and organizes learning opportunities and services to induce student participation in, and their benefit from such engagement activities (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2010). Flecther

(2017) revealed, student involvement is a distinctive component of the school environment.

One strategy that schools (i.e., K12 & Postsecondary) have undertaken is the infusion of electronic technology to engage students. New developments in technology allow students to become engaged with their coursework, peers, and teachers. As Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt (2005) noted, "used appropriately, instructional technology can increase the amount of time a student spends on a given subject" (p. 73). For example, Jackson State University (JSU) launched a groundbreaking Technology Advantage Scholarship Initiative that provided each incoming freshman with an iPad at the beginning of the Fall 2012 semester. According to The Jacksonian (2014), Dr. Deborah Dent, Vice President for Information Technology at JSU stated, "since the iPad initiative began, researchers have seen a seven percent rise in student performance" (p. 11).

During a recent interview, Hawkins stated, "What's more exciting, is students are more engaged in class and working collaboratively" (The Jacksonian, 2014, p. 11). She also added, "they come to class ready to have a dialogue because they're able to research topics easier; they have a global library at their fingertips" (The Jacksonian, 2014, p. 11). Other institutions choose to utilize course management software such as Blackboard or WebCT. Each of these software platforms makes it possible for students to access their classes, discussion boards, and course materials from remote locations. Each of the referenced studies tells the researcher to look closely at how engaging the students feel their education experience is.

The studies above are examples of how student engagement applies to our understanding of a student's educational performance. Further research in this area may yield information regarding the gap in the literature. The referenced studies fail to consider or document what the students themselves have to say. Furthermore, the research did not primarily focus on students who are African American males.

Institutional Characteristics

McDonald (2011) provided insight into ways that institutional characteristics contributed to the social and cultural isolation that African American males experienced in school (i.e., K 12 & Postsecondary). McDonald suggested institutions have an enormous influence on the socialization of African American students. Bush and Bush (2010) assert, "scholars, as well as others that look at African American male achievement, have not adequately explored institutional characteristics as variables and limit their studies to the dichotomies between cognitive and non-cognitive variables" (2010, p. 41). Formal organizational structures, such as school size, peers, teachers and student interactions, resources, and goals impact the academic experiences and achievement of African American students.

Frierson, Peason, and Wynch (2009) indicated that African American males experience many social problems in school. Specifically, they are stereotyped, lack emotional stability, and become victims of a culturally disengaging climate that ultimately affects their ability to achieve academic success. The authors also noted that because of the many social barriers African Americans males face, they are far behind their African American female counterparts. Therefore, the authors recommended that

schools (i.e., K-12 & post-secondary) improve some of their services to retain more African American males, including providing tutors and enhancing teacher-student relations. Slater (1994) noted that failure among African American males to attain a high school diploma or college degree would eventually "undermine their status in the black family and further hasten the disintegration of the traditional black family with all the social and economic consequences which that implies" (p. 52-53).

McDonald (2011) made it clear that formal and informal institutional characteristics, particularly the racial composition of the school, behaviors and racial attitudes of other students, and opportunities for social and academic interactions with community stakeholders, influence the lives of African American male students. Socialization agents, such as teachers, students, coaches, and administrators play an essential role in determining whether or not African American male students are successful academically within the school (i.e., K-12 & post-secondary) setting.

While the studies mentioned above focus on African American male students and their experiences within a school setting, none take into account the perspectives of the students themselves. Furthermore, the research did not explore possible solutions to the issue(s) faced by African American male students based on their input.

Summary

Indeed, African American males face a myriad of problems in regard to their education. Research shows that far too often they find themselves negotiating their African American beliefs to cope with the demands of the dominant culture. Geertz (1973) stated, "there is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture" (p. 39).

Glenn (2009) noted that schools (i.e., K12 & Postsecondary) must develop programs and services for cultural affirmation and cultural education as well as provide mentors who understand and appreciate the experiences of African American males.

The responsibility of addressing issues related to cultural identity, social isolation, and academic success of African American males falls in the hands of educators, policymakers, government officials, and parents. "The educational problems and issues that African American males experience in elementary and secondary schools are not endemic to those educational settings. Similar trends can be noted in postsecondary education" (Palmer, Davis, Moore, & Hilton, 2010, p.111). High schools must provide rigorous curricula, colleges must offer opportunities for African American males to become engaged in social and academic activities, and African American males must search for ways to overcome the institutional, academic, and social barriers to achieving academic success.

After synthesizing all of the data and literature, there is one thing that stands out more than anything else: the future of African American males is in jeopardy. "African American males are more likely than any other group to be subjected to negative forms of treatment in school, the message is clear; individuals of their race and gender may excel in sports, but not in math or history" (Noguera, 2003, p. 445). For many African American males, schools have become sites of alienation, resistance, silence, and failure (Howard, 2003; Song, 2014). Kohl (1994) indicated "many disenfranchised students consciously make the decision to not learn in schools when they feel their cultural knowledge and identity are invalidated, disrespected, and not viewed as a conduit to their

learning" (p. 134). Researchers such as Heath (1983), Gay (2000), Ford (1995), and Irvine (1990) suggested, "the dissonance that exists between school and a students' home environment is the primary reason for the academic underachievement and social maladjustment of racially diverse students" (Howard, 2003, p. 4). According to Palmer et al. (2010), "various theories and philosophies have attempted to provide an understanding regarding African American males' intellectual disengagement (i.e., unemployment, illiteracy, educational disengagement)" (p. 112).

A review of the literature demonstrated that there are a number of gaps in the literature with respect to identity status and the perceptions of Upward Bound's influence on academic success among African American male students who participate in the Upward Bound program in a southern state. Of note, much of the literature focuses on African American males in urban settings (Wright, 2009; Henfield, 2011; Moore, III. & Flowers, 2012). Most importantly, none of the research (Sanchez & Roda, 2003; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005; Liu, Cheng, Chen, & Wu, 2009; Bacon, 2011) took into account the perspectives of the students (i.e., African American male Upward Bound students) themselves. The literature (Bauman, Bustillos, Bensimon, Brown, & Bartee, 2005; Noble, Roberts & Sawyer, 2006; Kumari & Chamundeswari, 2013) on the identity status of the students coupled with student achievement and effectiveness of educational programs failed to explore oppressed African American male students. Literature (Jones, Johnson-Yale, Millermaier, & Pérez, 2009; Goode, 2010) that focused on the socioeconomic background of students did not consider how African American males perceived the influence of their socioeconomic background and environment on their

academic success. Therefore, important to this study is the discovery of those factors that

support the academic success of African American males as perceived by them.

Additionally, given the substantial amount of initiatives (both educational and social)

designed to support African American males in education; it is important to investigate

how these students develop their student identity status. Further, documenting the role of

Upward Bound in the experiences of African American male students is vital. Thus, it is

critical to discover the perceptions of academic success of the students.

CHAPTER III:

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of African American male Upward Bound participants to determine their identity status and to document their perceptions of Upward Bound's influence on their academic outcomes. This chapter has the following sections: research questions, research design, units of analysis, participants, data collection, data analysis, and a summary of the chapter's content.

Research Questions

Based on the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, and the conceptual framework, the following research questions emerged:

Grand Tour Question: What are the experiences of African American male students who participate in an Upward Bound Program?

Sub Question 1: What can the experiences of the African American male Upward Bound participants reveal about their identity status?

Sub Question 2: What are the perceptions of African American male Upward Bound participants of the program's influence on their academic outcomes?

Research Design

"Qualitative research can help researchers to access the thoughts and feelings of research participants, which can enable development of an understanding of the meaning that people ascribe to their experiences" (Sutton & Austin, 2015, p. 226). Therefore, a

qualitative research approach was the chosen method for this study to adequately describe the experiences of eight African American male Upward Bound participants and their perceptions of Upward Bound's impact on their identity status and academic success. Harrison, Burks, Franklin, and Mills (2017) stated, "the fundamental goal of qualitative research is to conduct an in-depth analysis of an issue, within its context with a view to understand the issue from the perspective of participants" (p. 19).

A qualitative study involving data collection by way of semi-structured interviews and a focus group was conducted to address the research questions mentioned above. A qualitative inquiry is the most appropriate approach to use participants' voices in gathering descriptions of their experiences and to explore how they interpret Upward Bound's influence on their academic success. According to Harrison et al. (2017), "qualitative research is most often described as qualitative inquiry" (p. 18). Therefore, a qualitative approach was appropriate because data were gathered about the experiences of a previously understudied and unique population (i.e., African American male Upward Bound participants from a southeastern state). A qualitative study generates valuable descriptions for understanding a problem that has not previously been well studied (Goes, 2013). Semi-structured interview questions were used. "Semi-structured interviews are used when the research would benefit from a fairly open framework and when more useful information can be obtained from a conversational two-way communication with the participants" (Pathak & Intratat, 2012, p.4). Using a semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to explain the experiences of the participants in their own words. Following the semi-structured interviews, a focus group discussion was held. According

to Jamshed (2014), "group discussions have some intrinsic worth of expressing the opinions openly by the participants" (p. 87).

Qualitative research studies are widely known as a method of inquiry rooted in the premise that reality consists of events and objects as understood or perceived by ones conscious (Mastin, 2008). The above-mentioned approach placed emphasizes on human actions, motives, and perceptions of self (Linsenmayer, 2011). This study aligned with the tenets of qualitative research (i.e., perceptions, etc.) in that through dialogue, it sought to discover how African American male Upward Bound participants constructed meaning(s) from their experiences. Furthermore, this study aligned with qualitative research as it was "aimed at attaining a profound understanding of the nature or meaning of daily experiences" from which themes were derived (Crotty, 1998, p. 25). Moreover, a qualitative study in general allowed for the "capturing the complexity of a particular event, program, individual, or place" (Rallins & Rossman, 1998, p. 175). McDonald (2011) concluded, "quantitative methods do not allow researchers to understand how African American students interpret their experiences" (p. 5). Furthermore, unlike a quantitative study, in a qualitative study, the point is not to measure a matter, but to make sense of it.

Participants

In a qualitative study, the units of analysis are the participants under study. Yin (2003) explained such units might vary from the abstract (e.g., relationships, decisions, communities) to more concrete (e.g., individuals, schools, or organizations). For this particular study, African American male high school students enrolled in an Upward

Bound Program represent the units of analysis. The participants in this study were current African American male high school students ranging in age from 14 to 18 years old and in grades 9th-12th. As indicated above, participants were currently enrolled and participated in the Upward Bound program at Southeastern State University, a Historically Black College and University located in the southern United States. Each participant received the services offered through Upward Bound, including tutoring, career and personal counseling, exposure to cultural events, and other educational offerings necessary for advancing students through the educational pipeline. The participants will also have taken part in a year-round (academic year component) program that required them to meet on Saturdays during the normal academic year (AY) on the college campus. Upward Bound also provides a summer residential program located on the college campus that affords the students opportunities for academic, cultural, and social enrichment in which the participants will have taken part.

Profile of Participants

The eight students who participated in this study were all African American males but had diverse social influences, educational experiences, and perceptions about school.

Participant I

Jordan, participant I, was a 16-year old male high school student who lived with his mother and extended family members. Jordan has one sister who is seven. His mother graduated from high school and enrolled in college but did not finish. She enlisted in the U.S. National Guard and works full-time. Most of his friends are African Americans who live in the same rural community.

Participant II

Jake, participant II, was a 16-year old male high school student who grew up in a small town. He lived with his grandparents and had one brother who is 24 years old. Jake's brother graduated from high school but did not attend college. Jake's mother graduated from high school and obtained a college degree. She is currently employed as a police officer.

Participant III

James, participant III, was a 17-year old male high school student who grew up in a small town. He lived with his mother, a college graduate, and four younger siblings. His mother is employed as a social worker.

Participant IV

Kiree, participant IV, was a 17-year old male high school student. He grew up in an urban area and lived with his mother and father. She is a college educated social worker, and his father is a non-college graduate who is currently unemployed.

Participant V

Maurice, participant V, is a 17-year old male high school student who grew up in a small rural community and lived with his mother. He has two sisters and one brother, all of whom are more than 10 years older than him. His siblings have assisted with raising him at one time or another and serve as a source for advice. Maurice indicated his mother is a college graduate who currently works as a manager in a grocery store.

Participant VI

Joshua, participant VI, was a 16-year old male high school student. He grew up in a small town with four siblings, two brothers, and two sisters. His mother who graduated from high school but did not attend college was the sole provider for their family. She is employed as a carpenter.

Participant VII

Derek, participant VII, was 16 years old male high school student. He is a single child and was raised by his mother in a small town. His mother graduated from high school. She is currently unemployed. His father did not complete high school.

Participant VIII

Kevin, participant VIII, was a 17-year old male high school student, who was raised and educated in a small town. He has two siblings. His mother was the only person in her family to graduate from college.

Data Collection

To collect data for this study, the researcher first obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Morgan State University and Southeastern University. Next, I met with the director of the Upward Bound Program at Southeastern State University to discuss the scope of the study. After IRB approval was received from the director of Upward Bound and Southeastern State, I invited program participants to volunteer for this study during a Saturday session general assembly. I provided the volunteers with both an assent and parental consent form. The forms provided the overall scope of the

study, what would be required of the participants, my contact information and the contact information for my dissertation chair.

Data were gathered during individual interviews that were based on the three-interview series as designed by Dolbeare and Schuman (Schuman, 1982). The three-interview series is an in-depth interviewing model that gives meaning to the experiences of people by putting those experiences into context (Seidman, 2006). A focus group preceded the third individual interview. A copy of the interview protocol can be found in Appendix A.

The initial interview assessed the participant's life history to provide an experiential context. Such context allowed the research participants to inform the researcher of their life history (i.e., age, family background, social relationships, etc.) and how they felt about the Upward Bound program. The intent of the second interview was to allow the participants to recall details of an experience within the context of its occurrence. Occurrences focusing on the participants' feelings about school, their teachers, and the impact of Upward Bound on their matriculation was the topic of discussion. Participants discussed the meaning of their experience(s) in the final interview.

The first two interviews established a context that allowed the meaning yielded from the third interview to be "contextually grounded" (Mishler, 1986, p. 117). The third interview followed the conclusion of the program and encouraged students to reflect upon the meaning of their completed experience in the Upward Bound program. Throughout each interview, however, the interviewee gave meaning to their experience by expressing

it through language (Vygotsky, 1987). "The series allows for a participant to relate who they are (their history) with what they did (details of their experiences) and connect these to what their experiences mean to them (reflection upon meaning)" (Rubrecht, 2006, p. 145).

Another intended outcome for the multiple interviews was to foster a rapport with the participants. Through the series of interviews, each participant gained insight into their experiences, perceptions, and feelings. Thus, not only did the researcher gain valuable data, each participant learned more about themselves as well. The mutually enlightening kind of human interaction was the inherent product of the interview (Seidman, 2006). Additionally, the use of multiple interviews reduced the possibility that the entire study became distorted by the circumstances of a single day. If for example, my mood or the participants' mood caused a distraction on a particular day the entire outcome of the study would not be compromised. Thus, adding validity to the interviews.

The interviews took place on the campus of the host university (Southeastern State University) of the Upward Bound program. Since the Upward Bound program is year-round, the interviews occurred at weekly intervals (e.g., first week, second week, and third week).

The constant comparative method served as the methodological basis for this study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Thus, a preliminary analysis of the emerging data occurred during the interviews. The data insertion provided me (the researcher) with the opportunity to introduce questions in subsequent interview sessions that either reinforced

or refuted developing hypotheses. Based on information from the data insertion, changes could be made if necessary, for interview questions.

Research participants were invited to participate in a focus group that served as the culmination of the interviews. "Focused group interviews are small group discussions that concentrate on specific topics. Small groups encourage collaboration among individuals, create memorable learning experiences, increase learner participation, and limit anxiety" (McClure, 2002, para. 9). Each of the eight participants participated in the focus group. Questions for the focus group arose from different responses or lack thereof as identified by me (the researcher) during individual interviews. Also, research participants were given an opportunity to elaborate on questions from their interviews collectively.

Data Analysis and Presentation

A transcript was developed based on responses to the interview questions and reviewed. A word document was then created to identify the experiences of the participants based on significant statements from each interview (Creswell, 2007). A color-coded font was utilized to identify similar and relevant experiences among the participants (Moustakas, 1994). The above-referenced document was also reviewed to remove any possible duplication of statements. The significant statements were then grouped into clusters of meaning (Moustakas, 1994). Next, the clusters were coded using open coding. Codes were combined to form overarching themes that grasped the core of the participants' experiences. Summary themes of the data were presented with direct quotes from the participants to illustrate the meaning of their words (Riemen, 1986).

This process is also referred to as textual description (Creswell, 2007). Emerging themes were presented after being grouped into categories. A coding frequency table was implemented to keep track of the coded data.

The data analysis took place with the assistance of researchers from the University of Pittsburg's Qualitative Data Analysis Program (QDAP). QDAP specifically assists with storage of data, access to ATLAS.ti software (qualitative analysis tool used on large bodies of graphical, audio and textual data), and guidance for coding and theme development. QDAP provided a "PC-based workbench that supports project management, enables multiple coders to collaborate on a single project, and generates output that facilitates the analysis process" (University of Pittsburg, 2014, para. 1). Collaborating with QDAP for analysis of the data will add validity, objectivity, and creditability to the research.

Data Validity and Trustworthiness

In all fields of research, validity and trustworthiness are critical. Moreover, these two areas are also of much concern. Merriam (2009) suggested, "these concerns can be approached through careful attention to the study and the way in which data are collected, analyzed and interpreted" (p. 210). The presentation of findings is also another focal point of validity. Therefore, validation is necessary to "assess the accuracy of the findings" (Creswell, 2007, p.206).

To understand the participants through in-depth interviews, ensure data validity and trustworthiness, interviews were scheduled weekly. This weekly schedule would minimize the likelihood that any negative experiences on the part of the participants'

daily routine could adversely affect the data. During the interviews, I would often repeat the responses provided by the participants to ensure accuracy. Furthermore, the interview transcripts and data analysis notes were shared with the participants. These documents were shared with the participants for review, verification of accuracy, and corroboration of my interpretations.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of African American male Upward Bound participants to determine their identity status and to document their perceptions of Upward Bound's influence on their academic outcomes. This qualitative study employed semi-structured interviews to collect data from African American male students participating in the Upward Bound Program located at Southeastern State University. In addition to the individual interviews, the participants were invited to take part in a focus group session. The African American male students were potential first-generation college students from low-income families. The participants' responses were reviewed and coded using open coding. The codes were combined to create themes.

CHAPTER IV:
FINDINGS

This qualitative study explored the experiences of African American male

Upward Bound participants to determine their identity status and document their

perceptions of Upward Bound's influence on their academic outcomes. The eight

participants were African American male high school students, ages 14 to 18 years old,

and in grades 9th-12th. Participants were enrolled in the Upward Bound program at

Southeastern State University, an Historically Black University located in the Southern

United States. Each participant received tutoring, career and personal counseling,

exposure to cultural events, and other educational offerings necessary for advancing

students through the educational pipeline. The participants also engaged in a year-round

(academic year component) program that required them to meet on Saturdays during the

regular academic year (AY) on the college campus.

The Experiences of African American Male Upward Bound Participants

The grand tour research question was concerned with the experiences of African

American male Upward Bound participants. Each student resides in what is described by

the U.S. Census Bureau (2016) as the poorest state in North America. According to the

U.S. Census Bureau (2016), this state has the highest poverty rate (20.8%) and the

seventh highest unemployment rate (5.8%) in North America. More specifically, the

congressional district, which the students call home, is one of the poorest regions in the

country (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). The median household income is $34,392 and only

19.3% of the total population (456,953) who are 25 years and older possess a bachelor's

degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). The local public-school districts have

received overall student performance letter grades of "C" and "F" from the state's Department of Education (Mississippi Department of Education, 2017).

The eight participants in this study experienced positive social and academic experiences in the Upward Bound program. Most participants indicated that the academic year and summer components of Upward Bound provided skills that helped improve their grades and enhanced their self-concept, or identity. Kinney-Walker (2015) concluded, "Upward Bound provides an environment conducive to student identity development and learning" (p. 134). Program participants' also purported that being African American males was irrelevant to their academic achievement for two reasons. First, the high schools they attend are 99% African American. Which simply results in intra-group competition that might not necessarily be predicated on high achievement standards. Second, they participate in the Upward Bound program, which provides additional services (i.e., one-on-one tutoring, mentoring, test prep, exposure) needed or absent in their high schools. The African American male participants had friends who were not in Upward Bound, but these friendships did not impact their experiences in Upward Bound because they were able to meet new friends within the program, while maintaining their previous friendships outside of the program. Being able to surround themselves with like-minded individuals, despite the geographical location of their homes, helped the students develop both academically and socially within the Upward Bound program. This development was based on learning about each other, sharing ideas, coexisting, and working as part of a team for the duration of the program. Research has shown that positive encouragement by peers and shared aspirations were

beneficial to the academic success of African American male students (Crawford 2016; Harper, 2006). According to the participants', they benefited from the above-mentioned academic/social development and participation in Upward Bound gave them a "head start" that they would not have otherwise received.

According to participant responses, Upward Bound was extremely important in their lives, but was not solely responsible for their positive social and academic experiences. Participants' credited their parents and other family members, high school teachers, and non-Upward Bound friends as essential factors in making their experiences rewarding and insightful. The African American Male Theory captures the above-mentioned factors under its microsystem. The microsystem focuses on systems that "can be physical, emotional, and ideological that may affect individual development" (Bush & Bush, 2013, p.8).

Experiences of African American Male Upward Bound Participants and Their Identity Status

Table 1: *Identity Themes Table*

Identity Themes
Motivation to Work Harder Personal Insight Emotionally Supportive

The grand tour research question was concerned with the experiences of African American male Upward Bound participants. From the descriptions of their experiences,

an attempt was made to determine the identity status of each student. It was also important to focus on what influence, if any, that the Upward Bound Program has on the identity status of the African American male students who participated in the program. During the interviews, students were asked to identify factors from their experiences in the Upward Bound that helped them. Based on their responses, the researcher determined their identity status. Interview responses signaled codes and specific themes evolved as indicated in table 1 displayed above. Section IV (Upward Bound), V (Upward Bound Summer Component), and VIII (Upward Bound Academic Year Component) of the Interview Protocol were used to answer question one posed by this study. Influences are always present when focusing on developing an identity status (Marcia, 1966). Various factors influence identity status development (Waterman, 1999). Said factors vary from one student to another.

Themes were developed based on the responses of the students. The themes that emerged were, motivation to work harder, personal insight, and emotionally supportive. Based on each of the students' descriptions of their experiences, the researcher determined the themes as mentioned above were central influences that the Upward Bound program had on their identity status.

From their experiences, as described by the eight African American male students, the researcher discovered that in one way or another the Upward Bound program had a positive influence on their identity status as students. Viewed through the lens of Marcia's theory, identity status is context specific. Therefore, Marcia's theory

allows the researcher to focus on the participants' identity status within an academic

context. For example, Jordan said,

> It's a great program to achieve academic goals. The program has influenced the
> *way I feel about school*, it makes me *feel good about myself* and have a *purpose*
> *as a student*. There were many times we had motivation sessions that focused on
> the struggles of African Americans. During one of the summer sessions, we were
> also taught ways to *recognize self-worth*. I thought this was a good idea. I also
> thought that the motivation speeches from community leaders were really helpful
> because the *speakers were able to identify with us*. They made us *feel good about*
> *ourselves* and helped us recognize that we have a purpose in life.

Previous research by Gordon, Iwamoto, Ward, Potts and Boyd (2010) also provide

support for the roles of after school and pre-college programs in the identity development

and academic achievement of Black male students. Maurice asserted, "once my

academic skills improved, my self-esteem and self-concept improved." The students

made a connection between understanding and developing who they are as individuals to

become better students. Research by Witherspoon, Speight, and Thomas (1997)

postulated that the identity status of African American male students influenced their

academic achievement. Joshua noted, "I gained a lot of insight about myself during the

summer because we had many activities to help improve our social skills. All this helped

improve my self-concept." This connection as implied by the students suggested that

while they had some idea of their identity status before joining the Upward Bound

program, the program aided them in achieving their identity status. Caldwell's and

Siwatu's (2003) work support the aforementioned findings, as they discovered that during

the Upward Bound seminar, identity is discussed to help the students learn about

themselves and many benefited from the seminars. Identity achieved refers to individuals

who have experienced commitment after exploration. Jordan added, "before Upward

Bound, I was not committed to anything, but now I am." Joshua agreed, stating, "I have

skills and contributions to make like anyone else, and I'm committed to doing just that."

Moreover, each of the other students indicated their commitment to the Upward Bound

program, school, and making better grades.

Kiree's response was similar to the others. However, he talked about how he

believes society has painted a negative picture of young African American males. Kiree

stated, "I know I have a lot of strengths, but I realize society may have a negative view of

me." The previous statement is profound coming from a 17-year-old. Kiree's statement

is profound because research by Bas W van Doorn (2012) revealed that images of

African American males were associated with 474 poverty-relates stories in the United

States. These stories were published from 1992 to 2010 by *Time Magazine*, *Newsweek*,

US News, and *World Report* (Doom, 2012). Also, research by Brittian (2012) showed

that Black male students could easily develop a negative sense of identity status based on

negative stereotypes and racism. Moreover, the profoundness of Kiree's statement is

reflected by the lack of reference to societal perceptions by any of the other participants.

Kiree continued by stating, "that's alright because the important thing is that I have high

self-esteem and *society's view of me doesn't really matter a lot*." Kiree attributed his

high self-esteem to the positive character reinforcement provided by the Upward Bound

staff and the seminars that program participants are required to attend. It is evident that based on Kiree's commitment, he is determined to overcome the negative preconceived perceptions that society has about him, his peers, and other African American males in general. Kiree possesses self-efficacy, he is self–driven and highly motivated. Based on the data and Marcia's Theory, Kiree has reached the status of identity achievement.

Another influence on the identity status of the participants as identified from descriptions of their experiences, was the support provided by the Upward Bound program. Jake noted:

> It helps me with education and *character*; gives me a heads up in school. It encourages me to *keep going*, *learn more* and *do better* in my classes. I'm *focused on* graduating from school now.

Positive support can be invaluable to the development of African American male students' identity status. Research by Wright (2009) found that support programs are extremely beneficial for African American male students as they develop their identity not only academically, but socially as well. The findings from this study provide verification for findings presented by Wright (2009). As Jake's assertion that, he is "focused on graduating from school now" demonstrates another commitment that has been made by one of the students. Thereby, it was determined that Jake has also reached the status of identity achievement according to Marcia's Theory. James felt, "Upward Bound was more supportive than anything else." James based his response on the character building seminars sponsored by the program. He stated that the "seminars

made me *look at myself in the mirror*." It is clear that the Upward Bound program supports the students holistically and not just from an academic standpoint.

Throughout each interview, it became clear that no single factor influenced the identity status of the students. This finding provides validation for the African American Male Theory (Bush & Bush, 2013), the theory's suggestion that different entities (i.e., social, educational, spiritual, psychological, etc.) can contribute to the identity development of African American males. One commonality among all of the students was the view that the support provided by the Upward Bound program had a positive impact on their lives. As students moved through the stages of identity development, having a sense of self-worth, exposure to new things, and people (i.e., Upward Bound staff, motivational speakers provided by the program) became influences. The aforementioned findings provide a connection between the African American Male Theory (Bush & Bush, 2013) as previously specified above and Marcia's Theory (1966), which addresses identity status. At the core of Marcia's Theory, "the idea that one's sense of identity is determined largely by the choices and commitments made regarding certain personal and social traits" (David, 2014, para. 3).

The findings also coincide with research by Bluic, Ellis, Goodyear, and Hendres (2011) as it supports the importance of students having a strong social identification, which contributes to students having better grades in school. Furthermore, the challenges and academic rigor provided by the Upward Bound program was an identifiable influence. Finally, the Upward Bound program also taught the students to commit to those things for which they held strong beliefs. For example, the students committed to

attending the Upward Bound program and putting forth their best efforts academically.

Gordon (2009) found that academic enrichment programs that also provide male role

models for African American male students is key to assisting this group in reaching their

full potential in school and in society. Several of the program participants' referenced the

Upward Bound staff (i.e., full-time staff, part-time teacher's, and tutors) in a positive

manner. The staff is composed of nine males and seven females, all of whom are African

American.

Perceptions of Upward Bound's Influence on the Academic Outcomes of African

American Male Program Participants

Table 2: *Academic Themes Table*

Academic Themes
Planning for the Future **Improved Grades** **Getting a Head Start**

Research sub question two focused on how Upward Bound influenced the

academic outcomes of African American male program participants. Bush and Bush's

(2013) African American Male Theory informs this study by providing a lens to explore

the "position and trajectory of African American male boys" (p.6). The academic themes

mentioned above coincide with the position and trajectory of African American male

students as previously identified by Bush and Bush (2013). Interview responses signaled

codes and specific themes evolved as indicated in table 2 above. Themes were developed

based on the students' responses. The themes that emerged were "Planning for the Future," "Improved Grades," and "Getting a Head Start." Each of the students felt they performed better academically because of their participation in the program. Moreover, each of the students said they would graduate from high school and aspired to attend college. Several of the students have identified a field of study they would like to pursue. Participants responded to questions in Sections IV (Upward Bound), VI (Feelings about School) and X (Future Plans) of the Interview Questionnaire to address the third question.

Jordan and Kevin shared similar perceptions of how Upward Bound has influenced their academic performance. Jordan felt that the influence of the program on his academic performance is demonstrated by his improved grade point average. Jordan has become an honor student. The data indicate that his study habits have changed along with how he prepares for classes. Jordan noted, "Upward Bound classes were hard, we had to be prepared before class and some of our teachers were college professors. They expected us to be prepared." Jordan attributes this improved GPA to the preparation he receives from the Upward Bound program during the summer. Jordan stated, "Upward Bound is worth it because it gives me a chance to get a *head start* on classes for the next school year." Because of this head start, Jordan is now prepared for many of his high school classes once school resumes in August. Not only did Jordan identify the head start that Upward Bound has afforded him, but he also talked about how the program assisted in his identity development as a student, which he also perceived to influence his academic performance. Jordan stated, "The program opened up doors for me because I am *a* member of the program's scholar bowl team. I am committed to the team too.

Before Upward Bound, I was not committed to anything." This finding is consistent with that of Buller (2010), which also found that students enrolled in the Upward Bound program saw an improvement in their grades and the program helped them reach their goals.

Kevin also talked about how the program has afforded him the opportunity to get ahead in his classes. Kevin stated, "I'm getting a *head start on my curriculum* for what I need to know for school." Kevin pointed out specifically how he has been prepared by Upward Bound for his Spanish II and English IV classes once he returns to school in the fall. Ironically, this study found that much of the coursework assigned to Kevin in school, is very similar, if not identical to some of the academic work covered in his Upward Bound classes. Kevin further explained that he appreciated the Upward Bound staff for motivating him to follow his dreams and to prepare for his future now. Garcia (2010) concluded, "Upward Bound instills strong work ethics, study habits, and the ability to think critically" which are beneficial to program participants with respect to their education (p. 85).

Jake and James shared similar perspectives on the influence that the Upward Bound program has had on their academic performance. Jake attributed learning how to manage his time and developing study skills to his participation in the Upward Bound program. Jake felt that learning and developing these two skills contributed to better academic performance on his part. James also believed that the skills he developed at Upward Bound helped him academically. For example, James stated, "Upward Bound gave me a chance *to learn new things* I didn't learn in school."

James referred to learning how to develop and present a PowerPoint presentation, and also the hands-on experience gained from conducting science experiments (i.e., dissecting a cat, Ion expressions) in a laboratory. At the high school James attends, students are unable to gain such experiences. This study also revealed very disturbing financial issues within the participants' school districts. James stated, "since our school don't have much money, we kind of don't really do that stuff at school. Science experiments are a no go." It is certain that said financial issues had a direct impact on the quality of education being provided to the students and also the student to teacher classroom ratio. The Upward Bound program provides its participants with experiences that lower funded schools cannot provide, such as hands-on science experiments in a laboratory setting. James also pointed out that the Upward Bound staff took time out to discuss his plans for the future and how to possibly achieve them. Thomas (2014) reported that Upward Bound actually bridges the gap between the instruction and rigor students need and what their public schools can actually afford to provide.

In his response to the influences of Upward Bound on his academic performance, Kiree focused more on his perceptions of how Upward Bound prepared him for college. Kiree stated, "I liked how Upward Bound helped prepare me for college." Ogbevire (2015) also found that the services and support provided by Trio programs such as Upward Bound were extremely beneficial to the program participants' preparation for college. Kiree attributed this preparation to the Upward Bound instructors; several of whom are college instructors. Data from this study suggested that several of the participants responded extremely well to the college instructors, as they appeared to have

higher expectations of the students and challenged them academically. Kiree also mentioned the exposure he received from participating in a financial aid workshop hosted by Upward Bound and from having the opportunity to reside in the residence hall of the host institution during the summer program.

Maurice hinted at the fact that Upward Bound made him more accountable. For example, Maurice stated, "the program helped me by encouraging me *never to skip class and do my work.*" Thereby, influencing his academic performance. Lackey (2012) coined the phrase, "students who attend class, tend to pass" (n.p.). It was clear that Maurice believed that holding himself accountable for class attendance translated into earning better grades. However, it is possible that Maurice's newly developed sense of accountability was also attributable to knowing consequences he would face for skipping classes during Upward Bound. Maurice stated, "Man, they called the roll in every class, and if you missed that roll, you were in trouble. Aint nobody trying to miss out on they stipend like that. Cause Mr. Swint told us, he'll keep it."

Joshua revealed that his grades are now higher than ever before, and he believes it is because of Upward Bound. He felt that the program influenced his academic performance by shaping his attitude towards school. This is of importance because Wright (2009) previously reported that based on racial-ethnic identity research, "some African American male students may demonstrate an oppositional stance toward their academic subjects and school" (p.123). Upward Bound provides an environment where program participants are encouraged to do their best academically and they are not ashamed to ask for help. In particular Joshua pointed out, "I don't have a problem with

asking for help with school work like I did before." He based this statement on the fact that the Upward Bound staff has always made themselves available to provide him with academic support as needed. Also, the staff of Upward Bound has expressed to Joshua how essential it is to ask for help when he does not fully understand the material being covered in classes. For African American males, asking for help is sometimes viewed as a weakness. Toldson and Owens (2010) also confirmed that many African American males felt embarrassed to ask for help while others simply "did not know who to ask for assistance when needed" (p. 91).

Derek discussed how he had failed a state-mandated test, a test he is required to pass in order to be promoted to the next grade. Derek perceived the academic help offered by the Upward Bound program assisted him in achieving a passing score during his retake of the failed state test. Derek stated, "the tutors and classes at Upward Bound helped me out a whole lot. With the help of my teachers at school and the Upward Bound program, *I passed my retake."* Derek also mentioned that the Upward Bound program helped him plan for college. He stated, "they helped by giving us workshops on admission standards, how much it costs, scholarships, information on student support programs." Because of the statements above, Derek perceived that Upward Bound influenced his academic performance.

All eight participants agreed that the Upward Bound program had a positive influence on their academic performance, but the manner it impacted their academic performance varied. Those variations ranged from planning for the future, getting a head start on courses, to earning better grades. These themes answer research sub question

two, which aims to understand Upward Bound's influenced on the academic outcomes of African American male program participants.

Focus Group

A focus group was held after the interviews were conducted. The focus group allowed for a follow up to some of the interview questions. The focus group was also useful in obtaining detailed data about group and personal perceptions. This is in addition to gathering data about the experiences of the research participants. Another advantage of a focus group is "participants can feed off each other as they respond to each other comments" (Center for the Study on Student Life, 2012, p.1). The focus group allowed the participants to expound on their responses to the research questions. Four of the major themes of the focus group were: a) Upward Bound program made them better students, b) absent fathers, c) their communities, and d) their feelings about failure.

Upward Bound: A Helping Hand

The participants all agreed that the Upward Bound program helped them with school and possibly going on to attend college. Thomas (2014) concluded that the Upward Bound program is effective in achieving its objective of encouraging and assisting in the enrollment of program participants in college. Jake stated, "the program has shown me how to prioritize and not wait until the last minute to complete my assignments." The previous statement is just one example as to why Jake felt that the program has helped him with school by becoming a better student. Jake also talked about the ACT prep class in which he is enrolled in conjunction with participation in Upward Bound. Jake believes despite only scoring a 16 on the ACT during his first attempt that

he will do better the next time. The ACT prep class is preparing him for the exam. Jake recognized the need to earn an acceptable score for college admission. He is determined to attend a four-year college. Jake utilized many hand gestures as he talked about the Upward Bound program and appeared excited and eager to discuss how the program has helped him. A distinctive tone of voice was detected when Jake mentioned prioritizing and not being last minute with his work. The same tone of voice was used as he talked about his ACT score. He appeared to genuinely be optimistic about making a higher ACT score the next time he takes the test.

Joshua who agreed with Jake's statements responded, "Upward Bound is a program that really motivates you to stay in school and not to drop out. It stresses keeping your grades up". Joshua even hinted at a friendly competition that has developed among the program participants to see who could score the highest on any given exam. That these students have developed a friendly competition with respect to earning the highest score on an exam is outstanding. This is commendable because the students are pushing one another to do their absolute best and to take their academics seriously. Because of the Upward Bound program and the friendly competition that has resulted, Joshua has realized that attending college is a possibility for him. He stated, "before Upward Bound; I really was not sure about college being an option. I'm going to college." This theme speaks to the second research question that focuses on the perceptions of Upward Bound's influences on the academic outcomes of African American male program participants.

Lack of a Father

The next point that emerged from the focus group was the absence of a father in the lives of the participants' and how they perceived it affects them. The National Center for Fathering (1999) reported that, "according to 72.2% of the U.S. population, fatherlessness is the most significant family or social problem facing America" (n.p.). Research has shown that 57.6% of Black children live without their father within the home (Family Structure and Children's Living Arrangements, 2012). Many of the participants are being raised by single mothers or by grandparents. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 48.5% of Black children live with their mother only (2012). Jake was the first participant to respond. He felt that not having a father in ones' life could have a negative impact on a student, depending on the student's personality. For example, Jake said, "Like if you're the type of person growing up and you know you don't have a father, and you are sensitive then your outcome isn't going to be as positive as you want it to be." When he referred to outcomes not being positive, Jake is suggesting that not having a father in one's life could be used as a crutch by some. Used as a crutch, refers to a method of rationalizing not doing your best, or an excuse for not reaching your goals. In this case, it can be argued that in discussing one of the roles of a father, Jake's choice of words did not fully articulate what he intended to say. This position is based on Jake's view that, "you're going to let people tear you down and tell you what you can't do, because that's what your father is supposed to be there for." Based on the conversation, face-to-face interaction, and his demeanor at the time, it is assumed that Jake was suggesting that one's father should be there to encourage one to overcome obstacles.

Joshua was extremely proud to talk about his grandfather, as he displayed a smile from ear to ear. It appeared that he did not lack a male figure in his life or the need to have his biological father present in the home. According to Joshua, his grandfather, "stepped in the gap; so for me, it was never like anything was missing because he is my father basically." Joshua's grandfather seemed to meet all of his criteria for a father. A twinkle could be seen in Joshua's eyes as he talked about how his grandfather encouraged him and told him always to represent the family's name well. For example, Joshua stated, "he always motivated me to go to school and make those good grades." The other students who were engaged in this discussion accorded Joshua their undivided attention. All could feel the passion in his words.

Jake chimed in, "I grew up without a father also, but I still had siblings to carry me on throughout my lifetime." Jake's statement is telling. It is difficult to replace a father figure within the home and in a child's life. Jake's siblings stepped in to fill this void as best as possible. It appears that Jake has benefitted from the guidance and "tough love" afforded to him via his siblings. He exuded a sense of appreciation as he talked. It seemed as if the other students also found some appreciation for Jake's siblings, as Joshua patted him on the back.

Maurice was the last participant to respond to this topic of discussion. He shared with the group that his father died when he was only five years old. His grandfather instantly became the father figure in his life. However, his grandfather also died. Maurice stated, "after my granddaddy died, I just like really had no male figure in my life." At that point, Maurice's mother, with the help of their community, became the

guiding forces in his life. Maurice said that they "encouraged me every day to live my life, get out of high school and get out of Blue Lake and become successful." Maurice spoke in a very soft tone. His words seemed painful initially; almost like he was on the brink of giving up. A stronger tone could be heard as he talked about his community and his mother. He appeared determined to overcome whatever obstacles may come before him. By the time he finished talking, Jake had placed his arm around Maurice's neck in a display of support.

The focus group discussion about the lack of a father was very different from the previous conversations. When discussing this topic only four of the students participated in the conversation. This was extremely odd, as the majority, if not all of the students participated in the previous conversations. A scan of the room revealed that the other four students appeared to be disengaged or just not interested in the topic. Of those four, two sat with their heads tilted towards the floor and did not utter a word. It almost appeared as if they were ashamed or embarrassed by something. One of the remaining two pulled his cell phone out and began to scroll through his social media feed on Facebook. The final student sat there with a pale look on his face while gazing into space. His expression appeared as if he not only removed himself from the conversation but from the room altogether.

None of the students should feel ashamed or be embarrassed about not having a father in their lives. Typically, these are circumstances and lived experiences out of their control. Moreover, this is a time where role models and male figures are critical in the development of these young men. Research has shown, "when fathers are involved, their

children learn more, perform better in school and exhibit healthier behavior" (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 3). The Upward Bound program has filled this gap for students without fathers by providing male role models, mentoring opportunities, and support in their academic pursuits. The support of family can also have a tremendous influence on the young men being able to successfully navigate this stage in their lives. This theme reveals some of the experiences of African American male Upward Bound participants as probed in the grand tour research question.

There Is No Place Like Home (Community)

The next topic that arose from the focus group was centered on the participants growing up in the Mississippi Delta. A focus on their home environment, cultural influences on their education, and aspirations guided the discussion. Research by Howard (2013) stresses how invaluable it is for African American male students to have community-based educational spaces that promote academic achievement.

Derek said, "I say no, my environment and being from here does not influence me, or my education at all." Throughout the interviews, Derek has been either reserved or extremely shy as shown by his response above. Several attempts to get him to open up more or provide additional details about his responses were unsuccessful. Derek appeared to be an introvert, which could possibly be attributed to him being an only child with few friends.

Jake disagreed with Derek's statement. Jake felt that growing up in the Mississippi Delta does, in fact, influence some African American males, including him. For example, Derek stated "We got a lot of racist people here. Rarely is there good news

about the Delta. It's always something bad." Derek uses the previously stated negative

aspects of his community to motivate him. He said, "it makes me try harder in school; to

make good grades so I can go to college." Derek believes that through school, education

is his only way to escape life in the Mississippi Delta. Jake appeared to be slightly

defensive as he talked. This was uncommon of Jake based on interactions with him over

the duration of this study. Jake did not appreciate the continued negative narrative

associated with where he is from. It appears that he is using the negativity as a positive

influence to do well in school, and attend college. Thereby allowing him to escape his

current environment, as he suggested previously. It should be noted that Jake was the

only participant to reference the fact that racism still exists in the area.

Joshua, like Jake, perceived where he is from has an impact on him and his

development. Joshua was adamant about explaining his perspective. He chimed,

Let me tell you how, when you live in the Mississippi Delta people always say,

he's just from the Mississippi Delta. He won't be too much in life. So why even

worry about him. Our schools are failing to meet state performance scores, and

they are failing us.

Joshua like Jake also channels these negative aspects of his community and uses them as

motivation to not become a statistic. Not becoming a statistic refers to being counted as

another African American male within the penal system, buried at a young age because

of participation in illegal activities, high school dropout, or unemployed. Joshua intends

to "always defy all odds, and always to remember where he came from." Joshua hopes

that he can be an inspiration to other young African American males in his community by

showing them that doing your best in school can be beneficial. This theme reveals additional data about the experiences of African American male Upward Bound participants as probed in the grand tour question and it provides data to determine their identity status as presented in the first research question.

Drugs

The focus group then moved on to a discussion of what goes on in their neighborhoods. Immediately, the discussion began to focus on drugs. Drugs were not a topic that was mentioned by any of the participants during their interviews. The prevalence of drugs within their communities, substance use and abuse by the students themselves and within their families can affect a student's academic aspirations (Williams, Davis, Johnson, Williams, Saunders & Nebbitt, 2007).

Joshua was of the opinion that drug activity is not prevalent in his neighborhood. He based his statement on the fact that he has never witnessed any drug activity in his community. Jake, on the other hand, disagreed with Joshua. Jake stated, "I don't believe he was so truthfully about that. He don't wanna break the guy code (i.e., code that stipulates that guys do not to reveal information about someone else) in his town." Jake went on to inform the group that where he lives, drug activity is visible everywhere you look. Said drug activity has turned a once quiet neighborhood into a high traffic area. Jake suggested that he stays away from all of this illegal activity by participating in the Upward Bound program and in sports sponsored by his high school.

Like Jake, Jordan also said that illegal drug activity can be found in his neighborhood. Jordan noted that "it's something they do all day from what I see" as he

referred to those persons who sell drugs in his neighborhood. Jordan recognized that selling drugs is a dangerous lifestyle, as he admitted to knowing several guys who have been incarcerated for their participation in this illegal industry. However, Jordan also admitted to admiring the materialistic things (nice cars, latest Jordan's, & money) that are gained by those who partake in drug dealing. He adamantly stated, "I don't want that life." Moreover, Jordan exclaimed, "I'll stick with school and see how that turns out."

Maurice also indicated that illegal drug activity is an issue in his community. However, he stated, "my mom has warned me about it." As Maurice discussed his mother's warning not to get involved with drugs, you could hear the fear in his voice. It is apparent that his mother is a strong Black woman. This was the second time Maurice discussed his mother with the group.

It is apparent, like many other places across the country, drugs can be found in the communities in which the participants live. This, despite the area being rural and one of the most impoverished areas in the United States. The preceding discussion provides evidence, that the students come from environments that are plagued with drug activity. This is not an uncommon scene within the surrounding areas and the students' home communities. It is noteworthy that the students recognize this activity and the perceived benefits (i.e., money, materialistic things) associated with it, yet they have no intent to become involved. The aforementioned findings from the focus group session substantiate that the Upward Bound program has played a role in the students' not wanting to take part in the illegal activities found in their communities. This is achieved by providing the necessary support students need to succeed academically, requiring attendance during

Saturday class sessions, which minimizes their free time on the weekend, and requiring them to attend the six-week summer component that also removes them from their home environment for an extended period of time. For example, Jake stated, "they keep us busy with Upward Bound and we're always at the college campus." Finally, exposing the students to different environments (i.e., college campus, educational field trip, etc.) was also found to be beneficial. Research by Myers (1999) supports the findings that the exposure provided by the Upward Bound program is of great benefit to program participants. Furthermore, the strong influence of family, their desires to finish school, and move their families out of such areas is a driving force for these young men.

As previously pointed out, the students reside in the most impoverished state in the United States of America (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). The poverty rate is the highest in the United States at 20.8% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). The state is home to the 7th highest unemployment rate (5.8%) in the United States. A mere 19.3% of residents age 25 and older possess a bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). The public-school system in which the participants attend is a failure! Having received overall student performance grades of "C" and "F" from the state's Department of Education (Mississippi Department of Education, 2017). Simply put, "life here ain't been no crystal stair" (Hughes, 1994, np.)! The above referenced theme uncovers data about the experiences of African American male Upward Bound participants as probed in the grand tour question.

Failure

The next discussion was around the word failure. Collectively we discussed failure and its meaning. The participants shared what failure meant to them and what implications it has if any.

Joshua asserted, "I don't even know the meaning of failure it isn't in my dictionary." Joshua was stern when discussing the meaning of failure. He admitted to knowing the definition of failure but insisted that everyone in the room understood that he is not a failure. Joshua stated, "I succeed now, and I will be successful." Joshua's body language suggested that there is a strong possibility that at some point in his life someone has referred to his as or expected that he would be a failure.

Jake associated failure with fear. Jake articulated, "if you're scared to do anything, then you're a failure." Jake appeared passionate about this statement and insisted that his goal is to succeed at everything he attempts. Jake stated, "I put forth my best effort in every sport, in every academic bowl, every test, every challenge that comes my way."

Similar to Jake's response, Jordan stated: "failure is not pursuing something, not doing it at all." Jordan insisted that everyone should try their best in everything they do; even when the odds are against them. Jordan iterated, "get out there, and you try. There's no telling what you can accomplish." Jordan seemed to be a very positive young man. While acknowledging failure as a reality, he also indicated that much could be learned from failure. Finally, Jordan added, "In life, you will hit shots, and you will miss shots, but I promise if you shoot, you'll hit more than you miss."

Derek stated in a subtle tone, "I agree with all that has been said. Its spot on and I feel that same way." Again, there was an unsuccessful attempt to get Derek to expound on his statement. There very well could be some dynamics taking place with Derek regarding interacting within the focus group.

Kiree felt that "failure is not giving your all; not giving 100 percent." Just as several of the other participants suggested, there appears to be a connection between giving your best and failure as perceived by the group. Moreover, Kiree also touched on a similar point as Jordan. Kiree stated, "a successful person they fail plenty of times, but soon they get so good at it that they start being successful." This statement suggests that while failure may occur, it is merely part of the process of becoming successful.

This focus group session proved to be one wherein most of the participants decided to share their perceptions and perspectives on the topics of discussion. They were assertive with their comments, except Derek. Different tones in their voices were also evident. It appears that failure was endemic to participants' experiences. Coincidently, the participants coupled failure with not putting forth great effort. Moreover, the participants discussed the need to persevere rather than accepting failure. The theme of failure, and the discussion that followed provided descriptions of the participants' experiences, which provided additional data to aid the researcher in determining the participants' identity status as listed in the first research question.

Connection of Emerging Codes to Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of African American male Upward Bound participants to determine their identity status and to

document their perceptions of Upward Bound's influence on their academic outcomes. To explore such, three research questions were created. Data from these questions were organized into tables; which summarize findings of each sub-question and the grand tour question. The three questions were:

Grand Tour Question: What are the experiences of African American male students who participate in an Upward Bound Program?

Sub Question 1: What can the experiences of the African American male Upward Bound participants reveal about their identity status?

Sub Question 2: What are the perceptions of African American male Upward Bound participants of the programs influence on their academic outcomes?

The data analysis of the participants' responses to the aforementioned research questions via coding revealed additional findings as presented in the following coded clusters: *Upward Bound Experiences, High School Experiences, Environment, Lack of Father, Social Influences, Stereotypes, Pre-High School Experiences*, and Other.

Coded Clusters

Keen attention was placed on accurately identifying emerging themes from the data. The focus was explicitly on the usefulness, depth of description, application of context, and connection of the data. During the transcription process, immersion into the data revealed several pattern developments. The interview content was grouped into categories, and a code table was developed (Table 3). The code table is a constant reference source during the code frequency analysis.

Table 3*: Code Frequency Table*

Participant Name		Coded Clusters							
	Codes	UBE	HSE	ENV	LOF	SOI	STE	PHE	OTH
Jordan		9	8	8	10	6	7	4	2
Jake		7	12	9	6	4	4	3	3
James		14	7	10	7	7	8	5	4
Kiree		8	12	12	4	5	5	2	1
Maurice		12	9	8	8	10	2	1	7
Joshua		15	5	6	5	9	9	7	6
Derek		10	11	7	11	11	8	3	3
Kevin		11	8	3	9	8	10	8	2
Total		**86**	**72**	**63**	**60**	**60**	**53**	**33**	**28**

*Note. UBE=Upward Bound Experiences, HSE=High School Experiences, ENV=Environment, LOF=Lack of Father, SOI=Social Influence, STE=Stereotypes, PHE=Pre-High School Experiences, OTH=Other

As displayed in Table 3, Upward Bound experiences showed the highest total frequency (86) and pre-high school experiences had the lowest total frequency (33) among the identified coded clusters. These data were gathered in response to sections IV (Upward Bound), V (Upward Bond Summer Year Component), VI (Feelings about School, Schoolwork, and Level of School Attachment), and VII (Upward Bound Academic Year Component) of the interview protocol. In addition, the data presented in Table 3 aligns with Garcia's (2009) research, which showed that Upward Bound experiences impacted participants in the areas of academic preparation, persistence, and personal enrichment. As indicated in Table 3, James (14) and Joshua (15) tallied the highest frequency in regard to Upward Bound experiences among the group during data collection. Interesting enough, there are two commonalities shared between James and

Joshua other than being African American male Upward Bound participants. They were reared in single parent, female-headed households and had four siblings each. Research by Amato, Patterson, and Beattie (2015) found that being raised in a single-parent house affected the educational achievement of children. However, research by Persaud, Gray, and Hunt (1999) argued that African American male children raised in a single parent household could be successful. This is contingent on the parent being able to "assume the male-female role responsibilities" and children being involved in positive activities outside of the home (p. 69). In the current research, the Upward Bound Program is the positive activity in which the children participate.

The second highest coded cluster with a frequency of 72 was high school experiences. This data were gathered in response to sections VI (Feelings about School, Schoolwork, and Level of School Attachment), VII (Feelings about Classes and Teachers), and IX (Extra-Curricular Activities) of the interview protocol. Research by Bell (2015) illustrated how the various dynamics of the high school experience could influence the academic success of African American male students. In addition, Davis (1994) also explored the effects of school context and structure on the experiences of African American males. Both studies revealed that the high school experiences of African American males could be of great assistance or be extremely detrimental to the groups' academic success.

It is vital to recognize the importance of high school experiences for African American males. These experiences for African American male students can "potentially have board consequences for the students' future educational attainment, employment,

and family relations" (Davis, 1994, p. 570). As presented in Table 3, Jake (12) and Kiree (12) displayed the highest frequency for this cluster. Both Jake and Kiree grew up in two-parent households. This is uncommon as Roberts (2008) reported that only 40% of Black children lived in a two-parent household. Also, each of their mothers graduated from college. Research by Brownstein (2014) concluded, "parents' experiences with education strongly influence what their children do after high school" (n.p.). Jake and Kiree's plans of attending college could be attributed to parental educational experiences, as well as their participation in the Upward Bound program. Those are the only two shared characteristics between Jake and Kiree other than being African American male Upward Bound participants and attending the same high school. According to Jake, Upward Bound is "like a bridge, the program supports me where my school falls short." The Upward Bound program provides Jake and his peers with more one-on-one instruction and mentoring, than his school is able to offer. Moreover, Jake and his peers are also afforded the opportunity to socialize with other program participants from different schools. This is because the services offered by the program are strategic and based on the number of students the program is funded to serve. According to Whaley and Noël (2012), such programs are key in minimizing the impact of bad high school experiences on African American males.

The coded cluster with the third highest frequency was environment with a frequency of 63. This data were gathered in response to sections I, II, and IX of the interview protocol. Marcia's Theory (1966) posits that a person's environment affects them. Data presented by Ransom (2016) indicated that positive environmental factors

such as nurturing and caring environments, contributed to higher rates of academic success among African American male students. For example, when discussing Upward Bound, James stated, "the staff shows us that they care. They challenge us to do better, they check our grades, and offer us individual help when we need it." Furthermore, Rolland (2011) identified community initiatives and programs (i.e., Upward Bound) as being critical factors to the academic success of African American male students.

James (10) and Kiree (12) recorded the highest frequency for this coded cluster. Both James and Kiree are 17 years of age and their mothers both have four-year college degrees. Ironically, both of their mothers are social workers. The fact that both of their mothers are social workers is interesting. Sherman (2016) concluded, "social workers have been a life force within the education system" (p. 147). Therefore, it can be argued that James' and Kiree's mothers both have a keen understanding of how environmental factors can influence their children's engagement with the education system. Noguera (2001) suggested, "it is commonly understood that environmental and cultural factors have a profound influence upon human behavior, including academic performance" (n.p.). This is especially true for Black boys (Lee, 2000). Moreover, Bush's and Bush's (2013) African American Theory provides a lens for understanding the influence of environmental factors on the academic success of African American males by placing value on background characteristics (i.e., family, environment, school, beliefs, & perceptions) of the students. The only notable difference between James and Kiree was the number of parents and siblings in the household. Kiree was raised in a two-parent

household as an only child. James' mother raised him and his four siblings in a single-parent household.

The aforementioned findings support previous research (Parke, 2003; Usakli, 2013; Armato, Patterson, & Beattie, 2015), which suggests that students who are reared in a two-parent household perform better academically and are more likely to attend college. However, the data also showed that the services provided by the Upward Bound program were of great benefit for students who are reared in single-parent households and participate in the program. The students benefited not only academically, but socially as well. Benson (2015) asserts that programs that offer additional educational and social development services within the community are "game changers" for students who come from single-parent households. The extra nurturing, assistance, and positive reinforcement are central to the needs of this group of students. Research by Grimard and Maddaus (2004) reminds us especially how beneficial programs such as Upward Bound can be for students from single-parent homes in rural communities. According to Grimard and Maddaus (2004), "once enrolled in the program, students began to benefit academically, financially, and socially" (p. 30).

The coded cluster with the second lowest frequency (33) was pre-high school experiences. Data were gathered in response to sections VI, (Feelings about School, Schoolwork, and Level of School Attachment) of the interview protocol. The researcher hypothesizes that the students possibly were impacted in ways they did not recognize during this stage in their lives. For example, there was a reference to Mr. Lucas, a pre-algebra (8th grade) teacher as being a role model for one of the participants. Being able to

identify a role model within the school can be perceived as a positive influence during the pre-high experiences of the participants. Despite its low frequency in reference to the data in Table 1, this is a critical dynamic that can be harmful to the academic development of African American male students. According to Yaffe (2012), "the physical, emotional and social transitions of the middle school years, ages 9 to 13, pose especially great risks for these already-vulnerable children" (p. 1). Kevin (8) and Joshua (7) tallied the highest frequency in this area. The two commonalities shared between Joshua and Kevin are that they both have siblings and were raised by their mothers in single-parent households. McHale, Updegraff, and Whiteman (2012) postulated that not only can parents have an influence on the educational experiences of their children, but siblings can also have a profound influence on the educational experiences of one another.

Connection of Coded Clusters, Emerging Themes, and Research Questions

The data analysis of the participants' responses to the aforementioned research questions via code clustering revealed the following emerging themes: *Motivation to Work Harder, Emotional Support, Positive Influence, Role Models, Aspirations to Succeed,* and *Participation in Extracurricular Activities*.

Emerging Themes

Six themes emerged from the interview data based on codes that appeared in high frequency within the interview transcripts and were grouped based on code clustering. From the coded clusters, the themes were developed based on Anfara, Brown, and Mangione's (2002) surface content analysis. Anfara et al. (2002) speak to the need to

"compress many words of communication into distinct categories based on explicit rules of coding" (p. 30). The six emergent themes were: Motivation to Work Harder, Emotional Support, Positive Influence, Role Models, Aspirations to Succeed, and Participation in Extracurricular Activities. These six themes accounted for majority of coded responses once the data were transcribed. When comparing the themes that arose from the interviews to the research questions, it was essential to focus more on the aforementioned high-frequency themes. The high-frequency themes appear to be most important to the participants.

The first theme, ***motivation to work harder***, encompasses the significance in which African American male Upward Bound participants place on informal and formal interactions with their family, friends, teachers, and Upward Bound staff. Motivation "is the act of giving somebody a reason or incentive to do something" (Zhu, 2017, np.). The essence of this theme relates to how the research participants perceive their experiences with the above-mentioned individuals who encourage them to do well. Harris, Hines, Kelly, Williams, and Bagley (2014) suggested that motivation factors can led to academic engagement and success among Black male high school students. Value is placed on these interactions, especially when students receive encouragement about their education. Consonant with this view, participants expressed appreciation for their teachers and the Upward Bound staff genuinely caring about them. Participants suggested that they were comfortable asking their teachers and the Upward Bound staff for help with their schoolwork based on how they continuously motivate them.

The second theme, *emotional support*, demonstrates what the participants perceive to be an essential component to their academic success. Participants found this characteristic in several of their family members, their friends, some of their teachers, and the entire Upward Bound staff. For African American male students, Crawford (2016) discovered, "support is often crucial" (p. 14). The essence of this theme describes how the students openly welcome the help of others. Students noted that many of the individuals who support them are often individuals who also display compassion for others. This is important because the participants related compassion to a positive emotional influence. It is not often that participants are exposed to what they consider a positive influence psychologically (i.e., emotion) especially concerning their academic success.

The third theme, *positive influence*, describes the impact experienced by the participants through interactions with their family, friends, teachers, community, and Upward Bound staff. Zhu (2017) states, "to influence is to produce an effect on someone by imperceptible or intangible means" (np.). The essence of this theme is found in the influence participants experienced from their interactions with the various parties as mentioned previously. Participants are inspired to think positively. Said inspiration is perceived to be beneficial in their efforts to stay on task, complete assignments, and do their best concerning school. This finding is consistent with research by Crawford (2016) who found that "through the development of strong, supportive networks, students were able to counter the influence of the street environment and cultivate a belief in academic achievement" (p. 16).

The fourth theme, *role models*, encompasses the value placed on African American males with whom the participants come into contact at school, in their church, and at Upward Bound. From their research on Black male high school students, Williams and Bryan (2013) discovered the students attributed their academic success in school to having mentors. The essence of this theme describes positive encounters participants have with African American males. Many of the participants have been raised by their mothers and lack a father figure within the home. Teachers, coaches, church members (i.e., pastors, deacons), and the Upward Bound staff have filled this void for some of the participants. In some instances, the participants have identified a role model who has no knowledge that they are being looked up to by these young men. They have no clue that the students are attempting to emulate their actions and/or behaviors. Those role models have the slightest clue of the influence that they have on the participants.

The fifth theme, *aspiration to succeed,* demonstrates what the participants perceive as an important goal. The core of this theme is rooted in the desire to not become a "statistic" as an African American male (i.e., dropout, convict, etc.). Jackson (2013) pointed out "students of lower socioeconomic status are at a disadvantage when it comes to having aspirations" (p. 27). Aspiration is a topic that has repeatedly been discussed by the Upward Bound staff as well. Aspirations coupled with the exposure provided by the Upward Bound program, bring participants to the realization that they can genuinely become whatever they want as long as they are committed to their schooling.

The sixth and final theme, ***participation in extracurricular activities,*** encompasses the value placed on the experience of participating in various after-school activities by the participants. Research by Crawford (2016) supports the aforementioned theme. Crawford stated, involvement in extracurricular activities has also been seen as a factor that promotes education in the Black community" (p. 19). This theme essentially describes the desire of the participants to work with others, under the direction of a coach or director, to achieve a set goal. Williams and Bryan (2013) suggested, "these programs provide African American male students with academic or school-oriented peer environments and positive relations with other students" (p. 298). Involvement in extracurricular activities or programs also requires the participants to make commitments (i.e., to attend practice, to abide by rules, to maintain eligibility, etc.). Participants also benefit from the additional structure afforded to them from their involvement in extracurricular activities.

Participant Narratives

Participant I

Jordan perceives Upward Bound as a way of getting a head start in college. He does feel that Upward Bound impacts the way he perceives high school. Jordan has positive perceptions of his peers, both those who are in Upward Bound and those who are not. For example, Jordan feels that each of his peers are never in trouble, they want better for themselves, and they always try their best in school. Therefore, it is apparent that Jordan carefully selects friends who share similar beliefs as him regardless if they participate in the Upward Bound program or not. Jordan has both positive and negative

feelings about his high school teachers. His positive feelings were associated with teachers who were nurturing, demonstrated good instructional skills (i.e., ability to explain subject in simplest terms), and also had expectations of the students. The negative feelings grew from teachers whom he felt were not serious about their jobs, showed little or no interest in his educational future (i.e., preparing him to pass the class & graduation), and could not control the students within the classroom (i.e., lack of classroom management).

Participant II

Jake's perception of the Upward Bound program was positive because his grades have improved. He attributed this to the structure the program provided for him and the one-on-one academic tutoring. Jake also has positive perceptions of his peers and high school teachers. According to Jake, his friends are all cool and well-liked by everyone at school. He views his two male teachers as father figures, who genuinely care about his well-being. His other teachers often take extra time to help him with work that he does not fully understand. Jake has consistently made the honor roll from middle to high school. He indicated that his peers have perceived him as a leader and expect him to do well in school.

Participant III

James suggested that Upward Bound also had positive influences on him because he grew (i.e., social, academic, & identity development) not only as a student, but also as an individual. His perceptions were guided by the exposure (i.e., college environment, educational field trips) the program provided him and his ability to make new friends

(i.e., socialize) within the program since most of his friends from school were not enrolled in the program. James typically does well in school but found math to be particularly difficult. According to James, Upward Bound has helped him improve his grades in math. James perceived his high school teachers to have a positive impact on his education as they took time to make sure he fully understood the work that was being covered in class before moving on to another topic. James' perception was based on the fact that some of his teachers were "old school." They are serious about their jobs and wanted the best for students. His teachers knew several of his family members, because they also taught them in high school.

Participant IV

Kiree thoroughly enjoyed participating in Upward Bound. His perspective is that he is a better overall student because of the program. He has set goals for himself, is more disciplined, communicates with others better, and has recognized a slight improvement in his grades, which he attributes to the positive influence of the Upward Bound program. Most of Kiree's friends are not in Upward Bound, which necessitated stepping out of his comfort zone to make new friends within the program. Overall, he found school somewhat difficult because he was not a proficient reader and it took him longer than others to complete assignments but praised his high school teachers for keeping him focused. Kiree indicated he would not go to college were it not for his teachers, who encouraged him to get more involved in class discussions. From his involvement in class discussions, Kiree felt a sense of inclusion thereby becoming an

active participant in his education. Kiree even admitted that he enjoys classes where he can share his perspective in regards to the topic being discussed.

Participant V

Maurice credited his success to good high school teachers and a supportive Upward Bound program. The Upward Bound program provided an abundance of support as suggested by Maurice. When he needed help with writing a paper, the Upward Bound teachers and tutors were available during the academic year. Also, because he does not have a computer at home, Upward Bound affords him access to use of a computer to complete assignments outside of school hours. For these reasons, Maurice perceives Upward Bound as a positive influence.

Participant VI

Joshua attributed his academic success to his mother, friends, and the Upward Bound program. Joshua's mother always encouraged him to give 100 percent effort in all that he did. She would say, "It takes the same amount of effort to do wrong as it does to do right." Joshua lives by that statement. He also said because of his mother's line of work, he admires her, as not many women are carpenters. His friends remind him of the dreams they shared as small children. That dream was to be able to provide a better life for their families. The group of friends have embraced education as their means to accomplishing this goal. They are always holding one another accountable for not missing days from school and participating in extracurricular activities because there is nothing to do at home. At Upward Bound, Joshua said he is assigned so much class work during the academic year program and the teachers even give them homework during the

summer program. He said the work had helped him greatly by preparing him in advance for the work assigned to him at school. He also appreciated having access to computers, printers, and the Internet while attending Upward Bound. Joshua's family cannot afford internet services at their home, and no one in his immediate family owns a computer. According to Joshua, "ain't too many folks got the Internet where we stay." This is yet another obstacle that many Upward Bound program participants must overcome to achieve academic success.

Joshua had a favorable view of his teachers and the high school he attended. Initially, he found it strange that the teachers would allow the students to have input in what is taught and the preferred method of delivery. For example, the students felt they benefited more from conducting research in the discovery lab instead of the school's library. The teacher agreed to permit this change, as long as the students completed their assignments. Joshua liked his high school because of the positive environment. Positive quotes were posted throughout the school campus, and the principal demonstrated he truly cared about the students. Continually noticing and reading the quotes influenced positive thoughts amongst the students over time. Several students submitted their quotes to the principal, and they were posted along with the other quotes. The principal grew up in the local area. Therefore, he is familiar with many of the issues that the students may face daily.

Participant VII

Derek stated that he is often teased by his peers for speaking correct English, or being too studious. Initially, being teased made him feel bad. Adding to this, he only

had two friends. Being a part of Upward Bound has helped him in overcoming this issue by affording him the opportunity to gain several new friends who share the same seriousness about school. He has accepted being viewed as different, and it no longer bothers him. Derek also viewed Upward Bound as a positive influence because the program helped him to refocus his attention on achieving academic success and going to college. Because of Derek's lack of acceptance amongst his peers, he was withdrawn (i.e., kept to himself), began to have low self-esteem, and he began to not always put forth his absolute best effort with his schoolwork. It should be noted, despite Derek not putting forth his best effort his grade point average was still within the top seven percent of his class. Derek spoke favorably about his high school teachers and peers. His teachers understood that he was often teased and each day they would offer words of inspiration. He appreciated their support. Derek indicated that he viewed his peers like family. They have each other backs and can be found hanging together outside of school.

Participant VIII

Many of Kevin's friends are not in Upward Bound and do not influence his educational aspirations. Kevin stated that he could not allow others, especially his friends, to adversely influence his desire to finish school adversely. He chose to participate in Upward Bound because he believed it would assist him in getting ahead academically. He connected his academic success to the encouragement of his mother and teachers. His mother has always conveyed to him the importance of getting an education and has set an example for him by obtaining her college degree. His teachers always remind him of the many pitfalls in and around the small town he lives in. They

encourage him to finish school so that he can escape the trap that many of his peers could fall into.

Summary

This chapter presented findings from interviews and a focus group session. In this chapter, students described and explained their experiences, along with their perceptions of Upward Bound's impact on their identity status and academic success. The themes that emerged from the code frequency chart were "Motivation," "Support," "Positive Influence," "Role Models," "Aspirations," and "Extracurricular Activities." The experiences of each participant varied slightly, despite similarities in backgrounds and school settings. Analysis of the data from the individual interviews revealed common issues.

During the individual interviews, each of the participants appeared calm and relaxed as they sat at a desk across from the researcher. A few of the participants (i.e., Jake, Joshua, & Maurice) were like open books. They had no problem sharing their thoughts and experiences. Those three young men could talk forever if allowed. Derek, on the other hand, was the complete opposite of Jake, Joshua, and Maurice. He was direct and to the point in his responses. Offering as few words as possible to answer each question.

Each participant talked about their environments (i.e., communities), family, school, the Upward Bound program, mentors, expectations, and goals. It became immediately apparent that the participants have somehow attempted to turn the negative things in their environments into motivation to be the best they can be in school and life.

Moreover, the participants collectively agreed that they each wanted better for themselves and their families based on their current situation(s). Each participant recognized the school as being vital to their success and achievement of personal goals. Finally, there was a resounding appreciation for the role that the Upward Bound program has played in their lives and the opportunities afforded them by the program.

The focus group followed up on some of the topics (i.e., communities, Upward Bound) that were discussed during the individual interviews. The participants, except for Derek, appeared anxious to begin the focus group session. It seems that Derek is just a laid back, easy going young man of few words. He appears not to allow himself to get overly excited about anything or down about other things.

Some new topics (i.e., lack of a father, drugs, failure) were either discovered from reviewing the transcript data or were brought up in the group conversation during the focus group. The group was asked to expound upon the new topics that were discovered during a review of the transcript data. Participation in the focus group was good until the discussion regarding the lack of a father being mentioned during the individual interviews was pointed out. It felt as if the air had been sucked out of the room, based on the facial expressions and body language of some of the participants. However, others such as Jake, Joshua, and Maurice, stood tall, almost at attention, proud like soldiers to offer their insight. A statement that was found to be common and supported by all the participants was that the Upward Bound program made them better students. Also, several of the participants shared common lived experiences of drugs being a problem within their

communities and the many challenges (i.e., lack of resources, extreme poverty, failing school systems) presented by growing up in such of an impoverished region.

As the researcher, I felt that the participants were truthful in their statements. It was expected that they would be more forthcoming during the individual interviews than in the focus group session. This was the case for some (i.e., Jordan, James, Kiree, & Kevin) of the participants but not for all. The majority of the responses about their environment (i.e., communities, state, school system), were factual and verifiable.

This study described the experiences of African American male Upward Bound students and their perceptions of Upward Bound's impact on their identity status and academic success. The eight participants were high school African American male students, ages 14 to 18, in grades 9th-12th. Participants were enrolled in the Upward Bound program at Southeastern State University, a Historically Black College and University located in the southern United States. Students indicated that Upward Bound provided them with positive academic and social experiences and that their immediate living environment was less relevant in determining their academic success.

Chapter V: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the experiences of African American male Upward Bound students and their perceptions of Upward Bound's impact on their identity status and academic success. The exploration process allowed the participants to share significant experiences and influences that contributed to their perceptions of academic success. A qualitative research approach permitted the researcher to capture "the experience as perceived by the participants" (McMillan, 2008, p. 291). Eight African American male Upward Bound participants shared their experiences, along with their perceptions of Upward Bound's influence on their identity status and academic success. Only a few studies (Witherspoon, Speight, & Thomas, 1997; Myers, 1999; Ogbevire, 2015; Walker, 2015; Vega, 2015) have specifically examined the experiences of African American male Upward Bound students. There is also a dearth of studies that focus on identity status and the perceptions of Upward Bound's influence on academic success among African American male program participants in a southern state.

This research was inspired by Gail Buller's (2010) work on the impact of Upward Bound on academic success. This study begins where previous research ended and provides an opportunity for African American male Upward Bound students to share; in their own words, the experiences and influences that have shaped their perceptions of academic success. Other studies (Witherspoon, Speight, & Thomas, 1997; Myers, 1999; Ogbevire, 2015; Walker, 2015; Vega, 2015) that included African American male Upward Bound students emphasized strategies to obtain academic success with this

group, but omitted the students' voices. According to Freeman (2005), "assessing the missing pieces of the puzzle between aspirations and participation in higher education is paramount to both bridging the gap in research and developing workable programs and models that go beyond the typical services" (p.5). It is paramount to understand the missing links in the research; thereby improving our understating of the phenomenon at hand.

Chapter five provides a discussion that is informed by the research and the central themes from Chapter four. The conclusions of the research findings were derived from the discussion buoyed by the literature and followed by the research questions as listed below. The research questions are:

- What are the experiences of African American male students who participate in an Upward Bound Program?

- What can the experiences of the African American male Upward Bound participants reveal about their identity status?

- What are the perceptions of African American male Upward Bound participants of the programs influence on their academic outcomes?

Summary of the Study

This qualitative study utilized three face-to-face interviews, followed by one focus group discussion to collect data pertinent to discerning the perceived influence of Upward Bound on the academic outcomes of African American males and descriptions of their experiences to determine their identity status. The participants in the study included eight African American male teenagers from ages 14 to 18, in grades 9th-12th. Each

participant was enrolled in the Upward Bound program at Southeastern State University. The data obtained from the interviews were coded, analyzed, and categorized; thereby allowing for the identification of themes. The previous chapter presented the findings and themes that were identified. The emergent themes and finding were discussed in Chapter Four. The final chapter expounds on the previously mentioned themes and synthesizes them.

Discussion

While analyzing the data, the researcher came to realize that he too shared several of the same perceptions as some of the participants' in the study. He too was raised in the same town as five of the participant's and attended the same high school as those participants. In some cases, the participants' were pleasantly surprised to find that we shared similar perceptions. The participants' perceptions reinforced the importance and need for programs such as Upward Bound, especially in rural southern states where poverty rates are high, and the attainment of college degrees is low. The discussion below displays the six emergent themes from this research as they were found to be prevalent in extant studies and research findings. Following the themes, the research questions as identified previously will be presented.

Theme 1: Motivation to Work Harder.

Several of the themes that emerged from this study align with the literature and research identified previously. For example, an article published by the New York Times (1990) entitled *Motivate, Don't Isolate, Black Students* speaks to the theme of motivation. The article refers to Black males and states, "the school staff and parents develop a

partnership to inspire confidence in each student, and ultimately improve academic performance" (n.p.). One research participant, Maurice stated, "because of Upward Bound my academic skills improved and I felt motivated to do my best in school." Another participant, James added that the seminars sponsored by Upward Bound "helped to shape my thinking, reinforced my belief, and motivation that I can do anything." Moreover, additional research (Barnett, 2004; Crawford, 2016; Harper, 2012; Trotter, 1981; White, 2009; Williams, 2002) found that motivating African American male students was critical to their academic success.

Theme 2: Emotional Support.

Emotional support was another emergent theme that has been identified in past studies (Harper, 2006; Sullivan, 2002; Prioleau, 2011; Rolland 2011). Support is a board term that can encompass a number of dynamics. For some students, support is simply having someone to help them with not only their academics but also with issues they may face outside of school. Students mentioned receiving support from their parents, teachers, peers, and staff of the Upward Bound program. As also suggested by Harper (2006), it appeared that peer support was most important to the participants. For example, Derek avered, "the Upward Bound staff and our classmates have always tried to uplift and support us."

Theme 3: Positive Influences.

"To influence is to produce an effect on someone by imperceptible or intangible means" (Zhu, 2017, np.). The third theme, positive influences have been widely discussed in other research (Crawford, 2016; Grieve, 2009; Hall, 2014) concerning the

academic success of African American male students. For example, James mentioned the White House during the interview and his desire to be like President Obama. Ironically, Vaughn (2015) labeled this positive influence for African American male students as the "Obama Effect." Vanderbilt University Professor Ray Friedman suggested, "Obama is obviously inspirational" (Dillion, 2009, A15.). Friedman, David Marx, and Sei Jin Ko (2009) studied whether President Obama influenced the proficiency of African American males on an academic test. According to Dillon (2009), after President Obama's election, a performance gap among African American males and white males nearly disappeared on the 20-question test taken from the verbal sections of the Graduate Record Exam and administered by Friedman, Marx, and Ko. Despite this, McCarron and Inkelas (2006) found that parents have the most significant influence on their children's academic success. For example, Maurice stated, "my mother encouraged me every day to graduate from high school and become successful." Referring to his grandfather who raised him, Joshua also stated, "he always motivated me to go to school and make those good grades." Kevin added, "my mother did a good job helping me gain insight about my goals and the contributions I can make to society." Thus, it can be argued that positive influences from parents and others is vital to students' academic success.

Theme 4: Role models.

The fourth theme identified by this study was role models. Research by Smith (2015) not only discussed the relevance of role models for African American male students, but the dire need for them. Womack (2007) suggested, "Black boys need more role models, not rappers" (n.p.). Gale (2007) informs us that role models would be

beneficial to African America male students by having a positive effect on their life goals and identity development. Joshua considers his mother as his role model, "I admire her because of her line of work; there are not many women in the field of carpentry." Jordan indicated, "Coach Gilbert is someone I look up to, he's a role model for me." According to Jake, "I view my two male teachers as father figures and role models, who genuinely care about my well-being." Despite referencing their parents, teachers, coaches, and church members as role models along with the positive influences these individuals have on them, the participants did not make a definitive connection between role models and positive influences despite it being implied.

Theme 5: Aspirations to Succeed.

Aspirations form the fifth emergent theme of this study, has been widely discussed in previous research (Chavis, 2011; Kester, 2017; Grieve, 2009; Rolland, 2011). It is important that participants to set goals and strive to attain those goals. During the interviews, several aspirations (i.e., graduating from high school, attending college, & making a better life for their families) were echoed constantly. Grieve (2007) and Kester (2017) posited that family, school, and peers could influence the aspirations of African American male students. The participants' responses also support the findings from Grieve's (2007) and Kester's (2017) research. For example, Jordan stated, "my peers are never in trouble, they want better for themselves, and they always try their best in school." Kiree praised his high school teachers for "keeping him focused on his education and encouraging him to achieve his goals." Kevin added, "my mother and teachers are preparing me for college. My goal is to graduate from college." Each of the

participants had aspirations that differed slightly. However, all agreed that they wanted to graduate from college and pursue a better life for themselves and their families.

Theme 6: Participation in Extracurricular Activities.

The final theme of this study was extracurricular activities (i.e., band, athletic teams, Beta Clubs). Research by Crawford (2016;); Everson (2005); Prigmore (2013) and Rolland (2011), revealed the importance of participation in extracurricular activities for African American male students. Moreover, the researchers were able to identify a pattern based on the academic success of African American males who participated in extracurricular activities. For example, the participants for this study indicated that their football coach, Coach House was very tough on them, taught them discipline and stressed passing their classes. Membership in the Beta Club demonstrated the young men's commitment to academic achievement. According to Everson (2005), participation in extracurricular activities was found to be crucial to success in school amongst African American males who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds (i.e., poverty). The findings from this study support this assertion.

The Experiences of African American Male Upward Bound Participants

The majority of the participants reported that their experiences (i.e., daily experiences, activities, & encounters) did not have an overwhelmingly negative impact on their schoolwork. This is hard to fathom, as one would expect some minimum impact. It is quite possible that the participants simply do not recognize the likely impact their experience(s) have had on their education. For example, Jordan indicated that drug activity is prevalent in his neighborhood. The lifestyle of a drug dealer can be magnified

by the expensive cars and jewelry, however Jordan asserted, "I'll stick with school and see how that turns out." Jake quipped, "rarely is there good news about where I'm from, it's always something bad." Yet, he stated "it makes me try harder in school; school is probably my only way to escape life here."

The hardships of growing up in a rural and impoverished area can be detrimental to his education. For example, Joshua mentioned that he does not have access to the Internet or a computer at home. To the best of his knowledge, there are not many households in his neighborhood with Internet services. Furthermore, each participant indicated that a parent had graduated from high school, but only two indicated that a parent had obtained a college degree. Academic success and college attendance was not a focal point of many of their communities. Moreover, other African American males within the community could be found standing on the corners doing nothing. A lack of male role models was also found to be an issue as suggested by the participants.

Because of the obstacles faced by the communities in which they reside, there are limited to no afterschool programs for these students. Therefore, many participate in extracurricular activities (i.e., Beta Club, athletic teams) sponsored by their high schools. For example, Joshua added,

> My friends and I are holding each other accountable by not missing days from school and participating in extracurricular activities because there is nothing to do at home once the school day is over.

Also, the only educational program afforded to the students, outside of school is the Upward Bound program. Findings from this study reveal that Upward Bound has been a

constant and positive force in the experiences of the research participants. Upward

Bound has been a decisive factor in each participant's educational pursuits. The

participants' school districts are consistently underfunded by the state's elected officials

and unable to provide students with adequate educational services. Thus, the Upward

Bound program is viewed as a form of academic life support by parents and local

educators. Upward Bound for many of its students has become a means of providing the

basic services students should receive at their local high schools. The Upward Bound

program, conceived out of war (i.e., war on poverty), continued out of necessity.

Influences of Upward Bound on the Identity Status of African American Male

Upward Bound Participants

Based on the descriptions of their experiences, as the participants navigated the

stages of identity status, it appears that they experienced three of the four distinctions as

presented by Marcia (1966). The relationship between African American males, their

perceptions of Upward Bound's influences on their academic success, identity status, and

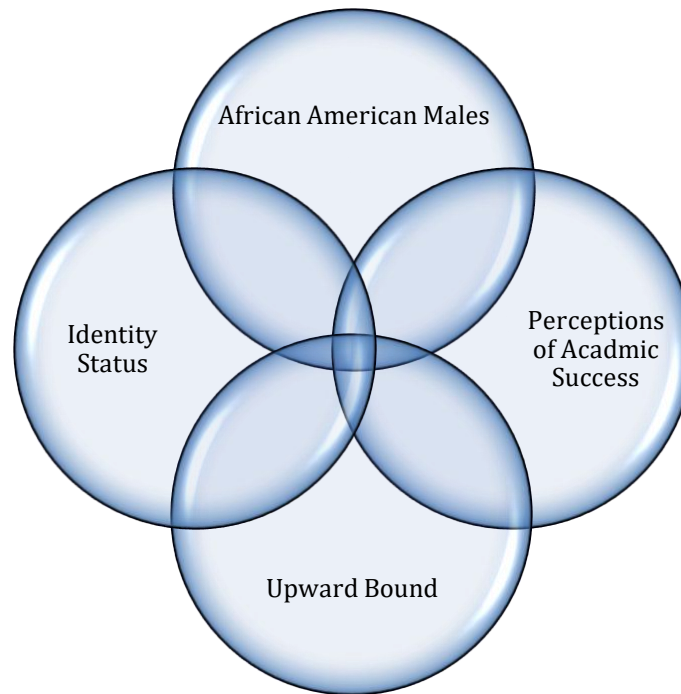the Upward Bound program are depicted in Figure 1 as viewed by this study.

Figure 1. African American Males, Upward Bound, Identity Status, and Perceptions of Academic Success Relationship Diagram.

The three distinctions from Marcia's Theory that were identified in this study are identity achieved, moratorium, and foreclosure. Identity achieved refers to individuals who have experienced commitment after exploration. Commitment after exploration is when someone, in this case, African American male Upward Bound participants have experienced an identity crisis and committed to a chosen sense of identity, based on their exploration. For this study, crisis is defined as "a period of engagement in choosing or searching among meaningful alternatives" (David, 2014). Based on the participants' description of their experiences, data suggested that the Upward Bound program did, in fact, influence the identity status of the research participants. For example, after participating in the Upward Bound program, all of the participants stated that they have

committed to school, making better grades, graduating from high school and attending college. It appears the exposure and services (i.e., tutoring, mentoring, cultural exploration, field trips, dramatics club) provided by the program were vital in the participants' decision to make such commitments, thereby reaching the identity-achieved stage of Marcia's Theory (1966).

Moratorium refers to individuals who have experienced commitment after exploration but have not made commitments. David (2014) indicated that those persons who are found to be in this stage experience low levels of identity and high levels of exploration. For example, Jordan stated,

Before Upward Bound, I was not committed to anything. The Upward Bound program opened up doors for me because I am a member of the program's scholar bowl team. I am committed to the team when I am at Upward Bound, but when I am at home I am really not focused on preparing for scholar bowl.

Furthermore, each of the eight participants indicated that they were not truly committed to anything before their participation in Upward Bound. This lack of commitment is inclusive of the exposure (i.e., attendance at competitions, college fairs, school-sponsored trips) provided in extracurricular activities sponsored by their respective high schools. This stage of moratorium is relatively common for teenagers (Fraser-Thill, 2017). As suggested by Marcia, moratorium is a time of exploration for young people and must be completed before moving to another stage of identity status

Foreclosure refers to individuals who have consciously adopted the values prescribed by significant others, such as parents or peers, without having examined

alternatives. For example, five of the eight participants attend the church to which their parent/guardian takes them, thereby implicitly influencing the religious beliefs of the young men without permitting them to explore other religious beliefs or denominations. A connection between church and this study was identified as students discussed their cultural influences, role models, and positive influences in their lives. Two other participants in this study indicated that they did not attend church. This research established that each of the participants also experienced this distinction as described by Marcia (1966). The age of the participants prevented them from having complete authority over their experiences and exposures.

Kinney-Walker (2015) found that Upward Bound influenced and contributed to the identity development of program participants. Moreover, data presented by Thayer (2007) also supports the notion that Upward Bound influences the identity status of African American male students. Based on the identity distinctions mentioned above and existing literature presented, this study sought to explain what influences the Upward Bound program has on the identity status of the research participants. This research study differs from that of Kinney-Walker (2015) in that her study focused primarily on Upward Bound graduates. Kinney-Walker's study also explored the student's persistence in college. Furthermore, the focus of this study also differs from Thayer's (2007) focus on the effects of the assimilation process and acculturation on the academic achievement of African American male students.

Influences of Upward Bound on the Academic Performance of African American

Male Upward Bound Participants

The participants noted the program staff, learning strategies, mentoring, social relationships, academics, and exposure as the most influential components of the Upward Bound's impact on their academic performance. Overall, each participant enjoys participating in the program and views the program as positive and helpful in their academic performance. The participants also placed value on the experiences they have and relationships forged over the duration of the program.

The participant's perceptions were based on their grades before joining the program and those since participating in Upward Bound. On average, the participants indicated that their grades improved by a minimum of one letter grade. Each of the participants successfully passed one or more of subject area tests as required by the Mississippi State Department of Education for promotion to the next grade and graduation. Five (62.5%) students improved their ACT scores by an average of three points since enrolling in Upward Bound. This was in large part due to the ACT Prep class in which they are enrolled through Upward Bound. For example, Jake stated,

Upward Bound paid for me to take my ACT and we had a class ACT prep, to prepare us for the test. I made a 16 but will retake it because I want to go to a four-year college.

Two (25%) of the remaining participants had the opportunity to take the ACT for the first time because of their enrollment in the program.

Research by Ogbevire (2015) suggested that African American males who participate in a Trio Program (i.e., Upward Bound, Talent Search, Student Support Services) benefited academically from the programs. Adams- King (2016) research, which focused explicitly on the mathematics and reading class grades of Afriacn American males also found that, Upward Bound was instrumental in increasing the grades. Thomas (2014) added that based upon grades, the Upward Bound program was effective in influencing African America males to succeed based on their school grade point averages.

The research findings from this study further supports the previous research on the effectiveness of the Upward Bound program on African American male program participants as discussed above. Moreover, the research findings from this study revealed that Upward Bound influenced the identity status of African American male program participants and also shaped their academic performance thus disagreeing with the research findings on the effectiveness of Upward Bound as presented by Mathematica Policy Research Inc. (2009).

Implications

This study establishes recommendations to provide to; a) Upward Bound administrators, b) local high school counselors, c) administrators, d) parents, and e) government officials, which will allow for the development of keener understandings of factors perceived by African American to influence their academic success.

Upward Bound Administrators

Upward Bound administrators must embrace the critical role they play in the lives of African American male program participants (Quinn, 2015). This study revealed that program administrators must recognize how vital the services provided by the program are for its students. Building on past success is always good, but it is wise to adapt and implement strategies that are most effective when working with African American male program participants. For example, continue to offer the students opportunities for educational and cultural exposure as provided by the program (Anderson, 2009). This is critical as each participants has lived in or been exposed to an environment extreme impoverishment over their life span which stems from residing in Mississippi. Exposing the young men to other environments could also enhance their identity development by recognizing across-ethnic group environmental diversity. This would also be an excellent opportunity for the young men to learn to appreciate their own environment while learning to respect the differences in other environments. One component of the Upward Bound program that should be of particular focus is the students' needs for access to computers, printers, and the internet to conduct research and to complete assignments.

High School Counselors

No price can be placed on the value that counselors have within the educational landscape. Based on the findings from this study, specific focus should be placed on the influence of counselors on African American males within high schools. For example, Derek stated, "I have had positive interactions with my counselors. They always try to lift you up and make you feel good about yourself." Jordan added, "We have had

counselors from Jamaica, Oregon, and England. They have been a huge help to me with my schoolwork." Moreover, as pointed out by previous studies (Herndon & Moore, 2002; Moore, 2008; Ruekberg, 2006; Washington, 2010), counselors help with the scheduling of classes, registering for national exams, completing scholarship and college admission applications. In some cases, based on the relationship between a student and the counselor, the counselor may recommend a specific college the student should attend along with a suggested major.

Another counselor role that is of particular importance to this research is that associated with students applying to and being accepted into the Upward Bound program. The staff of the Upward Bound program works closely with high school counselors to identify potential program participants. Additionally, the counselor and Upward Bound staff works together in identifying various approaches and best practices to support the students academically.

Administrators

High school and post-secondary administrators must recognize that African American male students are a unique population (ETS, 2011; Gardiner, 2006; Rolland, 2011). More importantly, traditional approaches and practice to maximizing the academic success of this group may not work (Bell, 2010; Harper, 2012; Yaffe, 2010). For example, Joshua mentioned, "his principal demonstrated he truly cared about the students and took time out to talk with them about life." This study revealed that Joshua perceived the interaction with his principal to be positive and it influenced his desire to always do his best in class. High school and post-secondary administrators should work

together for the greater good of their local communities. The Upward Bound program provides one instance where such an effort can be gratifying. Working together to forge partnerships and true working relationships would be beneficial for all. For example, services that the student's need but cannot be afforded by their school districts could be available to the students via the Upward Bound program that is situated on the campus of a post-secondary institution.

Moreover, the Upward Bound Summer Bridge program allows program participants, who are recent high school graduates, to enroll at the host institution for summer classes. Thereby, adding to the undergraduate student enrollment numbers for the host institution. While the Upward Bound program cannot promote one post-secondary institution over another, it sure can maximize the experiences of the participants on the campus of the host institution with the assistance and support of the host institutions administrators.

Parents

Parents have the most significant influence on their children's academic success (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). When parents are directly involved in the education of their children, they are more likely to achieve academic success, graduate from high school and attend college (Bridgeland, 2010). There has been extensive research (Allen, 2017; Howard, 2015; Riddick, 2011; Threlfall, 2013) on the role of parents of African American male children in education. For no other ethnic group is it more important for the parents to be involved in their child(s) education than for African American male students (Howard, 2015; Fleischmann, 2016).

This study revealed the positive influences (i.e., encouragement, motivation) of the parent(s) and extended family members on the education of African American male students. It is critical that parents make it a priority to be involved in their children's education, especially the fathers of African American male students. This study found that the fathers of African American male students must do a better job of being involved in their child's learning. Again, this involvement not only aids in the academic success of the student but also with their life course (Yaffe, 2012).

Government Officials

The achievement gap has been a topic of discussions within the field of education for decades. Moreover, it has been the focus of countless research studies (Atkinson, 2010; Bohrnstedt, 2015; Vanneman, 2009). Yet, there has been no definitive approach to solving this problem (Murphy, 2010; Perreaud, 2015; Plucker, 2010). This study found that the Upward Bound program has dramatically influenced the academic success of African American male students. Previous research (Hunt, 1969; Lee, 2009; Kinney-Walker, 2015; Thomas, 2014) also supported the impact that Upward Bound has on student academic achievement.

If government officials are genuinely interested in during their part to assist with closing the achievement gap, they will support programs such as Upward Bound. The Upward Bound program is a federally funded program that is awarded to institutions of higher learning and other non-profits organizations (i.e., school districts, community centers) via the United States Department of Education. For years, the funding of the Upward Bound program has been in question. Data from this research is yet another

example as to why government officials should continue to support funding for Trio

Programs (i.e., Upward Bound, Talent Search, Student Support Services) as the programs

work. This research allowed the students themselves to express how the Upward Bound

program influenced them. The Upward Bound program is not broken; it works and

should receive unwavering support from government officials.

Implications for Theory

The findings from this study provide have theoretical implications. A review of

the conceptual framework established in Chapter one shows Marica's Theory (1966)

broken down into four distinctions identity achieved, moratorium, foreclosure, and

diffuse. Also represented is Bush and Bush's (2013) African American Male Theory

which consists of the tenants of inner/outer microsystem and inner macrosystem for this

study. This study focused on the experiences of the eight participants and their

perceptions.

During the research process, it was immediately discovered that the participants

had to move from one distinction to the next in respect to Marcia's Theory. Moreover,

none of the students honestly knew what distinction they identified with at the time of the

study. Also, it appeared that at least three of the research participants possibly alternated

between Marica's distinctions of identity status from time to time. Based on the

emergent themes identified by this research, it is clear that various influences played a

role in the student's transition from one stage to the next of Marcia's Theory. Of vital

importance was the influence the Upward Bound program had on the student's identity

status. Based on the perceptions of the participants, Upward Bound was critical in their

development and ability to move from one stage to the other based on Marcia's Theory (1966).

Overall, each of the participants expressed a strong inner and outer microsystem as outlined by Bush and Bush (2013). The inner microsystem consists of personality, beliefs, intellect, and perceptions. The outer microsystem consists of family, peer groups, neighborhood, church, and school. Each participant attributed some manner of support to the outer microsystem (i.e., home, parents, friends, church, etc.). However, the neighborhood component of outer microsystem was a concern for three of the participants as they felt that their communities overall did not support or promote their academic success. Despite this, they agreed that their friends and parents supported and pushed them to be their best. There were no expressed implications of Bush and Bush's (2013) macrosystem on the participants. The macrosystem consists of cultural hegemony, racism, hip-hop and youth environments. There was no perceived implication of cultural hegemony by the participants. Only one of the participants mentioned racism during the research process. Furthermore, a lack of influence from the macrosystem was surprising, given many African American males are influenced by what they see on television, which is mostly hip-hop.

The participants in this study reflected on the impact of their various experiences on them. Also, the participants discussed how their experiences shaped their perceptions. The theories by Marcia and Bush and Bush could be instrumental in further understanding the relationship between identity status, cultural hegemony, and racism among African American male students. Additional research in this area would add to

the literature as some research (Earick, 2012; Ross, 2016) has taken place based on similar influences.

Societal Implications

The societal implications of this research can be rewarding. Increasing the academic success of African American male students is within itself noteworthy. As a country, it is imperative that we support and encourage the academic success of African American male students. According to the Schott Foundation (2015), only 59% of Black males graduated from high school. Such a low graduation rate (as compared to males of other ethnic groups) translates into low college enrollment for this group. Research by Feireman (2014) showed, "Black males ages 18 and older make up just 5.5% of all college students, and of that number, only one in six will receive a college degree (para. 2). This is unacceptable, as there are many academically inclined young Black men within African American and other communities. Huggins (2015) further explained, "as a result of their academic shortcomings, African American males find themselves at an increased risk for unemployment and poverty and have become the most represented racial group in the United States prison system" (p. iii).

It is imperative to stop this cycle. These communities need more Black leaders, role models, law enforcement officers, teachers, physicians, judges, lawyers, and business owners. The younger generation deserves to be able to identify with someone in their community and be able to aspire to be like that person. Fathers must answer the call of the children; they desperately need this support. Gangs and negative influences are ever

so present to welcome children with open arms. There is a need to remember the old African proverb, "it takes a village to raise a child."

Implications for Future Research

This study described the experiences of eight African American male Upward Bound students and their perceptions of Upward Bound's impact on their identity status and academic success. As a result, this research contributes to our understanding of the challenges faced by this group. However, future research is always endorsed to increase our knowledge. It is crucial for Upward Bound administrators, parents, high school teachers/guidance counselors, and institutions of higher learning to know as much as possible about the lived experiences of African American male Upward Bound participants. In particular, how such experiences in combination with what factors influence academic success among this group can be of great benefit.

An area that would add to our understanding of this phenomenon would be to examine the experiences and influences of males from different cultural groups who also participate in the Upward Bound program. Identifying similarities and difference between and among the groups could be of great benefit to the higher education landscape. Another focus of future research could examine the academic success of African American male Upward Bound participants whose fathers live within the household as compared to those who do not. Such research could provide additional insight into the role of role models and any effect that having a father present has on the academic achievement of the young men.

Future research might consider if the academic success of the African American male Upward Bound participants has any influence on their parent(s) desire to obtain a GED, or college degree. Understanding the phenomenon that may exist between the parent and student based on the students' academic achievement could be beneficial in understanding the potential aspirations of the parent. A final implication for future research would be to investigate the highest degree attainment of African American male Upward Bound participants and why the specific degree field was chosen.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the experiences of African American male Upward Bound students and their perceptions of Upward Bound's impact on their identity status and academic success. This research provides a first-hand account of their experiences and perceptions. The perceptions of the participants and the positive influences in their lives, as they indicated, verify the conceptual orientation of the study. The findings provide new insight into the experiences and perceptions of academic success among African American male Upward Bound participants.

The researcher's original goal was to interview at least 10 African American male students who participated in the Upward Bound program at Southeastern State University. Unfortunately, the researcher ended up with only eight participants because it was not as easy as assumed to convince the students to volunteer for this study. Despite this, the researcher believes that he was still able to capture the essence of the participants' experiences and perceptions.

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Appendix A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview One

I.   General Information
   a. How old are you?
   b. What grade are you in?
   c. What school do/did you attend? In what city/town is the school located?
   d. How long have you participated in Upward Bound?

II.   Background/Family
   a. Where were you born?
   b. Where did you grow up?
   c. What ethic background do you identify with? (Black or African American)
   d. Do you know what town/city where your parents grew up?
   e. Who do you live with? (Father, mother, grandparent, extended family)
   f. Do you have any siblings? (Brothers or sisters)
       1. How old are they?
       2. Are they in school? Did they graduate from high school?
       3. How do you think your parent(s) feel about their decision to stay in school (graduate) instead of dropping out of school?
   g. What language do you generally speak at home?
   h. If your parent(s) is employed, what is his/her occupation?
   i. Did your parent(s) graduate from high school?
   j. Did your parent(s) graduate from college?

III. Social Relationships
   a. You already told me that you are (Black, African American). Are most of your friends also (Black, African American)?
   b. Describe your best friend.
       1. Is s/he in the same classes as you?
       2. Is s/he also in Upward Bound?
   c. How do you think your best friend would describe you?
       1. Do you think s/he would call you a "scholar" or "school kid?"
   d. How do your closest friends feel about school?
   e. Do you think your friends influence the way you feel about school?
   f. What do you think your friends would say if you decided to drop out of school?

g. Have your friends or anyone else ever teased you or made fun of you for trying to do well in school?
  1. If so, tell me about it.
h. Have your friends or anyone else ever teased you or made fun of you for being Black/African American or for the way you speak/used to speak English?
  1. If so, tell me about it.

IV. Upward Bound
a. Why did you join the Upward Bound Program?
b. Do you hang out with other students in Upward Bound?
  1. Are any of your close friends also in Upward Bound?
  2. Did you become friends after you were in Upward Bound together or were you already friends before the program?
c. Do you think being involved in Upward Bound affects the way you feel about school?
  1. If so, how?
d. Do you think you do better in your classes as a result of being in Upward Bound?
  1. If so, why?
  2. Why not?
e. Do you feel like the other students in Upward Bound make you try harder in your classes?
  1. If so, what do they do or say that makes you want to try harder or do better?
f. Do the other students in Upward Bound talk about their future plans?
  1. What do they say?
  2. Do they talk about graduating and going to college?
  3. Do you think what they say influences you at all?
g. During general assembly or counseling sessions, does the program director of counselors ever talk to the group or you individually about plans for the future?
  1. What does s/he say?
  2. Do you think these talks have influenced you?

V. Upward Bound Summer Program Component
a. What was your experience like during the program?
b. What are you hoping to learn?
c. What do you hope to become better at by attending this program?
d. In what ways do you think this might help you get into college?

Interview Two

VI. Feelings about school, schoolwork, and level of school attachment

a. When you were in elementary school, did you like it?
   1. How did you feel about school?
   2. What did you like?
   3. What didn't you like?
b. In elementary school, what kind of student were you?
   1. Was schoolwork hard for you?
   2. Which things or subjects were hard?
   3. Which things were easy?
   4. What kind of grades did you get?
c. When you were in middle school, did you like it?
   1. How did you feel about school?
   2. What did you like?
   3. What didn't you like?
d. When you were in middle school, what kind of student were you?
   1. Was schoolwork hard for you?
   2. Which things subjects were hard?
   3. Which things subjects were easy?
   4. What kind of grades did you get?
e. Here in high school, how do you feel about school?
   1. What do/did you like?
   2. What don't/didn't you like?
f. Think about how Upward Bound might have changed the kind of student you are/were in high school.
   1. Is/was schoolwork hard for you? What about before you were in UB?
   2. What things are/were hard? What about before you were in UB?
   3. What things are/were easy? What about before you were in UB?
   4. What kind of grades do/did you get? What about before you were in UB?
g. Do/did you like school? What about before you were in UB?
   1. What do/did you like? What about before you were in UB?
   2. What don't/didn't you like? What about before you were in UB?
h. Do you think school is important? What about before you were in UB?
   1. Why?
   2. Why not?
i. If you didn't have to go to school, would you (have)?
   1. If not, what do you think you'd be doing/would have done instead of going to school?
j. Do you plan to attend college? Where?
   1. How do you feel about the challenges you will face?
   2. Have you decided what your major will be?
   3. Have you participated in any programs that will help you prepare other than Upward Bound (Talent Search)?
   4. Do you plan to seek help if courses are challenging? From where?

     5. Do you feel like Upward Bound has prepared you well for college courses?

VII.   **Feelings about Classes and Teachers**
  a. What classes do you take?
  b. Tell me about your classes.
     1. Do you think your classes are the right level for you?
     2. Do you feel that you understand most of what the teachers are saying in class?
     3. Do you participate in class discussions?
        1.Why?
        2.Why not?
     4. Do you feel like you know just as much as other students in your classes?
  c. How much homework do you have on an average night?
     1. Do you usually finish all your homework?
        a. Why?
        b. Why not?
     2. Do you find homework hard?
        a. What about it is hard?
        b. What about it is easy?
  d. Describe a really good teacher you've had in high school.
     1. What did he or she do that was helpful?
     2. Are most of the teachers you have now like that?
        a. How are they helpful?
        b. How are they not helpful?
  e. Do you think your teachers expect you to do well in class?
     1. What do they do or say that makes you feel this way?

VIII.   **Upward Bound Academic Year Program Component**
  a. What have you liked most about the academic program so far?
  b. What was different from what you expected?
  c. What have you learned that might help you succeed in school?
  d. What have you already learned that is related to getting into college?

Interview Three

IX.   **Extra-Curricular Activities and Time Outside of School**
  a. Are you involved in any school clubs beside Upward Bound?
     1. Tell me about these clubs?
     2. Who leads the clubs?
     3. Are your friends also in the clubs?
     4. Do you think being in clubs makes you like school more?

     5. Do you feel like other students in the club make you try harder in your classes?
       i. If so, what do they do or say that makes you want to try harder?
   b. Are you involved in any after-school, extra-curricular, or school activities (sports, family, community, church, etc.)?
     1. Tell me about these activities?
     2. Who leads these activities?
     3. Do your friends also participate in these activities?
     4. Do you think being involved in these activities affects your feelings about school?
       i. If so, how?
     5. Do you feel like other members in these groups make you try harder in your classes?
       i. If so, what do they do or say that make you want to try harder?
   c. Do you have a job?
     1. Tell me about it. (Doing what, how many hours per week, etc)
     2. Did you want to have a job or did your parents ask you to?
     3. Is this your first job?
       i. How old were you when you first got a job?
     4 What do you do with the money you earn?
     5. Do you think the time you spend at work affects your schoolwork or how much homework you get done?
   d. Do you have to take care of your brothers and/or sisters?
     1. How many hours a week do you take care of them?
     2. Do you think you spend the time you spend taking care of your siblings affects your schoolwork or how much homework you get done?
   e. Do you have any household chores or duties?
     1. Tell me about them?
     2. How many hours a week do you spend doing these chores?
     3. Do you think the time you spend doing chores affects your schoolwork or how much homework you get done?

X.   **Future Plans**
   a. Do you think you will graduate from high school?
     1. If no, why not?
   b. Do you plan to go to college?
     1. If yes, have you thought about a particular school?
     2. Do you have any idea of what you would want to study?
   c. Have you thought of what kind of job you would like to have?
   d. Have you ever thought about getting married and/or having children?
     1. Tell me about your thoughts.
     2. Do you have any friends who are pregnant or already have children?

3. How do you think having kids at a young age might affect your plans for the future?

XI. Upward Bound Summer Program
a. What strengths did you develop during the summer program that you think will help you in school?
b. What challenges do you think you still might face when you go back to school in the fall?
c. What is the most important lesson you are taking with you?
d. What suggestions would you have for the staff and/or program?

XII. Wrap-up
a. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?
b. Do you have any questions for me?