

Beat Out Your Own Rhythm:
A Study of Public School Step Teams' Influence on Academic Identification and
Academic Motivation Among African American Males

by

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Abstract

Public school stakeholders continue to appeal for quality educational outcomes for African American male students. This continuous outcry has led researchers to study critical subgroups from a framework of excellence in order to justify the need to restructure urban schools and expand the coverage of cultural identities. This research sought to determine if a culturally relevant extracurricular activity can influence African American males' academic motivation and identification with academics. The current investigation utilized a posttest only design with nonequivalent groups approach. This investigation examines a public school step team's influence on academic identification and motivation among African American male students. Specifically, this study uses the Identification with Academics Scale (IAS) and the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS) in order to determine if a statistical difference existed between participants and non-participants in the step team program. This study was the first known examination of a step team program in relation to enhancing identification to academics or academic motivation. Results indicated that step team participants' identification to academics and intrinsic motivation scores were higher than non-participant peers, but not statistically significant. However, there was a statistically significant outcome in relation to step team participants' extrinsic motivation scores when compared to non-participant peers. Additionally, reported academic performance revealed a statistically significant interaction effect with step team membership and identification to academics score.

Keywords: academic motivation, African American males, Black, identification with academics, step teams

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*Thou shalt also decree a thing, and it shall be established unto thee:
and the light shall shine upon thy ways.*

-Job 22:28 (King James Version)

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Chapter 1

In 1933, Carter G. Woodson published his legendary narrative, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, in order to convey a call to action. Wesley & Perry, who wrote the introduction to the book, summarized,

The most imperative and crucial element in Woodson's concept of mis-education hinged on the education system's failure to present authentic Negro History in schools and the bitter knowledge that there was a scarcity of literature available for such a purpose, because most history books gave little or no space to the black man's presence in America. (as cited in Woodson, 1933)

He declared that America's public schools had a problem teaching African American children. Such children were students who teachers did not love, respect, or understand (Woodson, 1998). More than 80 years later, educators are still struggling to become more aware of the needs of diverse learners in the classroom (Gay, 2002). Today, speculation persists pertaining to the education of ethnic minority males (Ogbu, 1992; Osborne, 1997b; Osborne & Walker, 2006). The quandary of negative barriers, societal influence, and remediation among African American males can be quite depressing. In an era when schools are under pressure to increase academic achievement of all subgroups, there is minimal growth in academic achievement rates of African American male students (Comer, 2004; Cokley, McClain, Jones, & Johnson, 2012).

As the public clamors for better public schools, leaders must implement effective practices to sustain academic excellence for all school children. By fourth grade, there is a tendency for African American boys to decline in academic progress while falling into the negative traps of discipline and remedial classes (Fremon & Hamilton, 1997). The

current educational circumstances and social barriers some students face can lead to higher drop-out rates and low school performance if not addressed appropriately.

In order for schools to carry out any exemplary educational practices to establish a genuine inclusion of all students, it is crucial that there is an initial comprehension of the nature and contexts of the specific problems and experiences that lead some students to leave school prematurely. (Dei et al., 1997, p. 4)

Several research studies (Dawkins & Guilbault, 2006; Gordon, Iwamoto, Ward, Potts, & Boyd, 2009; Wyatt, 2009) have focused on mentoring programs and sports participation as means to impact academic achievement. However, explorations in innovative, extracurricular programs are limited in scope. If investigations continue to point out that African American males are disproportionately disengaged with academics as conveyed by Cokley et al. (2012), it is important to explore ways to positively impact identification with academics through innovative measures.

Statement of the Problem

There are three paramount conditions needed for educational resiliency to prevail and for African American male students to make significant academic progress. The following techniques presented in an instructional and extracurricular setting are vital components of academic success:

- (a) Culturally responsive activities that help African American male students to link school and culture and make a significant impact on achievement (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Additionally, African American males have an affective

orientation and need a nurturing environment that creates a sense of belonging in order to be successful (Ladson-Billings, 1994);

(b) Programs that intentionally increase social capital and associate positive outcomes to membership help to reduce negative barriers that impede academic progress (Wyatt, 2009); and

(c) The school's role to empower the pursuit of leadership and academic success by guiding identity development and providing a network of social support that connects students to academics (Harris, Palmer, & Struve, 2011).

Educational resilience and identification with academics increase when such factors are present and consistent with African American males (Wynn, 2008). While schools are organized in such a manner to promote high achievement, explicit examples need to focus on critical subgroups that are continuously disengaged.

Disengagement in the instructional setting is not an insurmountable challenge and is not only an issue facing African American male students. However, the critical subgroup tends to succumb to at-risk factors of poor academic performance even when analyzing data in middle-class, predominantly Black communities (Ogbu, 2003). This documented presence of low achievement within the minority male population is captured as a disturbing problem centered on cultural mismatch (Villegas, 1988). This mismatch often occurs because cultural performance tasks are not utilized within daily instructional activities. "The truth is that much is known about the condition of African American education. Yet we find that little has changed in the achievement of these students since the introduction of standardized achievement tests" (Lomotey, 1990, p. 1). "Moving from an assimilationist melting pot perspective to a culturally pluralist

perspective demands that schools make profound changes in the way teachers view culture, learning, language, and teaching” (Phuntsog, 1999, p. 102). There is a great need to reflect on current practices and create circumstances for significant change that can inform educational training and preparation to lead successful program implementation at local schools.

School improvement planning often involves efforts to increase academic achievement while confronting unique challenges. This collaborative effort should be an inclusive goal for students, parents, teachers, and administrators to create cultural capital for the benefit of students. Cultural capital exists when a community develops a sense of social consciousness as a tool to revitalize political, social, and educational needs as a priority for improved outcomes (Franklin, 2002). Developing excellence in instructional practices and expanding extracurricular activity programs are primary foci of schools willing to help students go beyond proficiency and to inspire them to reach their full potential (Wynn, 2008). Schools should use the creative talents of teachers to emphasize building positive relationships and engage in intentional planning for dialogue that will help African American males succeed. Although well-intentioned, current improvement efforts do not create the context to promote growth for all students (Comer, 2004).

The curriculum, instruction, assessment, management, and infrastructure adjustments that have taken place do not go to the heart of the problem – the failure throughout the education enterprise to put the child and adolescent development at the center, and to manage systems in a way that will support it and simultaneously support academic learning. (Comer, p. 239)

This disconnect has led to the current state of underachievement and creates disadvantages for African American males in particular.

Educating children of African descent requires learning that develops an understanding of the direct relationship between academic success and the educational, cultural, social, economic, and political advantages of the entire community (Kafele, 2002). Some attempts have been made to address the achievement gap and improve relations to school academics through mentoring programs and sports. Studies indicated that memberships in certain programs can improve academic achievement and have personal-social development advantages (Wyatt, 2009; Morris & Adeyemo, 2012). In the same manner, the implications of many research studies (Asante, 1991; Johnson, 1999; Griffin & Allen, 2006; Toldson & Owens, 2010) strongly asserted the need to engage in more research in the field on specific examples of what is working, and to expand the dialogue from athletics to other frameworks that could benefit Black male students.

There is a need to move schools toward adopting and adapting programs that may have a positive impact on improving African American male students' identification with academics. Current studies (Toldson, Brown, & Sutton, 2009; Osborne & Jones, 2011; Howard, 2013) presented several shortcomings of developing strong programs with a primary focus on mentoring and sports. Toldson (2008) recognized that mentoring and sports programs contribute positively to the emotional well-being of students but emphasized a smaller ratio of students to coaches and counselors are needed to make an impact on overall student performance. Additionally, sports programs in schools can tend to focus more on short-term winnings, rather than the investment of long-term relationships and care needed to program African American males for school excellence

(Hodge et al., 2008). Thus, there is a need to continue comparative studies of programs in relation to academic achievement and identification as a means to enhance overall school culture. If a connection can be established between participation in mentoring programs and athletics, then it might be possible to use culturally relevant programs, such as step teams, as a strategy for increasing African American male identification to academics.

Limitations of Research

There have been various studies that examined academic motivation and identification to academics (Voelkl, 1997; Wentzel & Wigfield, 1998; Osborne, 1999). Additionally, there have been investigations of Black Greek-Letter organizations' (BGLO) impact on leadership ability of minority students. There has not been a known major exploration of public school step teams' influence on academic achievement factors (Parks, 2008). Therefore, there are little baseline data for the present study. In addition, as a pilot study, surveying African American males from only one district, with active step teams, limits the ability to generalize.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore ways in which a culturally relevant step team program may influence African American males' identification with academics and academic motivation. This study focused on the following research questions:

1. Is there a statistical difference in identification with academics between high school African American male participants and non-participants in a step team program?

2. Is there a statistical difference in academic motivation between high school African American male participants and non-participants in a step team program?
3. If differences exist, what moderates those differences (i.e., age, reported academic performance, length of time on step team)?

Definition of Key Terms

Academic Motivation - that which causes the enjoyment of school learning and increases the students' level of engagement (Lai, 2011).

Black Greek-Letter organizations (BGLOs) – more often referred to as the divine nine, acknowledging the first nine fraternities and sororities founded between 1906 and 1963 by African American men and women. Fraternities include: Alpha Phi Alpha (1906), Kappa Alpha Psi (1911), Omega Psi Phi (1911), Phi Beta Sigma (1914), and Iota Phi Theta (1963). Sororities include: Alpha Kappa Alpha (1908), Delta Sigma Theta (1913), Zeta Phi Beta (1920), and Sigma Gamma Rho (1922). Such organizations have played a significant role in collegiate social life, civil rights, networking, and higher education (Parks, 2008).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy – “Culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria or propositions: (a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 160).

Identification with Academics – Osborne (1997a) used the Identification with Academics Scale (IAS) to assess the “extent to which a student’s self-esteem is connected with and dependent upon academic outcomes” (p. 62).

Stepping (step teams) – Kimbrough (2003) referenced stepping as part of the origin of African dance adopted by historically Black fraternities and sororities as part of chants and rituals signaling “crossing over” (p.19) and acceptance into Black Greek-Letter organizations.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Educators often search for ways to encourage success in order to increase the achievement of students. In a case study analysis of effective sports programs, scholars noted extracurricular activities help students to examine their existing knowledge and beliefs, thus, increasing conceptual knowledge in the classroom (Dawkins, Williams, & Guilbault, 2006). Likewise, such programs tend to adapt curriculum expectations and materials to meet the various learners' needs. One significant method of providing nurturing scenarios to African American male students is through culturally relevant activities. Noguera (2008) indicated authentic relationships and teachers' knowledge of students' internal and external circumstances are important factors in creating successful outcomes for minority school boys. Moreover, schools should make it a priority to provide an engaging learning environment that is personalized with mentors, psychological guidance, and other intensive supports that serve as an intervention to at-risk factors. Teachers have a moral responsibility in shaping the character and intellect of students. Taking a genuine interest in the total well-being of students has been shown to be influential on academic identification for African American males (Mitchell & Stewart, 2012). Some African American male students often struggle with the intellectual experience because of a lack of relevant cultural pedagogy and effective teacher-student relationships (Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

The idea of teachers caring for students has become a vital component of student success. Ogbu (2003) argued, "African American male students are more concerned with

how they are treated or represented in the curriculum and with whether schools and teachers care for them than with teachers' expertise in knowledge, skills, and language" (p. 53). African American students must be motivated in ways that do not ignore who they are and what they bring to the intellectual experience. Teachers implement strategies that affect students negatively and positively. These techniques are the framework that establish whether a student will fail or persevere in the academic arena.

Culturally relevant activities place the student at the center of the learning context. An Afrocentric curriculum is the theory and practice of relating the general experience of African Americans into mainstream educational topics and expanding dialogue to be culturally inclusive (Asante, 1991). In a traditional Eurocentric-based curriculum, efforts are needed to adjust lessons and place African Americans as a part of the academic information being discussed. School teachers need to be exposed more to the culture of their students in order to fully comprehend what transpires in the academic setting (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Furthermore, teachers of African American students will benefit from having more prolonged immersion in African American culture.

Research using culturally relevant pedagogy moves away from the deficit framework in discussing African American males to an approach centered on social relations and conceptions of self and others (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Culturally relevant pedagogy attempts to redefine current educational conditions. "As a matter of course, culturally relevant teaching provides a link between classroom experiences and students' everyday lives... Teachers are not afraid to assume oppositional viewpoints to foster students' confidence in challenging what may be inaccurate or problematic" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 94). The critical element of using a students' lens as a framework to

narrate understandings can help to propose solutions to current, challenging trends in educational settings.

Building cultural competence in the classroom relates to how an instructor uses the experiences of students to gain understanding about their personal practice and adapts methods to improve the academic capability of students. Maximizing student learning opportunities is a critical step in creating continuous growth. Milner (2011) strategically detailed how a Caucasian science teacher became self-aware of his practice through deepened understandings and reflections of his diverse, urban students' experiences. This process helps teachers move from theory to practice, often described as culturally relevant teaching. "Educators who create culturally relevant learning contexts are those who see students' culture as an asset, not a detriment to their success" (Milner, 2011, p. 69). This recognition of students' intellectual, social, and economic experiences validates their perceptions as a worthy element to be explored and discussed within the curriculum.

Instructional lesson plans and activities should be able to take into account the diverse audience that needs to be engaged. Diversity is a valuable resource that should be affirmed in a multicultural society (Nieto, 1999). Often, students are motivated to show an appreciation for different viewpoints and cultural understandings of general issues. However, Nieto (1999) suggested that structural inequalities are prevalent in communities of color and economically disadvantaged. Such communities need to be given the power to make decisions that impact learning and utilize their experience to frame successful outcomes. "Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students" (Freire, 1970, p. 72). Too often, mainstream

education resists dialogue, conceals reality and certain facts, and treats students as objects of assistance, particularly in urban communities. Educational systems may have to be redesigned to achieve different results for critical subgroups, often disengaged.

Utilizing culturally responsive techniques and reforming pedagogical practices can nurture cultural consciousness. By viewing education as a human right, priorities in revamping curriculum, instruction, and assessment to meet the needs of all schoolchildren become a collective movement of educators embracing cultural practices. “This movement illustrates a bottom-up educational intervention that nurtures the collective consciousness and identity to indigenous peoples in ways designed to counter cultural annihilation and accommodation” (King, 2005, p. 25). Such teaching methods may take on a risky approach to denounce the current trend or curriculum standards in place. However, Haynes and Nembhard (1999) argued such an alternative to revitalize conditions built on collaboration is embedded in the American tradition of development and change. This exchange of ideas and development of new teaching programs and activities, such as step teams, could serve as a model of authentic engagement.

Research in cultural contexts requires understanding ways to investigate new learnings while examining missing constructs in current intervention plans. Examining culturally relevant teaching activities like step teams should reveal how such programs affirm students, make connections, and transcend current practices. The development of conceptual understandings of step teams and possible links to increased academic motivation and identification to academics may help educators understand the scope of creative possibilities that exist to make a difference with African American male students. Urban school improvement studies include examining cultural mechanisms

with a serious, purposive, continuous effort to advocate for high-quality public education (Jones-Wilson, 1991). The overarching goal of such a research framework is to move away from perceptions of inferiority to an emphasis of maintaining excellence through a commitment to creating equitable learning conditions for minority students.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) can play a critical part in the examination of current practices, while simultaneously providing suggestions for planned improvements. Often, inequalities persist in education due to the limited inclusion of historically disenfranchised groups in discussions on school improvement. Kozol (1991) argued that racism plays out in the schooling experiences of poor African American and Latino students in particular. “Race has become metaphorical – a way of referring to and disguising forces, events, classes, and expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body politic than biological race ever was” (Ladson-Billings, 1997, p. 49). CRT affirms the disappointing amount of academic research that takes a deficit approach to the educational struggles of African American male students, without being mindful of how they narrate their own experiences (Griffin & Cummins, 2012). Engaging in intentional dialogue that seeks to grasp the authentic experience within a cultural context can provide insights yet to be discovered or discussed previously.

The ‘voice’ component of critical race theory provides a way to communicate the experience and realities of the oppressed, a first step on the road to justice. As we attempt to make linkages between critical race theory and education, we contend that the voice of people of color is required for a complete analysis of the educational system. (Ladson-Billings, 1997, p. 58)

Freire (1974) emphasized how social relationships are critical and linked to perceptions of self and others. Extensive reviews of the educational gap in academics between African American males and their peer counterparts have been profiled in statistical reports. Stinson (2006) suggested that researchers move toward a theory of excellence through explicit discoveries of cultural practices, while debunking common languages of deficiency with regard to academic studies of minority males. Thus, the framework for studying and reporting on cultural viewpoints involves a critical examination of current truths and perceived realities.

There are several variables to explore when examining relationships in the education of African American males. Introducing subtractive schooling practices as a form of chaos can be an effective research construct to explain the ecological circumstances related to the effects of school achievement (Polite, 2000). This confrontation of truth considers individuals as a part of an integrated whole, rather than outside of the norm (Freire, 1970). Often, the evaluation of African American male students in educational research views participants as problematic. Although the research based on such students has been informative and expansive, more discussion about the diversity of their experiences through innovative analysis needs to be explored (Howard, 2013).

Culturally-inclusive model studies may help to inform current practices in education that have yet been reviewed. In one analysis (Key, 2003), 131 African American eighth-grade science students from three middle schools were surveyed to evaluate how they perceived culturally inclusive topics. African American students responded positively to topics that related to them and their culture. Results indicated a

statistically significant difference in perceived interest with regard to culturally inclusive lessons versus traditional topics without regard to integration of culture (Key, 2003). Since education and general schooling practices play a role in self-identity, it is imperative to explore dynamics of successful cultural programs that may improve issues of disengaging qualities among African American males. Studies dealing with educational structures need to look at different ways of describing practical approaches to enhancing curriculum, educator preparation, and school culture.

CRT provides a lens to reshape schooling practices that can benefit historically disadvantaged groups. The purpose of CRT is to review profound patterns of exclusion and social disparities from a perspective of privilege and oppression that affect the current circumstance of a cultural group (Hiraldo, 2010). CRT, initially introduced in the legal field, has become embraced in educational studies to, not only understand social situations, but to transform them for the better (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). School reform efforts often acknowledge that disparities exist between subgroups but fail to describe systematic programs that are effective in addressing the sociocultural complexities involved in restructuring schools. Day-Vines and Day-Hairston (2005) provided numerous examples of high-minority, high-poverty, and high-achieving schools noting that school districts shared common elements in reducing the achievement gap, often providing culturally relevant, supplementary instruction. A comprehensive approach addressing academic, social, psychological, and cultural identity should serve as the foundation for intervention services geared towards increased, positive outcomes for African American males. CRT helps to focus educational examinations on the cultural and racial politics of schooling with an emphasis on institutional change.

An important challenge for educators is to develop students' competency and to have them realize they are valued. "This is indeed difficult to do in our present society for there is a pervasive societal preference for people whose attributes are not African in origin" (Burlew, Banks, McAdoo, & Azibo, 1992, p. 155). Despite such racial disparities, current models of research must shift from a disorganization frame to a more strength-based, resilient model in order to describe and analyze how African American male students survive in extremely adverse situations (Wilson, 1986). The lens of CRT allows research to confront the discourse that exists in a deficit view, while navigating the unacknowledged and often unheard of successful practices already in existence (Yosso, 2005). Public school step teams have been an extracurricular activity in urban schools since the late 1980s (Kimbrough, 2003), but have not been explored in depth as a culturally relevant activity for students. Often formed by members of Black Greek-Letter organizations (BGLOs), step teams in public schools provided a safe-haven for minority students away from often segregated clubs, particularly in the south (Nelson, 2018). Similar to the showband style of marching bands at historically Black colleges and universities, step teams established an avenue for Black students to showcase cultural traditions of interest away from more conservative, traditional performances. Solorzano (1997) proclaimed CRT should be used to explore cultural research where minority educational inequalities are investigated. Explorations of a school step team may be able to provide suggested structures and interactive networks for possible positive effects on African American male students.

The use of a research paradigm that will allow for an educational critique while uncovering cultural understandings in newly explored activities is relevant to the study on

school step teams. Researchers have implied that the tenets of CRT are vital to educational studies despite scholarly critique (Bell, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Gillborn, 2005; Cole, 2009). “Critical race theory becomes an important intellectual and social tool for deconstruction, reconstruction, and construction: deconstruction of oppressive structures and discourses, reconstruction of human agency, and construction of equitable and socially just relations of power” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 9). In a study on school step teams, the attempt should be made to discuss an innovative, current practice that may identify positive trends for school leaders to consider for implementation and adaptation to strategies in place. The essence of CRT is to explicitly analyze creative trends that have emerged due to the inability of current constructs to create sustainable success for specific subgroups. The phenomena of stepping may be an approach to develop positive outcomes for African American male students. The use of CRT in analyzing culture and climate in a school setting allows a story to be told from a marginalized subgroup’s point of view (Hiraldo, 2010). For the current investigation, students’ academic motivation and identification with school will be examined within the framework of CRT.

Academic Motivation

There are many variables that promote motivation to achieve in school. McFadden (1978) utilized a *t*-test to evaluate the degree to which a given classroom had implemented the techniques and procedures of the Responsive Environment Model (REM) to determine if there was a statistical difference in achievement outcomes using 52 school children in two-first grade classes. Results indicated students in the REM classroom were more highly motivated than the children in the nonresponsive classroom

$t(50) = 3.39, p < .01$ (McFadden, 1978). Culturally relevant activities can be viewed as a responsive measure because of the emphasis on social interactions that help students connect to schooling. Although there is limited scholarly research on the concept of stepping and the impact it may provide on student learning outcomes, it can be used as a responsive measure to influence academic identification. Fine (1991) conducted an extensive review of the cultural elements of African American Step Shows, from a folklorist perspective, detailing the routines and practices discovered at step show performances. However, no links were made to academic achievement or positive outcomes of membership.

In order to make educational meaningful, a cultural-based approach to learning may be a solution to the lack of connectedness in the current design.

Academic motivation is an important dimension to consider in African American males' schooling experiences. "Unfortunately, most African American children are not enrolled in effective schools that nurture and support them while simultaneously providing high quality instruction" (Noguera, 2003, p. 450). As indicated by motivational research (Wood, Hilton, & Hicks, 2014), the study of academic motivation is complex due to intrinsic and extrinsic factors that drive self-determination. A combination of social factors can contribute negatively and positively to one's drive to succeed. In a survey on academic motivation (Garibaldi, 1992), African American male students expressed a desire to finish school and believed that teachers should push them harder to achieve goals and to challenge them. In the same manner, a recent dissertation study, Crawford (2016) investigated academic resiliency and suggested multiple school factors played a role in the motivation of African American students including teacher

influence, positive environment, involvement with peers engaged in similar challenges, and family encouragement. Step teams can possibly serve as a peer social network of students receiving similar emotional support, praise, and understandings through a creative outlet.

The presence of interpersonal relationships through a structured, competitive activity, can create a sense of unity with a team. Cooperative learning structures may positively influence social conditions of students considered at-risk (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Early research on academic motivation (Trotter, 1981) indicated strong academic achievement may cause African American students to have low self-concept due to the lack of peer approval. During this period of research in a deficit framework, scholars often referenced this negative view from peers as “acting white [*sic*]” (Majors & Billson, 1992, p. 247; Hale, 2001, p. 12; Noguera, 2008, p. 142). Conversely, as research models shifted to a framework of excellence, success indicators revealed African American males have a strong preference to succeed and desired the rigorous conditioning in the school setting to help them along the way (Okeke-Adeyanju et al., 2014). African American males tend to indicate a high affective orientation when compared to other racial subgroups revealing the social need to have group affiliation (Noguera, 2008). This disclosure should lead schools into more practices that create positive associations focusing on membership traits that lead to creating an ability to overcome obstacles.

Similar to positive, peer relations creating a sense of unity, school staff members need to intentionally engage in building the relational capacity with African American male students. The relationships that students have with adults should serve as an extended family often reiterating positive conditions or filling in the gap where

dysfunction exists (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Research studies (Ford, Harris, Webb, & Jones, 1994; Toldson & Owens, 2010) have analyzed in depth the significance of group affiliation among African American students implicating that the positive development of students may be contingent upon educators becoming culturally aware themselves, and that training should revolve around effective ways of working with minority students. Likewise, Perry, Steele, and Hilliard (2003) asserted students bring a unique social and cultural perspective to the classroom, and deeper understandings of such dynamics can promote high achievement. When introduced as a cultural activity, step teams may be able to reinforce identity, role development, and motivation because of the historical roots in historically BGLOs and colleges where students attain educational outcomes they once considered unreachable (Kimbrough, 2003).

Although team-based cultural programs may enhance academic motivation, schools should be cautious in creating situations that may escalate alienation and clubs of exclusivity. Since step teams are often coached by members of fraternities and sororities, advisors should monitor student conduct and ensure inclusiveness. Early customs of African American students that served as founders of Greek-letter organizations included divisions in the community centered on class and colorism (Kimbrough, 2003). This divisiveness has been explored in studies regarding unequal participation in extracurricular activities (McNeal, 1998; Covay & Carbonaro, 2010). Nevertheless, Kimbrough and Hutcheson (1998) informed that members of culturally-based organizations evidenced greater student involvement and had more confidence in leadership skills. Thus, participation in a step team club could ultimately boost academic motivation when operated in a culture of high care.

Demonstrating care through personalized interactions directly influences students' motivation to achieve. The politics of caring has been clearly linked in studies of subtractive schooling practices (Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999; Calaff, 2008). "The difference in the way students and teachers perceive school-based relationships can bear directly on students' potential to achieve" (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 62). Embracing new insights and activities that directly correlate to African American male students' interests can help to unravel the distant relationships they sometimes feel with school staff members. One of the conclusions, in a multilevel study by Kennedy (1992), signified the ability of African American males to translate academic participation into achievement and was strengthened not only through participation (as was true for Caucasian males), but also through the trait of association (not as significant for Caucasian males). Consequently, membership and peer-teacher interaction play a role in the educational circumstance of minority students.

Academic motivation continues to be highlighted as a predictive measure of student achievement. Grounded in self-determination theory, academic behavior can be seen as intrinsically motivated, extrinsically motivated, or amotivated (Fortier, Vallerand, & Guay, 1995). Derived from the French Echelle de Motivation en Education (EME), Vallerand et al. (1992) explained:

the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS) is composed of 28 items subdivided into seven sub-scales assessing three types of intrinsic motivation (intrinsic motivation to know, to accomplish things, and to experience stimulation), three types of extrinsic motivation (external, introjected, and identified regulation), and amotivation. (pp. 1003-1004)

Various research studies have utilized the AMS as a research tool in the study of racial identity and high achievement with African American students (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Chavous et al., 2003; Griffin, 2006). Such studies highlight how internal and external factors cooperatively create students' experiences and one element individually cannot fully detail total academic motivation.

Social support for academic motivation with African American males often extend beyond the immediate family. The students' attitudes toward self-determination are contingent on many social interactions and school environmental factors. Countering current trends of underachievement with African American males, Oliver (1989) used a structural-cultural perspective suggesting schools should promote unity through an Afrocentric socialization process to lessen the negative barriers of social pressures. Correspondingly, Woodland, Martin, Hill, and Worrell (2009) pointed out that young, African American males are attracted to programs with cultural and personal relevance and often mention positive relationships as a motivator for continued attendance. A common finding of such studies is the essential role of the school in the development process of such programs that address the needs of the community. Rather than view public school step teams as a playtime performance (Fine, 1991), stepping can be analyzed as a new case study providing feedback on its role in academic motivation and social development of African American male students. As students from critical subgroups begin to form alliances as they pursue personal and educational goals, sociocultural capital should be explored as a part of the current investigation due to its significance in shaping students' values and beliefs within educational settings.

Sociocultural Capital

Whether performing in an academic club, sports, or marching band program, there are benefits of student membership in certain organizations. Research studies (Broh, 2002; Eitle & Eitle, 2002) have specified how participation in sports programs promote development and social connections and tend to have a positive effect on student attendance and school achievement. Similar to academic benefits, extracurricular programs have a positive effect on social capital. Broh (2002) reviewed such benefits in sports and non-sports activities and tested participation in different types of activities simultaneously. The study (Broh, 2002) revealed that participation in nonacademic activities led to improved achievement outcomes. In the same manner, Covay and Carbonaro (2010) revealed how the influence of extracurricular participation increased both non-cognitive and cognitive skills and helped reduce the achievement gap when socioeconomic status was considered.

An examination of sociocultural capital is important for the turnaround narrative of how African American males alter negative trajectories into positive solutions. In an extensive review (Feldman & Matjasko, 2005) on school-based activities, the concluding remarks indicated future research must consider the mechanisms through which activities exert their influence on development. “Within youth transitions [*sic*] research, it is recognized that as a concept ‘social capital’ offers a useful analytical framework for capturing how young people negotiate ways out of social disadvantage” (Wright, Maylor, & Becker, 2016, p. 5). In the same manner, Stinson (2008) used participative inquiry within a qualitative frame, sampling four academically successful African American male students. “Present throughout the counter-stories of each participant was a recognition of

himself as a discursive formation who could negotiate sociocultural discourse as a means to subversively repeat his constituted ‘raced’ self” (p. 975). Expressed simply, African American male students that showcase elements of success often partake in problem-posing (Freire, 1970) becoming critical of the system and forming their own cultural identity of excellence. As a nontraditional school activity, stepping may serve as a cultural link for students, providing opportunities for bonding, discipline, and self-love either as a reinforcement program or as an intervention.

Similar to the criticisms and issues of academic motivation in extracurricular programs, there are damaging components of sociocultural capital with step team frameworks. In the American musical comedy drama *School Daze* (Lee, 1988), the historical and stereotypical associations that exist in Black Greek-Letter organizations highlighted the negative and positive traits that often plague fraternal organizations in terms of grouping: nerds, pretty boys, country boys, and the rambunctious crew. In reality, these organizations have also negotiated such discourse and constructed their identities into positive elements: men of distinction, young gentlemen, civil rights advocates, and strong Black men (Brown, Parks, & Phillips, 2005). Maybe this sense of resiliency and overcoming adversity is a happenstance of step teams that usually mimic and adopt elements of Greek-Letter customs. Occasionally, African American male students need to see direct examples of moving forward *in spite of* scenarios and step teams can offer such cases from a historical standpoint adding value to students’ current circumstances.

African American youth use experiences in education, society, and culture to position themselves for success. In a qualitative study of low-income African American

students, Carter (2003) invoked new thoughts of membership association recognizing cultural capital is multi-dimensional and coexists within a social hierarchy and interplay in the lives of minority students. Since stepping has derived naturally from Black Greek-Letter organizations, similar status positioning may occur in step team programs.

Cynthia Lynne Shelton, an expert on Black Greek-Letter identities in the postmodern era, discussed this cultural exchange:

The essential (albeit unconscious) goal of Black Greek-Letter organizations (BGLOs) was to contest the negative representation of African American people. The goal was to facilitate, validate, and construct a positive image of blackness. Thus, BGLOs employed essentialism for strategic purposes. The goal has not changed in the current postmodern era. (as cited in Parks, 2008, p. 214)

There is a need to showcase primary examples of authentic forms of cultural capital for African American students. While mostly encouraged through an extracurricular component of sports and mentoring programs, step teams can illustrate such concepts more realistically due to the formation of step teams from BGLOs.

As researchers move from a study of excellence mindset to frame analysis of African American students' schooling experiences, sociocultural variables have been studied to determine correlation to academic success. In a quantitative study of 118 African American male and female ninth-graders in the midwest, Somers, Owens, and Piliawsky (2008) examined factors related to academic success indicating social support was mildly correlated with academic achievement. Although the study used scales of assessment of identity, only grades (specifically, grade point average) were used to determine academic achievement with no implications for motivation or identification.

Moreover, Freeman (2003) studied the effects of creative drama on self-concept, problem behavior, and social skills using a 2 x 2 factorial analysis of variance acknowledging no significant treatment effects, and highly suggesting that future research consider the potential for skewed distributions on pretest measures when creative drama is the treatment. When investigating the step team as a creative action program for sociocultural capital, specific variables and testing procedures should be seriously considered.

Sociocultural capital studies inform educational systems on the need to teach to students' differences in order to improve chances for academic success. African American males often beat the odds and engage in a variety of ways to respond to conflicting narratives about how they should perform in school (Emdin, 2012). Osborne and Jones (2011) designed psychometric evaluations to encourage diverse efforts to research different possibilities of the theoretical relationship between identification with academics, academic motivation, and academic outcomes. Step teams could serve as an example of reciprocal teaching where students learn from mentors (teachers) and mentors learn from students in the responsive classroom model (McFadden, 1978). Such creative structures, if adopted, could provide more opportunities for minority students to feel included and as a part of the total educational experience.

Identity Development and Mentoring

The most practical reason for implementing culturally relevant activities such as step teams may be the effects it has on increasing the motivational level of African American male students. American public schools have rejected the ideas of assimilation and integration in reform efforts. Ladson-Billings (1994) declared that the educational

plight of African American students remains a problem largely due to the fact of marginal inclusion of African American communities in decision-making processes. Perry, Steele, and Hilliard (2003) suggested that the task of achievement for African Americans in the post-Civil War era is complicated because schools are not intentional in their efforts to assist with shaping identities of African American students as achievers and make few attempts to sustain academic excellence.

African American parents, as the first generation of African Americans to experience racism and its impact on achievement in an allegedly open and integrated society, might possibly not have figured out how to develop institutional formations and pass on psychological coping strategies to their children that respond to this new context. (Perry et al., p. 100)

This rationale may help to explain the gaps that exist with identification to academics. African American male learners may succeed more frequently as they participate in programs that intentionally craft a social identity for them as achievers.

Research conducted by Griffin and Allen (2006) justified the need to restructure the school curricula and expand the coverage of cultural identities and accomplishments. “Educators must encourage state legislators and policymakers to turn attention to high-resourced environments and insist that teachers, counselors, and key administrators receive diversity training to increase their sensitivity to the needs and experiences of their African American students” (p. 492). It is the responsibility of school stakeholders to modify current practices in order to provide a more inclusive approach to reaching African American students. Culturally relevant teaching attempts to redefine current educational conditions.

A study (Wyatt, 2009) detailed an after-school counseling group that assisted with students' developmental challenges. "The purpose of the program is to close the achievement gap as a disproportionate amount of adolescent African-American males are not fully engaging in education as the catalyst for their future success" (p. 463). The results coincide with elements of culturally relevant practices. Afrocentric principles were presented during the program, such as the Nguzo Saba, through student engagement, male topic of discussions, cultural field trips, and leadership opportunities. Academic achievement outcomes in participants were higher than in nonparticipants, but the response could have been associated with other factors outside the mentoring program such as parental involvement and other extracurricular participation. "The findings presented in the study reiterate the need to provide continuous academic, personal, and social support to African American males through the use of mentoring groups" (Wyatt, 2009).

While mentoring programs have been researched thoroughly and tend to yield positive achievement indicators, current trends investigate identity development and experiences of African American students as a means to conceptualize how discrepancies with identification to academics exist. Although Harris, Palmer, and Struve (2011) utilized undergraduate college males to provide insight on the current state of social contexts and how African American students attributed certain social factors to success and failure, the findings tended to relate to the experiences and challenges of students in grade school. An interesting behavioral expression in this study (Harris et al.) revealed that the majority of participants learned to value and prioritize academic success despite the research that continuously points out disengagement. Data in this study were more

than likely skewed since it was completed at a highly selective, rigorous college where nearly all students have a strong academic background. However, the findings proposed recommendations that support healthy gender identity development among African American males. The researchers encouraged programs such as mentoring and linking educational topics to real life experiences as beneficial and increasing identification to academics.

Gordon et al. (2009) engaged in mixed methods to analyze an urban middle school's mentoring program for African American males. This study showcased the community stakeholder support of cultural programs and detailed how to integrate Afrocentric methodologies in mainstream pedagogy. "Fostering a positive racial identity may begin to dismantle the social barriers to academic success often experienced by African American young men" (p. 285). The researchers used mentoring as an intervention to examine racial identity, academic progress on standardized tests, and academic achievement outcomes. The study reiterated the need to engage in future investigations using innovative methods that may be effective in turning around disengagement.

Identification with Academics

As the need for innovative and culturally responsive intervention programs continues to grow, so does the research on identification with academics. Although this is an area in which researchers need to continue to collect and share data, previous findings provide relevant implications for current school leaders. One of the initial studies in this area was conducted by Osborne (1997a) leading to the creation of the Identification with Academics Scale (IAS). Higher scores on this instrument indicate

more identification between academic performance and self-view. The students' scores predicted academic outcomes. Although completed with undergraduate college students, the scale has been used in the elementary school setting, mostly in the analysis of effective mentoring programs. Osborne and Jones (2011) suggested strategies on how to increase a student's identification with academics leading to improved academic outcomes including:

- (a) "Helping students feel a sense of belongingness in academia by recognizing and embracing the existence of more than one cultural frame" (p. 149);
- (b) "Acknowledging and validating students' home language without using it to limit students' potential" (p. 149); and
- (c) "Allowing students to use their cultural frame of reference in addition to the mainstream frame" (p. 150).

Some African American male students have a tradition of encountering difficulties academically; however, through guidance-based programs, they may become more academic-oriented if education can be viewed as a way to maintain or transform status.

Cokley et al. (2012) conducted a preliminary investigation of academic dis-identification among African American students using a sample size of 96 African American high school students in the southwest (41 males, 55 females). Results of a hierarchical regression indicated that academic self-concept was the strongest predictor of academic outcomes. In this study, academic outcomes were measured with grade point average. The study was profound in that it found academic dis-identification was present among the male students, but not the female students. Additionally, Griffin (2002) studied academic dis-identification with regard to race and high school dropouts. While

much of the discussion in the field relates to African American males, Griffin (2002) discovered that Hispanic males had the lowest engagement scores and were disconnected from academic success, which contradicts most of the studies on dis-identification. Despite high expectations to do well in school, Hispanics have the lowest rate of high school and post-secondary degree completion (Schneider, Martinez, & Owens, 2006). Thus, educators may have to reconcile different engagement approaches based on the context of particular lessons while considering the culture of all student participants.

Situated in the analysis of low-performing schools and students, early research on identification to academics speculated on why it was happening. Cool pose theory (Majors & Billson, 1992), cultural ecological perspective (Ogbu, 1992), and stereotype model (Steele & Aronson, 1995) emphasized negative barriers that kept African American males from incorporating academics into their cultural self-concept. In reviewing these three prominent theories, Osborne (1999) encouraged future research work to understand meaningful factors that counter the negative issues. In trying to rationalize underperformance, the underlying shift is to now engage in more experimental research on models of excellence, thus, being able to provide possible solutions (or treatments) to African American male students in need of intensive support.

Contrary to the stereotypes of acting White and not identifying with school, qualitative and quantitative studies shed a promising, divergent view. Voelkl (1997) investigated the antecedents of students' identification using a 2 x 2 (race, gender) analysis of variance concluding that African American and female students had higher levels of identification with school than did White and male students. Although the study used classroom participation as a predictor of academic achievement (not grades, or

grade point average), it was an early effort to interrupt the continuous results of associating students with negative outcomes. Equally, Tyson, Darity, and Castellino (2005) used textual analysis interviews to explore the achievement orientation of Black students as assessed through course selection and revealed three interesting implications: (a) there was an expressed desire to do well academically among all informants, (b) excelling academically was not a problem as students did not feel any pressure to underachieve, and (c) high school, high achieving Black students dealt more with isolation. While peer culture and interaction can provide positive predictors, there may be some disadvantages that have not been explored leading to the necessity to study more about such similarities and differences.

Prompting the need for additional studies and research in this area is the notion that something critical is missing in schools, in training, in professional development, and in the overall structure of school. It is apparent from interviews of young African American males (Sparrow & Sparrow, 2012) that an overhaul of current practices needs to be addressed to create a sense of urgency before it is too late – if it is not already. Thirteen-year-old Dominique explains, “African American males aren’t successful because we don’t try our hardest, we fall into our environment. If we had more leaders and less followers, we would be on top” (as cited in Sparrow & Sparrow, 2012, p. 45). The student is the sole purpose of schooling and should be placed at the center of the context. West (2004) asserted that the recent crisis in schooling is that teachers teach as they do with little reflection or consultation about what they do, why they teach what they do, and whether what they teach aids their students in preparation. The total welfare of children at-risk, African American males, particularly, is contingent upon many culturally

relevant factors and there is a great need to deconstruct traditional methods of schooling with innovative, relevant factors that can lead to successful outcomes for all subgroups of students.

Culturally Responsive Practices with African American Males in School

Culturally responsive practices are particularly beneficial for African American male students (Garibaldi, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Noguera, 2003). Understanding the cultural characteristics of students can benefit instructional engagement and classroom dynamics between teacher and student. Boykin et al. (2005) observed 460 classrooms categorizing lessons as mostly mainstream concluding that lessons identified as Afrocentric were often student initiated. This finding may suggest the need to provide training and explicit programming information to educators on culturally relevant activities that help to create safe spaces for African American male youth. Moreover, providing the appropriate balance of student input into learning assignments can create more autonomy for minority students (Freire, 1970). Bristol (2015) called attention to how culturally responsive caring is exhibited when teachers shift from just teaching the standards in curricula to considering the gender and culture of the student population the teacher is educating. While African American male students are more likely to have educators who are not of the same race, implementing culturally relevant programming in the school setting can enhance relationships and achievement outcomes.

Weinstein et al. (2004) created a guide, based on European American educators' experiences teaching minority students, suggesting there are five critical components of a culturally responsive classroom. The five elements are "(1) recognition of one's ethnocentrism and bias, (2) knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds, (3)

understanding of broader social, economic, and political context of the educational system, (4) ability and willingness to use culturally appropriate classroom practices, and (5) commitment to building a caring classroom community” (p. 27). While Ladson-Billings (1995a) referred to these components as “just good teaching” (p. 159), studies continued to indicate significant struggle of educators of all ethnic backgrounds to create successful and resilient learning environments for students of color (Ogbu, 1992; Valenzuela, 1999; Bondy et al., 2007). Stepping, as a team activity, could serve as a possible intervention in the school setting to aid school staff members in creating classroom spaces of care where African American male students are responsible and succeeding academically.

Youth empowerment programs have served as a culturally relevant activity in many urban schools geared towards academic improvement for African American males (Alford, 2002). African-centered rites of passage programs serve to re-acculturate students to African-centered themes focusing on positive, cultural themes, and guiding students in understanding their role and responsibility in bettering themselves, others, and the communities they come from (Alford, 2002; Ginwright, 2004). As summarized in his case study observing practices of an Afrocentric program in an Oakland, California high school, Ginwright (2004) asserted social change can occur when youth voices are recognized, and school leaders build on those strengths of identity and culture to create educational change. African American male students’ worlds are shaped within many different contexts and it can often be difficult for any educator, no matter ethnicity, to relate to their class-based reality (McWhorter, 2000). The type of reform that informs today’s school leaders’ practices are embedded in caring, authentic interest, and

innovation. “Through caring relationships, community connections, political consciousness, and cultural identity Black youth reengage in civic life by addressing issues that are closely connected to struggles in their everyday life” (Ginwright, 2010, p. 144). Step teams, explored as a culturally relevant program, should prioritize cultural pride and determine if promotion of stepping to African American males can translate into academic achievement.

Research in the educational setting often examines the experiences of African American male students in school. In navigating components of high care and school success, recent studies (Parsons, 2005; Milner, 2011) have focused on the classroom teacher and reported the subtle, yet significant characteristics that influence how minority male students respond favorably to specific instructors’ behaviors. Furthermore, Siddle-Walker (2000) suggested that teachers of all ethnic backgrounds may have to reject mainstream strategies and individual management approaches by reviewing and adopting the experiences and practices of successful schools for African American children that were in place during segregation. This controversial consideration is based partly in fact that many of the negative issues plaguing minority males in school today were almost non-existent from 1935-1969 (Siddle-Walker, 1996) as parental involvement was high and literacy was steadily improving among all African Americans.

Teachers assumed the responsibility of interacting with the students beyond the confined class periods and interceding when external difficulties could prohibit the objectives they had for a particular child. Teachers held extracurricular tutoring sessions, visited homes and churches in the community where they

taught, even when they did not live in the community, and provided guidance about life responsibilities. (Siddle-Walker, 2000, p. 265)

As a result of persistent, positive interactions, Afrocentric programming, and cultural socialization, African American male students have shown promise to make progress prior to today's standardization movement of remedial intervention and dropout prevention. Step team programs may be a way to simultaneously provide substantive cultural identification while supporting students' academic, behavioral, and social needs.

Exploring Black Greek-Letter Organizations and the Role of Stepping/Step Shows

In order to understand stepping as culturally relevant, a clear connection should be made between the art form and the historical significance to Black Greek-Letter organizations (BGLOs). In the early 1920s, some of the best and brightest African American students were attending historically Black colleges and universities and redefining their purpose through finding their voice and taking control of curriculum that had often been delivered in an Eurocentric manner (Nelson, 2018). Most of the BGLOs (five of nine) were founded at Howard University in Washington, DC. Considered the "black [*sic*] ivy-league" (Graham, 1999, p.61), because of its prominent graduates' ability to attract Black elites, and reputable stance in mainstream corporate and professional America, insights from Howard University in the early twentieth century helped detail significant, cultural attributes stepping has to the African American community. In addition to exploring historical matters of Howard University, BGLOs have played a significant role in racial uplift and creating successful Black communities (Graham, 1999). A review of how such successful communities have been shaped through the

ideals and uplift endorsed by BGLOs can place stepping into the cultural context of socialization practices in the school setting.

The first BGLO, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., was initially organized as a social studies club in 1905, at Cornell University, before evolving into a fraternity in 1906 (Parks, 2008). Similar to many social organizations for African American students, BGLOs were founded after initial attempts to join mainstream clubs were met with resistance and minorities were denied entry or were blackballed (Kimbrough, 2003). The Beta Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. was chartered at Howard University in 1907, with founding chapters of other BGLOs following soon after: (Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., in 1908, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., in 1911, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., in 1913, Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc., in 1914, and Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., in 1920. These organizations' history with Howard University is significant because during their founding, students were a part of the first generation of colored people to attend college and impart knowledge, when most African Americans a generation before, were slave laborers and denied any chance to an education (Anderson, 1988). Research studies surrounding each organization verified common goals of racial uplift, community service, and cultural appreciation (Kimbrough, 2003; Parks, 2008; Nelson 2018).

BGLOs have adopted many symbols and rituals with origins related to Africa (Kimbrough, 2003). "One shared ritual over which there is little debate is the syncopated, percussive rhythms that emerge from the marriage of precise and stylized movements of the body dubbed as the art of stepping" (Degregory, 2015, para. 7). In her excerpt, *The Foundations of Stepping*, Carol Branch gave a vivid account of the culture

of a step show connecting stepping to the vibrant culture of Black people and suggested its African roots are always evolving (as cited in Brown, Parks, & Phillips, 2005). Stepping is mostly associated with the gumboot dance of Africa, where African laborers would communicate using movements and steps in mines (Osborne, 2011). Similar to some of the gimmicks employed during the pledge process, African workers had strict guidelines and were not allowed to talk during work, so gumboot dancing became their way of communicating with each other (Kimbrough, 2003). BGLOs adopted the practice of stepping as part of fraternal rituals on the collegiate level, and school step team advisors began using the movement form to showcase student expression at the elementary and high school level.

The future of school success is contingent upon stakeholders to engage all student subgroups. There is growing awareness that relevant, innovative programs can enhance academic identification, but more studies are needed to give explicit examples and detail the relevance of such programs in the context of student success. Stepping, as an art form, is not a new concept, as BGLOs have practiced the cultural activity since the early 1900s (Kimbrough, 2003). As a new phenomenon in the public school realm, step teams may be able to cultivate some of the academic identifiers needed for African American male students to make positive identification with success. The previous school generation may have some connection to step teams from watching the popular television series *A Different World* (Carsey-Werner, 1987), set at a fictional, historically Black college that showcased several elements of culturally relevant experiences absent from today's school setting.

Step teams boast increases in college awareness, self-esteem, and behavior (Step in School, 2016). While research (Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998; McClure, 2006) exists on Black Greek-Letter organizations influence on academic identification, there has not been a scholarly study conducted on public school step teams' impact on such measures. McClure (2006) revealed that such associations create social capital that builds connections to academic success, community networking, and political mobility. In the same manner, Morris and Adeyemo (2012) asserted that the focus of African American excellence must be expanded. "If we want African American males to achieve at academics, we must encourage and support those yearnings as much as we do their athletic aspirations" (p. 28). By promoting and publicizing culturally relevant programs such as step teams, African American male learners may become motivated beyond the sports arena.

Recently, a physical education program explored stepping as part of the middle school curriculum. Hastie et al. (2007) employed stepping as part of the physical education dance content for sixth-grade students. The Caucasian teachers recognized that the unique content created some uneasiness due to the discomfort and the unknown historical context but realized the benefits to African American students including a renewed school spirit, learning excitement, and student bonding.

From a post-colonial perspective, this project developed within us a concern as to how we present ourselves as members of the dominant class, particularly when appropriating cultural activities from minority groups who are not in position themselves to control the educational process. (Hastie et al., pp. 304-305).

As a result of systematic patterns of control over curriculum, teachers may need to explore notions of Afrocentric ideas that help students become a dominant force in shaping pedagogy, thus, giving affirmation to successes that may prevail after considering input from student groups regarding programs such as step teams.

Considering researchers' challenges to engage in more studies of models of excellence, it is surprising that public school step teams have not been thoroughly investigated. When pondering over the list of successful African American males such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Thurgood Marshall, Langston Hughes, John Lewis, Steve Harvey, and George Washington Carver, one common trait that existed was membership in a BGLO. Stepping, with roots in BGLOs, is a creative element of the pledge process involving discipline, bonding, and cultural awareness (Kimbrough, 2003). Gregory S. Parks (2008) proposed that critical studies of BGLO cultural elements are necessary for scholarship:

Despite their 100-year existence, little substantive research has been conducted on BGLOs, and even less has been published. This is surprising given that these organizations' rolls serve as a veritable who's who of black [*sic*] achievers in almost every field of endeavor. Moreover, during the twentieth century, these organizations played a prominent role in various racial uplift activities in the United States and, in some cases, abroad. (p. 2)

Some rationale for not exploring BGLOs cultural themes may be due to secrecy of membership rituals and, in some cases, discovering realities of elitism, colorism, and exclusivity that existed (and still exist) in such fraternal groups (Parks, 2008).

Nevertheless, a pilot study on step teams presents an exciting project to include in culturally relevant studies on African American males' attainment of positive outcomes.

Advisors of step teams play a role in setting the tone of excellence with participants. As proclaimed by one advisor of a youth step team,

If you want to do good and perform well it takes discipline, and it takes hard work, and it takes commitment. People always compliment them on how well-behaved they are, and I think that comes from just the discipline that we have had to instill. (as cited in Fine, 2003, p. 103)

Also, in a review of literature and techniques to counsel minority males, Harper, Terry, and Twiggs (2009) conveyed how counselors must be more active in helping African American males to empower and help themselves. Step team advisors can achieve this by assisting participants to think logically and choose a path of success over failure. The unique, cultural activity of stepping can be physically demanding and highly competitive. The movements that are displayed during routines exemplify African American values and aesthetics that speak to cultural survival (Malone, 1996). Joining a step team can create a sense of pride and instill discipline and should be studied more in-depth in terms of its influence in the academic realm.

Summary

For more than a century, stepping has been a part of the African American community. A form of African dance, step shows became a part of the general rituals of Black Greek-Letter organizations. Presently, step teams have been formed at the public school level as a method to serve and protect cultural identity of minority students. African American males have mostly been studied from a deficit perspective to

rationalize reasons for underperformance and disengagement in academics. As experimental research shifts to a study of excellence model, a call has been made to provide specific examples of success with regard to African American males, a critical subgroup. This investigation is unique in that no other known investigation has examined step teams as a means to enhance identification to academics or academic motivation, when specifically considering student achievement. This current investigation will seek to compare and examine the effects of a public school step team incorporating the IAS and the AMS. Additionally, the current investigation focused on the influence measured by the IAS and AMS on African American male achievement comparing step team participants to non-participants within a similar demographic group.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The primary purpose of this study was to explore ways in which a culturally relevant step team program may impact African American males' identification with academics and academic motivation. As a pilot study on step teams, the investigation used a posttest only design with nonequivalent groups approach to better determine if statistical differences existed with participants of public school step teams and determine if such programs can be used to better influence and shape students for future success.

Research Questions

This study focused on the following research questions:

1. Is there a statistical difference in identification with academics between high school African American male participants and non-participants in a step team program?
2. Is there a statistical difference in academic motivation between high school African American male participants and non-participants in a step team program?
3. If differences exist, what moderates those differences (age, reported academic performance, length of time on step team)?

All descriptive analyses were reported, based on self-reported information. Data analyses were composed of first establishing the reliability of student responses for the current investigation. Zero-order correlations were used to understand the associations between the responses on both constructs. Factors were computed, and regression type analyses were conducted.

Participants

This study was conducted in a large, urban school district with a school population of approximately 101,000 students. The student population is comprised of diverse cultures and ethnicities (Georgia Department of Education, 2016). The population of interest was Black male high school students. The sampling frame was students specifically in South Taylor School District. South Taylor served as the sampling frame because they currently have actively engaged step teams at five local high schools (Georgia Steppers League, Inc. [GSL], 2017). All Black male students, both participating and non-participating on the step team, were asked to provide feedback. Pseudonyms were provided for the school district, high school names, and step teams for the purpose of this investigation.

The average enrollment of the five high schools is 1,275 with 96.7% of the students identified as African American. The current dropout rate is 4.5%. Forty-nine percent of the students enrolled are male. The step team participants are registered with the GSL, Inc. (2017), a non-profit organization created to assist schools with forming step teams and producing step shows for performance, leadership, and healthy habits (GSL, 2017). Participation in step team programs is voluntary. Local public schools with step teams in Georgia become certified with the GSL. Founded in 2009, GSL (2017) has grown from a membership of eight founding teams to 40 metro-Atlanta area step teams (GSL, 2017). This study included five high schools with male step teams with approximately 50 participants. According to the GSL (2017) calendar, step team season begins in early October and ends in late March (approximately 24 weeks).

Step teams have become popular in the district since the late 1990s and were initially introduced as a club to attract students who were not into sports or other academic clubs (C. Frazier, personal communication, February 23, 2018). L. Anderson noted that the superintendent of schools was a member of a fraternity and familiar with stepping, and since coming to the district, has supported step teams and often attends step shows (L. Anderson, personal communication, March 3, 2018). The district has become known on a national level for having award-winning step teams at the high school level in the male, female, and co-ed division, often being awarded as grand champions (GSL, 2017).

Instrumentation

A questionnaire was created combining questions from the IAS (Osborne, 1997a) and AMS (Vallerand et al., 1992). A review of the literature clearly indicated the IAS as a widely-used tool to assess students' identification to academics. Osborne (1997a) used the IAS to assess the "extent to which a students' self-esteem is connected with and dependent upon academic outcomes" (p. 62). This scale uses a 5-point Likert scale response set ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) based on responses to 13 questions. Items 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 12, and 13 were reverse-scored, and all items were summed up to create one composite index. Higher scores on this instrument indicated more identification between academic-performance and self-view. Osborne (1997a) utilized the IAS at the collegiate level tracking community college freshmen performance finding a significant correlation to the score on the IAS to academic success suggesting counselors use the tool to determine students most at-risk for failing. Additionally, Gordon et al. (2009) used the IAS with African American male, middle school students to

explore a mentoring program comparing results of participants to non-participants. Similarly, the research revealed a link between scores on IAS to academic success citing that mentoring participants' scores were higher. The reported Cronbach's alpha was 0.72, indicating good reliability in relation to data collected (Field, 2005). A copy of the IAS is provided in Appendix A.

In the same manner, literature review indicated the AMS as a scholarly tool to assess students' academic motivation. The AMS contains 28 questions that are grouped into seven different sub-factors. These sub-factors include

- Intrinsic Motivation to know;
- Intrinsic Motivation towards accomplishment;
- Intrinsic Motivation to experience stimulations;
- Extrinsic Motivation –Identification regulation;
- Extrinsic Motivation –Introjected regulation;
- Extrinsic Motivation –External Regulation; and
- Amotivation (Vallerand et al., 1992).

Each sub-factor has four items. The scoring of the AMS was accomplished by averaging the total score for each sub-factor. Each sub-factor is made up of four questions. A recent dissertation (Adams-King, 2016) utilized results of the AMS to explain the achievement gap between African American males and other subgroups. The reliability analysis for all three samples in the study exceeded acceptable levels with reported Cronbach alphas of 0.902, 0.757, and 0.890, respectively. It should be noted that Cokley et al. (2001) used the AMS with a United States sample suggesting, in the psychometric analysis, that there is partial support of construct validity indicating

intrinsic dimensions need to be studied more thoroughly with ethnic subgroups. The reported Cronbach's coefficient ranged from 0.70 to 0.86 suggesting internal consistency with the seven subscales of the English version of the AMS. Furthermore, a recent inquiry (Stover, de la Iglesia, Boubeta, & Liporace, 2012) indicated support for the usage of AMS with minority populations and comparing results with other measures in future research studies. A copy of the AMS is provided in Appendix B.

Procedures

To protect participants, approval was sought from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Youngstown State University (YSU). Permission to survey high school students was granted by the South Taylor School System, Office of Research, Evaluation, and assessment. This joint permission allowed for statistical analysis by using survey data of step team participants and non-participants within the district.

The IAS and AMS were administered to both participants and non-participants within the district as a post-test only method. A personal visit by the researcher to the five high school principals was scheduled to discuss the purpose of the study and to agree on the least disruptive strategy for students to complete the questionnaire such as homeroom or advisement time. A second correspondence was scheduled with the principals' designee to review copies of consent forms and administering the IAS and AMS. Completed questionnaires were collected in late March, the expected ending of the treatment period (step team season). The researcher used an electronic survey tool as deemed appropriate with local school administration.

Proposed Data Analysis

The following steps to data analyses were proposed: (1) the estimates of the reliability of the instruments will be conducted on the unidimensional level for this new data, using Cronbach's alpha, (2) the factors of the two inventories will be computed, (3) Zero-order Pearson Correlational analyses will be computed and analyzed, and (4) General Linear Modeling (GLM) analyses will be used to address the primary research questions as well as investigate the presence of potential moderator variables.

Summary

A study of public school step teams' influence on academic motivation and identification among African American males was conducted at one urban school district. Purposeful sampling was employed, whereby the school district was identified as having a prominently active, male step team through network referrals. Participants in the study were members of a local step team group. Both participants and non-participants of step team programs were a part of South Taylor School District. A posttest only design was ideal for administering the IAS and AMS to determine statistical differences in self-reported data.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to explore ways in which a culturally relevant step team program may influence African American males' identification with academics and academic motivation. In an effort to accomplish this, high school male students were administered an electronic survey using questions from the Identification to Academics Scale ([IAS], Osborne, 1997a) and the Academic Motivation Scale ([AMS], Vallerand et al., 1992). The IAS consisted of 13 questions where items 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 12, and 13 were reverse-scored, and all items were summed up to create one composite index. The AMS consisted of 28 questions grouped into seven different sub-factors including:

- Intrinsic Motivation to know (IMK);
- Intrinsic Motivation towards accomplishment (IMA);
- Intrinsic Motivation to experience stimulations (IMS);
- Extrinsic Motivation –Identification regulation (EMIDR);
- Extrinsic Motivation –Introjected regulation (EMINTR);
- Extrinsic Motivation –External Regulation (EMER); and
- Amotivation.

Amotivation was not considered for this study. Each sub-factor had four items. The scoring of the AMS was accomplished by averaging the total score for each sub-factor.

Description of the Sample

Originally, five schools from South Taylor School District were included in this study; however, student responses were only received from four schools. Since the purpose of this study was to assess the results of participation in a culturally relevant step team program between male participants and male non-participants, consent forms were distributed to approximately 1,000 high school males. This included the distribution of consent forms at a high school step show as approved by the Research Review Board (RRB) of the local district. After parental consent was secured, students were allowed to take the survey electronically. A total of 147 responses were collected. Fourteen students indicated membership in a step team program. Statistical data were analyzed using self-reported data from the 147 participants.

The following section will summarize the responses of local high school male students, from four separate schools in South Taylor School District, who completed the IAS and AMS. Following the descriptive statistics, preliminary analyses are presented. This is followed by analysis addressing each research question specifically.

Descriptive Statistics

All surveys included student responses to a question about their race. The distribution of reported race is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. *Race of Participants*

Race	Frequency	Percent
African American	122	83.6
White	2	1.4
Latino	11	7.5
Other	10	6.8
Total	145	99.3

The distribution of race does not significantly differ from the racial make-up of the four schools within the local district. The average enrollment of the four high schools is 1,275 with 86.7% of the students identified as African American (Georgia Department of Education, 2016). Due to the large presence of African American students in this district and the focus of this research study, primary data analysis will be limited to students identifying as African American. Table 2 displays the reported age distribution of the four high schools.

Table 2. *Age of Participants*

Age	Frequency	Percent
14	9	6.2
15	31	21.2
16	27	18.5
17	46	31.5
18	25	17.1
19	7	4.8

The distribution of age, for the population from which the data were collected, is predominantly represented by 17-year-old students. These age distributions do not

significantly differ from the distribution of ages within the student populations of the district. Table 3 provides the self-reported grade point average (GPA) of the participants in this study.

Table 3. *GPA of Participants*

GPA	Frequency	Percent
0	2	1.4
2	3	2.1
2.5	21	14.4
3	49	33.6
3.5	46	31.5
4	24	16.4

When examining the self-reported academic performance for the population in this study, most participants are represented as having a 3.0 (mostly B's). The data suggest most of the participants have a self-reported GPA of 2.5, or higher, with very few students self-reporting academic failure. Table 4 provides the number of male students in the population sample participating in a step team program.

Table 4. *Step Team Membership*

Step	Frequency	Percent
No	132	90.4
Yes	14	9.6

About 10% of the participants in this study actively participate in a culturally relevant step team program. This participation rate does not differ significantly with typical membership in such programs at other local schools within the district and state

(GSL, 2017). Table 5 illustrates the participation rate in other extracurricular programs besides step teams.

Table 5. *Extracurricular Activity Membership*

Extras	Frequency	Percent
No	53	36.3
Yes	93	63.7

Examination of this data reveals that the majority of high school male students in this study participate in some type of extracurricular program. According to the self-reported data, less than 40% of the students do not participate in any extracurricular activity.

Preliminary Analysis

Table 6 provides the basic reliability estimates for academic identification using the IAS, sub-factors of intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation using the AMS, and overall average of intrinsic factors and extrinsic factors.

Table 6. *Reliability Estimates*

Factor	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Identification	0.69	13
IMSE	0.85	4
IMA	0.87	4
IMK	0.85	4
EMIDR	0.83	4
EMINTR	0.77	4
EMR	0.86	4

Intrinsic	0.94	12
Extrinsic	0.79	12

All of the reliability estimates for the IAS and AMS exceed the established acceptable levels of (α . 0.60, Field, 2005). Through careful examination of the data in Table 6, a slightly higher Cronbach's alpha is observed in overall Intrinsic Motivation score. Table 7 provides the descriptive statistics of factors for identification using the IAS, sub-factors of intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation using the AMS, and overall average of intrinsic factors and extrinsic factors.

Table 7. *Descriptive Statistics of Factors*

	Identificatio n	IMS	IM A	IMK	EMID R	EMINT R	EME R	Intrinsi c	Extrinsi c
Mean	55.59	5.56	5	5.15	4.14	2.83	4.64	5.24	3.87
SD	11.21	1.4	1.44	1.48	1.53	1.46	1.48	1.31	1.01
Skewnes s	-0.18	-1.19	-0.8	0.83	-0.23	0.58	-0.55	-0.99	-0.12
Kurtosis	0.05	0.91	0.26	0.08	-0.62	-0.39	-0.08	0.68	1.05

The mean score on the IAS is 55.59. The overall AMS Intrinsic Score (5.24) is higher than the overall AMS Extrinsic Score (3.87). Of the intrinsic sub-factors, intrinsic motivation to experience stimulations (IMS) represents the highest mean (5.56). In the same data set of extrinsic sub-factors, the external regulation (EMER) represents the highest mean (4.64). In reviewing the scores of all the AMS sub-factors, the mean for extrinsic motivation related to introjected regulation (EMINTR) is significantly lower

than the other sub-factor averages (2.83). Table 8 provides the Pearson Zero Order Correlation of factors.

Table 8. *Pearson Zero Order Correlation of Factors*

Factor	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
IAS (1)	-	.26**	.47**	.48**	.52**	-0.49**	.46**	.44**	.25**
IMS (2)		-	.61**	.80**	.39**	-0.08	.55**	.88**	.43**
IMA (3)			-	.82**	.74**	-0.15	.83**	.89**	.70**
IMK (4)				-	.62**	-0.20	.74**	.96**	.58**
EMIDR (5)					-	-0.12	.77**	.64**	.82**
EMINTR (6)						-	-0.09	-0.16	.37**
EMER (7)							-	.78**	.83**
Intrinsic (8)								-	.63**
Extrinsic (9)									-

Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

As indicated in Table 8, the IAS has significant correlations across all sub-factors indicating some linear relationship. Additionally, most of the AMS sub-factors also indicated significant correlations. However, the sub-factor of EMINTR does not indicate a linear relationship. Due to the low average reported in the descriptive statistics of factors in Table 7, this is expected.

Research Question 1

Research question 1 asks, *Is there a statistical difference in identification with academics between high school African American male participants and non-participants in a step team program?* In order to answer this question, an independent *t*-test was

conducted comparing the identification score of step team members to non-step team members. Results indicate that the identification scores of step team members are higher than their non-step team peers, however, these results are not statistically significant: $t(143) = 1.53, p = .128, CI95[-11.00, 1.39]$. Table 9 provides a summary of the identification scores by group.

Table 9. *Summary of Identification Scores by Group*

Step Team	N	Mean	SD
No	131	55.12	11.03
Yes	14	59.93	12.33

Step team participants' IAS is higher than non-participants' ($M = 59.93, SD = 12.33$).

While practically significant, the values are not statistically significant for this particular study.

Research Question 2

Research question 2 asks, *Is there a statistical difference in academic motivation between high school African American male participants and non-participants in a step team program?* This was analyzed by conducting a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANOVA). MANOVA was deemed most appropriate as the subfactors of intrinsic motivation are highly correlated, as indicated in Table 8. The Levene's Test of homogeneity of variance and the Box's Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices were tenable. Results indicate that step team members' intrinsic motivation scores are higher across the three subfactors of intrinsic motivation relative to their non-step team member peers, however, these results are not statistically significant: $F(3, 142) = 1.10, p = 0.351$,

according to multivariate tests. The results of the Tests of Between-Subjects' Effects are presented in Table 10.

Table 10. *Tests of Between-Subjects' Effects*

Source	Dependent Variable	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	η^2
Step Team	IMS	1	0.456	0.231	0.632	0.002
	IMA	1	5.708	2.783	0.097	0.019
	IMK	1	2.081	0.953	0.331	0.007

As indicated above, the Tests of Between-Subjects' Effects does not reveal any significant findings. A summary of the group intrinsic motivation scores for each factor are provided in Figure 1.

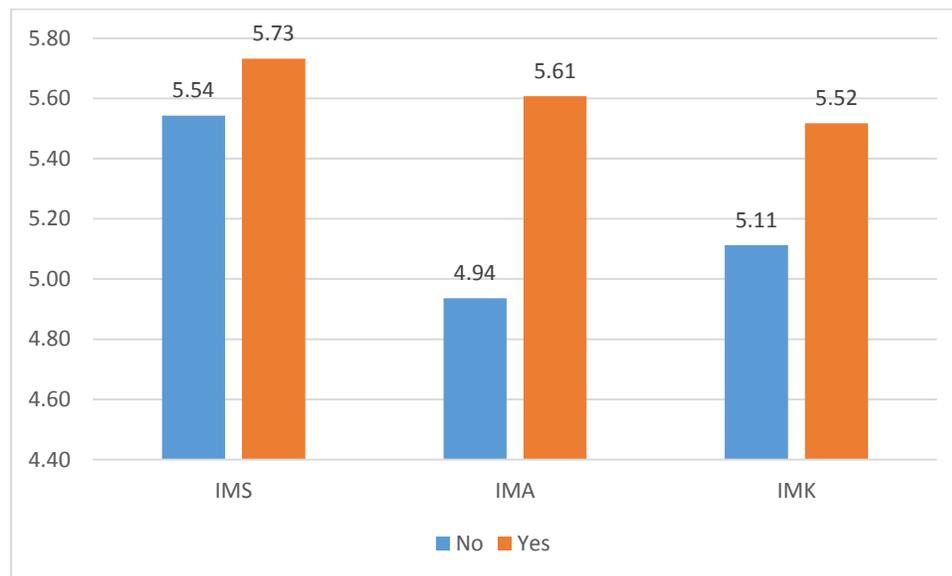


Figure 1. Intrinsic Motivation Scores by Factor and by Group

Step team participants scored higher in every sub-factor of intrinsic motivation when compared to non-participants (IMS M = 5.73; IMA M = 5.61; IMK M = 5.52).

MANOVA was conducted for extrinsic motivation due to the highly correlated factors, as indicated in Table 8. The Levene's Test of homogeneity of variance and the

Box's Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices were tenable. Results indicate that step team members' extrinsic motivation scores are higher across two subfactors of extrinsic motivation relative to their non-step team member peers. However, step team members' scores were lower on the EMINTR subfactor. These results are statistically significant, $F(3,142) = 2.93, p = 0.036$, according to multivariate tests. The results of the Tests of Between-Subjects' Effects are presented in Table 11.

Table 11. *Tests Between-Subjects' Effects*

Source	Dependent Variable	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	η^2
StepTeam	EMIDR	1	6.833	2.946	0.088	0.02
	EMINTR	1	8.573	4.13	0.044	0.028
	EMER	1	11.106	5.251	0.023	0.035

As indicated above, significant results were revealed for both the EMINTR and the EMER factors of extrinsic motivation. A summary of the group extrinsic motivation scores for each factor are provided in Figure 2.

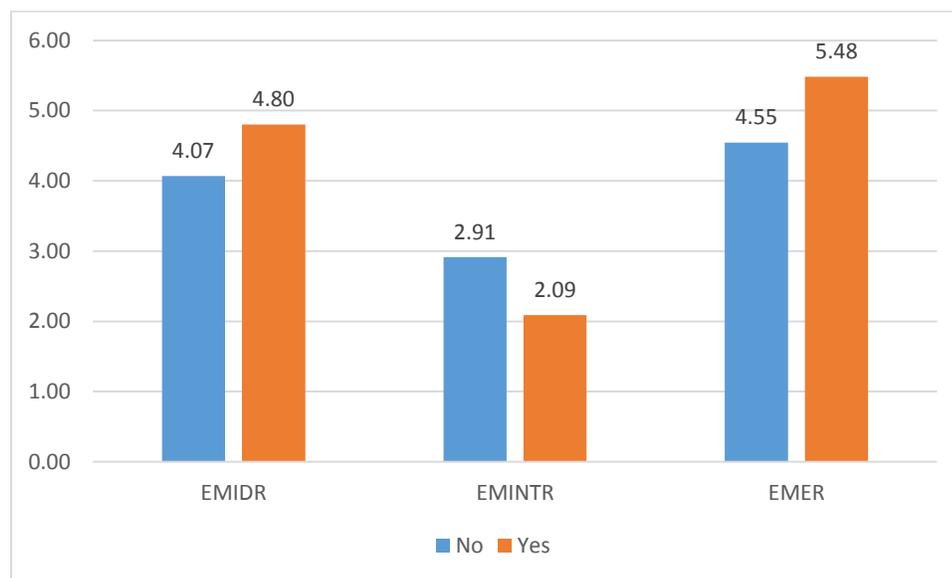


Figure 2. Extrinsic Motivation Scores by Factor and by Group

Step team participants scored higher in two sub-factors of extrinsic motivation when compared to non-participants (EMIDR M = 4.80; EMER M = 5.48). Although the results are statistically significant, there is one lower sub-factor score of extrinsic motivation with introjected regulation (EMINTR M = 2.09). As previously discussed, this particular sub-factor had a lower descriptive statistic of factor (Table 7) and did not have a significant correlation among factors (Table 8). This constant issue suggests more review may be needed with this particular sub-factor of extrinsic motivation.

Research Question 3

Research question 3 asks, *If differences exist, what moderates those differences (age, reported academic performance, length of time on step team, participation in extracurricular activities)?* Initially, a Pearson zero-correlation was conducted in order to assess the existence of a relationship between the potential moderators and the three dependent variables (identification to academics, intrinsic motivation, and extrinsic motivation). The results are presented in Table 12.

Table 12. *Pearson’s Zero-Order Correlation of Potential Moderators*

	Identification	Intrinsic	Extrinsic	GPA
Identification	1.00	.44**	.25**	.22**
Intrinsic	.44**	1.00	.63**	.25**
Extrinsic	.25**	.63**	1.00	.21*
Age	-0.09	-0.07	-0.03	-0.10
GPA	.22**	.25**	.21*	1.00
Extras	0.01	-0.05	0.07	0.09
Length of Time	-0.08	-0.10	-0.11	-0.12

Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level; * significant at the 0.05 level.

Based on the results of the Pearson’s zero-order correlation, it was determined that GPA should be examined as a moderator of the dependent variables. Results reveal a significant interaction effect between GPA and step team membership on the multivariate analysis of the three dependent variables: $F(3,135) = 4.00, p = 0.009$. The results of the Tests of Between-Subjects’ Effects are presented in Table 13.

Table 13. *Tests of Between-Subjects’ Effects*

Dependent Variable	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Identification	3.00	354.22	3.00	0.03	0.06
Intrinsic	3.00	0.50	0.30	0.83	0.01
Extrinsic	3.00	0.14	0.13	0.94	0.00

As indicated above, Identification (IAS) revealed significant differences when examining the interaction effect between GPA and step team membership. A visual illustration of the significant interaction between GPA and step team membership on the Identification to Academics (IAS) is presented in Figure 3.

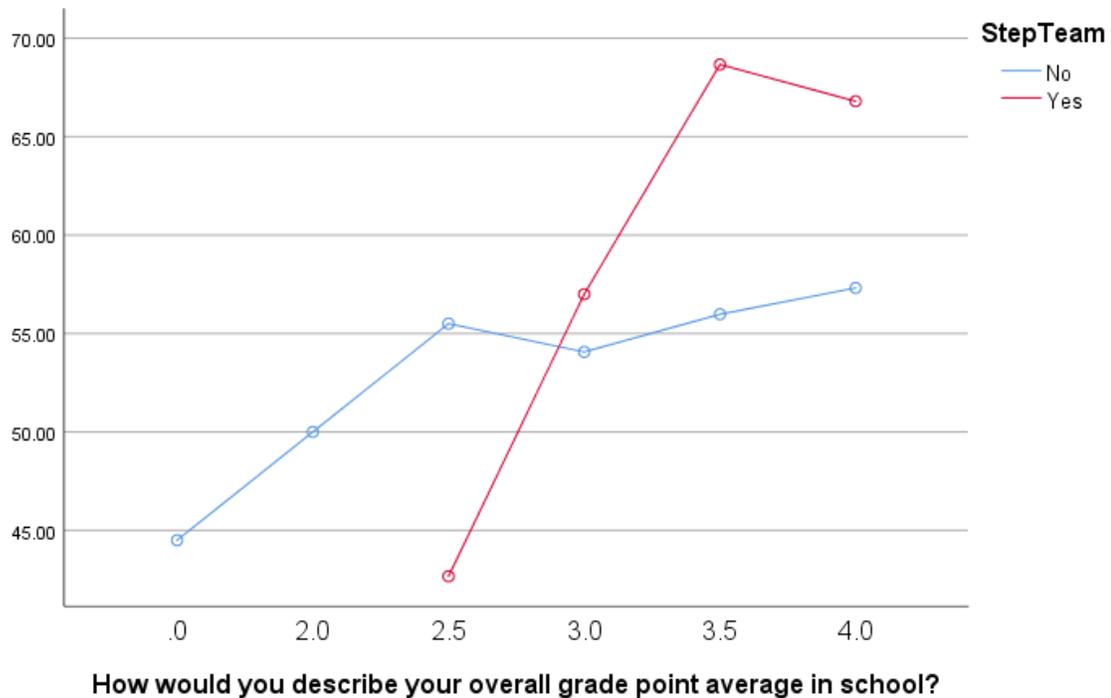


Figure 3. Interaction Between GPA and Step Team on IAS

As indicated above, step team members' IAS scores were higher for students with reported GPAs above 2.5.

Summary

The results provided in this chapter have been examined using an independent samples *t*-test, a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANOVA), and Pearson's zero-order correlation. Participants' self-reported data were taken from an electronic survey that combined two instruments: (a) the Identification to Academics Scale (IAS) and (b) the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS). The participants surveyed were high school males between the ages of 14 to 18 years and older at four local schools in South Taylor School District. The surveys were administered after parental consent was given electronically with the understanding the responses would remain anonymous.

The focus of this investigation was African American male students participating in step team programs in comparison to non-participants. The racial make-up of participants did not differ significantly from the selected schools within the district (Georgia Department of Education, 2016). Additionally, the percentage of participants indicating step team membership was typical of schools in the region (GSL, 2017).

Findings of this investigation indicate that identification scores of step team members are higher than their non-step team peers. The implication from this data is that African American male students reporting step team membership demonstrate higher identification to academics when compared to non-step team participants. However, the data are not statistically significant in this study.

An AMS inventory was examined across sub-factors in intrinsic and extrinsic categories using a MANOVA. MANOVA was deemed most appropriate as the sub-factors of intrinsic motivation are highly correlated. Step team participants scored higher in every sub-factor of intrinsic motivation when compared to non-participants. The implication from this data is that African American male students reporting step team membership have slightly larger levels of motivation regarding school, specifically for intrinsic reasons, when compared to non-step team participants. However, the data are not statistically significant in this study.

In the same manner, MANOVA was deemed an appropriate analysis for the highly correlated extrinsic categories. In this case, step team participants scored higher in two of three sub-factors of extrinsic motivation revealing a statistically significant difference between step team members and non-step team peers. The implication from this data is that African American male students reporting step team membership have a

significantly larger level of motivation regarding school, specifically for extrinsic reasons, when compared to non-step team participants. It is noted from the research that one sub-factor of EMINTR should be disaggregated more closely as the data presented a significantly lower mean for descriptive statistics of factors with no correlation effect. Questions within that specific sub-factor may need further review for analysis.

Lastly, self-reported GPAs were determined to be a significant moderator among step team participants and IAS scores. Students that were members of a step team and had a GPA greater than 2.5 reported higher scores on the IAS. The implication from this data is that African American male students reporting step team membership have higher identification scores when GPA is higher than average.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The current study examined the influence of a culturally relevant step team program on African American males' identification to school, as measured by the Identification to Academics Scale (IAS), and academic motivation, as measured by the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS). Although stepping has been a part of the Black Greek-Letter organization (BGLO) community for more than a century, this was the first known major exploration of public school step teams' influence on academic achievement factors. This chapter will interpret the findings, examine the results in relationship to existing research, and discuss implications of the study.

Discussion of Results

The first research question examined if there was a step team membership effect on students self-reported level of identification to academics. The IAS composite scores indicated students' self-view of academic performance that can be linked to positive student achievement outcomes. The IAS is used to assess the "extent to which a student's self-esteem is connected with and dependent upon academic outcomes" (Osborne, 1997a, p. 62). Since self-view of academic performance and identification can help students feel a sense of belonging in academia, step team programs can be utilized to increase members' identification by "allowing students to use their cultural frame of reference in addition to the mainstream frame" (Osborne & Jones, 2011, p. 150). Previous research has shown that peer culture and interaction can provide positive predictors of academic identification for African American male high school students (Griffin, 2002; Tyson, Darity, & Castellino, 2005; Sparrow & Sparrow, 2012; Cokley et al., 2012). The results of the present study further suggested similar connections. Although this study assumed stepping as culturally relevant due to its African origin, students who were participants of the step team program had a higher composite score on the IAS than non-participant peers. Thus, high school males engaged in step team programs may be more connected to academics in the school setting. Step team programs may be an innovative construct that enhances overall achievement outcomes for African American males.

The second research question examined if there was a step team membership effect on students' self-reported level of academic motivation. The AMS averages scores into intrinsic sub-factors that can be linked to positive student achievement outcomes. Step team participants' average scores in all three intrinsic motivation sub-factors were

higher than non-participant peers. Although not statistically significant, the results indicated practical benefits of step team programs that could play a role in increasing academic motivation intrinsically. Research points out that African American males are attracted to programs with cultural and personal relevance indicating the need for positive social interaction to increase motivation to attend school (Fine, 1991; Ford et al., 1994; Woodland et al., 2009; Toldson & Owens, 2010). While the results in this study did not indicate a strong association, step team participants clearly illustrated higher scores within all sub-factors of intrinsic motivation, and step team programs should be explored further to determine if there is significant influence on academic motivation from an intrinsic standpoint.

In addition to intrinsic sub-factors, the AMS averages scores into extrinsic components that can be linked to positive student achievement outcomes. Results of the present study indicated a statistically significant relationship as step team participants' average scores in extrinsic motivation sub-factors were higher than non-participant peers. While there was a statistically significant relationship, step team members' scores were lower on the EMINTR. In a recent investigation (Stover et al., 2012), high school students' extrinsic averages were higher than intrinsic averages. The recent study yielded the opposite as intrinsic averages were higher than extrinsic averages. However, a common pattern between this study and two recent cases (Cokley et al., 2012; Stover et al.) is that all extrinsic factors correlated higher than with EMINTR. In fact, Cokley et al. conveyed that academic self-concept was not correlated to EMINTR. This finding may indicate a need to possibly review questions within that sub-factor and exploring how high school students respond more in depth. Therefore, before the current, statistically

significant results are acted upon, the connection between step teams' influence on extrinsic motivational factors among African American males needs further investigation into specific extrinsic sub-factors related to EMINTR.

The final research question examined if age, reported academic performance, or length of time on step team moderated the IWA or AMS outcomes based on the students' step team membership. There was a significant interaction effect between self-reported GPA and step team membership. Thus, higher GPAs among African American male step team members may contribute to higher scores on the IAS. Research studies specify how participation in extracurricular programs promote school achievement (Broh, 2002; Feldman & Matjasko, 2005; Covay & Carbonaro, 2010). The current data support how step team programs may influence academic performance leading to enhanced identification to academics. This pattern supports similar findings from other investigations, which have illustrated positive links between academic motivation, academic performance, and participation in non-academic extracurricular activities.

The current study demonstrated that while step team participation may positively influence academic identification and academic motivation among African American male participants, the overall effect is not statistically significant. However, a linear relationship did exist between students' self-reported GPA and three dependent variables (identification to academics, intrinsic motivation, and extrinsic motivation) with a statistically significant outcome. Step team participants' scores on the IAS and AMS were higher than non-participant peers' scores. EMINTR was the only sub-factor step team participants scored lower, which was expected, due to outlier illustrations in descriptive statistics of factors. Step team programs may be able to serve as an

intentional effort to implement culturally responsive practices in public schools. This study aligns with research that suggested student participation in such activities can enhance relationships and achievement outcomes (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Noguera, 2003; Bristol, 2015). In reviewing findings of the current study, other dependent variables should be explored in relation to step team participation to address some of the academic deficits facing African American males in the educational setting.

Implications of Findings

Public school educators are continuously seeking ways to combat issues of disengagement and academic underperformance of African American male students. As a critical subgroup in the K-12 setting, organized frameworks need to be implemented that promote high achievement, cultural identity, and positive academic outcomes. This study focused specifically on identification of academics and academic motivation as two factors directly related to school success. Step team programs align with the research on innovation and non-traditional activities that are specifically implemented to craft a positive social identity and expose students of color to relevant reflections related to Afrocentric ideals (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003; Griffin & Allen 2006). Thus, encouraging step team participation may be a potential intervention to assist African American students with a positive cultural identity.

Similar to other extracurricular programs that traditionally exist in public schools, step teams provide an outlet for students to form social bonds and can serve as a catalyst to motivate learning. Often, academic motivation is enhanced by the way in which the instructional material is organized (Peters, 2006). This study illustrated how all internal motivation sub-factors were practically significant among step team participants.

“Internal motivation is longer lasting and more self-directive than external motivation, which must be repeatedly reinforced by praise or concrete rewards” (Peters, 2006, p.65). Stepping takes a great deal of effort, skill, and direction and participants have to exert components of teamwork in order to execute a step show successfully (Fine, 2003). Rather than focusing on the immediate reward such as the two points in a basketball shot, or six points in a football touch down, stepping may be a way for students to increase resiliency and internal motivation as planning a performance for peer group involves strategic comparison of abilities, opinions, and emotions (Peters, 2006). Step team “affiliation can also result in direct anxiety reduction through the mechanisms of the social acceptance and, oftentimes, the mere presence of others” (p.67).

Social acceptance has become a current phenomenon in public education, as educators become more aware of the needs of students exposed to traumatic social events and home environment (Cullinan et al., 2003). Stepping, which is referenced as part of the origin of African dance adopted by historically Black fraternities and sororities as part of chants and rituals (Kimbrough, 2003), is currently associated with successful intervention outcomes of abused children experiencing trauma. Van Der Kolk (2014) discovered that such interpersonal rhythms help to activate social engagement and can increase capacity to navigate relationships. By turning reaction into reflective intervention, educators are more likely to be successful in supporting students (Bramlett, Nelson, & Reeves, 1997). Similar to other therapeutic resolutions, stepping may present a kinesthetic and rhythmical approach for students experiencing difficulties in the classroom. Such hands-on activities have been implemented to help benefit students in the school setting (Sink, 2008).

In addition to social acceptance and psychological needs, CRT informs educational practitioners to supplement instruction with programs that provide opportunities to embrace cultural identity. This foundation is often present in schools that have experience with academic success among African American males (Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005). Such programs tend to adapt traditional performance tasks of mainstream curricula into culturally relevant pedagogy. Some African American students often struggle with the academic experience and forming a positive cultural identity in K-12 settings because of the lack of relevant instructional practices and programs (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Using the results from this study, step team programs may be viewed as a culturally relevant activity that places the student at the center of the learning context. Navigating cultural identity is a critical challenge for African American males in school (Noguera, 2003). However, by connecting students with positive, older peers, schools may be able to strengthen students' sense of security shaping a more positive cultural identity (O'Connor, Dearing, & Collins, 2011). As noted in this study, a great deal of step team participants were 17 years old, possibly indicating junior/senior year status in high school, and possibly serving in a mentor role to younger students. African American males use such experiences in school and society to form their identity.

As a nontraditional school activity, stepping may serve as a cultural link to reinforce positive attributes and provide a connection to cultural identity. The nature of the cultural identities that African American male students embrace have implications for their psychological well-being and educational outcomes (Youdell, 2003). "Critical pedagogy argues that there must be a fundamental shift in the teacher-student relationship

in which teachers become self-reflective and respect the knowledge students bring with them to the classroom” (Givens et al., 2016, p. 169). Stepping, as connected to the identity of Black Greek-Letter organizations (BGLOs), may help African American male students see themselves in a positive lens leading to more positive academic outcomes in school. This study clearly illustrated higher scores of participants in identification and motivation and may serve as a structure that provides an expanded opportunity to engage in social interactions related to positive self-images of African Americans in general. Step team programs can help teachers make a shift in the K-12 setting by engaging students and focusing on individuals’ creative ability to work with peers, creating and teaching steps, and working as a team, thus, enhancing the overall instructional environment and relational capacity leading to academic achievement.

Limitations

There have been various studies that examined academic motivation and identification to academics (Voelkl, 1997; Wentzel & Wigfield, 1998; Osborne, 1999). Additionally, there have been investigations of Black Greek-Letter organizations’ (BGLO) impact on leadership ability of minority students. There has not been a known, major exploration of public school step teams’ influence on academic achievement factors (Parks, 2008). Therefore, there are little baseline data for the present study. In addition, surveying African American males from only one district, with active step teams, limits the ability to generalize.

Recommendations

The higher scores revealed on the IAS and AMS by African American male students participating in a culturally relevant step team program provide insight for further exploration. Other factors could account for higher scores because the study was conducted in a district known to be the second-most-affluent county with an African American majority in the United States (DeKalb County, GA, n.d.). The noticeable presence of upper-class African Americans in the community (Graham, 1999) could influence some of the scoring dynamics. First, a replication of this study using a larger sample in a different district could provide new insights. It may be difficult, however, to increase the number of participants in a study of this type in the public school system because of the limited number of high school male step teams nationwide (NSL, 2018).

Second, a closer examination of step teams using qualitative approaches could provide a unique perspective from the participants' point of view. Ethnographic methods are appropriate for studying culture and providing insight in the educational setting. "Ethnography literally means to write about a group of people" (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013, p. 11). As a researcher providing new insight on a unique element unfamiliar in the research paradigm, there may be a need to immerse in the cultural setting and engage in participant observation. Being able to observe and interact with participants, consistently, are integral components of ethnographic inquiry and provide natural methods of studying shared meanings and practices that are well suited for this study (Guest et al.). Observations of step team participants could be conducted while interacting with steppers at summer step clinics, observing step team practices, conducting interviews, and participating in cultural rituals such as step shows. Similar to the replication recommendation, qualitative components can be difficult in the K-12

setting due to parental consent and IRBs. However, observations of step teams at practice and performance events would be non-disruptive to the traditional, educational setting. These methods are all components of ethnography and could provide data to make meaning of common patterns within the data through coding.

This study assumed stepping as culturally relevant due to its African origin and direct connection to BGLOs. A peer-reviewed assessment, such as the Orthogonal Cultural Identification Scale (OCIS), should be utilized in future studies to determine step teams' impact on cultural identity among African American students. The OCIS has been utilized to assess minority students' cultural identity with school-related academic outcomes (Oetting & Beauvais, 2001; Johnson, Wall, Guanipa, Terry-Guyer, & Velasquez, 2002). Stepping, as a modern research phenomenon, can be explored among many different academic, cultural, and social constructs. By using the OCIS as a tool in follow-up studies, stepping may reveal statistically significant outcomes in cultural identity among African American students which will help justify its classification as culturally relevant.

Further study should also examine the link between sub-factors of the academic motivation scale and overall extrinsic score. Due to the lack of baseline data on step team programs with regard to academic outcomes, the rationale for lower sub-scores from participants could not be explored further to determine if significant differences exist.

Concluding Statement

The importance of this study centers on the premise that without further research inquiry as to the practical and reasonable innovations that contribute to the success of

African American males, public schools will further escalate the academic crisis that exists. The results of this study enhance the current literature that exists on identification to academics by adding an innovative framework of the step team model as a creative, culturally relevant component to the success of African American males. The implications for school leaders working with the critical subgroup center on the critical need to make adjustments to meet the needs of all students, no matter the academic deficits that may exist. In *Walden*, Thoreau (2014) asserted, “If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to music which he hears, however measured or far away” (p. 175).

When students come to us in the classroom and they seem as though they are not ready to learn, they may need something a little different, innovative, and culturally relevant to captivate their interest. It is the duty of educators to tackle such issues with a relentless pursuit to gain understanding for improved teaching practices. Educational stakeholders may need to allow more students to march to a different drum, or simply, beat out their own rhythm.

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Appendix A

Survey Instrument - IAS

Items in the Identification with Academics Scale

1. Being a good student is an important part of who I am.
2. I feel that the grades I get are an accurate reflection of my abilities.
3. My grades do not tell me anything about my academic potential. *
4. I don't really care what tests say about my intelligence. *
5. School is satisfying to me because it gives me a sense of accomplishment.
6. If the tests we take were fair, I would be doing much better in school. *
7. I am often relieved if I just pass a course. *
8. I often do my best work in school.
9. School is very boring for me, and I'm not learning what I feel is important. *

10. I put a great deal of myself into some things at school because they have special meaning or interest for me.

11. I enjoy school because it gives me a chance to learn many interesting things.

12. I feel like the things I do at school waste my time more than the things I do outside of school.*

13. No test will ever change my opinion of how smart I am.*

Note. All items measured on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree).

*Item reverse scored.

Appendix B

Survey Instrument - ABS

Are you?	<input type="radio"/>	Male							
	<input type="radio"/>	Female		What is your race?					
How old are you?	<input type="radio"/>	16	<input type="radio"/>	African American					
	<input type="radio"/>	17	<input type="radio"/>	Caucasian					
	<input type="radio"/>	18	<input type="radio"/>	Latino					
	<input type="radio"/>	18+	<input type="radio"/>	Other					
					90's (A's)	80's (B's)	70's (C's)	60's (D's)	50's (F's)
How would you describe your grade in English?			<input type="radio"/>						
How would you describe your grade in Math?			<input type="radio"/>						
How would you describe your <i>overall grade</i> in school?			<input type="radio"/>						

Using the scale below, indicate to what extent each of the following items presently corresponds to one of the reasons why you go to school.

Does not correspond at all	Corresponds a little	Corresponds moderately	Corresponds a lot	Corresponds exactly		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Why Do You Go To School?

1. Because I need at least a high-school degree in order to find a high-paying job later on.	<input type="radio"/>						
2. Because I experience pleasure and satisfaction while learning new things.	<input type="radio"/>						
3. Because I think that a high-school education will help me better prepare for the career I have chosen.	<input type="radio"/>						
4. Because I really like going to school.	<input type="radio"/>						
5. Honestly, I don't know; I really feel that I am wasting my time in school.	<input type="radio"/>						
6. For the pleasure I experience while surpassing myself in my studies.	<input type="radio"/>						
7. To prove to myself that I am capable of completing my high-school degree.	<input type="radio"/>						
8. In order to obtain a more prestigious job later on.	<input type="radio"/>						
9. For the pleasure I experience when I discover new things never seen before.	<input type="radio"/>						

Does not correspond at all	Corresponds a little		Corresponds moderately		Corresponds a lot		Corresponds exactly
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

10. Because eventually it will enable me to enter the job market in a field that I like.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. Because for me, school is fun.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. I once had good reasons for going to school; however, now I wonder whether I should continue.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. For the pleasure that I experience while I am surpassing myself in one of my personal accomplishments.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. Because of the fact that when I succeed in school I feel important.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. Because I want to have "the good life" later on.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. For the pleasure that I experience in broadening my knowledge about subjects which appeal to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. Because this will help me make a better choice regarding my career orientation.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. For the pleasure that I experience when I am taken by discussions with interesting teachers.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. I can't see why I go to school and frankly, I couldn't care less.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. For the satisfaction I feel when I am in the process of accomplishing difficult academic activities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. To show myself that I am an intelligent person.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. In order to have a better salary later on.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23. Because my studies allow me to continue to learn about many things that interest me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24. Because I believe that my high school education will improve my competence as a worker.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25. For the "high" feeling that I experience while reading about various interesting subjects.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26. I don't know; I can't understand what I am doing in school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27. Because high school allows me to experience a personal satisfaction in my quest for excellence in my studies.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
28. Because I want to show myself that I can succeed in my studies.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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Appendix C

Parent Consent Form for Student Participation

CONSENT FORM FOR ONLINE SURVEY

Your child is invited to participate in a web-based online survey on Identification to Academics and Academic Motivation. This is a research project being conducted by Landon Brown, a school principal and student at Youngstown State University. The research will attempt to discover differences in academic motivation and identification between high school male participants and non-participants involved in extracurricular activities. It should take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

PARTICIPATION

Your child's participation in this survey is voluntary. Your child may refuse to take part in the research or exit the survey at any time without penalty. Your child is free to decline to answer any particular question they do not wish to answer for any reason.

BENEFITS

Your child will receive no direct benefits from participating in this research study. However, their responses may help educators learn more about the influence culturally relevant programs have on academic motivation and identification with student participants.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. The possible risks or discomforts of the study are minimal. Your child may feel a little uncomfortable answering survey questions due to their personal educational experiences.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Survey answers will be sent to a link at SurveyMonkey.com where data will be stored in a password protected electronic format. Survey Monkey does not collect identifying information such as name, email address, or IP address. Therefore, your child's responses will remain anonymous. No one will be able to identify your child or their answers, and no one will know whether or not your child participated in the study. No names or identifying information would be included in any publications or presentations based on these data, and your child's responses to this survey will remain confidential.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact my research supervisor, Dr. Karen Larwin via phone at 330-941-2231 or via email at khlarwin@ysu.edu

If you feel your child has not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or that your child's rights as a participant in research have not been honored during the course of this project, or you have any questions, concerns, or complaints that you wish to address to someone other than the investigator, you may contact the Youngstown State

University Institutional Review Board at One University Plaza, Youngstown, OH 44555,
or email research@ysu.edu.

PARENTAL CONSENT: Permission has been obtained to conduct the study from the county school system and the high school principal. Your signature is needed to proceed with administering the survey to your child. Selecting “Agree” indicates:

- You have read the above information
- You voluntarily agree to have your child participate in this study

Agree

Disagree

Parent signature: _____ Date: _____

Parent/Guardian printed name: _____

Student’s name: _____ Grade Level: _____

School: _____

Sincerely,

Landon A. Brown, II
Doctoral Student, Youngstown State University

PLEASE RETURN THIS PAGE TO YOUR ADVISEMENT TEACHER

Due date is Friday, February 23, 2018

Appendix D

Institutional Review Board Approval



One University Plaza, Youngstown, Ohio 44555

Office of Research
330.941.2377
www.yzu.edu

February 13, 2018

Dr. Karen Larwin, Principal Investigator
Mr. Landon A. Brown II, Co-investigator
Department of Counseling, School Psychology & Educational Leadership
UNIVERSITY

RE: HSRC PROTOCOL NUMBER: 089-2018
TITLE: Beat Out Your Own Rhythm: A Study of a Public School Step Team's
Influence on Academic Identification and Academic Motivation Among
African American White Males

Dear Dr. Larwin and Mr. Brown:

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed the abovementioned protocol and determined that it is exempt from full committee review based on a DHHS Category 2 exemption.

Any changes in your research activity should be promptly reported to the Institutional Review Board and may not be initiated without IRB approval except where necessary to eliminate hazard to human subjects. Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects should also be promptly reported to the IRB.

The IRB would like to extend its best wishes to you in the conduct of this study.

Sincerely,

A rectangular box with a blue border, intended for a signature.

Michael A. Hripko
Associate Vice President for Research
Authorized Institutional Official

MAH:cc

c: Dr. Jake Protivnak, Chair
Department of Counseling, School Psychology & Educational Leadership

