

2020

## Experience of Academic Motivation Among Disadvantaged High School Graduates

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Jamaal Anthony Thomas

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Walden University  
2020

Abstract

Experience of Academic Motivation Among Disadvantaged High School Graduates

by

Jamaal Anthony Thomas

MA, Walden University, 2015

BS, Duquesne University, 2011

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Psychology

Walden University

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## Abstract

Impoverished students face obstacles that influence academic achievement and motivation. These young people are disadvantaged by their circumstances and are at risk for missing opportunities that could prepare them for meaningful careers and improved quality of life. The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain a deeper understanding of academic motivation in academic scholarship students who attended disadvantaged schools. Social identity theory provided the theoretical framework for a narrative analysis of the experience of academic motivation, academic achievement, and social identity. Five female and 4 male college students were interviewed. The thematic analysis revealed 4 themes: motivated by overcoming challenges, school relationships that aided scholarship attainment, unconventional routes to scholarships, and social identities that motivated academic achievement. Structural analysis of academic motivation development revealed 4 key elements: challenge, support, motivation, and accomplishment. Participants reported experiencing academic and personal challenges, receiving support from their social groups, becoming motivated to overcome the challenge, and achieving an accomplishment during their motivational development. Recommendations for future research include exploring disadvantaged students' understanding of "scholarship" and the scholarship process, as well as, misconceptions about college and the available resources to help finance school. The results of this study supply stakeholders, academic institutions, and community leaders with information that can provide the means to support disadvantaged students.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

There are approximately 21 million students who are attending Title 1 schools in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Title 1 schools are lower educational agencies and public schools that receive financial assistance due to the high number of attending students who are from low-income families (Education & Secondary Education Act, 1965). These schools are typically located in neighborhoods (rural, urban, suburban) in which 40% of the student population come from low-income families (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Additionally, Title 1 schools normally service students who are in high poverty neighborhoods, meaning they are normally enrolled in other government assistance programs such as free and reduced lunch (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Title 1 schools are typically referred to as impoverished schools (Harris, Al-Bataineh, & Al-Bataineh, 2016; McMahon, 2011; Stichter, Stormont, & Lewis, 2009).

Out of the 21 million attending Title 1 schools, approximately 67% enroll to attend college the next year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). The number of disadvantaged students who received private scholarships from colleges, universities, or private institutions are lower than wealthy and middle-class students (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Additionally, students learning in disadvantaged school settings face different challenges than most students in the United States. Students who learn in impoverished school settings face poor curriculums, receive inexperienced instruction, and have a poor learning atmosphere (Berkowitz, Moore, Astor, & Benbenishty, 2018;

Burney & Beilke, 2008; Sirin, 2005). Students learning in impoverished conditions also face low resources, peer distractions, and poor academic influences (Bierman et al., 2010; Burney & Beilke, 2008; Sirin, 2005). Socioeconomic status has a strong influence on academic motivation and academic achievement (Berger & Archer, 2016; Eamon, 2005; Lacour & Tissington, 2011). Disadvantaged students live in poverty and attend disadvantaged schools, resulting in lower motivation to attend college, lower quality of life, and lower job prospects (Ou & Reynolds, 2014; Welton & Williams, 2015; Wickrama, Simons, & Baltimore, 2012).

Little is known about the academic motivation of students who receive academic scholarships after attending a Title 1 school. Understanding how disadvantaged students can advance academically may add to the literature on academic motivation and provide insights to programs that encourage the academic development of impoverished students. This chapter provides insight into the background of the study, the problem statement, and assumptions. The nature of the study, key definitions, significance, and purpose of the study will also be addressed in Chapter 1.

### **Background**

Historically, academic motivation was founded on the premise of academic achievement, locus of control models, and attribution theory, where a student's motivation to achieve is guided by the values they place on academics (Bandura, 1975; Weiner, 1972). Research regarding academic motivation was focused on academic achievement during the 70s and 80s, focusing on external variables such as cultural

norms and school demographics (Gjeseme, 1973; Hall, 1975; Weiner, 1990). As research developed during the 80s and 90s, widespread application of attribution theory indicated that academic intrinsic motivation was positively related with academic achievement (Ames, 1992; Brophy 1983; Vallerand & Bissonette, 1992). Then research into student academic motivation began to focus more on the influence of external motivators, which include student backgrounds, cultural influences, teacher and peer relationships, and students' socioeconomic status (SES); Fortier, Vallerand & Guay, 1995; Schunk, 1991; Simons, Van Rheezen, & Covington, 1999).

Current research correlates with these findings, suggesting that external motivators such as SES, cultural background, and school support impact the level of intrinsic motivation within students in today's academic climate (Urduan & Bruchmann, 2018; Vecchione, Alessandri, & Mariscano, 2013; Wilkinson & Penney, 2014). These external factors influence disadvantaged students as well such as family financial status, neighborhood influences, peer attitudes, and school resources (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008; Bierman et al., 2010; Chung, Mulvey, & Steinberg, 2011; Ibabe, 2016). Students who are learning in disadvantaged school settings also have difficulty with the material, in part because of poor teacher interactions and low learning opportunities (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008; Moy et al., 2015). The low morale in school climate also correlates with a poor social environment, leading to poor school adjustment (Ladd, 2006). Students who live in impoverishment also feel threats to their identity by teachers, peers, and other social groups (Butler-Barnes et al., 2011; Gullan, Hoffman, & Leff, 2011).

Current literature has indicated that understanding the motivation of impoverished students is needed to learn more about their learning experience (Cooper & Davis, 2015; Heberle & Carter, 2015). This study may contribute to the literature with a focus on the academic motivation of students who learn in impoverished settings and understanding how students experience their social identity as part of their motivation to academically achieve. Narrative analysis may provide insight into the development of their academic motivation while learning in a disadvantaged setting. The results of this study could assist future researchers by providing analysis on the experiences of motivated learners who are learning in disadvantaged settings.

### **Problem Statement**

Approximately 43.1 million people in the United States currently live beneath the poverty line, which accounts for approximately 13.5% of neighborhoods (Proctor, Semega, & Kollar, 2016). Research on poverty has demonstrated its effect on the pre-K through high school experience. Impoverished neighborhoods foster a variety of complex and challenging conditions that include gang culture and aggressive behavior, which influences disadvantaged adolescents (Emerick, Curry, Collins, & Rodriguez, 2013; Juon et al., 2014; Karandinos, Hart, Castrillo, & Bourgois, 2014).

Further, poor living conditions affect the quality of education and academic opportunities. For example, disadvantaged schools are less likely to have rigorous curricula, experienced and qualified teachers, opportunities to enroll in specialized academic programs, and parental involvement with students (Burney & Beilke, 2008).

Additionally, SES factors associated with disadvantaged students' academic achievement include parental education, parental occupation, eligibility for free and reduced lunch, family income, neighborhood, and home stability (Sirin, 2005). Poor social conditions have been shown to have lasting effects on cognitive development, memory, and executive functions (Cooper & Mulvey, 2015; Koreniowski, Cupani, Ison, & Difabio, 2016; Rose & Craik, 2012). Youth in impoverished areas are also more susceptible to the popularity of social networks that advocate joining gangs and using drugs (Fletcher & Bonell, 2013). Social identity has been shown to influence the academic motivation of third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade students through academic values held by their peer groups (Masland & Lee, 2013). These obstacles are likely to reduce or impede students' motivation to do well in school, with motivation being a component of cognitive functioning (Crocker et al., 2013).

There has been extensive research on the factors that motivate students to academically achieve. Factors affecting academic motivation include student engagement, behavior, and achievement when controlling for common academic factors such as intrinsic motivation, external regulation, amotivation, SES, general intelligence, school grades, absence, and conduct (Vecchione, Alessandri, & Marsicano, 2013). Student academic motivation can also be influenced by teacher expectations of their abilities, academic placement, and overall school setting (Wilkinson & Penney, 2014). Learning in a disadvantaged school setting can also impact student motivation, as there is an identified achievement gap between students in advantaged schools and disadvantaged



schools in terms of education and testing, class size, and attrition (Cooper & Mulvey, 2015; Ladd, 2012). Further, students' motivational outcomes in the classroom are impacted by socioemotional development, teacher behavior, and student behavior (Korpershoek, Harms, Boer, Kuijk, & Doolaard, 2016).

Past research provides insight that living in poverty and attending disadvantaged schools inhibits the motivation to learn in school. However, missing from the literature is a better understanding of academic motivation in academically successful students who come from disadvantaged school settings, and how social identity could influence student success. Thus, the purpose of this study to address this gap.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of academic motivation in academic scholarship students who attended disadvantaged schools with poor learning conditions. The study was concentrated on the narratives of former high school graduates who graduated from Title 1 or disadvantaged schools between 2015-2017 and received academic scholarships to attend a 4-year college/university.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do high school graduates who come from an impoverished, disadvantaged school setting and received academic scholarships to attend a 4-year college/university describe their experience of academic motivation?
2. How do high school graduates who come from an impoverished, disadvantaged school setting and received academic scholarships to attend a

4-year college/university describe their experience of academic achievement?

3. What do the narratives of these graduates tell us about the role of social identity in a disadvantaged school setting?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study involved the social identity theory (SIT). SIT was developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), suggesting that the social categorization of placing people into social groups that attaches to them a social identity. Student social identity has been found to have strong relationship with their cultural foundation (Butler-Barnes, Chavous, & Zimmerman, 2011). Different social groups such as friends, family, culture, and peers influence their academic motivation, attitude toward school, and future academic prospects (Colyar & Stich, 2011; Robnett & Leaper, 2013; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013; Wang & Algozzine, 2011). The application of SIT in relation to academic motivation can be seen within interactions of stereotype threat, self-efficacy, racial identity, and cultural identity, indicating that students to take a possible motivational stance to defend their identity (Alfaro et al., 2009; Close & Soiberg, 2008; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Rowley, Burchinal, Roberts, & Zeisal, 2008). Further application of SIT in relation to academic motivation can be found Chapter 2.

### **Nature of the Study**

The qualitative research design for this study is narrative research design. The narrative analysis used for this study consisted of thematic and structural analysis, which will be further discussed in Chapter 3. The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper

understanding of academic motivation in academic scholarship students who attended disadvantaged schools while looking to understand the role of social identity in the development of academic motivation. Narrative analysis for this study allowed for a deeper look at the expression of academic motivation for academic scholarship disadvantaged students through analysis for themes that emerge from the stories told by the participants (Patton, 2002; Riessman, 2008).

I collected the data from the participants in the study through a 60-90-minute semistructured interview. The participants of the study were students who graduated from high school in 2015-2017 and attended high school in an impoverished disadvantaged school setting and received an academic scholarship to attend a 4-year university or college. I analyzed the transcribed data through using NVivo software, which is further explained in Chapter 3.

### **Definitions**

*Academic achievement:* The representation of an individual's highest hope to achieve in an academic setting, which incites the individual to reach for greater efforts (Gottfried, 1985; Murraray, 1938; Weiner, 1986)

*Academic motivation:* Academic behavior that is influenced by expectations of personal abilities across different academic settings (Ardeńska et al., 2016; Schunk, 1991; Vallerand & Bissonette, 1992; Weiner, 1990).

*Extrinsic motivation:* External factors that influences the behavior of an individual toward achieving in an academic setting (Bandura, 1975; Weiner, 1972, 1990).

*Identity:* In reference to SIT, the identity a person holds is based on the social categorization of placing people into social groups (i.e., race, status, culture) that they are affiliated to (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971).

*Intrinsic motivation:* Internal factors within an individual that influences behavior toward achieving in an academic setting (Bandura, 1975; Deci, 1975; Weiner, 1972, 1990).

*Social groups:* Based on minimal group paradigm taking place in social settings, individual's sense of social identity derived from the groups they associate themselves with such as culture, race, or status (Turner, 1975).

*Socioeconomic status (SES):* The economic and sociological measure of students' family's work experience, income, and education (Sirin, 2005).

*Stereotype threat:* Gross generalizations or prejudices applied to a specific group of people with some level of shared characteristics (Fischer, 2010; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Schmader, 2010).

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions for the study included a presumption that participants would provide rich answers to the questions of the study due to them fitting the criteria. Components such as experience with the target group and viewpoints on the current educational environment could have also led to assumptions about the behavior and experience of the participants. The strategies utilized to reduce the impact of these biases and assumptions are addressed in Chapter 3.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

Regarding the scope of the study, participants from the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia in the United States were assumed to have transferability outside of the region. The region selected for the target group was convenient, allowing me the ability to recruit the participants needed for the study.

Delimitations of the study included the inability to have a dependability analysis of the data due to the resources not being in my reach. As the researcher, my experiences with the target group may have resulted in attitudes and opinions that correlate to researcher bias. My profession as a special educator at a disadvantaged school setting could have influenced selection and analysis of participants reported experiences. I implemented strategies mentioned in the confirmability section (such as describing procedures and method of analysis), which is in Chapter 3.

Additionally, the purposeful sampling strategy relied on the convenience of my surrounding region, with the assumption that the procedures and results could be transferable to other readers' experiences and prior published studies. To address this, I implemented transferability methods such as thick description. Regarding limitations with dependability, data were self-reported stories by the participants, meaning accuracy of the stories by participants could be misleading. Procedures to address trustworthiness of the study and increase the truthfulness and integrity of the interviews (such as member checking, thick description, and peer review) are in Chapter 3.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of the study involved myself (researcher), nature of the research design, and methodology. Other limitations involved dependability and transferability. Limitations of the thematic analysis included the definition of words to be the same for every participant (Riessman, 2008).

### **Significance**

This research study may fill a gap in understanding the experience of academic motivation in an impoverished, disadvantaged school setting. This study adds to the research on academic motivation in disadvantaged school settings by learning about students who overcame disadvantaged, impoverished settings (Cooper & Davis, 2015; Hopson et al., 2014). The results of this study provide current insight into how social identity shapes academic motivation to succeed while students are learning in a disadvantaged, impoverished school setting. These results could support educators, researchers, and parents to develop interventions that enhance the academic motivation of students who are learning in disadvantaged, school settings. To make social change in education, it is important to understand the social conditions that influence identity, behaviors and attitudes toward learning, aiding these students in reaching higher academic achievement regardless of school condition.

### **Summary**

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the study. This qualitative narrative study assessed the stories told by academic scholarship students who attended disadvantaged

schools. This study adds to the literature by providing insight into student academic motivation, specifically how student social identities were used in the development of academic motivation. Limitations of the study were also addressed in this section as well as the significance and purpose of the study.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

The intrinsic and extrinsic motivators that influence student academic success have been well-studied in socially stable, economically advantaged primary and secondary school settings. However, missing from the literature is a better understanding of academic motivation and social identity in successful students who come from impoverished or disadvantaged settings. The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how academic motivation and social identity influence scholarship students who attended disadvantaged schools. This chapter covers the literature relevant to this purpose.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

Quantitative and qualitative research studies and books were used in this academic literature search. PsychINFO, PsychARTICLES, PsychTESTS, Thoreau, and Google Scholar were the main search engines utilized when searching for information containing the key terms of *academic motivation amongst students who academically developing disadvantaged school settings in poverty*. Key search terms used in combination with *academic motivation* included *social motivation, social predictors, social identity, impoverishment, academic achievement, poverty, race, gender, meta-analysis, literature review, academic performance, scale, reading, writing, math, cross-cultural college, social identity theory, and social group*. Additional search terms included *history of attribution theory, history of expectancy-value theory, history of*



*achievement theory, social identity theory, social comparison theory, self-determination, self-efficacy, self-regulation, and academic motivational scales.* Studies that involved academic motivation and social economic factors was the focal point, especially regarding academic achievement and college ambition among the students in a disadvantaged setting.

The search process was iterative. Articles indicated a relationship between social components of poverty and academic component for students, teachers, and families. Google Scholar weekly provided a list of recently published articles and books related academic motivation for review. Quantitative studies were utilized to identify key factors but also indicated the need for qualitative studies that could add context and a complete understanding of academic motivation.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was based on the theoretical tenets of SIT. Tajfel and Turner (1979) developed SIT, which involves placing people into social groups that attaches to them a social identity. Minimum group paradigm, a derivation of this social categorization, suggests that in-group favoritism among a social group while discriminating against outer social groups can be caused by pure social categorization (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971). With minimal group paradigm taking place in social settings, individuals' sense of social identity causes them to compare themselves to outer social groups, resulting in a competition with them (Turner, 1975). By comparing social groups, an individual is accepting that social identity and is becoming a member of

that social group. Additionally, depending on the analysis of social comparison and categorization, stereotypes can be formed to create discriminative behaviors toward outer groups (Bilgic & Tajfel, 1973; Tajfel et al., 1971; Turner, 1975; Turner, Brown, & Tajfel, 1979).

An individual's social identity can affect motivation in approaching tasks in a social setting. Implications of motivation are apparent throughout the process of developing social identity (Oakes & Turner, 1980; Tajfel, 1974; Turner, 1975). Motivational components of social identity theory suggest that through social categorization within a social setting, an individual defines his or her position within in the setting. Through defining the position of their social group and the self, individuals can form positive self-identities based on positive social comparisons that supports superiority over other social groups. Social identity as a motivational phenomenon depends on the strength of the social identification with the social group as well as their position in the social structure of that group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Thus, SIT motivational use posits that definition of self-concept is related to what group someone belongs to, their values, and the emotional experiences (Yzerbyt & Demoulin, 2010).

### **Impact of Social Groups on Identity and Academics**

Research highlights the impact of social groups on academic motivation and academic achievement, including the direct impact social groups have on a student's identity. This can provide further insight into understanding the role of social factors on academic attainment. For instance, identity awareness and perceived social categories of

either being successful or deviant have influenced students to assimilate to the expected behavior of their social group while others have decided to prove the stereotype wrong (Hebert, 2001). Awareness of these prejudices could lead students to perceive a stereotype threat on their identity—a generalization of a group with some similar characteristics (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013)—, which was applied by their social surroundings. Adolescent minorities often have to deal with media images and stereotypes in places such as schools, with racial and ethnic stereotypes applying labels such as “troublemakers, criminals, and truants” (Hebert, 2001, p. 159). The development of self for individuals in relation to their social settings are affected by mixed messages on their culture and ability to achieve (Gulllan, Hoffman, & Leff, 2011). Stereotype threats can result in negative academic performance and cognitive function as well as delayed degree completion, though some students are determined to not conform to the stereotypes and hold a sense of responsibility to defend their identity (Fischer, 2010; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Schmader, 2010).

Students in impoverished school settings are constantly facing challenges toward their identity by teachers, peers, family, and other social groups. Students have reported having difficulty with being focused and motivated when being around peers who lack motivation to succeed in an academic setting. Additionally, students who succeed in an academic setting can face dissonance due to reaction of peers in their setting. Students have also reported the need to balance expectations and norms of two cultures such as African-American students being in fear of being identified as “acting white” by their

peers for being academically successful (Gullan et al., 2011; Owens & Massey, 2011). For example, Black students whose identities have been questioned due to academic success began to underperform in the classroom (Fordham, 1985). Further, students who have reported high in leadership competence had lower self-concept clarity and a lower connection with members in their race (Gullan et al., 2011).

Studies into student identity have found strong social relationships to cultural foundation. Cultural components such as racial and ethnic identity impacts students' academic experiences and social interactions. For example, racial identity and interaction with Black friends correlate to children's expectation for discrimination in cross-race relationships, especially with White peers and authority figures in school. However, when accounting for socioeconomic factors and parental support, adolescents with higher racial pride and religious coping when faced with difficult situations tend to have higher academic motivational beliefs (Butler-Barnes, Chavous, & Zimmerman, 2011; Rowley, Burchinal, Roberts, & Zeisel, 2008). Additionally, boys have been found to have a stronger, negative relationships between community violence and academic self-efficacy than those with high racial pride (Butler-Barnes et al., 2011). Regarding ethnic identity, generational status, bicultural stress, family, and ethnic identity communally impacts academic motivation, with bicultural stress causing the most significant impact in lowering motivation and academic achievement (Close & Solberg, 2008; Knight et al., 2010; Pina-Watson, Lopez, Ojeda, & Rodriguez, 2014).

The concept of identity is primarily understood to be intrinsic in nature, but

extrinsic factors can impact how the identity is formed. School motivation and school commitment are related constructs among students in secondary school, with various motivation factors such as school performance, social, and extrinsic motivators affecting academic achievement (Korpershoek, 2016). Elements of home environment like protectiveness, conformity, nurturance, punishment, and rewards are also significantly positively correlated with achievement motivation, with deprivation of privileges, social isolation, permissiveness, and rejection negatively correlating with academic motivation for adolescents (Joshi & Acharya, 2013). For example, discrimination against boys has had a negative relationship for boys' academic motivation and academic success (Alfaro et al., 2009).

### **Applications of Social Identity Theory to the Current Study**

SIT can provide an in-depth understanding of how extrinsic motivators (social groups) are experienced in relation to students' intrinsic motivation (academic motivation, social identity) in the classroom. The basic tenets of SIT rely on motivational principles of an individual's social group being superior to another social group, with a person's social identity representing their social group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The purpose of this study was to explore academic motivation in academic scholarship students who attended disadvantaged schools with poor learning conditions. The application of SIT helped to examine how perceived identity can be used as a motivator to succeed despite the odds of learning in a disadvantaged school setting. Research using elements of SIT have shown that student identities often gravitate toward claiming racial,

ethnic, and cultural identities, with some studies also highlighting how students recognize their SES (Butler-Barnes et al., 2011; Heberle & Carter, 2015; Rowley et al., 2008).

Further research into disadvantaged students' motivation can show how the students feel their disadvantage impacts them in school, especially how being categorized impacts their desire to learn (Heberle & Carter, 2015).

### **Literature Review Related to Key Concepts**

#### **The Challenges of Academic Success in Disadvantaged Schools**

Historically, disadvantaged schools have had difficulties with academic achievement. The number of low SES students who received private scholarships are lower than both wealthy and middle-class students (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Low SES and family income impact disadvantaged students who cannot afford higher education and face low work opportunities. Students who live in poverty and attend disadvantaged school settings tend to achieve lower earnings, assets, job quality, and overall quality of living (Ou & Reynolds, 2014; Wickrama, Simons, & Baltimore, 2012). Living in impoverishment also impacts students' college aspirations (Garriott, Hudyma, Keene, & Santiago, 2015; Kena, 2016; Walpole, 2003; Westrick et al., 2015). The stressful living conditions that are associated with living in poverty distracts students from desiring higher education. Studies highlight the impact of at-risk conditions in the respective community as being a deterrent to pursuing higher education, in which risk behaviors, perspectives, and attributes influence college success (Drotos & Cilesiz, 2016; Laskey & Hetzel, 2011).

**Historical research on academic outcomes in disadvantaged students.** Living in impoverishment impacts academic motivation through neighborhood influences and lack of motivational resources. Historically, students from low income households have been less prepared for school and face more disadvantages when performing in school (Levin, 1987; Manor, 1987; Rumberger, 1987). Students from low-income homes who attended Title 1 schools are academically lower than students who attend non-Title 1 schools (Stanley & Greenwood, 1983). Students in disadvantaged school settings have received inexperienced instruction, faced language barriers, and had poor relationships with administrators and teachers (Dumaret & Stewart, 1985, Levin, 1987; Stanley & Greenwood, 1983). Adolescent disadvantaged students also face factors that deter their education such as family responsibilities, social withdrawal, and poor academic outcomes throughout their school career (Levin, 1987; Moskowitz & Schwartzman, 1989; Rumberger, 1987).

Early research has highlighted that school conditions provide an obstacle to students' academic and social development. Disadvantaged schools often have difficulties with addressing student academic needs due to lack of structure, lack of resources, lack of parent involvement, student behavior, and difficulty providing adequate support and instruction (Andrews, Soder, & Jacoby, 1986; Lee & Bryk, 1989; Levin, 1987; Manor, 1987; Natrielo, McDill, & Pallas, 1985). Disadvantaged students who dropped out of school also contribute the decision to lack of satisfaction, a challenging environment, and socioeconomic factors such as low educational and

occupational attainment levels of parents, low family income, and absence of learning opportunities (Manor, 1987; Rumberger, 1987). Conditions in student's family such as number of family members and parent employment also contribute to students dropping out (Natrielo et al., 1985).

Language barriers are also an obstacle in disadvantaged school settings. Students who live in poverty tend to have low academic achievement in elementary and high secondary school due to cultural or linguistic differences. For example, in a study 44% of Black students and 56% of Hispanic students attending low-income schools were illiterate due to lack of resources provided at home to support school learning, lack of experienced instruction, and delays in developing learning skills (Levin, 1987). Disadvantaged immigrants face difficulty with school adjustment due to language barriers, socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, low financial resources, and low academic knowledge (Levin, 1989; Munroe-Blum, Boyle, Offord, & Kates, 1989). Further, family dysfunction, poverty, subsidized housing, and older age account for immigrant students who are at risk for child psychiatric disorder (Munroe-Blum et al., 1989).

Students from disadvantaged settings also face social pressures from peers, administrators, and teachers. Students who reach academic failure face pressures from their school and home settings that impact their academic performance. Actual student ability, social feedback from others about their achievement, dissonance about feedback and actual ability, and peer comparison groups have also contributed to student self-



concept of academic ability (West, Fish, & Stevens, 1980). Academic self-concept is lower among students who are considered middle- or lower-class (Eshel & Klein, 1981). Being held back or retained also leads to lower self-concept and lower academic achievement. A meta-analysis on the effect of grade-level retention on elementary and junior high students showed that retained students scored .37 less than promoted students on various outcome measures, with retained students scoring lower in language arts, reading, mathematics, work-study skills, social studies and grade point average (Holmes & Matthews, 1983). Retention negatively impacts student self-concept, retained students having a less favorable attitude toward school and a negative personal adjustment score, which consisted of emotional adjustment, social adjustment, and behaviors in school (Holmes & Matthews, 1983).

Student academic achievement impacts the school climate in a disadvantaged school setting. Research has suggested that students from high aggressive areas were predictive of low intelligence, poor school achievement, and psychiatric problems. Additionally, students who were aggressive during their childhood had low academic outcomes during their adolescence as well as high psychiatric treatment, and students with low self-esteem fostered delinquent behaviors causing suspension from school as well as lower academic performance (Moskowitz & Schwartzman, 1989; Rosenberg, Schooler, & Schoenbach, 1989). Disadvantaged students may also be less competent and more likely to be disruptive with high stress levels, especially with factors such as lower IQ, low SES, and less positive family qualities (Masten et al., 1987).

Studies into academic instruction have found that disadvantaged students receive inadequate instruction that did not meet their entire needs. Lee and Bryk's (1989) quantitative study found that students' social distribution and academic achievement are positive when the school provides academic organization such as breadth of curriculum offerings, number of academic courses required, and structure of learning opportunities for high school students regardless of SES. Students who attend schools with poor academic and administrative structure such as poor administrative leadership from the principal were found to be unable to perform in areas of math and reading (Andrews et al., 1986). Implementation of instructional practices such as teacher pull-out by specialist, instructional time use, and teaching content are not done adequately, leaving students to have diminished relationships with their homeroom teachers and less promotion of academic achievement (Archer & Edwards, 1982; Levins, 1987; Natrielo, et al., 1985). Stanley and Greenwood's (1983) quantitative study investigated instructional procedures and their effect on student response in Title 1 and non-Title 1 schools found that while all students received infrequent response time to prompts by teachers, minority students in Title 1 schools received the lowest response time, hampering student ability to convey learning and retain material. White's (1982) meta-analysis of 200 studies on SES relationship with academic achievement found that SES was weakly correlated with academic achievement; but found higher correlation with analysis of specific factors such as grade level and specific SES measurements such as family characteristics (family income, family education, head of household occupation) home atmosphere, and school

resources.

Research during the 90s focused on the school culture and atmosphere for disadvantaged students. A literature review highlighted school cultures impact primarily influencing academic achievement amongst disadvantaged, minority students (Gaziel, 1997). Disadvantaged students who lived in poverty faced conditions such as high rates of violence, high substance abuse incidence, low educational attainment, child abuse and neglect, poor nutrition, and limited health care that impacted student academic learning ability in school (Barbarin, 1993; Floyd, 1996; Schuh & Caneda, 1997). These students primarily attended Title 1 schools due to their family's household income. Ross, Smith, Slavin, and Madden's (1997) literature review found that students who attended Title 1 schools could be placed in the category of being "at-risk" academically. The literature review of 27 studies found that students considered "at-risk" were over-represented in disadvantaged minority students; contributing to their low performance on academic achievement tests to reduced opportunities to develop academic skills, limited parental support, and expectancies for educational attainment, and distrust of outside cultural values of education (Ross et al., 1997). A literature review found that emotionally disabled students, considered "at-risk", were more likely to become unemployed or work a low paying job after graduation, or to drop out of school (Nelson, 1996).

Researchers aimed to understand the academic success of students who were attending disadvantaged schools, both for academically successful and academically stagnant students. Past research on student resilience in disadvantaged students have

found that family support, peer support, and teacher support have encouraged students to academically achieve (Barbarin, 1993; Floyd, 1996; Freiburg, 1993). Reis and Diaz (1999) found that academically successful, disadvantaged female students acknowledged the importance of being grouped with other academically talented students as well as receiving encouragement from peers, parents, teachers, specialists, and administrators. Resilient students also responded well to school culture and secondary school effectiveness including the norms of teamwork, orderliness, continuous school improvement, encouraging responsibility, and value of principal and teacher competency and shared cultural support in their school (Gaziel, 1997).

**Current academic outcomes in disadvantaged students.** Academic achievement and motivation can also be influenced by the social setting where the learning is occurring. A literature review by Kerr, Dyson, and Gallanaugh (2016) found that schools are considered the primary providers of services and facilities for disadvantaged neighborhoods, with community schools relieving social pressures by engaging in inter-organizational collaboration with community members. Kerr, Dyson, and Gallanaugh (2016) also found literature that focused on school-led activities whose goal is to build positive relationships, social networks, and cohesion with the community. Considering these findings, schools should also develop curricula and pedagogy that builds student and school relationships in the learning environment due to the recognition of the local culture (Kerr, Dyson, & Gallanaugh, 2016). These ideas are strongly urged for impoverished and disadvantaged schools, in which they rarely receive these

opportunities due to a lack of community participation, school resources, family involvement, and peer interactions (Berger & Archer, 2016; Ibabe, 2016; Kerr, Dyson, & Gallanaugh, 2016; Moy et al., 2014).

Disadvantaged students from low-SES neighborhoods attend schools that have a poor learning atmosphere (Urda & Bruchmann, 2018; Vecchione, Alessandri, & Mariscano, 2013; Wilkinson & Penney, 2014). A participant's reaction in Moy et al.'s (2014) study to working at a low-income school stated, "A lot of the schools we volunteer at are high minority and . . . that opens our eyes to a lot of injustices that really occur" (Moy et al., 2014; p. 335). A low morale in school climate also correlates with a poor social environment, leading to poor school adjustment (Ladd, 2006). Research on students from impoverished neighborhoods has demonstrated its effect on the learning experience in pre-K through high school. Living in impoverished neighborhoods foster a variety of complex and challenging conditions that include gang culture and aggressive behaviors that can translate to the school setting (Bierman et al., 2010; Emerick, Curry, Collins, & Rodriguez, 2013; Juon et al., 2014; Karandinos, Hart, Castrillo, and Bourgois, 2014). The extrinsic motivators related to impoverishment has influenced students to adapt moral norms that include aggressive behaviors, violence, drugs, and gang culture (Bierman et al., 2010; Emerick, Curry, Collins, & Rodriguez, 2014; Karandinos, Hart, Castrillo, & Borugois, 2014).

With research highlighting the conditions of school setting, students' school connectedness can influence academic motivation. Joe, Hiver, and Al-Hoorie's (2017)

study suggest that classroom social climate impacts areas such as self-determined motivation, willingness to communicate with other students and staff, and the overall achievement of the students in the school. Studies found that students who attend high poverty urban schools show less enthusiasm for their schools due to teacher interactions, peer interactions, and learning opportunities that are presented to them in school (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008; Albrecht, Mathur, Jones, & Alazemi, 2015; Moy et al., 2014; Olivares-Cuhat, 2011). Wilson et al. (2016) found that teachers believe mastery students showed above-average academic competence and average scores in behavior and teacher-student relationship, while low motivation students showed above-average disruptive behaviors and average scores in academic competence and teacher-student relationship. Wilson et al. (2016) found that lower motivation students scored higher in social-emotional behavior skills, social interactions with other students, as well as reporting a difference in home life and school life. Bierman et al. (2010) also found that teacher low ratings for authority acceptance and cognitive concentration can be attributed to school disadvantage due to repetitive exposure to negative behaviors seen in impoverished schools.

Disadvantaged students often receive inexperienced instruction and lack of resources (Chung, Mulvey, & Steinberg, 2011; Ibabe, 2016). Chung et al. (2011) found that adolescents living in more affluent communities reported greater access to educational opportunities than students from less affluent neighborhoods (Chung et al., 2011). Understanding the influence of school setting through the perspective of administration, teachers, and staff provides insight about the conditions of school that

students cannot always convey. Moy et al. (2014) found that graduate students' experience with service-learning brought awareness to the disparities between schools with different SES. Participants experience with low-income schools caused for them to reflect on their school experience highlighting how conditions of a "low resource setting" made them aware of differences in socioeconomic school settings (Moy et al., 2014). The conditions described in this study correlates with the findings of other researchers who stated lack of resources, increased exposure to low-income, academically low students, and segregation from students that perform higher impact student learning ability and motivation (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008; Conradi, Amendum, & Liebfreund, 2015; Hoglund, Jones, Brown, & Aber, 2015; Sánchez-Rosas, Takaya, & Molinari, 2015; Yoshikawa, Aber, & Beardslee, 2012).

Students who learn in disadvantaged school settings have poor teacher interactions and low learning opportunities (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008; Moy et al., 2015). It is important to note, student-teacher relationships are important to students, regardless of peer or social relationships in the classroom (Kelly, Rice, Wyatt, Ducking, & Denton, 2015; Raufelder, Jagenow, Drury, & Hoferichter, 2012). Moy et al. (2014) supported this finding with a participant's description of working at a low-income public school, "I remember just walking in and there were 35 kids in the class . . . I was working there for three months and they had gone through 3 teachers (p. 335)." Research has shown that high teacher turnover rates causes school disorganization, disruption of curriculum continuity, and recruitment of inexperienced teachers; especially when teachers are

working with disadvantaged students (Grissom, 2011; Ingersoll, 2001; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004; Scafidi, Sjoquist, & Stinebrickner, 2007). Researchers culminated factors that are commonly weighed during teacher's turnover decision; listing student characteristics (percent in poverty), teacher experience and characteristics, salary and benefits, school resources, and other school characteristics (location, size) (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Wheeler, 2007; Elfers, Plecki, & Knapp, 2006; Grissom, 2011; Hanushek et al., 2004). Grissom's (2011) quantitative study found that teachers who work with nonwhite students show lower job satisfaction and higher turnover, noting the lack of resources and effectiveness of principal as being key contributors as well. Ibrahim, Ghavifekr, Ling, Siraj, and Azeez (2013) found that teachers in schools with poor leadership reported having a low level of commitment to their profession.

**Cognitive delays in disadvantaged students.** Living in impoverishment extends itself into impacting the cognitive abilities of the children who live there. Cognitive components such as quality learning experience, memory, executive functioning and language acquisition are impacted negatively when living in impoverishment (Cushon, Vu, Janzen, & Muhajarine, 2011; Dilworth-Bart, Poehlman, Hilgendorf, Miller, & Lambert, 2010; Evans & Fuller-Rowell, 2013; Kuhl, 2010; Raver, Blair, & Willoughby, 2013; Winsler, Kim, & Richard, 2014). These cognitive delays could be contributed to the stressors of living in an impoverished setting. Blair and Raver's (2016) literature review of poverty and stress' impact on brain development found that brain development is delayed in children as early as infancy due to exposure to stressors such as household



chaos, conflict among family, and noise negatively impacts cognitive, emotional, and behavioral sequelae. Studies regarding poverty's relationship with cognitive function have shown that environmental challenges places children's brains under greater allostatic (wearing) burden, effecting human response physiology that is connected to executive functioning such as self-regulation (Raver et al., 2013, Supplee et al., 2011).

Children living in low-income households face stressors that greatly impact their growth and development cognitively. Cognitive functioning of disadvantaged students has been linked to experiences that they faced pre-school age. Raver et al.'s (2013) longitudinal quantitative study on chronic stress on children's executive functions found that children who spent more years in poverty during 15-48 months had lower executive functioning than children who spent less time, even when accounting for the depth of impoverishment they were experiencing. Studies have shown that students who live in low income households also show greater stress and lower levels of child adjustment due to characteristics such as noise from neighborhood activity and parent education (Dahl, Ceballo, & Huerta, 2010; Evans & Schaumberg, 2009; Kujala & Brattico, 2009; Raver et al., 2013; Schapkin, Falkenstein, Marks, & Griefahn 2006). Studies subsequently found that students who live in impoverished settings face noise inducing environments that interrupt their cognitive development due to a lack of sleep and alarming noises that are frequently in disadvantaged neighborhoods (Kujala & Brattico, 2009; Schapkin et al., 2006).

Disadvantaged school settings have a unique relationship with disadvantaged

students' cognitive development and ability. Roy and Raver's (2014) study highlighted that students who are exposed to higher poverty-related risks in pre-school are low functioning in 3rd grade across multiple learning domains. Students' cognitive functioning, specifically executive functioning, are shown to be inconsistent based on experiences in a low-income home and school setting (Blair, 2002; Bridgett, Burt, Edwards, & Deater-Deckard, 2015; Neuenschwander et al., 2011). These inconsistent experiences could be detrimental to student cognitive development when accounting for other personal home factors that deter brain development. Disadvantaged students who live in poverty are more prone to unique risk factors such as neglect, maltreatment, physical abuse, and parental substance abuse; all heavily impacting students' ability to develop cognitively (Connell, Bergeron, Katz, Saunders, & Tebes, 2007; Jones & Logan-Greene, 2016; Slack, Holl, McDaniel, Yoo, & Bolger, 2004). Teacher behavior also contribute to student brain development. Neuenschwander, Friedman-Krauss, Raver, and Blair (2017) found that children attending low-poverty schools showed smaller gains in executive functions when teachers reported higher stress levels.

The cognitive components that are affected from learning and living in disadvantaged home and school settings span widely through research. Research heavily notes the impact that living in poverty has on disadvantaged students' executive functions, specifically self-regulation, remembering and recalling information, and maintaining behavioral control (Dilworth-Bart, 2012; Fitzpatrick, McKinnon, Blair, & Willoughby, 2014; Holochwost et al., 2016; Raver et al., 2013). A key part to school

climate includes student behavior, in which poor schools have been reported to have behavioral concerns amongst the student population (Bridgett et al., 2015; Nelson, 1996; Prince, Ho, & Hansen, 2010; Supplee et al., 2011; Wolf, Aber, & Morris, 2015).

**Impoverishment's social influence on academic motivation.** Past research into impoverishment and education highlights how components of impoverishment such as family economics, family cohesion, violence, parent education, and neighborhood conditions influence academic outcomes (Chung, Mulvey, & Steinberg, 2011; Dai et al., 2014; Ibabe, 2016; Milan & Wortel, 2014). The previously mentioned components can also provide a social influence that affects learning, also known as sociocultural theory. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory posits that learning occurs through an interpersonal process that transforms into an intrapersonal process, highlighting that every function in a child's cultural development appears on a social level first, then an individual level. Vygotsky stated that the interaction first occurs between people and is then translated into the child. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory extends into the cognitive development of children, in which he proposed the zone of proximal development (ZPD); stating that this zone is where the student is prepared cognitively but requires assistance from the social interaction to become fully developed (Vygotsky, 1978).

Sociocultural conditions such as home and family environment, school climate, and values are known contributors to student academic achievement (Clayton and Zusho, 2015; Grenfell and Harris, 2013, Ou and Reynolds, 2014). Burney and Beilke's (2008) meta-analysis of poverty on high achievement suggest that sociocultural factors that

impact achievement shows relation to areas including race, ethnicities, and transient populations; with academic achievement suffering when student experience with these factors are negative. Influence of surrounding social economic conditions influence student academic motivation in varying ways. Socio-economic status (SES) has been one of the primary constructs to impact academic motivation and has been widely examined in different context (Berger & Archer, 2016; Lacour & Tissington, 2011; Patrick, Kaplan, & Ryan, 2011; Suarez-Alvarez, Fernandez-Alonso & Muniz, 2014). These studies focused on high school students from middle class backgrounds found SES was highly statistically significant to academic performance, with students from high SES schools reported stronger academic mastery goals, stronger performance-approach, and performance-avoidance goals than students from a low SES school; and students from low SES schools reported maladaptive performance-avoidance goals as the highest endorsed school achievement goal.

Student performance is integral to academic achievement, in which students who live in low SES settings tend to have lower chances to achieve academically due to low exposure to achievement, and as a result, lower academic motivation (Ladd, 2012; Ou & Reynolds, 2014; Wickrama, Simons, & Baltimore, 2012). Quantitative studies have analyzed the phenomenon of academic achievement amongst children in impoverishment, measuring parents' SES, academic achievement, intelligence, ability self-concept, deep poverty, poverty-related risk factors, caregiver race/ethnicity, children's outcomes in early elementary grades, academic performance, behavior

problems, and self-regulatory skills (Anderson, Leventhal, & Dupere. 2014; Roy & Raver, 2014; Steinmayer et al., 2010). These measurements closely correlate to sociocultural factors, highlighting the role that extrinsic motivators such as neighborhood structure and home structure play on student academic motivation. These components serve as extrinsic motivation factors that could influence how a student reacts to academic tasks in school. As a result, social disparities play a role in motivation, academic achievement, outcome expectations, and overall learning ability (Chung & Probert, 2011; Steinmayer, Dinger, & Spinath, 2012). Young offenders reported earning better grades than older offenders, which suggests that academic motivation often declines as offenders get older (Chung et al., 2011). Offenders who were more school-oriented also believed that they were more likely to succeed in school and work.

### **History of Academic Motivation**

The construct of academic motivation is rooted in theoretical and research investigations of how much of human behavior is influenced by expectations of an individual's personal abilities (Schunk, 1991). Outside of a person's personal abilities, theorists have also looked into environmental factors and their influence on human behavior. Initial conceptualizations of personal expectancy in psychology occurred in in Atkinson's early work on achievement motivation, Rotter's development of the locus of control model (1966), and Weiner's theoretical models of attribution (1972). These theories provided the foundation for other motivational theories including self-concept, self-efficacy, self-determination, self-worth and expectancy-value theory (Ames, 1992;

Bong and Clark, 1999; Schunk, 1991; Simons, Van Rheezen, and Covington, 1999).

The common tenets of these motivational theories posit that motivation is initiated and driven by desire, experience, interpersonal values, and external factors. Atkinson's work culminated in motivation studies from 1930 to 1970, finding that foundational need for achievement is motivated by individual differences (motives), what results are to be expected (expectancy), and the value of the expected results (value). The need for achievement was derived from Murray (1938), who stated that the need for achievement is the representation of an individual's highest hope to achieve in any setting, which goads the individual to reach for greater efforts. A person's need for achievement leads an individual towards striving towards being personally or socially valuable.

Atkinson's achievement motivation theory served as the gateway to other motivational theories. Rotter's (1966) locus of control model utilized certain components of achievement motivation theory and posits whether someone is motivated by internal forces or external forces. Rotter proposed that the locus of control for internal and external motivation differ based on factors of age, race, SES, and political affiliation. He also highlighted how locus of control impacts achievement motivation, noting individuals with internal motivation showed higher strive for achievement while those who rely on external motivators showed lower levels of achievement. Smith (1960) found that external motivators are less likely to forget their failures than those who are internally motivated. Overall, those who are internally motivated tend to show greater initiative than those who are externally motivated leading to greater achievement on personal tasks.

A constant factor in motivational studies is an individual's expectancy of the goal and whether that goal has any foreseeable value to them. These motivational principles are staples in historical studies regarding an individuals's motivation to achieve in various settings. Expectancy x value theory posits that a persone's motivation is driven by what their expectancy of a result multiplied by the value and actuality of reaching the motivating goal (Atkinson, 1964). Raynor (1969) conducted a study to analyze expectancy x value theory's relationship with achievement motivation, finding that "length of a contingent path and the subjective probabilities of future success and failure influence the degree to which future orientation effects strength of present motivation (p. 608)."

Achievement theory took influence on researchers during the 70's. Weiner (1972) utilized the need for achievement in attribution theory; theorizing that individuals who have high achievement tend to attribute their success to their high ability and effort, leading to a heightened sense of pride in their accomplishments. As a result, those individuals have an increased probability of continuing the achievement behavior and are more likely to persist with intermediate tasks (Weiner, 1972). Contrast to internal attributions, external attributions could possibly lead to learned helplessness due to a person's inability to correlate the relationship between low achievement with effort for outcomes (Weiner, 1972); which coincides with Bar-Tal and Freize's (1977) finding that accountability for failure is often unrecognized for externally motivated individuals due to them attributing their failure to external sources.

As motivational theories continued to evolve, widespread application occurred to see how setting and conditions impacted an individual's motivation. For occupational practice, Lawlis (1971) conducted a study to investigate what motivational factors correlate with employment stability, in which he found that the chronically unemployed individuals were fearful of being marginalized by society and had very little motivation to meet their needs through work, resulting in low gratification for work. Attribution theory was applied in this study, with the study attributing external sources such as societal marginalization as being a locus of control that impacted fear for unemployed individuals.

Motivational application also extended into understanding the motivation of military groups, like the Motowidlo and Borman (1978) study that found members of 16 military platoons were motivated by and showed higher morale with a culmination of factors considered army life such as job duty, awards, and platoon members but showed lower morale with serious incidents and AWOL situations. Foundational motivation theories such as Atkinson's achievement theory and expectancy-value theory (1957), and Weiner's attribution theory (1972) received theoretical applications to research the field of academics. Educational research utilized motivational theories such as attribution theory, achievement theory, and expectancy-value theory as the foundation for motivational research concerning academic achievement and outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 1991; Gottfried, 1985; Graham, 1997; Weiner, 1986).

**Examples of key theories linking motivation to academics.** In the 1970's and



'80's several theorists began applying the principles of expectancy and achievement motivation to academic settings (Maehr & Sjogren, 1971). Research in the field of academics aimed to understand student achievement motivation and academic motivation (Ball, 1982; Bandura, 1975; Deci, 1975; Weiner, 1972). Weiner's (1990) literature review of motivation theories applied to research in academics in the 70's included research topics such as associative and cognitive drive, attribution theory, achievement motivation, and self-esteem in relation to the learning process, perception and executive function. During this time frame, research focused primarily on the achievement strivings of students, with a trending shift towards understanding how individual differences within their persons impacted high or low motivation for achievement (Weiner, 1990). Studies on academic achievement delved into the external factors that influence student behavior such as culture, school environment, gender, and race (Bailey, Zinser, & Edgar, 1975; Gjeseme, 1973; Hall, 1975; Karweit, 1976; Travis & Anthony, 1975).

One of the most robust theories that has been applied to the study of academic motivation is attribution theory (Maehr & Sjogren, 1971; Weiner, 2010). Weiner's (1976) application of attribution theory involved investigating role of causality in student motivation to attend to task in an academic setting. Weiner specifically studied the influence of locus of causality for student achievement by both teachers and students. He eventually found that the causal attributions influence the likelihood of attempting achievement tasks, the determination to work at the tasks, and the amount of persistence when failing is salient. The degree of motivation by the students are also impacted by

additional influences such as rewards and punishments from teachers, as well as the pride and shame that is associated with their performance in front of other people (Weiner, 1986).

Research in the field of academic motivation during the 90's applied the foundational theories to understand the components that impact student academic motivation. During the 70s and 80s, research primarily focused on student need for achievement in an academic setting (Weiner, 1990). Significant application of attribution theory continued during the 90's in order to understand the locus of control for student academic motivation. Attribution theory was refined when applying it to academic motivation; stating that a person's locus of causality can either be intrinsic or external, with the stability (controllability) of the cause influencing the motivation more than the locus at the end (Weiner, 1986). Controllability or stability of a situation can be seen as the expectancy, which serves as the expectancy an individual use to determine whether they will approach an academic task. Weiner, Nierenberg, and Goldstein (1976) conducted a quantitative study that found stability of causal attributions are related to expectancy of success and expectancy shifts amongst undergraduate students.

The well-researched relationship between academic achievement and student attribution demonstrated that academic intrinsic motivation was significantly and positively correlated with school achievement and views of academic competence, that academic intrinsic motivation differed depending on school subject, and intrinsic motivation was more significantly related to achievement than school-subject motivation

(Brophy; 1983; Gottfried, 1985; Licht & Dweck, 1984; Marsh, Relich, & Smith, 1983). Attribution theory has been applied to intrinsic motivational studies. The results revealed that intrinsically motivated students' internalized values resulted in high-quality learning and an understanding of personal growth, and persistence (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991; Vallerand & Bissonette; 1992). The relationship between extrinsic motivation and academic outcome also showed that academic motivation was dependent on the type of academic outcome that was proposed (Vallerand & Bissonette, 1992). Studies of student academic expectancy and their values of academic tasks allowed for researchers to further understand academic motivation and achievement.

Eccles et al. (1983) applied an educational model to the expectancy-value model that theorized children's achievement performance, persistence, and choice of achievement activities are saliently predicted by their expectancies for success on those activities; while children's expectancies and values themselves are most directly regulated by other achievement's related beliefs including achievement goals and tasks beliefs. These studies have found that students were more prone to have an expectancy for improvement when they received situation-specific comments from teachers, students' expectancies were more strongly related to achievements than their values were, as children grow older, their expectancies and values are more aligned with their abilities and goals that actually wish to accomplish values have influence on future achievements that is equal or greater than expectancies (Berndt & Miller, 1990; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Krampen, 1987; Wigfield, 1994).

As research on academic motivation progressed, social applications became more salient in theoretical studies addressing academic motivation and achievement. Studies of academic motivation and achievement often applied attributional principles such as intrinsically centered motivators like self-determination, self-efficacy, and self-esteem (Ames, 1992; Deci & Ryan, 1991; Schunk, 1991;); to external motivators such as students from different economic backgrounds, cultures, identities, grades, and ages (Goodnow, 1993; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Simons, Van Rhee, & Covington, 1999).

These social factors rely on the locus of causality, where the student's relationship to academic motivation is associated with how the students respond to their social environment. Bandura (1971<sup>b</sup>) posited this relationship with social learning theory, in which he theorized that people are able to learn through observation of behavior and outcomes of others within their environment. Bandura also theorized that learning can be reinforced through a model, a third person, the imitated behavior's consequence, and vicarious conditioning, which occurs when a model is reinforced with a response and the observer continues that behavior in hopes of gaining the same response. Social learning theory served as a gateway to understanding how social context impacts an individual's motivation to learn, spawning other theories such as social cognitive theory.

Bandura (1986) stated that self-efficacy influence on motivational factors such as choice and persistence (Schunk, 1991). Fortier, Vallerand, and Guay (1995) highlighted how motivational theories examines the relationship between academic motivation and

school performance (p. 258). Schunk (1991), who is an expert on academic motivation, stated that indexes for academic motivation highlight cognitive efforts including attending to instruction, rehearsing information for memory, and organizing and developing meaning for knowledge. Cognitive efforts such as these should enhance learning and student efficacy, furthering student motivation (Schunk, 1991).

Through Bandura's social learning theory (1971), more research started to account for how social environments impacted the locus of causality for an individual. Maehr's (1974) study on culture posited that culture develops personality, which ultimately leads to the development of motivation to achievement regardless of the setting. When looking into Weiner's theoretical application of attribution theory, he stated that the social context should be examined to account for situational cues that individuals develop from the context. In an academic setting, the impact of social learning leads towards developing and adopting procedures, rules, and strategies; often to help them regulate their effort and motivation (Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1987; Garcia & Pintrich, 1994; Kuhl, 1992). Graham (1997) conducted a study applying attribution theory to understand academic and social motivation amongst African American youth, in which it was found that African American youth, especially males, were more prone to attribute academic failure to external sources assigning blame towards others and responding in an aggressive manner.

### **Current Definition and Measurement of Academic Motivation**

As interest in academic motivation grew, researchers were interested in

developing an index or scale that could be used to measure academic motivation as a unique construct. Recent research has applied the academic motivation scale to ascertain student motivation with initially meeting teachers, to compare students' motivation in other subjects such as physical education (Ardeńska et al., 2016), and the academic motivation of students who are in vocational and social care school (Utvær & Haugan, 2016).

To ascertain reliability and validity in cross-cultural context, studies were conducted with Hungarian, French, Ghanaian, American, British, Latin-American and Singaporean students; assessing the role of intrinsic academic motivation (Akoto, 2014; Caleon et al., 2015; Guay, Litalien, Valois, & Vallerand, 2015; Mugabe, Brug, & Catling, 2016; Stover, De la Iglesias, Boubeta, & Liporace, 2012; Toth-Kirly et al., 2017). These studies found that academic motivation scales are able to assess the motivational profiles of young adolescents in Asian contexts and are able to test hypotheses about gender and ability differences, as well as finding that the construct of intrinsic motivation varies with age. The ability to apply the academic motivation scale with different ethnicities and countries allows for different cultural components to be examined in relation to academic motivation.

In order to understand younger students' academic motivation, the academic motivation scale was modified to create the elementary school motivation scale. Researchers have found that students differentiate amongst intrinsic regulation, identified regulation, and controlled regulation in reading, low self-determination in math and

writing, and within school subject differentiation of motivation is more developed in older elementary age children than younger elementary age children (Garon-Carrier et al., 2016; Guay et al., 2010; Renaud-Dube, Guay, Talbot, Taylor, & Koestner; 2014).

Research also found that students who exhibit a belief that intelligence (learning) can grow over time are more persistent in the classroom and are more intrinsically motivated, as well as exhibiting high achievement in mathematics which could systematically predict late intrinsic motivation in mathematics (Garon-Carrier et al., 2016; Guay et al., 2010; Renaud-Dube, Guay, Talbot, Taylor, & Koestner; 2014).

**Factors associated with academic motivation.** Students who have low levels of academic motivation are more prone to have low levels of academic achievement; in which factors such as cultural background, SES, student engagement plays a role in students' level of academic motivation (Khan Ahmad, Hamdan, & Mustaffa, 2014; Vecchione, Alessandri, & Marsicano, 2013; Wilkinson & Penney, 2014). Studies found that student behavior, general intelligence, attendance, school support, regulation and intrinsic motivation influences academic motivation in the school setting (Vecchione, Alessandri, & Marsicano, 2013; Khan Ahmad, Hamdan, & Mustaffa, 2014; Wilkinson & Penney, 2014).

Each factor plays a role in the development of academic motivation for a student. For instance, Korpershoek, Kuyper, and Van de Werf (2015) conducted a quantitative study to investigate school motivation by using multiple goal perspective, in which four motivations were included: Mastery, Performance, Extrinsic, and School Motivation.

This study of 7,257 9<sup>th</sup> grade students in 80 secondary schools across the Netherlands, utilized the theoretical framework of achievement goal theory, finding that students who were on highest educational tracks had higher scores in mastery performance and social motivation than lower track student. This study showed that students' academic goals correlates strongly with social goals, with students exhibiting strong social motivation and mastery motivation, also showing that students who had relatively high scores in performance motivation also had high scores in extrinsic motivation.

Understanding student motivational profiles is a practice that has been utilized in other studies highlighting other profiles such as demotivated profiles (low intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and moderate amotivation) (Cannard, Lannegard-Willems, Safont-Mottay, & Zimmerman, 2015), persistence profile (Reimann et al., 2013), distinct motivated strategies for learning (Ng, Wang, & Chia Liu, 2015). Valle et al. (2015) focused on learning goals, performance-approach goals, performance, avoidance goals, task value, control beliefs, self-efficacy beliefs, and test anxiety. Comprehension of academic motivational profiles have allowed for researchers to study intrinsic values and extrinsic motivators that sustain academic achievement and motivation for lifelong learning.

Blašková (2014) conducted a mixed methods study that examined academic motivation for students and teachers, with creativity and responsibility being analyzed mutually while defining methods of reinforcement in the classroom to better understand the role of the creativity and responsibility as a component that impacts academic



motivation. The results indicated that the targeted and long-term reinforcement of student motivation, the accentuation of their own engagement in the task, and the creation of conditions that develop their creativity positively influenced student academic motivation and student academic success. Extrinsic motivators such as home environment, gender differences, discrimination from others, and sociocultural expectations have been shown to impact student academic motivation and academic achievement, specifically, in adolescent students (Alfaro, Umana-Taylor, Gonzales-Backen, Bamaca, & Zeiders, 2009; Bugler, McGeown, & St. Clair-Thompson, 2015; Joshi & Acharya, 2013).

Studies involving the causal attributions has provided insight on intrinsic and extrinsic values for students. A meta-analysis conducted by Lazowski and Hulleman (2016), found that interventions utilizing attribution theory consistently show positive, effective change in students' academic outcomes.

It is commonly believed that students who have higher levels of intrinsic motivators are normally more driven to complete academic goals and achieve in the classroom. Leana -Tascilar (2016) conducted a quantitative correlational comparative study, in which they found that there is a positive correlation with self-regulated skills such as motivation, planning/goal-setting, strategy using/ assessment, and total self-regulated learning and causal attributions such as locus of causality, stability, and personal control when examining their relationship amongst students and academic outcomes. As students' locus of control becomes more internalized to learn, they develop more self-regulated skills.

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation have unique relationships with different context of an individual's academic motivation. A meta-analysis by Cerasoli, Nicklin, and Ford (2014) showed that students who are intrinsically motivated often maintain higher persistence on tasks as well as higher interests in meaningful school tasks such as attending school and staying in school. Cerasoli and Ford found that when extrinsic motivators are salient directly to performance, students' intrinsic motivation greatly decreased. Cersaoli and Ford's (2014) study to explore mastery goals' role in the relationship between intrinsic motivation and performance found that mastery goals could mediate the relationship between intrinsic motivation and academic performance, highlighting that mastery goals have a reciprocal effect on intrinsic motivation. This means that the goals encourage the probability of an individual finding themselves in opportunities to engage in an intrinsically satiable task. O'Gorman, Salmon, and Murphy's (2016) meta-analysis on school contextual factors found that extrinsic motivators such as school safety, school culture, and school community increases student engagement academically in an alternative school setting. These current studies emphasize how students who use intrinsic motivators require longer persistence, allowing for a longer lasting drive towards accomplishing academic goals; while extrinsic motivators cause students to work towards sustaining goals that are in line with the environment.

### **Social Groups and Academic Motivation**

Social components that impact a student's academic motivation include teachers,

administration and everyday student social groups basis (Hughes, Im, & Wehrly, 2014; O’Gorman, Salmon, & Murphy, 2015; Santiago, Gudion, Baweja, & Nadeem, 2014). Many studies on group roles in academic motivation highlight the influence of academic identity. Oyserman’s (2013) literature review on group roles and academic motivation found that situational components influence whether students think of themselves as members of their racial-ethnic class or members with a unique ability. Research suggest that this influence lends itself to academic abilities and achievement for students, in which students consider the task attainable based on how their social group related to the task (Oyserman, 2013). A literature review on school climate research found an important component to relationships in school includes racial-ethnic group perception on academic climate of the school (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D’Alessandro, 2013).

Social group impact on student learning has guided research into understanding how groups influence intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. To analyze the role of the social groups on student motivation, quantitative studies measured perceived group impact on motivation, confidence, social niche. Specific measurements include achievement goals, academic self-efficacy, dissonance between home and school, perceived teacher and class support, peer acceptance and rejection, perceived coolness, and gender (Farmer et al., 2010; Kurtz-Costes, Copping, Rowley, & Kinlaw, 2014; Masland & Lease, 2013; Robnett & Leaper, 2012; Wilson et al., 2016). Measurements such as social niche, perceived coolness, peer acceptance, and peer rejection delves into the students’ awareness of the social climate on academics in their respective schools. The

measurements also support research that highlights how social groups influence intrinsic factors such as academic confidence and self-efficacy.

Findings from studies suggest that friendship groups are a social group with a prominent influence on academic motivation within the confines of a school setting, friendship group characteristics predicted career interests especially in STEM, with gender being significantly predicted by STEM group climate (Kurtz-Costes et al., 2014; Robnett & Leaper, 2013). Social groups formed around mastery of academics highlighted that Mastery students had the most adaptive school profile, while low motivation students had the least adaptive school profile mastery groups scoring average in academic efficacy, perceived teacher support, and perceived class support and below average in scores on home-school dissonance (Wilson et al., 2016). Mastery students also had average scores in the peer nomination measurements of peer acceptance, peer rejection, perceived coolness and getting along with teacher. Low motivation cluster group scored below-average on all variables except home-school dissonance, which was considered average; low motivation students scored above-average scores with peer rejection and below-average in peer acceptance, getting along with teachers, and perceived coolness (Wilson et al., 2016). This correlates with the Masland and Lease (2013) findings that academic values moderated peer groups norms. In contrast, Song, Bong, Lee, and Kim (2014) found that parental academic support predicted higher performance goals and mastery goals but also promotes stronger performance-avoidance goals and higher test anxiety, with parental academic support impacting academic motivation altogether

(Alfaro & Umana- Taylor, 2015).

At-risk students tend to have deficits with their social competencies which often leads to poor school adjustment, peer and adult relationships, and social effectiveness in school (Albrecht et al., 2015; Ladd, 2006, Wang & Algozzine, 2011.). An example of poor peer relationships can be seen in Rudasill, Niehaus, Crockett, and Rakes' (2014) longitudinal quantitative study of the association between changes in school connectedness and changes in correlation with deviant peers amongst 328 6<sup>th</sup> grade students who attend two different middle schools in high poverty neighborhoods, within the same school district. The results of the study highlighted the influence of deviant peers in a school setting, especially amongst males. Rudasill et al. (2014) found gender a significant predictor of affiliation with deviant peers, with males reporting higher affiliation than females. Rudasill et al. (2014) found that students who reported greater decrease in school support were more likely to report an increase in affiliation with deviant peers. The results also showed that school support and affiliation with deviant peers were negatively associated at the beginning of the school year, highlighting that transition to middle school in high poverty neighborhoods may be a poor fit due to values, priorities, and social demands of their neighborhood. The results of the study also highlighted that student support declined significantly across the school year, regardless of affiliation with deviant peers. Positive perceptions with school were associated with lower affiliation with deviant peers (Rudasill et al., 2014).

Research into academic motivation has shown that students' academic identity is

also affected by social group influence. Colyar and Stich (2011) conducted a qualitative discourse analysis, in which 86 students' written essays were examined to explore remedial students' academic identities. Discourse analysis is considered a qualitative method of analysis that examines written texts from participants to understand how features of language contribute to the interpretation of the texts. Results from this qualitative study highlighted the impact of family and peer support and their role in student optimism about their identities and their attitudes toward college. Colyar and Stich (2011) found that family expectations is an important motivator, with students claiming their identities were connected to family expectations and sense of responsibility. Students expressed anxiety with college, often writing about insecurity with facing college in the future. The study also found that remedial students relied heavily on the support of family and peers when they discussed the prospects of attending college. Colyar and Stich (2011) finalized through discourse analysis that friendships are necessary for academic success and survival in college. These findings are synonymous with the research on importance of parental support, peer support, and teacher support for students who live in impoverished settings to develop integral skills such as self-regulation, achievement motivation, (King & Gantonice, 2013; Suizzo et al., 2016).

### **Summary and Transition**

Research has provided insight into the influence of disadvantaged settings on students social and academic outlooks (Alfaro et al., 2009; Gullan et al., 2011; Kerr et al., 2016). When measuring the impact of disadvantaged settings on academic motivation,

research has found that SES was statistically significant to academic performance (Ladd, 2012). Students who live in low SES settings tend to face family economic struggle, family cohesion, and educational influences (Chung et al., 2011; Dai et al., 2014; Ibabe, 2016). Repeated exposure to living in a low SES setting leads to lower earnings, job quality, and overall quality of living (Ou and Reynolds, 2014; Wickrama et al, 2012). Johnson-Ahorlu's (2013) and others have suggested future endeavors on this topic include qualitative research into understanding how students respond and are motivated by the external viewpoints on their identity as students. In order to build upon the gaps in literature, the current study is looking to explore students' experience of their social identity and how it relates to their motivation to earn an academic scholarship to college. Chapter 3 provides a detailed description of the methods used to address this gap.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The purpose of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of academic motivation in academic scholarship students who attended disadvantaged schools with poor learning conditions. The study was focused on the narratives of former high school graduates who graduated from disadvantaged schools in 2015-2017 and received academic scholarships to attend a 4-year college/university. Two forms of narrative analyses, thematic and structural analysis, were used to examine the data collected from interviews (see Riessman, 2008). Use of both approaches allowed me to triangulate results and can improve trustworthiness of the analysis and interpretation.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology used to answer the research questions as well as the rationale for using dual narrative analyses. Components of the research methodology such as instrumentation, ethical considerations, and possible biases are also addressed. Additionally, participant selection, data collection, interviewing, and data analysis are reviewed. Finally, methods to enhance the quality of the study, including trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, ethical procedures, are explained.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

#### **Rationale for Narrative Analysis**

To gain an understanding of undiscovered aspects of how disadvantaged students overcome the obstacles of social, economic, and resource limitations to gain academic



scholarships to colleges, I chose a narrative analysis of their experience of academic motivation. A qualitative approach allows the researcher to learn about the lived experience by examining participants' self-reported values, beliefs, and emotions (Elliot, 2005; Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008), which the narrative design is focused on through the stories of participants (Riessman, 2008). Narrative analysis allowed me to analyze transcript data for themes and compare structural arcs among participants' narratives (Patton, 2002; Riessman, 2008). Narrative interviewing also encourages an interviewee to tell their story about a significant event that they have experienced, allowing me to analyze a timeline of important events associated with the experience (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000; Riessman, 2008).

Narrative analysis required me to follow a specific set of techniques when constructing and implementing the interviews. For example, it is important to have a conversation with the participant, helping the participant explore the meanings and connections of the stories that they tell through probing for details while still giving them control of the conversation (Riessman, 2008). During the interviewing process, I had the role of interviewer, only probing to gain more clarity on particular moments mentioned by the participant. Wording questions, constructing open-ended questions, and understanding the goal of questions are also key techniques for building the interview guide (Riessman, 2008). This provided the opportunity to gather meaningful stories from participants due to the openness of interpretation held by each participant. Additionally, I was able to act as an interviewer while maintaining an ethical code that did not affect the

study's integrity by not including detailed accounts (Riessman, 2008).

The decision to not quantitatively explore this study was a result of analyzing the numerous quantitative studies addressing academic motivation. Delving through research highlighted the amount of quantitative studies in comparison to the few qualitative studies addressing academic motivation. Additionally, no current studies have been done on this target group. To address the purpose of the study, which was understanding academic motivation of students from disadvantaged schools, a qualitative study provided in-depth analysis of student narratives of their experience. A quantitative study would provide a statistical description of academic motivation, so this approach was not chosen.

A phenomenological research approach was also considered for this study. Other forms of qualitative research are focused on the inner workings of specific groups or culture, developing theories based on specific coding of interviews, and analyzing multiple forms of data to understand a specific group or event. Phenomenology's focus on a specific phenomenon or experience was similar to the purpose of my study. However, a narrative research approach was chosen due to my focus on understanding an experience through stories and using narrative analysis to find common themes and story sequences among participants who have a common experience (Riessman, 2008).

### **Research Questions**

1. How do high school graduates who come from an impoverished, disadvantaged school setting and received academic scholarships to attend a

- 4-year college/university describe their experience of academic motivation?
2. How do high school graduates who come from an impoverished, disadvantaged school setting and received academic scholarships to attend a 4-year college/university describe their experience of academic achievement?
  3. What do the narratives of these graduates tell us about the role of social identity in a disadvantaged, impoverished, school setting?

### **Role of Researcher**

I took on multiple roles in this study, which involved constructing the interview guide, recruiting participants, interviewing participants, transcribing the interviews, and analyzing the data. I was the sole researcher for this project; the selection of participants and scheduling of interviews was solely managed by me. For recruiting purposes, I used referrals from other teachers and educational professionals through networking locally in the state of Maryland as well as using social media applications such as LinkedIn.

To ethically obtain unbiased data, the participants of the study did not have a personal or professional relationship with me in any manner. I also provided the participants the purpose of the study as well as any risks and consequences that could result from their participation. Participants were cognizant of their rights as participants, which included the right to withdraw, review their transcript and a summary of my interpretations, and knowledge of confidentiality.

Addressing the issues with trustworthiness, a practice of researcher reflexivity was done to improve credibility. As an elementary school special educator, I have been

exposed to many examples of how some students can progress despite living in a disadvantage neighborhood and attend a disadvantaged school setting. I taught in a school zoned for multiple impoverished neighborhoods in Maryland. I observed student academic behaviors to help my students become more excited about the material that they had to learn. During my years as a substitute teacher, I also frequented assignments in areas that were impoverished. My experiences with impoverished students dated to my years in high school, as I was associated with students from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

My experiences of 15 years working with impoverished students from different backgrounds, cultures, and norms has enriched my viewpoint but may also have formed attitudes and opinions that could have led to potential bias. My experiences from attending schools in different neighborhoods could have influenced my viewpoint on current students' perception of their school settings. Additionally, my profession as a special educator in a disadvantaged school setting could have influenced the analysis of the participants' reported experiences with academic motivation. However, qualitative research acknowledges the role of the researcher and potential bias they pose on the research. Research reflexivity helped me examine my own personal biases, views, and motivations so that they would not enter the study (see Xerri, 2018). Other strategies included peer review, encouraging thick descriptions in interviews, and maximizing saturation with a sufficient sample size. Procedures applied to reduce the risk of bias are described in the Trustworthiness section of this chapter.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection Logic**

**Population and criteria.** The target group for the study were students who graduated from high school in 2015-2017 and attended high school a Title 1 school and/or a disadvantaged school setting and received an academic scholarship to attend a 4-year university or college. The criteria for selection were students over the age of 18 who graduated from a Title 1 and/or disadvantaged high school in Washington, D.C., Virginia, or Maryland and received an academic scholarship to a 4 -year college or university. This was verified via self-report at the initial contact and informed consent review.

**Sample size and saturation.** For the purpose of this study, the sample size proposed for this study was six-12 students, with modifications to sample size being dependent on actual saturation of data (Guetterman, 2008; Mason, 2010; Walker, 2012). Educational studies with narrative designs typically have sample sizes that range from 1 to 24 (Guetterman, 2008). Additionally, for phenomenological studies using purposive sampling and thematic analysis, the ideal number of interviews for experience- based analysis is 12 (Guest, Bruce, & Johnson, 2006).

A form of snowball sampling strategy (referral sampling) was used. Snowball sampling is useful for finding participants who can provide information-rich descriptions of key events and experiences that pertain to a specific topic (Patton, 2002). I distributed an invitation to academic colleagues within the county I reside. They passed on an invitation to potential participants who met the criteria describing the nature of the study

and how to contact me. Interested participants contacted me by e-mail or phone to participate. For those who participated, at the conclusion of the interview, I inquired about persons they knew who met the criteria for inclusion and requested that they invite the individuals to contact me.

### **Instrumentation**

Data were collected through a 60- to 90-minute interview with each participant. The semi-structured interview guide was developed as consistent with narrative analysis approaches (Elliot, 2005; Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000; Riessman, 2008). Interview questions related to the purpose of this research were focused on experience with academic motivation, experience with academic achievement, and the role of social identity. The experience of academic motivation provides insight into students' intrinsic motivators, extrinsic motivators, regulation, and general intelligence (Bugler, McGeown, & St. Clair-Thompson, 2015; O' Gorman, Salmon, & Murphy, 2016; Wilkinson & Penney, 2014). Experience with academic achievement influences academic motivation and is relevant to studies of academic performance and self-regulatory skills in impoverished children (Anderson, Leventhal, & Dupere. 2014; Roy & Raver, 2014; Steinmayer et al., 2010). Further, questions about the role of social identity are relevant to understanding intrinsic and external motivators shaped by identity formation, cultural expectations, and academic motivation (Fischer, 2010; Gullan et al., 2011; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Schmader, 2010).

The constructed interview guide addressed these main points as the participants

detailed their experiences with academic motivation, academic achievement, and social identity from middle school to high school. Questions in the guide also addressed perceived support systems, gathering an understanding of their role throughout their academic experience while attending a disadvantaged school setting. The guide is located in Appendix A.

To improve the credibility and trustworthiness of the instrument, subject matter experts and methodology experts reviewed the interview guide for the study. A pretest interview with a former student who was similar to the study's criteria was done to evaluate comprehension of interview questions, as well as the length of prospective interviews.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

I distributed an invitation to academic colleagues within the county I reside. For those who were willing, they passed on an invitation to potential participants, describing the nature of the study and how to contact me. They distributed the invitation to individuals who met the predetermined criteria required to address the purpose of the study (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson, 2006). Interested participants contacted me by email or phone in order to participate.

Upon confirmed interest in the study, I contacted the participants to go over the details of the study and review, by phone, the informed consent. The interviews were scheduled, and participants received an email with the Informed consent letter containing the instructions to reply for consent.

A one-time interview was planned to last approximately 60-90-minutes. Riessman (2008) recommends in-person interviews, but interviews through telephone or online video chats are also effective data collection methods (Fischer et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2017). A pre-test interview with a student similar to the study's criteria was done to evaluate comprehension of interview questions, as well as the length of prospective interviews. Interviews were conducted by myself, with all interviews being audio recorded and field notes being kept by me.

At the end of the interview, participants were asked to pass on invitations to persons they know who may fit the criteria for inclusion. This effort was consistent with a snowball sampling approach in order to maximize data saturation.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by the myself. Transcriptions of the data allowed me to better ascertain the language and semantics used in the narratives (Riessman, 2008). Thematic analysis heavily relies on transcript dialogues due with the focus of the analysis focusing on “what was said”; while structural analysis techniques guides the researcher to pay attention to how the story was told (Riessman, 2008).

Analyzing data using the NVivo qualitative software package will help me glean information such as similar phrases, terms, and story structures (Edwards-Jones, 2014; Brandão, 2015). Thematic analysis requires me to carefully analyze and annotate the narratives to find themes that provides information that could answer the research question (Riessman, 2008). Structural analysis provides the opportunity to compare



storylines amongst participants, searching commonalities and differences in the narratives. Transcribed data were node coded, allowing all known data referring to particular concepts to be coded in text. NVivo strategies will be used such as querying the data, leaving annotations on quotes, adjusting codes, and producing word clouds (Brandão, 2015; Edwards-Jones, 2014; Hilal & Alabari, 2013).

### **Trustworthiness of the Study**

#### **Credibility**

Credibility in the study was achieved by allowing participants to review and comment on a summary of their transcript (Birt et al., 2016; Shenton, 2004). Credibility was solidified through application of peer review, encouraging thick descriptions in interviews, maximizing saturation with a sufficient sample size, and researcher reflexivity in examining thoughts and comments (recorded in a separate journal) occurring during data collection and analysis, and review of previous findings once the study has been completed (Shenton, 2004; Xerri, 2017).

#### **Transferability**

Achieving transferability with this study was encouraged through application of thick description, allowing the audience the opportunity to determine external validity based on the research provided previously in Chapter 2 (Shenton, 2004). A detailed description of the boundaries of the study was provided, further solidifying transferability of the study (Cope, 2014; Shenton, 2004; Williams & Morrow, 2009).

**Dependability**

Dependability methods to ensure the stability of the data collection practices included member checking and peer review (Shenton, 2004). Enhancement of dependability of the data collection were achieved by having the research questions and interview guide reviewed by content and methodological experts (Cope, 2014; Shenton, 2004). Procedural steps of the study are provided in the study in order for future replication to occur in other studies (Shenton, 2004).

**Confirmability**

Confirmability techniques implemented in the study included describing the procedures of how conclusions and findings were discovered (Cope, 2014; Shenton, 2004; Williams & Morrow, 2009). Any influences that could have potentially impacted my interpretation of the data were mentioned and accounted for to ensure bias was minimized (Shenton, 2004). Interview guides and research questions were also reviewed by the URR as well as professionals familiar with the topic (Shenton, 2004, William & Morrow, 2009).

**Ethical Procedures**

The study was within the guidelines established in the federal regulations and IRB standards. The criteria for the study was students over the age of 18, who graduated from a Title 1 or impoverished high school in the eastern region of the United States and received an academic scholarship to a college or university. Information provided was kept confidential and personal information was not used for any purposes outside of this

research project, and participant identity was not mentioned in written transcripts or study. Participants were provided a written informed consent that was in ordinance with IRB protocol before participating in the study. Informed consent informs participants on the purpose of the study, the methods in keeping their confidentiality, their right to participate and withdraw from the data collection and data analysis, as well as potential risks for participating. Data storage were locked on a password protected electronic file. Per requirements of ethical procedures by the IRB, documents and data will be disposed five years after the completion of the study. Participant consent were written or verbal, depending on the form of data collection.

### **Summary**

Chapter 3 contains the research rationale, methodology, procedures of the study, instrumentation, and ethical considerations of the study. This study implemented a narrative analysis on the academic motivation of academic scholarship students who attended a Title 1 or disadvantaged school setting, learning more about the role of social identity in their academic motivation. The participants of the study fit the criteria of students over the age of 18, who graduated from a Title 1 or impoverished high school in the eastern region of the United States and received an academic scholarship to a college or university. The role of the researcher addressed my responsibilities in this study. Methodology explained the target group, sampling strategies and addressing saturation, formation of the instrumentation procedures, data collection, and data analysis. Trustworthiness of the study and ethical procedures explained how techniques such as

member checking and peer reviewing, reducing risks to participants, and the informed consent formation will assist with maintaining the ethical integrity of this study.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to explore the narratives of former high school graduates who graduated from schools between 2015-2017 and received academic scholarships to attend a college/university to understand the academic motivation of students who attended disadvantaged schools and received scholarships. Participants' stories were collected using a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions that were designed to explore potential themes that would address the research questions. The research questions address the areas academic motivation, academic achievement, and role of social identity:

1. How do high school graduates who come from an impoverished, disadvantaged school setting and received academic scholarships to attend college/university describe their experience of academic motivation?
2. How do high school graduates who come from an impoverished, disadvantaged school setting and received academic scholarships to attend college/university describe their experience of academic achievement?
3. What do the narratives of these graduates tell us about the role of social identity in a disadvantaged, impoverished, school setting?

The theoretical framework for this study was based on SIT, as I examined the role of social identity in a disadvantaged student's formation of academic motivation. In this chapter, I described the setting of the study, demographics of the participants, methods of

data collection, and changes to the process. Data analysis methods are described including the process of transcription, coding, and movement from the interview transcripts to creation of themes and structural components as well as any discrepancies that arose. Evidence of trustworthiness will also be presented with a focus on credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The results will address each research question, any data that supports findings, and possible outcomes based on supporting tables or figures.

### **Setting**

The setting for this study took place at local neighborhood public spaces, campus offices, and via telephone. Participants were able to choose their setting, as interviewing participants in their preferred setting offers the best conditions for storytelling, though this could have led to recall of specific memories (Riessman, 2008). For example, participants who interviewed at their home or local neighborhood public space could recall narratives that could be traumatic due to their location and the interview questions. Thus, it was important to be cognizant of the influence of myself, setting, and social circumstances (Riessman, 2008).

The interview setting consisted of a one-on-one interview between the interviewer (myself) and participant with the following materials: a telephone recorder, the recorder app, a clipboard, pencil, interview question guide, iPad, and two bottles of water. Participants were informed of the opportunity to discontinue at any time if they felt any discomfort during the interview. Locations of interviews included offices in university

buildings, library office, and via telephone. Locations were selected by participants based on their schedule and preference of location. Six interviews were conducted in person and three interviews were conducted via telephone. In-person interviews consisted of me and interviewee sitting across from each other at a desk with the recorder located on the desk between them. None of the participants opted to discontinue the interview at any time. After the interview, participants reviewed my notes. Participants via telephone had the notes read to them once the interview concluded.

### **Demographics**

Nine separate interviews were conducted with five female and four male participants. There were two freshman, two sophomores, three juniors, and two seniors. The total time of the nine interviews was 7 hours, 35 minutes, and 31 seconds, and interview length averaged about 50 minutes and 36 seconds. All participants received an invitation to the study, consent form, and \$10 acknowledgement of participation before the interview.

The target group for the study were students who graduated from high school in 2015-2017 and attended high school at a Title 1 school and/or disadvantaged school setting and received an academic scholarship to attend a 4-year university or college. The demographic information that was collected included high school attended, years of attendance at schools, years living in poverty, race/ethnicity, and years in college. Information about social groups and/or affiliations (sports, clubs, religious groups, etc.) as well as form of scholarship attained was also collected.

Participants attended middle schools in Maryland, California, Washington, D.C., and New York and attended high schools in Maryland, Washington, D.C., and Northern Virginia. Students reported living in disadvantaged areas, though descriptions of participants' neighborhoods varied from "nice" to "violent." Descriptions of neighborhood influence are further detailed in the data analysis section. All participants reported receiving some form of financial assistance, though scholarship was not the only means of financial aid. Experience with obtaining resources for college, scholarships, and financial aid was reported, with participants describing level of difficulty to obtain resources, impact of obtaining resources, and area of resource that was of highest need for participant and family. Table 1 includes a detailed description of the demographics for the participants of the study.

Table 1

*Demographics Table*

| Participant (S#) | Year in College | Gender | Race               | Location   |
|------------------|-----------------|--------|--------------------|------------|
| S1               | Senior          | Female | African American   | University |
| S2               | Sophomore       | Female | African American   | Telephone  |
| S3               | Junior          | Female | Asian              | University |
| S4               | Junior          | Female | African American   | University |
| S5               | Sophomore       | Female | Dominican          | University |
| S6               | Senior          | Male   | Hispanic-Caucasian | University |
| S7               | Freshman        | Male   | African American   | Telephone  |
| S8               | Junior          | Male   | African American   | University |
| S9               | Freshman        | Male   | African American   | Telephone  |



### **Data Collection**

Data collection began on November 15, 2018. Flyers were placed in local community cafes, grocery stores, restaurants, apartment community boards, and bus stops. The locations of distribution included suburban locations, urban inner-cities, and e-mail. Flyers were posted three times a week in the different locations. Social media posts were posted bi-weekly on LinkedIn and Facebook. Invitations were also given via e-mail to community workers, educators, college/university staff, and community leaders with the goal of them distributing the invitation to potential participants who fit the criteria for the target group.

The data collection process initially drew interest from multiple participants, but due to the holidays, participants had other obligations that they had to fulfill. Therefore, I had to reassess my data collection methods. When speaking with potential participants and referral sources, participants cited the proposed length of the study as a deterrent. Additionally, during practice interviews, I observed that the interview time length could be reduced as well. After reviewing these concerns and observations, I submitted a request for change in procedures which was received on January 9, 2019. The changes included changing the length in time from 60-90 minutes to 45-60 minutes as well as including a \$10 gift card for acknowledgement of participation in the study from a store of their choice with choices including Amazon, Chick-Fil-A, Chiptole, Dick's Sporting Goods, Target, and Walmart. The gift card was distributed before the study to avoid the perception of coercion. This decision was based on research showing that college

students were more likely to give full answers, participate fully in the study, and have a better representative sample if they received a promised amount of \$10 (Partick et al., 2013). These changes required amendments to be made to the consent form, invitation, and social media post.

Data collection reconvened with flyers being posted three times a week for 2 months in different locations. Social media posts were displayed once a day for 1 month but were discontinued due to lack of response through the platform. Interviews were conducted in the time span of 4 months—February through May. Interviews were scheduled through telephone, e-mail, or text message. Students selected the location to ensure comfortability with the study. A total of nine interviews were scheduled—six in-person interview and three via telephone. Interview time length averaged a range of 45 minutes to 60 minutes.

Interviews were done through a question-and-answer format. The recorder was tested before the first question to ensure sound quality was adequate for transcription. Telephone interviews were recorded using the Recorder App, using the telephone recorder feature. During the phone interviews, I had to predetermine a time to stop the recorder due to the time limit restrictions enforced by the Recorder App. Notes were taken on a printed-out interview script, which participants were able to review at the end of the interview. There was an irregularity when recording the second interview in which the second half of the interview was not recorded due to the Recorder App closing after the 30-minute time limit. However, the participant for the second interview agreed to

redo the interview a week later.

Once the recorded interview was completed, I e-mailed the interview to myself within the next 24 hours. The interviews were then downloaded to a computer and placed on a password-protected hard drive. Transcription of the interviews began within 2 weeks of the interview. Five of the interviews were transcribed by me, and the remaining four were transcribed by a transcription service, Rev.Com. Transcription software used during this study included OTranscription, Express Scribe, and The Recorder Application transcription feature. The transcription of the interviews took approximately two months.

### **Summary of Individual Narratives**

Prior to examining the data across cases, I read, reread, and summarized the interviews for each participant. Participants were labeled as “S#,” with “S” meaning “student” and “#” denoting their order of being interviewed. For member-checking, I shared the summary with each participant—once immediately after the interview and then a more in-depth report through e-mail, approximately 8 weeks later.

**Participant S1.** S1 conducted her interview in person. S1 reported on her experiences attending middle school and high school, perspective of college, formation of academic motivation, feeling different, academic views by peers and staff, school environment, and role of identity. S1 reported living in an impoverished, single-parent household, which consisted of her mother, her sister, and her grandmother. S1’s description of middle school included feeling different than her peers, being a part of school activities, student relationships with teachers, student relationships with her,

academic views held in the school, her relationship with teachers, and her origins of academic motivation. S1 described her accomplishments in middle school, her family influence, home life, and her social life. S1's experiences in high school included academic challenges, negative academic viewpoints among peers and teachers, a negative school environment, negative perceptions toward college, her relationships with teachers and peers, and her social life.

S1's description of the scholarship process highlighted the relationships and connections that she formed while she was in high school. She further described her relationship with teachers' roles in attaining her scholarships for college. S1 also described the role of past experiences in relation to what currently keeps her motivated, her perceptions toward college, and using her social identity as motivation.

**Participant S2.** S2 participated via telephone and reported on her experience in middle school, describing the impact of impoverishment, academic accomplishments, home life, social life, school environment, and formation of academic motivation. She described her peers' view points on academics, teaching practices, and comparisons between her experience with academics in Maryland versus New York. S2 also described her experiences developing socially in middle school as well as the impact of her home life on her socially.

S2 detailed her experience with impoverishment, academic and personal challenges, teaching practices, teacher relationships, and other relationships while in high school. S2 described the impact of her pregnancies on her views on learning, motivation,

feeling different, perceptions on college, home life, challenges, and social life. S2 detailed her process with obtaining scholarships, mentioning her support system, positive experiences, and resources. S2 described her current motivations, describing her accomplishments, views on academics, role of relationships, and her identity as motivation.

**Participant S3.** S3 conducted her interview in person at her university's library office. S3 reported on her life in middle school, detailing her experiences with race-culture, challenges, lack of school and home support, home life, and views on academics. S3 explained the differences between American schools and Chinese schools, specifically in math. She detailed the difficulties of formulating a social life, being an English Language Learner, her relationship with her peers, and finding motivation.

S3's account of high school included race-culture observations, lack of school support, relationship with peers and teachers, family influences, and descriptions of poverty. She also detailed her experience with receiving resources, her perceptions on college, her motivation origins, and her social life. S3 chronicled her experience with joining the military, the impact of the military, her identity with military, and the scholarship process with the military.

**Participant S4.** S4 conducted her interview in person at her university. S4's account of middle school included impoverishment, personal and academic challenges, home life, family influence, social life, and relationship with peers. She described other students' relationships with teachers, influence of home life impacting retainment in

middle school, academic differences between the middle schools that she has attended in her district, and the social environment of her middle schools. S4 detailed narratives of receiving personal support from teachers, academic motivation from teachers, the impact of social life on academics, and her views towards academics.

S4's descriptions of high school included relationships with peers, social life, challenges due to her school closing, and impact of family on academics. S4 detailed the academic views of students and staff, highlighting student behaviors and school activities along with the school environment. S4's account of the scholarship process included describing her experiences acquiring resources, her support system's role, her motivation to attend college, and the stresses of finding and completing scholarships. S4 also reported on her current motivations, motivation origin, and the role of her identity in high school.

**Participant S5.** S5 conducted her interview in person at the university she attended. S5's account of middle school includes living in impoverishment, student behaviors, social life, diversity in population, school activities, and relationship with teachers and peers. She detailed the impact of student behavior on school activities, teacher classroom management, and resources in school. She also addressed the influence of her social life on her academics, origins of motivation, teacher relationships, and family influence in academics.

S5's description of high school included school activities, academic and personal challenges, social life, concerns about entering high school, student behaviors, and

influence of impoverishment on academics. She detailed the challenges of obtaining a scholarship, the resources provided by her high school, her relationship with her teachers, and support systems role in applying for college. S5 also detailed her current motivations, her family influence, her identity's role in academics, and her views on college.

**Participant S6.** S6 conducted his interview at an office at his university. S6's account of middle school addressed academic motivation, social life, views on academics by peers and himself, teaching practices, and impact of student behaviors. He described his family influence on his academics, academic and social challenges that he faced, his relationship with teachers, and the role of his identity with academics. S6 discussed the origins of his motivation, which involved his home life, his academic accomplishments, and being different from his peers.

S6's description of high school detailed his transition between two schools; highlighting the social life, academic views of peers and teachers, teaching practices, and perceptions of college. S6 detailed the role of his social life on his academics, his perceptions towards college, and academic motivation. His narrative of the scholarship process includes the role of his support system, positive and negative experiences obtaining a scholarship, his academic motivation, and his ability to obtain resources. S6 discussed his current motivations, citing his family influence, his academic accomplishments, influence of other relationships, and the scholarship process.

**Participant S7.** S7 conducted his interview via telephone. S7's description of middle school entailed academic motivation, family influence, and academic challenges.

He discussed the influence of his social life, detailing its impact on his academic motivation, his views towards academics, and his peer relationships. S7 also described his relationship with teachers, the school environment, and influence of other relationships.

S7's account of high school highlighted personal and academic accomplishments, family influence on academics, the influence of his identity on academics, his social life, and his views on academics. S7 described the teaching practices in high school, his peers' views on academics, the influence of the school environment, and influence of other relationships. S7's narrative for the scholarships process highlighted his support system, resources provided by his school, family influence, his academic motivation, and his social life.

**Participant S8.** S8 conducted his interview in-person at his university. S8 described the challenges he faced in middle school, his academic motivation, the influence of poverty, student behaviors, and teaching practices. S8 detailed his views on academics, describing influences from home life, his relationship with peers and teachers, and his academic motivation. S8's account of the school environment detailed student behaviors, the influence of impoverishment, personal and academic challenges, and negative views of academics by peers.

S8's description of his high school experience highlighted his academic and personal challenges. S8 discussed the influence of his social life on relationships with peers and teachers, his academic motivation, and his school environment. S8's narrative



entailed being diagnosed with cancer, detailing the influence of his support system, the origins of motivation, the influence on academic motivation, and family influence. S8's account of high school included peers' perception of college, peers' views toward academics, different high school environments, and description of teaching practices and school continuity. He described the scholarship process, describing the application process, the influence of his support system, difficulty obtaining financial aid, and the role of his IEP in obtaining a scholarship.

**Participant S9.** S9 conducted his interview via telephone. S9's description of his middle school addressed his academic challenges, views on academics by peers, teachers, and himself, and the influence of his social life. S9 detailed his social life, describing its influence on his academic motivation, his academic accomplishments, and his views toward learning. S9's account of middle school detailed student behaviors, teaching practices, school activities, and school environment, students' negative views on academics, and family influence on academics.

S9's description of high school detailed his academic motivation, academic accomplishments, family influence, and influence of school activities. He detailed his social life's impact on his views on academics, his academic motivation, and his relationship with his teachers. His description of the scholarship process highlighted his accomplishments, his perception on college, his family influence, and the role of his identity.

## **Data Analysis**

As described in Chapter 3, the intent was to complete the thematic and structural data analysis process using NVivo. I stated that I was going to do majority of my analysis utilizing NVivo. In fact, hand-coding was utilized more than NVivo. NVivo was used to do the coding for thematic analysis and note-taking of the transcribed data. Hand-coding was used to organize data from codes into categories and themes for interpretation.

As I repeatedly read the transcripts, I created different broad categories that were aligned with the content of the narratives, following Riessman's (2008) process for examining the data for both thematic and structural meaning. These broad categories are identified as: accomplishments, challenges, family influence, feeling different, motivation, perceptions of college, race-culture, resources, scholarship influence, school environment, school relationships, and social life. My thoughts, wonderings, and annotations were written in my journal and in the memo section of NVivo as part of the reflexive process. Then, I examined the data, first using a thematic approach, then using a structural approach. These are described in separate sections following this one. Categories and related codes are also charted (see also Appendix B).

### **Thematic Analysis**

The statements and phrases within each category were further examined, and I saw that each category could be subdivided into smaller units of meaning (codes). I created a chart for each of the categories with columns representing each code. I placed summarized experiences into the column that most closely corresponded to the meaning

of the code. For example, a participant described their academic struggles in middle school as a result of their difficulty acquiring the English language. The summarized narrative was then placed underneath the academic challenges' column on the challenge page in my journal. Formation of themes were accomplished through careful analysis of key terms and phrases found in each category, focusing on the participants' experiences of the phenomena of interest: academic motivation, academic achievement, and social identity. Table 2 presents the individual themes that emerged, and the categories associated with each theme.

Table 2

*Categories and Presence in Each Theme*

| Themes  | Categories |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |    |
|---|------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|
|   | 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
| Overcoming challenges was a main source of motivation | X          | X | X | X | X |   | X |   | X | X  | X  |
| Student-teacher relationships                         | X          | X |   | X | X | X | X |   | X | X  |    |
| School relationships aided scholarship attainment     | X          |   |   | X | X |   | X | X |   | X  |    |
| Scholarships  | X          |   | X | X | X |   | X | X |   | X  |    |
| Social Identity                                       | X          |   | X | X | X | X |   |   | X | X  | X  |

*Note.* 1 = accomplishments, 2 = challenges, 3 = family influence, 4 = motivation, 5 = perceptions of colleges, 6 = race-culture, 7 = resources, 8 = scholarship process, 9 = school environment (contains views toward learning), 10 = school relationships (participant perspectives), 11 = social life

Some of the categories were common to all of the themes. For example, accomplishment was spoken of repeatedly, and emphasized as important in staying

motivated, building relationships with mentors, etc. These themes are discussed in more detail in the Results section.

### **Structural Analysis**

Riessman (2008) stated the Labov method (1972) (i.e., searching for common structural elements across different narratives) is a commonly used strategy for structural analysis. The structural element used in this research was time, specifically Middle School to High School. The structural analysis was applied within time periods and then over the entire timeline of the narrative.

Four structural elements emerged: Challenges, Support, Motivation, and Accomplishment. Three of these elements triangulated with the thematic analysis, while the fourth element (Support) emerged as something slightly unique. For example, support evolved from the students' narratives detailing how the support from their family, friends, social groups, and teachers assisted them with their academic challenges, personal challenges, lack of resources, and the scholarship process. All the students reported experiencing each of the structural elements in Middle School and High School, with participants detailing majority of the experiences in both time frames.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

Upon the completion of interviews, transcription and analysis, data verification was conducted to ensure trustworthiness of data.

### **Credibility**

Credibility was achieved by allowing participants to review and comment on the

interviewer's notes after the interview and on the emailed summary of their transcript, the use of peer review (my committee), the benefit of thick descriptions provided by the participants (who were encouraged to describe their experience in as much detail as possible), subsequent comparison to previous published findings, and research reflexivity (Birt et al., 2016; Shenton, 2004; Xerri, 2017). Researcher reflexivity was done using a journal that contain thoughts, comments, and notes that occurred during data collection and data analysis. Participants reviewed the notes taken during the interview upon completion and then was sent the interview summaries approximately eight weeks after being interviewed.

### **Transferability**

Efforts were made to make the data gathering analysis and the results as transferable as possible, allowing the audience to determine meaning of the results based on their own experience as well as the scholarly literature described in Chapter 2, and a detailed description of the boundaries of the study. (Cope, 2014; Shenton, 2004; Williams & Morrow, 2009).

### **Dependability**

Dependability was achieved through member checking, review of interview guide, research question reviews by content and methodological experts, and following recognized procedural steps to provide for future replication (Cope, 2014; Shenton, 2004). Member checking was achieved through allowing participants to review the interviewer's notes and the summary of their interviews after the study.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability was achieved through describing the procedures to reach the conclusion and findings, listing of any potential influences that could impact the interpretation of the data to reduce bias, and interviews guides and research questions were reviewed by the University Research Reviewer and subject matter experts (Cope, 2014; Shenton, 2004; Williams & Morrow, 2009). A description of the steps taken during analysis was provided in the data analysis section of Chapter 4. Any potential influences that could cause bias were listed in the Role of the Researcher section in Chapter 3.

## **Results**

### **Thematic Analysis**

Thematic analysis of the rich narratives revealed five themes: overcoming challenges was a main source of motivation, student-teacher relationships, school relationships aided scholarship attainment, scholarships, and social identity. As shown in Table 3, four of the themes contained sub-themes that detailed layered experiences with learning in a disadvantaged school setting. Participants' narratives revealed different routes to attain academic achievement and academic motivation, but their narratives were similar in terms of impact on academic motivation and academic achievement.

Table 3

*Themes and Subthemes*

| Themes  | Subthemes  |
|---|--|
| Overcoming challenges was the main source of motivation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being comfortable with uncomfortable (“I’m used to facing a challenge”)</li> <li>• Student-peer communication (“It was hard to communicate with them”)</li> <li>• Distraction from home (“I need to forget”)</li> <li>• Proving myself</li> <li>• The push for achievement</li> </ul> |
| Student–teacher relationships                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inspirational</li> <li>• Misunderstood (“they didn’t understand our culture”)</li> <li>• Influential</li> </ul>   |
| School relationships aided scholarship attainment       | N/A  |
| Scholarships  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Same goals, different paths</li> <li>• Economic stress</li> <li>• Scholarship as synonymous with “help”</li> </ul>  |
| Role of Social Identity                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Being the oddball/different”</li> <li>• Racial/ethnic identity</li> <li>• Being part of a team</li> <li>• Friends and family</li> </ul>  |

**Overcoming challenges was a main source of motivation.** Participants described the experience of overcoming challenges as a primary academic motivator. A closer look at participants' rich descriptions revealed distinctive subthemes: being comfortable with uncomfortable ("I'm used to facing a challenge"), student-peer communication ("It was hard to communicate with them"), distraction from home ("I need to forget"), proving myself, and the push for achievement.

***Being comfortable with uncomfortable ("I'm used to facing a challenge").***

Participants detailed facing obstacles while attending disadvantaged school settings, often describing these moments as "motivators to succeed" academically. The challenges described were not always academic in nature, often detailing events that were very personal. Participants reported an unstable home life through middle school and high school; enduring negative experiences such as home abuse, family health concerns, living conditions of poverty, and family relationships. Students' struggles and challenges were motivational factors that helped them refocus whenever they felt themselves going off track. S6 described how coming from a "very" broken family influenced his motivation when he needed help to "refocus" or when "he felt like he was going off track."

One thing that helped me refocus was my struggle growing up, not having a stable parental figure in my life coming from a very broken family and just the overall cycle of a broken family. I just saw the need of someone to go to high school, someone to go to college, and just break the cycle and the curse that felt like we



had . . . and my sister, because I saw my sister accomplish so much.

Low academic support and resources from home were salient challenges for participants. S5's family's lack of resources and support motivated her to apply herself whenever she had the opportunity in school.

I always wanted to learn because I didn't have someone to like teach me. Like, I had an older sister, but it's not like she knew everything. She's only three years older than me. So, and my mom didn't know no English . . . I had to go to school and actually get the information. Cause I know like, once I go home, like nobody is going to be able to help me.

S3 described her family as "not really that supportive", stating, "they want me to literally just stop going to school, and just go to work." S4 stated her home support "interfered" with her academic performance and attendance and "kind of my relationship with teachers and other staff in the building." S1 highlighted that she learned to be "comfortable with uncomfortable", stating "I think a lot of my peers were just so comfortable with doing what they were doing, they didn't try to branch off into other stuff." This is still a current motivation for her while she is in college, mentioning this as being an "advantage."

***Student-peer communication ("It was hard to communicate with them").***

Participants reported peer attitudes toward learning being drastically different from their own. Developing academic motivation was difficult for participants because of the influences of student views towards learning, student behaviors, peers' viewpoints on

college, and their relationship with peers. Students described being intrinsically motivated to succeed despite other students' viewpoints on academic achievement, desires for college, and scholarship attainment. Participants most challenging relationship in the school environment was with their peers in school. S2 detailed her attempts at socializing, describing her experience attending homecoming:

I remember . . . Going to homecoming and it was kind of like awkward for me because I didn't know a lot of the kids at the school because I didn't socialize and I was new to the school. So, I went with a couple of people that I knew from around my neighborhood and it was OK but it wasn't enjoyable.

S8 reported being "expelled" from multiple high schools for fighting with other peers, contributing the issues to "neighborhood discrepancies." S5 was suspended from school due to an altercation that she had with a group at school.

. . . my Junior year, I got into like a situation with this group of girls... some of them went to the high school but then they transferred to another high school... My friends, they friends seen each other at the bus stop or whatever; and they br(ought) it up. And then we going into this big altercation and stuff like that.

Then, Truancy came and they had to let the school know because we all have our uniforms on. So, they had to let the school know. And the school had to let the parents know . . .

S1 described feeling "really upset and depressed" due to her lack of friends, questioning "why are they always trying to pick on me about this and that." She reported

that her peers didn't understand her academic focus, stating that "it was hard to communicate with them." S3 reported that despite being the only Asian in an "all-black school", she was never "bullied"; but did experience "being teased a lot" because she's "Chinese." S4 detailed that she became "anti-social", reporting:

I also noticed like a lot phony stuff with people. And I'm just going to speak on your peers, your environment, your friends and stuff. And that's what still led me to be like kind of anti-social, a little.

Participants reported peer behaviors impacted the learning environment in school. Peer views were generally negative in regard to academics, citing skipped classes, peer approval, and lack of care for academics as primary reasons. Reports by S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, and S8 accounted for student behavior to be "rebellious" and "aggressive", detailing how these behaviors distracted student learning, with participants using descriptors such as "a lot of distractions to like a high school or place of learning", "crazy", and "rowdy." S1 detailed that peers and teachers had "arguments and differences" stating the "class is boring, or the kids don't want to learn, or the teachers don't want to teach." S2 described how coming from the same environment helped her understand her peers' behaviors,

A lot of the kids were poor. A lot of them came from broken homes . . . a lot of kids that come from the hood, and I'm just going to be honest . . . But a lot of kids from the hood are not taught how important education is . . . they're poor and their families are struggling. Their mothers probably working a lot and their dads,

nine times out of ten, are not in the picture. So, they don't have a balance of having a male and a female and being taught, you know how to live and survive . . . being raised in a single-family home. A lot of kids from my community were like that. So, they have issues to worry about opposed to school. They didn't understand how important school was. So, they will get in a lot of fights because they don't know how to control their anger. They would, you know be involved in kind of like the streets. Like drugs, violence, gangs; things like that. So, school was kind of . . . I mean we all knew we had to go to school but it wasn't like we knew the big picture. It wasn't like, you know, we knew the end goal.

S8 described that there were students who “wanted to learn and get out” and “you had your troubled students”, reporting that peers “were caught up into what they've been around all their life, or at least part of their life, the neighborhood drama.” This had a subsequent “influence”, reporting:

. . . me being influenced by them and participating in the things that they participated in, not going to class, fighting, leaving school early which is part of not going to class, yes it put a damper on my grades.

***Distraction from home.*** Participants focus on academics provided students a safe haven when they had to deal with pressures and stress from home. S6's “broken home” was persistent throughout his academic career, with academics providing a focal point through it all. S2 indicated her homelife and academics had a reciprocating relationship.

Honestly, I love school and I have a passion to learn. So, that's one thing to help

me get through. I just used to block out all out of the extra stuff. Like, no matter what I was going through; I would try to focus on . . . you know my education and get all the information that I could get out of everything.

S4's narrative detailed school as a place where students- including herself- could go to take their minds off of the situations that they faced at home.

I guess kind of be entertained by what was going at school. To get some type of entertainment other than the other things that come along with worrying about what's going on at home and stress, and depression and stuff. Knowing that those are some factors that come with dealing with certain things at home... And to get some type of enjoyment to get my mind off of what was going on at home. But to also know that I was around other people that I knew was probably going through the same thing but like I said again, it helped me not focus on myself too much as to what I'm going through.

S4 and S8 spoke on the impact of retention being a challenge that is a constant source of motivation with a lasting impact, with S4 stating "I promised myself I will not be retained again because there are some people . . . that are retained more than once. And I'm like, "I'm not going to be one of those people." S2's disdain of her past became motivation, saying "The thought of having to go back to PG County and the thought of having to go back to the home life that I came from. And it helped me stay focus and motivated and to push. Cause I knew one that going back not an option for me. I didn't want . . . I don't want to go back and I don't want my kids to go back."

*Proving myself.* Participant motivation was driven by the feeling that they had to prove themselves to gain respect in school. S2 faced challenges such as forced enrollment into night school after transferring counties due to having children, “I had to prove that I was worthy, or I was serious about my education.” She also faced challenges such as earning financial aid after being placed on academic probation in community college and dropping out of college after a health concern with her children and experiencing mental health “issues.” S4 spoke on facing challenges such as others’ assumptions, stating “a lot of times I feel like I want prove people wrong because some people would even look at you and think of you a certain type of way and they place you in these different categories . . . .” S6 detailed how he had “a moral obligation” to “prove everybody wrong.” S1 detailed how coming from a disadvantaged, high school setting impacted her ability to transition into college, having to attend a program provided by her university for disadvantaged students.

I think me being someone who wasn’t like everybody else helped me (through) that process and it gave me an advantage. But then I had to go through a program . . . when I first got here because I was so disadvantaged in my high school and they didn’t feel I was college ready. So, I had to come here for a six-week program to learn about college basically . . . But then everybody from PG County and Baltimore City was in that program. It was only for PG County and Baltimore City students from low income families in that program. Because they felt like we didn’t really have the resources that we should’ve had. So, I’m like another reason

why I'm just the odd one out. I had the academics for it and the grades, but they wouldn't think I was ready because I didn't have the resources.

***The push for achievement.*** Participants transitioned their academic challenges into sources of motivation resulting in academic achievement. The challenges they faced academically consisted of weaknesses in either Math or English. S1's account included her struggle with AP Calculus, indicating "That was a really hard class for me" and "I got a one on the exam . . . it was really hard on me." When citing her motivation, she stated "I actually got a "B" in the class but I failed the exam. But because I kept trying and trying, and I started to doing good on the homework." S7 and S9 detailed the challenges they faced in high school, with S7 stating "I really struggled when it came to English and Math" and S9 admitting "I wasn't really on a good level to tell you the truth in my academics, not until 7th or 8th grade." S7's "focus" on his "craft" and "working on getting better" motivated him to achieve his goal of overcoming his deficits, stating "I overcame the English." S9's experience led to an intrinsic motivation to improve, stating "I was an ABC student but I still had to improve." S3's academic challenges included difficulty acquiring the English language, stating "my first 3 years in, I never learned any English at all. Not at all." She described having days where she would "try to learn something", stating, "Someday (s) I will get motivated. I would encourage myself. Say, "OK let's learn English. Let's adapt to it. Let's get it right."

Narratives on personal challenges highlighted participants' internal motivation to achieve. S8's personal challenges included being diagnosed with lymphoma and being

involved in multiple violent altercations in high school. Overcoming the diagnosis gave him “a second chance.”

It’s all summits, made me right my wrongs, even the stuff in the past, it’s the past you can’t change that. But as far as academically I’m doing what I had to do. It was awesome, I was in class every day, there was no skipping.

S2’s personal challenges included suicidal attempts, two pregnancies, homelessness, academic probation, and mental health episodes; in which these situations currently serve as motivation for her in college, stating “What currently keeps me motivated is my children. Most of all my children. And giving them a different lifestyle from what I had.” S9 described the passing of his great-grandmother as a difficult time in high school, but had a teacher who knew his mom’s family was described as a “guide” through high school stating, “she knew that really affected me more than anything else.” S6 detailed the culmination of his personal challenges, highlighting the impact of his experiences on him as well as the motivation it left afterwards.

All of that stress I experienced, I feel like I had PTSD at the time because of high school, it was very well needed. It was an eye opener. Like puberty times two. It was a must for me to go through that. Kind of eye opener like the real world is coming.

Despite challenges with peers, participants reported being internally motivated to achieve academically. S1 felt her motivation was different from her peers, “I know people . . . are like my competitors but they don’t have like my personality and they don’t



have my work ethic.” She reported “focusing on perfecting my craft” since she was in middle school, having different interest than her peers. S2 stated that she “loves” school and she had a “passion to learn” in middle school that manifested itself into college. She remembered “I was pretty much determined to continue my education.” When speaking on her motivation origins, she described being “optimistic even though it wasn’t a reality for me.” S4 and S5 described themselves as “self-motivators” S6 described his search for motivation, reporting “I try to find my own motivation because . . . growing up I didn’t have motivation so I just find it around me.”

S3 described her motivation to attain an education after joining the military, stating “I realize how important education is and I want to take full advantage of this army thing.” Participants described maintaining their motivation to go to college despite peer views on college. S9 knew the college that he wanted to attend and received a full scholarship to attend that school. S4 described wanting to go to college and is currently “thinking about grad school.” S6 described himself as “driven”, stating that “the strength of the student” helped him remain positive during a challenge with receiving college letters. S1’s account detailed her being different from her peers in academics.

I wanted to graduate and actually go to college. Then the people who did go to college or who wanted to go to college, I was on the only one I knew of my year that wanted to do journalism

**Student–teacher relationships.** Students heavily relied on their academic relationships to provide resources to reach academic achievement. They reported better

relationships with teachers and other staff, with these individuals providing more support in reaching academic achievement in middle school and providing moral support in high school. Participants' thick descriptions revealed a complexed, multidimensional student-teacher relationship divided into eccentric subthemes: *inspirational*, *misunderstood* ("they didn't understand our culture"), and *influential*.

***Inspirational.*** Students remembered receiving inspiration to achieve academically despite their school environment, in large part, due to their relationship with their teachers. Participants relied on their teachers to provide them motivation when they had difficulties with academics and social-emotional relationships. S4 detailed that one of her current motivations is her middle school teacher who recommended her to a private middle school, saying "if she was to run into me now . . . I think she'll be happy that I didn't let that effect . . . my years down the road experience." She noticed the role of teachers with her and her peers' self-esteem.

I experienced having like a lot of low self-esteem. So, it seemed like I guess, people in school systems, specifically; they know that during middle school, there could be a time period where I guess children need a lot of attention.

S2 remembered her teachers being "attentive", with teachers being "involved" with student learning. S9 attributed his academic growth in middle school to staff support, "I also had teachers and administrations will also help me, and push me to ensure and go to these summer programs." S1 valued her relationships with teachers over her peers, stating "I just knew that it would help me in the long run not being silly with

my friends.” S7 vividly described the role of his middle school teachers in his learning.

The teachers, they were very . . . engaged with us and wanted us to excel and get good grades and to just stay focused in school. I had a lot of great teachers and they helped me with life and with schoolwork and making sure that I could do the best I could.

S5 reported her middle school teachers as being overall “focused”, describing her middle school 8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher as someone who “would try to reach out and like see if everything is ok. Like trying to like help you anyway that you needed.”

***Misunderstood (“They didn’t understand the culture”).*** While participants cited teachers as motivation in middle school, participants relationships with middle school teachers were negative at times. S3 stated that the teachers “labeled” them as “bad students” and teachers “didn’t care if we were present or not.”

I think a lot of it is teachers’ attitude. Don’t get me wrong, there are some good teachers who go out of their way to help you. But I think for the most part, teachers just do their job. They would put the assignment on the board, tell you what to do, and that’s it. They just leave it there.

After describing the lack of motivation by students in his class, S6 attributed this experience to his teacher’s “energy”, remembering times when the teacher told students “You know what, it’s going to be an easy day” and changed the lesson for the day.

Participants all stated a period where teachers didn’t understand the “culture” of the kids at the school harming their relationship with students. S1 acknowledged that this lack of

understanding with culture hampered student engagement,

the teachers were really helpful but I don't think they knew how communicate with us younger students. I have really a lot of older students, I mean professors or teachers. So, like the older you get the less tolerance you have and when you're teaching 10, 11, 12-year old's; you don't really understand what's going on. And you're not really trying to put our culture into your culture. Like, if they did more things that involved entertainment; I think it would have helped us out.

Participants disdain with teachers did carry over to high school with students reporting lack of trust, lack of communication, and lack of happiness with teaching ability. S4 reported that at times, she couldn't "trust" her teachers, indicating that she felt some "misguided" her. At S6's first high school, he noticed how some teachers behaved as "I'm just here", further describing teachers' attitudes as "You could come here if you want, if you don't, I'm still getting paid." S1 remembered how a teacher's racial focus impacted her AP Government class,

I was in my AP Government class; that was the year that President Obama re-ran. And all my teacher did, she was a black woman. All she did was talk about how he was running again for president and it was a class where I thought I would learn about the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and stuff. All she did was talk about that because I think our culture was so big in the black influence, at the time. Where I felt like kind of was held back of learning about the stuff that they did before we had freedom.

S1's experience in AP Government left a mark on her high school experience, "People who are teaching you stuff, teach you what they want to teach you. And I didn't really like that."

Participants noted how cultural differences impacted the classroom environment and teacher instruction. S5 described how her teachers were "white", stating

White teachers dealing with Black kids and all their shenanigans with the fighting and all of that stuff. They not going to know what to do. So, it was just like, you know, it wasn't like disciplined... So, kids didn't really take teachers seriously and stuff. I mean like, we did have police officers and security guards but they can't sit in the classroom the whole time. So, it was just like...I mean they did try but it wasn't successful, I guess.

S2 cited "cultural barriers", highlighting that some teachers "didn't know how to engage." S8 remembered teachers having difficulties with student behavior, remembering one teacher "leaving" during the middle of the year. S9 remembered the discrepancies between teachers, stating "Some teachers didn't want it at all. Some teachers that didn't want to tolerate people playing music and stuff like that." These negative relationships with teachers did provide motivation for students to achieve with multiple participants feeling that they had to "prove themselves" to their teachers.

***Influential.*** Despite these setbacks with their high school teachers, participants' relationship with teachers and other staff grew as they transitioned into high school. Participants described teacher support in areas such as academic support, college

preparation, personal support, and source of motivation. S1's relationship with her teachers were described as a friendship, stating "I will just talk to them for hours about what I wanted to do. I kind of treated them as my friends even though we had 23 years of age difference . . . it was easy to talk to them because they had a focus and I had a focus." S6 described his high school teacher as a "very influential person . . . especially in my college life." S9 stated that the teachers in high school worked to build a "great relationship" with students, remembering the teachers as support for him throughout high school. He stated that the teachers "broke down barriers" and "helped" them with "anything we need." S8 described the support from his teachers with his disability, support after lymphoma, and assisting with adjusting to life after the illness. He described his teachers as "helpful", stating that they would come to his house after surgeries to assist with learning new material; being impressed that "they went beyond the school." S2 detailed the influence of having a relationship with her principal:

But sometimes when I sit back and go through; and talk to my kids about how my relationship and how my education was with my teachers. And my principals.

That's one of the things I let them know because I feel like . . . I feel like it really, really helps. It really, really made a difference in my education, me knowing my principal.

S3 highlighted the role of her ESOL teachers as she strived to improve in high school. She highlighted how her ESOL teachers were "really helpful", citing how they would focus on making sure students "retain" the information. She described the

motivation that she received from one teacher about acquiring the English language,

Don't treat it like its trash. She would take time out and share her experience with us about how it is hard to get a good education in her own town in Korea. Now we are afforded this opportunity, make the best of it. Try not to waste time. Try to actually study as much as we can. And then how learning English, and then use English as your weapon. Cause when you don't learn the language, how you going make something out of it in this country for yourself.

**School relationships aided scholarship attainment.** Relationships with teachers, guidance counselors, and other staff members provided the biggest support for students during the scholarship process. This theme was descriptively singular, no distinct sub-themes were consistently identified.

When participants didn't have the opportunities to earn their scholarships in high school, they earned them either through community college programs or military education programs. Students stressed the amount of resources and information they received from individuals in the school as being important and vital to their scholarship attainment. Peer relationships with these professionals were not as favorable with participants reporting that peers were "not focused" on going to college.

Relationships with the guidance counselor were detailed most by participants. The guidance counselor played an integral role in the development of student knowledge about the scholarship process and retrieval of scholarship opportunities. S4's relationship with her guidance counselor included terms such as "excited" and "so supportive",

detailing her trust by reflecting, “She would do things and say things that I never even understood but I just followed what she said because I knew that it was something good coming out of it.” S6 described a rocky but positive relationship with his guidance counselor, describing a moment where she withheld his college acceptance letters but also gave advisement on pursuing different scholarship programs. He described his guidance counselor as “one of the most memorable individuals during the scholarship process”, stating “my guidance counselor would tell me, ‘You know what, try this scholarship... She’ll find some out her day and be like ‘this is just S6’s pile’. And she’ll have them ready for me.”; finally stating that “She always gave me the resources I needed.”

S7’s career counselor was “the most memorable person”, describing her as “very influential in my life when it came to receiving different scholarships.”

I remember she invited me to different events where different people who owned different scholarships sponsored websites and stuff, so she helped me. She introduced me to them and introduced me to different scholarships that were online and... going to different events and stuff.

S3’s negative relationship with her guidance counselor highlighted not receiving resources for college or scholarships. S3 wanted her guidance counselor to “care more”, sharing “I think that’s what’s like in those hood areas, hood schools . . . we don’t have a counselor who actually care or genuinely care. That’s how I feel from my high school experience.”



Participants' scholarship experience with teachers resulted in positive accounts of scholarship achievement. S1's scholarship experience detailed receiving scholarship assistance from two of her teachers that she formed a strong relationship.

I didn't get all the scholarships I wanted . . . But one was from the actual High school and one was from outside source to go to my college. But I knew like the connection I made with my teachers would work out.

S8 received his scholarship assistance from his teacher, who introduced him to a scholarship and grant program for students with disabilities who fit a criterion to "qualify." S5 received assistance with finding financial support from her dance instructor, noting "She got me here." S9 contributed his current motivation to "family, friends, and administration," reporting on their "words and wisdom" as being memorable. Participants reported receiving scholarship support from academic relationships formed after high school. S2 reported receiving scholarship support from programs such as the TRIO program and the Job Training Student Resource (JTSR) program. She stated that the program can "give you a lot of help", detailing her one relationship with a rep, "she took my issues on as her own."

If the schools didn't have the programs I was already in, I would not have went to the school. Like the support system that was created for me with TRIO . . . If the school didn't have that same stability and that same outlet, I probably would not have gone because I need that extra support.

S3 discussed the impact of her military instructors on her scholarship

achievement. She described her Company Commander as “super supportive”, reporting “She recognized the . . . potential in me.” She reported a positive account on the role of her Reserve Officers’ Training Corps coordinator and a cadet, “they kind of helped me. Guide me every single step, every single phase.” She also highlighted receiving the assistance of a “Three-Star General” who was the first “African-American Surgeon General.” S3 received more support from the TRIO program,

They just took me in, just right in. They didn’t ask me any weird or awkward questions. They just embraced me. Where you from? What’s your major? They literally just treat me like any other student. No different, they don’t see the color. I’m just one of the . . . students, being a part of the TRIO. That’s pretty awesome, I kind of like it, too.

**Scholarships.** Participants description of the scholarship process were rich with narratives highlighting their perseverance and determination to achieve their goals. Three sub-themes emerged from the participant’s narratives on their path to earn a scholarship: same goals, different paths, economic stress, disadvantaged views of scholarship synonymous with “help.”

*Same goals, different paths.* Participants acknowledged the challenges they faced with the scholarship process such as lack of knowledge about the process, difficulty finding resources, difficulty with the volume of scholarships, and maintaining consistency in applying for scholarships. Out of all 9 participants, only 2 participants, S6 and S9, received traditional academic scholarships from their college or university. Other

participants relied on resources from school staff and group affiliations to take different paths towards receiving scholarship support: S5 received a financial packet from her university, S7 received a mixture of scholarships including a football scholarship, S1 received a scholarship from her high school and her college, S8 received scholarships and grants through MD Caps, S2 received scholarships through her relationship with the TRIO and the JTSR program, S3 received scholarships through the military, and S4 received her scholarships by applying to multiple scholarships.

*Economic stress.* Participants frequently commented on the stress of not knowing how college was going to be financed. Family support with scholarships were mixed amongst participants, with most stating that their family didn't know much about the scholarship process. A frequently used term throughout analysis of the scholarship process was "wanted", with similar words used being "lacked", "missing", and "needed." S6 described the stress of trying to find sources to pay for college because he was "broke" and questioned how he was going to "afford" college. S5 described her desire to attend college but "didn't know if . . . money wise, I was able to go to college", citing "Mom didn't know how to do it. I needed someone who knew how to do it. And my sister didn't go to college . . . she couldn't help me." S1 mentioned her mother's decision not to help her pay for college, "My mom . . . she always told me and my sister, 'If you want to go to college; that's on you . . . I don't have money to pay for it and I don't think it's my responsibility to pay for your college.'" S8 could have earned scholarships and grants through the DC and MD Caps program but didn't know until college, "I found out

later on that I could've received DC Caps because I graduated from a DC public high school . . . I ended up finding out from a student that graduated from a DC high school that goes here." S7 described scholarships as "very important to me and my family", stating his motivation was to "really ease the weight on my mom's shoulders by getting as many [scholarships] as I can and hopefully trying to get a football scholarship." S9 described the most memorable people during the scholarship process as his family, stating "Just my family in general. They are the ones that played a huge factor towards the scholarship."

*Disadvantaged views of scholarship synonymous with "help."* When participants described their scholarship process, one of the most frequently used words was "help." Participants reflected on the role that their academic relationships played in acquiring their scholarships, describing the assistance of teachers and staff vividly throughout. S1's scholarship process included the assistance of her teachers, in which she received a journalism scholarship and then received a high school academic and athletic scholarship through the assistance of two of her high school teachers. S7 described receiving assistance from the career counselor, calling her a "a very big influence on getting different scholarships." S6 detailed having a strong reliance on support to accomplish his dream of college.

I think because I lacked that support. When I had received it, I didn't know what to do with it. So, I just tried to keep them as much as I could, like juice them out so I don't need them no more. Which sounds bad, but again you give me

something I never had, of course I'm going to use it to the best of my ability and that's what I did with her. Because I remember sometimes, she be like "Stop email me, stop calling me, stop." I just wanted to get every question answered.

S8's scholarship process originally involved the assistance of his teacher informing him about the "DC Caps program" for students with disabilities. S3 received her scholarship through the assistance of the military, stating "the military really just opened the door to me", citing how they "encouraged" her and "supported" her. She described the Military's Green to Gold program as an "opportunity" where she moved from "soldier" to "officer" and go to college, where she received help from Reserve Officers' Training Corps coordinator, a cadet, and her officers.

I kind of look at my officer and say I can do that. That's when I find about the Green to Gold program . . . what Green to Gold is, is basically army program that help . . . they select qualified enlisted soldier to become officer. So, for me, I was an NCO [noncommissioned officer] sergeant. And then, I was doing pretty good . . . When I was in Korea after 2 years, I was taking night class every day. I was like doing my online class to accumulate my credit. That's where it helped me to get 60 credit so that I can apply to the program . . . the ROTC [Reserve Officers Training Corps] coordinator . . . She's the one who helped me put the whole Green to Gold packet together. She's the one who helped me coordinate with the whole school admission process to get all my credits to transfer over to . . . admissions.

S4 reflected on the importance of her guidance counselor's advice to her when applying to scholarships. She currently applies that advice when she has to apply to scholarships for college.

I remember as she helped me prepare for college, she would always throw scholarships at me. And I'm just like, "How am I going to do a scholarship that's due tomorrow. I feel like that helped me a lot because it's like now, I think of her telling me, "The more you apply yourself . . . you'll end up getting something."

S2 detailed the assistance of the JTSR and TRIO program with her scholarship program. Her circumstance caused for her to find scholarships for school, stating "I didn't really know too much about the scholarship process. So, once I started to go back to school, I needed money because I was paying out of pocket and stuff like that." She further described how relying on the response of others helped her attain scholarships for college.

That's when other options and other people reached out to me and let me know, "Hey, you can apply for scholarships." And then once I got into the TRIO program and they actually taught about how to apply for a scholarship, where to look for scholarships, and gave me the ins and outs . . . I don't know if I would have been able to accomplish it without her working with me.

**Social identity.** Participants social identity reflected mainly during students most pressing times during school. Participants' rich narratives detailed the maneuvering of

several identities during the formation of their academic motivation: being the oddball/different, racial/ethnic identity, reflection of the team, and their friends and family.

***“Being the oddball/different.”*** Participants’ most salient identity derived from being different from their peers. Participants were motivated by being an “oddball” or “different” from their peers in school. S4 remembered her experiences differentiated her from her peers in high school.

I think I just like stood out because I would look at them like, “I’ve already experienced that type of behavior. So, it’s like now, I don’t think that behavior is acceptable. So, it makes me understand why even then, back at the time, it wasn’t acceptable.

S2 described herself as an “oddball”, reporting “I really kept to myself . . . I was self-conscious. I had self-esteem issues. I used to internalize a lot. I didn’t share with too many people, what I was going through.” This would later become a source of motivation, with her reporting “give my children a different lifestyle from the one I had.” S1 shared a similar account in being labeled “odd” by peers for her academic interests. Being labeled as “odd” also played a role in forming social relationships, reporting “we kind of felt we were the odd ones so why not put our oddness together and become friends.” She mentioned a continued occurrence with being “odd”, claiming “it’s kind of helped me and not hurt me because I kind of use it to my advantage.”

S6 described how he constantly found himself questioning whether he should go

against his “morals” and “not study and go to class” or follow his “morals” and “separate yourself from them.” He reflected on their focuses as being the difference between himself and peers, reporting “I felt like for them it was more play than work and mine was more work than play.” S7 described a behavior change based on the influence of his teachers, giving him advice on how to “separate how I act in school and how I act socially”, summarizing “ he taught me how to really watch what I say when I’m in certain places and not to be like everyone else and to, honestly, be a leader.”

Participants’ expressed disappointment with peers due to their the lack of care for academics. S9’s account of peer views towards academics cited that “They didn’t care”, claiming that his peers “didn’t care about graduating” and were content with having a 2.0 GPA. He expressed disappointment when describing his friends’ academic achievements, stating “They used to kind of upset me because it’s like how do you fail a class that is kind of easy.” As SGA President, S5 attempted to motivate her peers to work harder for privileges, telling them “ya’ll can’t be acting like this but you want this . . . Ya’ll got to get it together so we can be able to do like more fun stuff and stuff like that.” S6 mentioned that there was “bullying” at his school and that his first high school “wasn’t a safe environment.”

Participants noted that there were differences in college aspirations that were starkly different from their peers. S1 remembered peer attitudes towards college, stating “The people that didn’t want to go to college, they kind of just put me down. Like “why would you go to college”, “why would you spend all of this money”, and “College is



stupid.” S6 compared peers in both high schools he attended, stating that his second-high school “shared the same hunger” for college while peers at the first high school weren’t looking for information and “no one would have gone to college.” S2 stated that while some of her peers at the Family Life Center wanted to go to college, most of them were “just trying to make it through high school”, with S9 reporting similar sentiments from his peers. S9 believed that “maybe 40, 50 percent of the school were more college and career ready than the other percentage of the school.” S3 highlighted how her peers “had no plans for college” due to them not having the “resources” provided to them.

***Racial/ethnic identity.*** Participants’ race and cultural identity influenced student motivation in school. S1 described how the racial identity of her high school teacher motivated her to attend college, “I met her my sophomore year and she was really cool. She also went to (my college). But she was a black woman and since I thought it was so elite at the time.” She influenced her to major in “Journalism” and assisted her with earning a “scholarship towards the journalism school.”

I would say my TV production professor because she actually did exactly what I wanted to do. She went to (my) college, she graduated with a journalism degree. She wanted to be a producer. But she decided to comeback to PG County and teach students because she knew that they didn’t have a resource. So, I think that really influenced the decisions I made and why I did (what I) did. And she was also black, so that was cool.

S1 also described the influence of race and culture on her and her peers’ college

decisions. She described going to “college fairs”, remembering “Then to have like college fairs and I thought that it was really cool. But I know everybody said they wanted to go to HBCU, the ones who were interested because we were like all Black and Hispanic really.” S3 described how her ethnicity allowed for her to be embraced by her peers, motivating her to learn more.

I was the only Asian in that school. It’s an all-black kid school. She approaching me and she talk to me, despite the fact that I don’t really understand what she is saying. Despite the fact that I still don’t speak any English, in the first year of my High School. She would still constantly talk to me. Try to teach me English. Try to help me to understand what she is saying. And then, gradually, I feel comfortable to kind of talk to her and ask her questions when I don’t understand something.

S3 contributed this to being “Asian” because they were into “Asian culture”, in which she received academic support from this group.

the best friend that I told you about earlier. She helped. And her sister. She had such a big family man. Every year her siblings would just come to the same school. So, her family was really nice. At least, they made me feel like I had somebody in school. Like I had friends in school. And also, there’s three other black girls. Their regular black skin; you know, regular black girls. They are really into Asian pop culture. And then, that’s how they how they first started talking to me. We would talk about, you know, K-Pop. Chinese Pop Music.

Actually, they're really nice. They're really good students. They all like AP class students. Every time when I was struggling, they helped me.

S8 described how attending a "diverse" high school motivated him to change his behavior because they were "different", "focused", and "going to college." S2 moved to a "predominantly white" area which opened her up to more "social issues" allowing her to "learn and grow" in school.

***Reflection of the team.*** Participants mentioned affiliations as part of their identities that provided them motivation when aiming to succeed. S7 described a great influence by his football team on his experience in high school.

I spent most of my time with them. They were very great individuals. We all connected because we played together and we usually spent time together a lot so they really stood out and helped my high school experience be very rememberable.

S3 detailed the military as being "encouraging", supporting this experience "anytime when I want to do something or I try to do something, they will always encourage me . . . And they would always provide me with the resources to help to get there." S5 joined a dance program that followed her from middle school to high school, stating "that just like motivated me", as well as being a part of the Student Government Association. S6 and S9 mentioned how being members of the National Honor Society were motivations, with S6 describing it as "validation." S9 detailed being how being in "law academy" provided him "memorable" opportunities and helped him make

“connections” with others. S1 reported that her role as an athlete aided her in attaining one of her scholarships to attend college, contributing her scholarship attainment to being “a pretty good athlete.” She also highlighted how being in AP courses influenced her in class, highlighting that “AP students” were more focused on “going to college” than the other peers.

***Friends and family.*** Participants described their social relationships with friends as motivators to achieve while in school. Participants described surrounding themselves with friends who were “like-minded” and “focused” on academic achievement. S6 detailed his relationship with his friends, stating that they “gave each other the strength” and “kept each other grounded.”

They pushed me harder than I could ever imagine myself doing anything. Again, we shared various classes together, so whenever we had time, we would link up... So, I just remember we were always doing work, we never played. I just appreciated the more mature mindset. Because I felt like I was childish from the transition from HS 1, but growing up with them is just like they’re going to keep me grounded so keep them together.

S1 described her friends as “oddballs”, stating that “we kind of felt we were the odd ones so why not put our oddness together and become friends.” She reported that they took “AP classes” together and would “do homework together.” S7 described his “friends” as academic motivators, reporting “I used to use my social life to help me in academics.” S9 described how he had “good friends” who had “good motivational

speeches”, highlighting that they have been friends from “middle school” to “high school.” S8 cited his friends from his “Virginia” school as “different”, stating “Everybody was cool, everybody was focused... because they were graduating, they were going to college.”

Participants’ family identity contributed largely to their academic motivation. S9 discussed the influence of family on his motivation to attain scholarships, citing that they “motivated and pushed” him to go to college, resulting in him wanting to go to college “just like they did.” S4’s family was “supportive” which helped her become “confident”, further detailing that she wanted people to be “proud.” S2’ current motivation is encompassed in her identity as a mother, “What currently keeps me motivated is my children. Most of all my children. And giving them a different lifestyle from what I had.”

S7 stated his family helped him “get back on track”, reporting that they “instilled” in him “to never quit and keep going.” S8 reported that his mother “played a part” in him getting back on track academically, ultimately stating “my mother motivated me because she made me do my academics, she made sure I did it. If it wasn’t because of her, I wasn’t motivated at my . . . school.” S6 received motivation from competing with his sister, detailing “we all had our strengths and weaknesses and whenever she came with her strength, I came with mine.”

### **Structural Analysis**

Structural analysis allowed for examination of the temporal aspect of the narrative, as participants’ academic motivation developed over the span of middle school

to high school. Each participant dealt with a similar structural arc during the development of their academic motivation. Through structural analysis of participants middle school and high school accounts, four main points emerged during the development of academic motivation. Participants are normally met with a challenge, then they receive support, they develop motivation to succeed, then they reach an accomplishment. Participants' report of their accounts did not always have an accomplishment, but all participants did face challenges, receive support, and develop motivation as a response to the challenges that they faced. This is shown in Figure 1.



*Figure 1.* Results of structural analysis. The cycle of challenge, support, motivation, and accomplishment that participants reported over the course of their middle to high school years.

***Middle school. Challenge.*** Participants account of developing their academic motivation started in middle school. Discussions on the challenges they faced in middle

school included academic and personal challenges. S1 and S8's challenges detailed their peer interactions and the impact that it had on them in school. S1's middle school challenge consisted of her not having friends due to her academic interests in school; while S8's middle school challenge included the negative influence of his peers on his academic motivation. Participants' accounts of challenges included the impact of student homelife on their academic motivation and achievement. S2 detailed having "home issues", describing her mother's mental health "issues" and her personal mental, well-being. S4's account of challenges in middle school included experiencing home issues that impacted her academics, resulting in her being retained. S6 described his upbringing as being raised in a "broken home." Challenges faced in middle school addressed the difficulty with understanding academic material. S7 and S9 detailed difficulty with adjusting academically to the requirements of middle school. S3 and S5 described the challenges of family providing low support due to unfamiliarity with American customs, as well as S3's difficulty with learning the language.

*Support.* Participants required support to help them overcome the challenges faced during their time in middle school. Participants described receiving support from teachers, peers, and family, with most of the participants describing support from family. S1 received support from joining the Rubix Cube Club and from her teachers. S2 described the support of her Godmother who moved her to New York to attend a private school. S4 and S5 described receiving support from family and teachers. S4 reported that her teachers, "gave me a lot of opportunities even when I wasn't supposed to have it or

when I was supposed to not be privileged to that opportunity.” S7 and S9 detailed receiving support from teachers, family, and peers to overcome their academic challenges in school, with both describing the impact of how teachers “helped” them improve their grades. S6 and S8 detailed the support of their mothers when facing their challenges, with S6 describing the support of his grandmother to help him “get back on track” in school. S3 described the relationship that she formed with an online video game group, stating that they added a “positive, good value” to her.

*Motivation.* Students were motivated to overcome the challenges that they faced, after encouragement from support. Student responses were academic in nature, with a focus on excelling. S1 contributed her motivation to her teachers and joining the club, stating “it kind of just taught me that, even though people might think it’s weird, it’s going to help; because I learned a skill.” S5’s described her motivation to overcome her lack of academic support at home, “I had to go to school and actually get the information. Cause I know like, once I go home, like nobody is going to be able to help me.” S8 detailed the importance of his mother as motivation, stating “If it wasn’t because of her, I wasn’t motivated at my . . . school.” S4 detailed her memory of being retained, using that memory as motivation, “it wasn’t a good feeling.” S2’s experience moving with her Godmother made her “appreciate school even more”, describing her time as “one of the things that helped me.” S3’s relationship with her little sister was a motivator, indicating the “hurt” she felt when she “looks at her.” S9’s motivation to “never let down” was intrinsic, detailing the strategies and supports he used to overcome academic concerns. S7



acknowledged that he started “listening” to his teachers, detailing “I became motivated to get good grades and to really excel in my academics.”

*Accomplishments.* Participants accomplishments were described as motivators that assisted them as they transitioned into high school. Participants’ detailed-rich descriptions of accomplishments ranged from winning awards to overcoming situations that were deemed insurmountable at one point. S4’s description of her experience with retention resulted into her developing a motivator that helped move her to the next grade the following year. S1’s account of her accomplishments included being proud of placing “7<sup>th</sup> place of 60 teams” in competition with Rubix Cube Club. S2 described her ability to continue to make “honor roll” despite the challenges that she faced in her personal life. S6, S7, and S9 detailed their academic accomplishments, with S6 detailing the “validation” behind joining Junior Honor Society, S7 describing his academic “excel” towards the end of middle school, and S9’s account including improvement to a “3.7 GPA” and winning “Most Improved Student” in middle school.

*High school. Challenge.* Participants description of motivation carried into high school, resulting in all participants responding to their challenges with accomplishments. Participants described facing challenges that impacted them academically in the classroom, which interfered with their ability to prepare for college and attend school, as well as facing personal challenges such as illnesses, homelessness, and familial loss.

Participants described challenges with their academic weaknesses while in school. S1 described having difficulty with AP Calculus, which frustrated to her the point she

would “cry in class.” S7 faced similar circumstances with English and Math, reporting that he “became discouraged” in his early years in high school, contributing it to being “nervous.” S8 was a student with a disability who had an Individual Education Plan (IEP); stating that he had an IEP for “math”, as well as being retained in 9<sup>th</sup> grade because he “failed” English. S3 described “not improving a lot” in high school, detailing in 11<sup>th</sup> grade that she had to go to “10<sup>th</sup> grade class” for English, as well as being “pretty good” in math but doing “kind of bad” on the English portion of the SAT.

Participants described how their interaction with their peers proved to be challenging during high school. S8 described being expelled from multiple high schools for fighting in school:

I had more fights and problems with people in my . . . schools because a part of it had to do with my attitude and being rebellious and feeling like I can say whatever I wanted, when I wanted to, to people.

S5 faced difficulties in high school with peers, indicating that she was suspended from school for a month due to an altercation that she had with another group of girls. She described that during that time, she was “banned from the school” which put her behind with her academics to the point she was “about to go to summer school.”

Participants described challenges impacting their ability to go to college, either through graduation or with receiving resources. S6 described his guidance counselor withholding his college acceptance letters, stating that he was “nervous” and he would “cry every day.” S3 described her disappointments with her high school guidance

counselor,

I don't think, I think that's what's like in those hood areas, hood schools. Like we don't have a counselor who actually care or genuinely care. That's how I feel from my High School experience.

S4 faced difficulties when her high school closed, claiming "they weren't really too focused on really trying to make sure the students were getting what they need and just providing them with as much information." She detailed the results as being "misleading" causing her not finish high school "on time." S2 described her experience transferring to another county to go to school, reporting the "challenges" were "making sure that the incoming guidance counselor had all of my information" to "receive credit and start school"; which she described as putting her in a "bad situation" causing her "start" in "night school."

Personal challenges that participants experienced did not involve the classroom but had an impact on their ability to grow academically. S4 described being in a "car crash" that made her feel like she was "in slow motion", as well as experiencing "not living at home." S2 described multiple personal challenges including academic decline due to being "pregnant . . . two times" in high school, being "molested at home" which made her "run toward the streets" and becoming "homeless." S9 described the passing of his Great Grandmother, stating that it took a "toll" on him, as well as suffering a broken ankle his Sophomore year. S8 detailed being diagnosed with "Lymphoma" and "was in the hospital for a while."

*Support.* Participants enlisted help from more sources once they made it to high school. Participants received support from teachers, peers, family and other relationships, with most of the participants remembering support from teachers and other resources. S1 received support from her peers, stating that she was told that she didn't "have to take Calculus in college." S2 described receiving support from her teachers, peers, and social worker from the family life center, detailing that she was touched by the experience of her peers, her social worker helping her accomplish goals, and her teachers helped her get her first job and first house. S4 relied on the support from her guidance counselor, teacher, and family during difficulty times.

S7 and S9 detailed received support from teachers, family, and peers to overcome their academic and personal challenges in school; with both describing the impact of teachers, family, and friends who helped them get back on track and motivated them academically. S5 remembered the support from her teacher and friends, describing getting notes from friends and emailing teachers to get help with difficult lessons. S6's account included support from her family, friends and teachers, particularly describing how his friends pushed him and a friendly competition with his sister helped him attain better grades. S3 detailed receiving support post-graduation from the military, reporting on how she received "resources" to help her get to college. S8's teachers "showed they cared" and "went beyond the school" when he was diagnosed with Lymphoma.

*Motivation.* Academic motivation for the participants consisted of reaching the accomplishments for the goals that they have set. S1 found motivation in going to

college, reporting “I wanted to graduate and actually go to college.” S8 described overcoming Lymphoma as a second chance, further explaining:

It’s all summits, made me right my wrongs, even the stuff in the past, it’s the past you can’t change that. But as far as academically I’m doing what I had to do. It was awesome, I was in class every day, there was no skipping. Teachers, they worked with me when I needed them, they were there for me.

S5’s motivation was not to fall behind on her grades and have to attend summer school to make it to the next grade, stating “Summer school is not an option.” S4 found motivation from making others proud of her, reporting:

And not only am I doing it for myself, but I’m doing it for other people because I want (them) to be proud of me... I want to be able to overcome things that I never imagined will happen or overcoming different struggles that I had. I guess, being appreciative of even past experiences and opportunities that I had that were really good for me.

S6’s ability as a student motivated him to be very positive and very optimistic, citing his “strength of the student” as a factor. S7’s account of his motivation became internal, stating “I began to focus more on working on my craft and working on getting better”, but also contributed his motivation to the people he surrounds himself with including his girlfriend, parents, and “a whole bunch of influences.” S9 was internally motivated by his accomplishments, stating:

Well, what it meant to me was that how my higher, and academic learning paid

off. Over the course of 12 years in school, and how it brought excitement to me and joy, because the amount of work that I pushed, and how it changed and improved myself . . . I wanted to do something better, instead of just going to a community college, I wanted to go to a four-year institution where I could get a better education in higher learning . . .

S3's noncommissioned officer encouraged her to go to school, which led to her building up 60 credits for the Green to Gold program. S2 avoided her past and remembered her role as a parent as motivators to push forward and attain her education, reporting "the thought of having to go back to the home life that I came from . . . it helped me stay focus and motivated and to push." She indicated that she wanted better for her children, detailing "that motivated me to go to college."

*Accomplishments.* Participant accomplishments were main motivators to help them overcome their challenges. Descriptions of accomplishments encased earning their scholarships along with other achievements. S3 earned high ranks in the military becoming an officer by entering the Green to Gold program, which provided her the opportunity to go to college. S4 described her accomplishment of winning multiple scholarships, stating "by graduation time, I end up getting quite a few scholarships." S2 was awarded scholarships after receiving "help" from the TRIO and JTSR programs but indicated meeting with the "Lieutenant Governor" about "funding" for the Family Life center was a great accomplishment and "memory." S1 described winning a scholarship from her "high school" and another from an "outside source" to go to college; validating

that her “hard work . . . actually mattered.” S7 indicated that he earned scholarships that allowed him “to play the sport I love” and “ease the weight off my parents’ shoulders”, contributing it to being a “hard worker” and “going to get what I want.” It resulted in him becoming more “aware” of “myself” and “what I was capable of.” S6 received multiple acceptance letters and earned a “full scholarship”, accomplishing a goal to “win the fight” for the “money.” S9 detailed being in the “National Honor Society” and earning a “full scholarship” to the school of his choice. S8 “overcame” his bout with Lymphoma and utilized “MD Caps” to pay for college. S5’s high marks in high school allowed her to be “SGA President” for “3 years straight” and she earned financial help through different sources with the help of her “dance mentor.”

In summary, the results of the structural analysis tell the chronological storyline of four key structural elements: challenge, support, motivation, and accomplishment. These elements were salient in students’ middle school and high school experiences, resembling a continuing cycle that participants experienced frequently while attending a disadvantaged, school setting. It is important to note that students reported this cycle multiple times during middle school and high school.

### **Summary**

Chapter 4 contains the setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and results. The setting of the study detailed where data collection took place as well as description of the interview environment. The demographics of the participants were reported, including their gender, race, year of

study, and level of scholarship attained. Data collection methods described the initial data collection plan, the reassessment of the data collection plan, the data collection environment, and procedure of post-interview data including data storage and data transcription methods. The data collection section contains the summaries of the individual narratives of the participants. Data analysis detailed the procedural steps for narrative analysis techniques, thematic analysis and structural analysis, of the transcribed interview data. The evidence of trustworthiness detailed the methods used to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The results section detailed the themes that emerged from the data and the structural arc detailing the development of academic motivation amongst the participants.

Based on the results of both analytic strategies, the research questions can be addressed as follows. For Research Question 1— How do high school graduates who come from an impoverished, disadvantaged school setting and received academic scholarships to attend college/university describe their experience of academic motivation? —the results of this study point to their experience of academic motivation as a complex, multi-dimensional phenomenon. A key difference in overcoming academic challenges were the students' ability to transfer academic and personal challenges into sources of motivation. Students heavily relied on motivators such as overcoming diseases, self-regulating aggressive behaviors, and inner-strength to succeed as a means to fuel academic achievement. Students stated that they were motivated to attain scholarships because their family couldn't afford to send them to college. Students



relationship with accomplishments throughout their academic careers provided a constant motivation for students, with their ultimate goal of achievement was not paying for school.

For Research Question 2— How do high school graduates who come from an impoverished, disadvantaged school setting and received academic scholarships to attend college/university describe their experience of academic achievement? —study results highlight the challenges experienced to attain academic achievement. Student relationships with teachers were a constant source of motivation for academic achievement. This relationship nurtured a respect that was different from their peers, with students reporting having a close relationship with their teachers in high school. Students described scholarship attainment and paying for school as a source of motivation and academic achievement. Students description of academic achievement came after reporting experiences with challenges, receiving support, and forming motivation often describing the accomplishment as their reward.

Finally, for Research Question 3— What do the narratives of these graduates tell us about the role of social identity in a disadvantaged, impoverished, school setting? — Results of the study reveal these students' ability to maneuver different identities to drive motivation in a disadvantaged, impoverished, school setting. Affiliations to different groups provided motivation to reach academic motivation, with participants using the military, football team, dance team, National Honor Society, Student Government Association, and being an AP student. Students allowed these affiliations to fuel their

motivation, socially and academically, allowing them to find an academic balance in high school. Students were aware of their cultural identity, understanding the impact that culture had on overall student engagement in school. Their learning environment was impacted by peer behaviors, with students' accounts including narratives of aggressive and rebellious behaviors from their peers. These behaviors caused a negative relationship with peers, with students separating themselves from their peers in the school setting. Students enrolled in classes and programs where general students did not have the qualifications to attend, knowing that they would experience less distractions. Despite the separation from their peers in terms of focus, students showed empathy due to their similarities in living conditions and home environment but a general attitude of disappointment with their peers. This view towards college was voiced in student narratives, citing how their peers questioned their desire for college, peers desire to "just make it through", and overall attitude of not caring about college.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

Student academic motivation is a fundamental component to student academic achievement (Collins, 2009; Guay & Bureau, 2018; Meens, Bakx, Kilmstra, & Deissen, 2018). Yet students learning in an impoverished, disadvantaged school setting show lower levels of academic achievement in comparison to students in higher SESs (Berkowitz et al., 2017; Fram, Miller-Cribbs, & Van Horn, 2007). The purpose of this study was to develop a deeper understanding of academic motivation in academic scholarship students who attended disadvantaged schools with poor learning conditions.

The study was focused on the narratives of high school graduates who graduated from Title 1 and/or disadvantaged high schools between 2015-2017 and received academic scholarships to attend a 4-year college/university. Five women and four men participated in this study. There were two freshman, two sophomores, three juniors, and two seniors.

Two forms of narrative analyses, thematic and structural analysis, were used to examine the narrative data collected from participant interviews (Riessman, 2008). Narrative analysis was chosen to understand the disadvantaged student's experience with overcoming social, economic, and resource obstacles to develop academic motivation. Research questions were focused on learning how the students described their experience developing their academic motivation at a disadvantaged, impoverished school, analyzing the role of their social identity in motivation development.

Thematic analysis revealed themes that signified student resilience, external and internal motivators working together, importance of formed academic relationships, difficulty attaining scholarships, and student social identity as a main source of motivation. Four themes emerged from the data: overcoming challenges was a main source of motivation, student-teacher relationships, school relationships aided scholarship attainment, scholarships, and social identity (see themes and subthemes in Table 4). Structural analysis revealed four key elements to student formation of academic motivation: challenges, support, motivation, and accomplishments (see Figure 1)

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

#### **Results of Thematic Analysis**

The purpose of this study was to develop a deeper understanding of academic motivation in academic scholarship students who attended disadvantaged schools with poor learning conditions. Student narratives revealed that students were motivated by overcoming challenges, positive and negative student/teacher relationships, school relationships that aided their scholarship attainment, unconventional routes to earn scholarships, and intrinsic motivation and social identity that motivated academic achievement despite peer behaviors.

**Overcoming challenges was a main source of motivation.** When asked to describe their motivation in school, students reported receiving motivation from the challenges they faced. Challenges that students described were a combination of academic and personal challenges that impacted overall student motivation and

performance (e.g., family views toward academics, broken family structure, lack of academic support, and lack of academic resources within the home). Research has also shown that students who attend disadvantaged school settings face low community participation, home resources, low family support, and family environment (Berger & Archer, 2016; Bullock, 2006, Ibabe, 2016; Kerr et al., 2016; Slack et al., 2004).

Participants also felt that they had to prove themselves because of personal (e.g., pregnant while in high school), structural (being poor), or social (being different) reasons. The social identity academic literature has described this as a form of stereotype threat, in which students enhance their performance to disprove the beliefs and thoughts of others (Alter et al., 2010, Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Owens & Massey, 2011; Schmader, 2010). Students mentioned the influence of their multiple identities, remembering them during times of being off track or needing to refocus.

Additionally, students detailed having academic and personal challenges that became motivation for academic achievement, answering the second research question regarding student descriptions of experience with academic achievement. Students indicated weaknesses in reading and math primarily, showing difficulty with academics more in middle school more than high school. Participants with immigrant families mentioned having difficulty with acquiring English as language, a difficulty that immigrant students face when learning in a disadvantaged, academic environment (Capps et al., 2005; Veron-Feagans & Cox, 2013; Winsler et al., 2016.) Disadvantaged students tend to have low exposure to academic achievement, which directly correlates with their

desire to maintain academic motivation (Berger & Archer, 2016; Chung & Probert, 2011; Kaplan, Gheen, & Midgley, 2002; Ladd, 2012).

Much like previous research, participants also reported that their most challenging relationship in the school environment was their peers. A common finding in the research is that impoverished students identify external factors such home life, peer deviant behaviors, and poor learning environment as more influential (Alfaro et al., 2009; Bugler et al., 2015; Cerasoli et al., 2014; Leana-Tascilar, 2016). Prior studies indicated that negative peer behaviors were difficult for disadvantaged students to manage during school, resulting in students conforming to the pressures of their external environment (Albrecht et al., 2016; Cohen & Prinstein, 2006; Masland & Lease, 2013; Wang & Algozzine, 2011; Wilson et al., 2016). Studies also show that peer influence in disadvantaged school settings leads to low academic achievement, low academic motivation, poor school adjustment, and school anxiety (Colyar & Stich, 2011; Rudasill et al., 2014). However, the students in this study reported an overall resilience from external environmental influences. Thick-rich participant narratives highlight a different response to negative school environments—an intrinsic motivation to be better, a passion to learn despite lack of optimism, desire to attend college, and realizing the importance of education.

Results also differed regarding responses to intrinsic motivation. At-risk adolescent students with low intrinsic motivation are more prone to have difficulty with learning development and academic achievement in their immediate and future education

(Gottfried, Fleming, Gottfried, 2001; Gottfried, Gottfried, Morris, & Cook, 2008; Marcoulides, Gottfried, Gottfried, & Oliver, 2008). These factors of intrinsic motivation are especially low in disadvantaged schools due to poor social environment, poor school climate, poor school adjustment, and low opportunities (Joe et al., 2017; Ladd, 2006; Moy et al., 2014). However, the student descriptions in this study indicated the development of self-regulation and self-determination in the academic setting. Students who exhibit traits of self-determination and self-regulation are more likely to experience academic success (Ames, 1992; Deci & Ryan, 1991; Schunk, 1991), which is a trait that impoverished, disadvantaged students do not often possess due to cognitive and social-emotional delays (Dilworth-Bart, 2012; Raver et al., 2013, Schapkin et al., 2006). Intrinsic academic motivation was described when students encountered personal challenges that impacted their academic performance. Students viewed overcoming personal challenges as an opportunity to academically correct their wrongs or prove themselves academically, reflecting a sense of pride and accomplishment in their abilities.

**Student–teacher relationships: inspirational, misunderstood, influential.**

Student relationships with teachers were also a constant source of motivation for academic achievement. Students had difficulty forming relationships with peers during middle school and depended on teacher relationships to help them navigate with academic and personal difficulties while in school. Studies on teacher relevance in the classroom have suggested that student motivation is directly correlated to teacher

engagement and relationship more than peer relationships (Kelly et al., 2015; Raufelder et al., 2012). Students felt that they were misunderstood by their teachers citing a lack of trust, teaching ability, lack of care, lack of understanding culture, and classroom management as motivators for their viewpoint. Students in this study also described a transformation to turn negative viewpoints into motivation, using them as an opportunity to prove themselves to their teachers, which is not consistent with research highlighting negative teacher interactions fueling negative academic motivation (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008; Albrecht et al., 2015; Bierman et al., 2010; Wilson et al., 2016).

When students evaluated their accomplishments such as scholarship attainment, their teachers were reported as being a main source of support and motivation especially when attaining resources, preparing college admission packages, and working on exam preparation. This has been demonstrated in previous research such as by Miron, Jones, and Kelaher-Young (2010), who found that teachers were motivated to bring their urban students to scholarship standing and students were aware of their teachers setting higher standards due to an introduced scholarship program named the Kalamazoo Promise. Students reported sharing experiences such as prom, support during family death, scholarship attainment, and receiving advice on how to socially behave. However, other research has shown that disadvantaged, impoverished students exhibit negative relationships and social behaviors with their teachers due to low school support, low teacher support, and school climate (Albrecht et al., 2015; Rudasill et al., 2014; Wang & Alogzzine, 2011).



**School relationships aided scholarship attainment.** Students reported having low knowledge on scholarship resources, leading them to rely on teacher and administrative staff to learn more about scholarships. Guidance counselor relationships were noticeable in the interviews, with students signifying them as the gatekeepers of scholarship information. Research on relationships between guidance counselors and students showed that counselors serve their students by collaborating on future goals, advocacy for their students, consultation, and being college and career ready (Baker, Robichaud, Dietrich, Wells, & Schreck, 2009; Bottoms & Sundell, 2016; Harvey, Timmerman, & Vazquez, 2019). Additionally, post high school scholarship attainment occurred for two participants, highlighting how the military and federally funded programs such as the TRIO program and locally-funded JTSR program helped students attain scholarship opportunities for disadvantaged students. However, these types of federally funded programs are not provided to everyone in need, with the TRIO program being offered to only 10% of the eligible population (Ohrtman et al., 2016).

**Scholarships: same goals, different paths, economic stress, disadvantaged views of scholarship synonymous with “help.”** A surprising finding that emerged from the narratives were the unconventional paths that students had to take to earn their scholarships to college. Out of the nine participants, only two received full academic scholarships to attend college, with the other participants taking alternative routes despite reporting high academic performance. Students received scholarships from sources such as the military, football program, their high school, TRIO program, JTSR, and the MD

Caps program. However, scholarship attainment is a rare opportunity for low SES students, with low SES students needing more resources provided to learn about their options (Simmons, 2014).

Students also reported having difficulty finding information pertaining to college, resulting in them receiving assistance to attain their scholarships. Students' family resources were minimal due to lack of experience with the scholarship process. It is important to note that schools servicing impoverished, disadvantaged students receive less family support when applying for college, lack important knowledge regarding college resources and experience, and have less information about college life and financial aid (Goodwin et al., 2016; Roderick, Nagoaka, Coca, & Moeller, 2008; Schneider, Broda, Judy, & Burlander, 2013; Vargas, 2004).

**Social identity: “Being the oddball/different,” racial/ethnic identity, reflection of the team, friends and family.** Students' social identity reflected race-culture, group affiliations, social status, and school status. Students noted that peers maintained different values, morals, and focus such as wanting to be liked by others, recent popular trends, and influences in their community, which led to a difference in achievements in and out of school. Studies also show that academic achievements between highly motivated and demotivated students reside in their ability to achieve, student engagement, teacher relationship, dissonance between home and school, and teacher and class support (Farmer et al., 2010; Khan et al., 2014; Korpershoek et al., 2015; Kurtz-Costes et al., 2014; Masland & Lease, 2013).

Cultural difference and similarities included racial, ethnic, and neighborhood differences that impacted the learning environment with gang fights, cultural misunderstandings, bullying, and teasing. Students who were academically focused noted that their racial and cultural identity was apparent when they approached difficult challenges along the way. Research on racial and cultural identity has indicated that students have used their racial and cultural identity as a means of motivation to prove a stereotype wrong, represent a group proudly, and defend their identity (Fearson, 2012; Fischer, 2010; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Schmader, 2010).

### **Results of Structural Analysis**

Students' reflection of their experiences attending an impoverished, disadvantaged school setting included moments of challenges and triumphs. Students' narratives of their experiences in middle school and high school were similar with emerging elements of challenge, support, motivation, and accomplishments, providing the crux of the students' development of academic motivation. Research on the development of academic motivation centers on the elements of cultural background, SES, student engagement, academic performance, student-teacher relationships, and peer behaviors as strong influencers (Alfaro et al., 2009; Bugler et al., 2015; Joshi & Acharya, 2013; Valle et al., 2015; Wilson et al., 2016).

Students' origins of academic motivation began with the description of the challenges they faced. Students strongly detailed their challenges as being strong motivators in the school settings. Challenges, both personal and academic, called for

students to rely on the support of their teachers, family, peers, and group affiliations. Students' social identity was an immediate source of motivation when students needed to overcome the challenges they faced during school. Student ability to rely on their identity helped them recognize their abilities which pushed them to triumph over their obstacles. The role of the social group in this study reflects current research denoting how students require the support of their social groups to help them form their academic identity in the school setting (Colyar & Stich, 2011; Rudail et al., 2014; Suizzo et al., 2016).

This study's findings highlight a key difference from previous research, i the shift from extrinsic motivation to intrinsic motivation, a transition that is not often seen in disadvantaged students. Students' rich descriptions of finding motivation delved into their response to complex situations provided in their environment. Students used intrinsic motivation to overcome obstacles that were extrinsic in nature, relying on factors such as "the strength of the student", self-determination, self-control, and resilience to influence goal achievement. Research on academic motivation and academic achievement has highlighted these intrinsic motivators as primary factors seen in successful students (Ames, 1992; Deci et al., 1991; Deci & Ryan, 1991; Schunk, 1991). These students responded much differently than their peers when they encountered challenges, with students describing peer behavior as "different" in an academic setting.

The success of achieving scholarships was their main source of academic achievement, showing the most pride in their ability to finance college despite their disadvantages. Students high school achievements highlighted their scholarship

achievement as their accomplishment, with some participants waiting until after high school to reach their achievements. Student scholarship achievement encompassed the support and representation of their different identities, with scholarship attainment being synonymous with social identities. Students highlighted their different identities- AP student, football player, National Honor Society student, military, and student with a disability- as being key contributors to their scholarship attainment.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Limitations of the study involved the myself (researcher), nature of the research design, and methodology. First, my previous experience in working with the target group may have resulted in researcher bias. Member checking was completed with participants twice, a review of notes post-interview and an emailed summary of the findings. However, practices in reflexive journaling occurred during data collection and data analysis (Shenton, 2004; Xerri, 2017). Creating and utilizing an interview guide that aligned with the research questions based on previous research increased dependability of the data collected for the study. Confirmability practices such as describing the procedure of how findings were discovered was included in the study (Cope, 2014; Williams & Morrow, 2009).

I was the sole researcher of the study, which limits other perspectives and interpretations of the data. As I was the only researcher present in the study, a lack of triangulation occurred during data collection and analysis (Anderson, 2010). Dual narrative analysis- thematic and structural- were completed, providing two different

techniques of data analysis (Riessman, 2008).

The specificity of the target group and difficulty finding participants may have reduced the ability to achieve transferability of results. However, considerable effort was made to obtain thick descriptions and connect interpretations to exact text to maximize the dependability of the findings. Findings of the study have limitations with generalizability, along with limitations with geography and number of participants. This study is also limited in its inability to study the relations between and among variables such as gender, race, identity, and year in college. Also, a detailed description of the boundaries (scope and delimitations) of the study was provided (Cope, 2014).

### **Recommendations**

The purpose of this narrative study was to gain a deeper understanding of academic motivation in academic scholarship students who attended disadvantaged schools with poor learning conditions. Rich descriptions of disadvantaged, scholarship students' experience with academic motivation and academic achievement entailed overcoming personal and academic challenges, relying on school relationships during difficult times in school and the scholarship process, and using their social identity as a main source of motivation.

Due to the qualitative nature of this design, statistical relationships could not be analyzed to provide relational results. For instance, an analysis of the relationship between variables for academic motivation and academic achievement with social identity serving as a control variable amongst disadvantaged students could provide

insight into understanding social identity's role amongst a school population. Students' relationships with their guidance counselors was prominent throughout the scholarship process, highlighting the pros and cons of student-counselor relationship in school. Future research could delve into the role of the guidance counselor in disadvantaged school environments, understanding disadvantaged student's perceptions of guidance counselors and their relationship with guidance counselors.

Students reflection on their scholarship experience highlighted a disconnect on scholarship resources, denoting lack of resources, lack of knowledge, and lack of opportunities presented to learn about scholarships. Students also reported having an overall lack of knowledge on colleges in general, highlighting school importance in gathering and learning more about scholarship and college opportunities. Research into exploring disadvantaged students' general knowledge of the scholarship process and the term "scholarship" would be vital, providing an opportunity to understand student misconceptions about college and the available resources to help finance school.

## **Implications**

### **Research Implications**

Disadvantaged, scholarship students overcame difficult conditions to reach academic achievement, often operating multiple forms of motivation to overcome the challenges that were faced. The students powered through poor peer interactions, conditions of poverty, academic failures, and social emotional challenges in order to achieve college scholarships, high academic success, and motivation to achieve future

endeavors in academia. Students exhibited traits of self-regulation, self-determination, extrinsic motivation, and motivation through stereotype threat; all being encompassed in the structure of their social identity. The research attempted to fill a gap in understanding the experience of academic motivation in an impoverished, disadvantaged school setting; adding to the research on academic motivation in disadvantaged school settings by learning how students overcame learning in a disadvantaged, impoverished settings (Cooper & Davis, 2015; Hopson et al., 2014).

Results of this research provide insight on the different motivators disadvantaged students needed to advance in a complex, disadvantaged learning environment. Students needed to focus their energy on achievement, largely relying on support when facing challenges in an academic or personal capacity. Low student support has been seen as a strong indicator of low academic achievement resulting in low academic motivation (Vecchione et al., Wilson et al., 2016). While studies have shown the importance of socio-emotional skills for students' academic achievements, students living in disadvantaged settings tend to have lower levels of social emotional skills leading to lower positive relationships with teachers, lowered ability in acquiring language, and low emotional intelligence (Bosacki & Moore, 2004; Coolahan, Fantuzzo, Menedex, & McDermott, 2000; Olivares-Cuhat, 2011; Raver, 2002; Winsler et al, 2016).

Disadvantaged students should be afforded more opportunities to develop their socio-emotional skills, showing a need for socio-emotional interventions to be placed in the schools. Research on socio-emotional programs have shown that programs aim to



target risk behaviors and help develop student ability to socially engage (Castro-Olivo, 2014; Kim, Oesterle, Catalano, & Hawkins, 2015; Walton et al., 2011). Research based socio-emotional components are included in school interventions such as Take Charge of Your Life program, Positive Psychology Interventions, and Fast Track PATHS program; assisting students in developing the appropriate skills to overcome challenges with behaviors and relationships while in school (Bierman et al., 2010; Bavarian, Duncan, Lewis, Miao, & Washburn, 2014; Muro, Soler, Cebolla, & Cladellas, 2018).

### **Theoretical Implications**

Vivid descriptions from student narratives highlighted how students tapped into intrinsic and extrinsic motivators to excel in a disadvantaged, school environment. Students possessed levels of self-regulation, self-efficacy, and self-determination; with origins of their motivation deriving from their social identity at times. Student narratives included extrinsic motivators that mirrored attribution theory, with extrinsic motivators playing dual roles as positive and negative forms of academic motivation.

Self-determination is when an individual uses their existing inner growth and psychological needs to motivate themselves for higher achievement (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Research on disadvantaged students show that students differ in intrinsic regulation, identified regulation, and controlled regulation in reading, and low self-determination in math and writing (Garon-Carrier et al., 2016; Guay et al., 2010; Renaud-Dube et al., 2014). Self-determination in students results in positive academic outcomes and higher academic achievement (Wehmayer et al., 2012). Studies on self-regulation in

student performance indicate its importance, with self-regulated learners possessing skills such as planning, monitoring, and emotional/behavioral regulation (Karlen, 2016; Lichtinger & Kaplan, 2015; Maulana, Opedendakker, Stroet, & Bosker, 2012).

Narratives detailed students' self-efficacy, with students envisioning the achievement of their goals as a reason for maintaining it at a high level. Baird, Scott, Dearing, and Hamill (2009) found that students with low self-efficacy had low cognitive levels or were students with disabilities. Hen and Goroshit (2014) suggest that students' academic self-efficacy is dependent on their ability to show self-management in an academic setting. Students' narratives were salient with descriptors of peers lacking these intrinsic motivators in an academic setting. Elements of attribution theory was described by participants, with participants using extrinsic motivators such as social groups, scholarships, and academic honors as controlling factors for their motivation.

### **Positive Social Change**

Disparities in education is a growing problem, which is supported by the growing academic achievement gap that exists between the different SES levels (Ladd, 2012; Sirin, 2005; Wilson et al., 2016) While the goal of education is to ensure a fair and equal education to all students, families in disadvantaged neighborhoods do not receive the same access to resources. Students in this study detailed not having support academically and having an overall lack of resources to achieve. Their understanding of academic scholarship highlighted the accomplishments of their academic prowess and winning scholarships as a representation of "academic scholarship." Students from disadvantaged

settings do not have an overall understanding of scholarship opportunities, leading to negative viewpoints and desires for college (Goodwin et al., 2016; Vargas, 2004).

Students are in need of education and exposure to many opportunities that are afforded to them in a disadvantaged school setting. An overwhelming number of students from disadvantaged neighborhoods have low academic achievement in schools, resulting in lower life opportunities (Juon et al., 2014; Ou & Reynolds, 2014). Evidence from this study could potentially provide stakeholders, academics, and community leaders the opportunity to assess the motivational elements found in the results and explore possible similarities with the students in their communities.

It is important to know the motivational influences for students who learn in disadvantaged school settings, with narratives and studies both highlighting student engagement as a main component needed for academic achievement in disadvantaged students. Students were motivated by identity groups such as academic interests, after school programs, racial identity, and family; with these identities promoting the development of skills such self-determination, self-efficacy, self-regulation, and emotional regulation. The formation and application of programs that could reach students based on strongly associated identity groups could engage students into developing positive socioemotional skills, resulting in higher academic motivation and academic achievement amongst disadvantaged students. Previous studies have shown that at-risk students are strongly influenced by their surrounding social environment, with students' behavior, emotions, and motivation being influenced by social groups in school

(Albrecht et al., 2015, Colyar & Stich, 2011; Ladd, 2006; Rudasill et al., 2011; Wang & Algozzine, 2011).

### **Conclusion**

Learning in an impoverished, disadvantaged school setting is a complex, difficult challenge that disadvantaged students face on a daily basis. When developing in an academic environment, students need to experience academic achievement, positive teacher and peer relationships, academic resources, proper home-school communication, and positive academic support from home; with many disadvantaged students not receiving the same opportunity for resources (Anwar, 2019; Farmer et al., 2010; Katy, 2008; Kurtz-Costes et al., 2014; Masland & Lease, 2013; Robnett & Leaper, 2012; Wilson et al., 2016). Disadvantaged students' relationship with academic motivation, academic achievement, and social identity reflects a negative relationship. Disadvantaged students tend to have low academic achievement, low academic motivation, and negative viewpoints associated with their identity; an experience that students in this study also described in their narratives (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008; Conradi et al., 2015; Fischer, 2010; Hoglund et al., 2015; Johnson- Ahorlu, 2013; Schmader, 2010).

The purpose of this narrative study was to gain a deeper understanding of academic motivation in academic scholarships students who attended disadvantaged schools with poor learning environments. Findings from this study revealed that students were motivated by overcoming challenges, students' school relationships aided their scholarship attainment, disadvantaged students' unconventional route to earn

scholarships, students' social identity motivated academic achievement, and students were intrinsically motivated to achieve despite peer behaviors. Examination of motivation development found four key elements to student formation of academic motivation: challenges, support, motivation, and accomplishments. Social identity played multiple roles in the midst of students' development of academic motivation, influencing students to maintain and sustain motivation, as well as aspire to reach new achievements.

Key takeaways from the study highlight the importance of student relationships with their school environment, social identity's importance in disadvantaged students' academic motivation, the importance of overcoming life challenges, and students' ability to maneuver different forms of motivation to succeed in a complex learning environment. Students' formation of academic motivation detailed overcoming challenges with the assistance of their support system, shifting that support into motivation for achievement, and to ultimately succeed. Students in disadvantaged settings face many challenges that deter their desire to succeed in an academic setting, with this study showing that disadvantaged students' ability to academically achieve rely on their inner strength and identity awareness in school.

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## Appendix A: Interview Guide

I'm about to ask you a few questions about your learning experience from middle school to this current moment. This interview is a biographical account about your moments learning in school by describing your most memorable experiences. Remember, if you begin to feel uncomfortable, you can stop at any moment at no penalty to you.

1. Let's start with where you lived during your middle school years.
  - a. Have you lived there your whole life?
  - b. Are your parents from here as well?
2. You said that you attended (insert school name) middle school. Describe the experience of going to (insert school name) middle school.
3. Tell me about a typical (normal) day at your middle school. How would you describe it?
4. How academically oriented (focused on learning) was the school?
  - a. What were your classmates' attitude (views) about academics?
  - b. How about the teachers?
  - c. How about you – what was your experience with the academic part of your middle school? Probe: Can you give me an example? Like did you participate in any academic activities (science fairs; sports)?
  - d. So, based on what you said, how would you describe how motivated you were academically?
5. Can you remember a particular person or group that was most memorable for you there?
  - a. Why do you think this person/this group stands out? (What did this person mean to you?)
6. How would you describe yourself socially at that time?
  - a. How would you describe the people you hung out (chilled) with?
  - b. On a typical day, what would you and your friends do?
7. (If) you felt yourself "going off track", what/who helped you refocus?

8. Tell me about your transition (shift) from middle school to high school.
  - a. What do you remember the most?
  - b. Can you remember a particular person that was most memorable during that time?
    - i. Why do you think this person stands out? (What did this person mean to you?)
  - c. How would you describe yourself at that time?
    - i. How would you describe the people you hung out (chilled) with?
    - ii. On a typical day, what would you and your friends do?
9. You stated that you went to (insert school name) high school.

Describe your high school years.

  - a. Describe the experience of going to (insert school name) high school.
  - b. Tell me about a typical day at your high school. How would you describe it?
10. How academically oriented (focused on learning) was the school?
  - a. What were your classmates' attitudes (views) about academics?
  - b. How about the teachers?
  - c. How about you – what was your experience of the academic part of your high school? Probe: Can you give me an example? Like did you participate in any academic activities (science fairs; sports)?
  - d. So, based on what you said, how would you describe how motivated you were academically?
11. Can you remember a particular person or group that was most memorable for you there?
  - a. Why do you think this person stands out? (What did this person mean to you?)
12. Describe a time in which you felt you wasn't going to make it academically?
  - a. What kept you motivated to continue your education?
13. How would you describe yourself socially at that time?
  - a. How would you describe the people you hung out with?

- b. On a typical day, what would you and your friends do?
14. (If) you felt yourself “going off track”, what/who helped you refocus?
15. Describe the attitude towards going to college at (insert school name) high school.
- a. How did this influence your thinking about college?
16. Describe your experience going through the scholarship process.
- a. Most memorable people/moments during this time?
    - i. Why do you think this person/moment stands out?
      - 1. What did this person/moment mean to you?
17. Based on your experience with the scholarship process, how would you describe the influence of this experience when you selected your school?
- a. Reflecting now, who/what influenced your decision the most? Why?
18. Is there anything else you would like to add?
- a. What currently keeps you motivated?
    - i. Describe how this is reflected in your personality today.

## Appendix B: Categories and Related Codes

| Category   | Codes  |
|--|--|
| Accomplishments                                      | Academic, Personal   |
| Challenges   | Academics, Impoverishment, Other   |
| Family Influence                                     | Home Life, Influence on Views Towards College, Influence on Views Towards Learning   |
| Motivation   | Current Motivation, Feeling Different, Motivation Origins, Motivators from Identity, Motivators from Negative Experiences, Motivators from Positive Experience |
| Perceptions of College                               | Other Perceptions, Participant's Perceptions, Staff's Perceptions, Students'-Peers' Perception   |
| Race-Culture   | Influences in School, Influence on Participant   |
| Resources  | Home Resources, Negative Experience, Positive Experience   |
| Scholarship Process                                  | Other Forms of Financial Support, Positive Experience, Scholarship Challenges, Support System  |
| School Environment (Contains Views Towards Learning) | School Activities, Student Behaviors, Teaching, View Towards Academics- Participant's View, Staff View, Students' View   |
| School Relationships (Perspective of Participant)    | Other Relationships, Peer Relationships, Teacher Relationships   |
| Social Life  | Social Activities, Social Influences, Social Life Regarding Friends, Social Life with Other Students   |