

**Successful African-American Men  
From Childhood to Adulthood**

# SUCCESSFUL AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN

## From Childhood to Adulthood

**Sandra Taylor Griffin, Ph.D.**

*A dissertation submitted to  
the Graduate faculty in Psychology and  
accepted as a requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
The City University of New York*

**KLUWER ACADEMIC PUBLISHERS**  
New York, Boston, Dordrecht, London, Moscow

eBook ISBN: 0-306-47189-2  
Print ISBN: 0-306-46363-6

©2002 Kluwer Academic Publishers  
New York, Boston, Dordrecht, London, Moscow

All rights reserved

No part of this eBook may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording, or otherwise, without written consent from the Publisher

Created in the United States of America

Visit Kluwer Online at: <http://www.kluweronline.com>  
and Kluwer's eBookstore at: <http://www.ebooks.kluweronline.com>

# PREFACE

When one reviews the literature, the background experiences of dysfunctional black men are often explored while few studies examine the motivating triggers for high achieving black men. The research purpose was to reveal the nurturing behavioral settings that high achieving black men used as adolescents and examine whether social capital played a role in helping them negotiate their way out of disadvantage. Thus, how black male adolescents reared in disadvantaged black communities were prepared to have high achieving adult outcomes was investigated. Additionally explored was what role adolescent community settings played in the men's success process. And, more importantly, how did settings accommodate the men's diversity, complexity, and the influence of black culture, and reconcile it to their being responsive to, and able to cope with mainstream America.

The findings support the theoretical construct of Coleman (1988) which argues that effective socialization relies in part on what happens outside the family. Participants for the study were 28 high achieving Black men between the ages of 28 and 77. It was hypothesized that for achievement oriented black male adolescents, a community of like-minded individuals were needed to expand and support their positive goal direction. The results showed the black male adolescent becomes increasingly aware of the world's dimensions, reality, fantasies and possibilities through their person-environment interactional processes. The main context is that, for them, their "life spaces" (environmental interactions) were nested in (a) self, (b) family and home, (c) the neighborhood (peers and adult influences), (d) the black community and (e) their adolescent settings. What is particularly important is that, in turn, these settings were able to act as "refuges from racism" to validate the youths' value, teach them the rules and skills of survival and expand their opportunities within an interconnected web of positive reinforcing community influences.

It is hoped that this research will sensitize psychologists, sociologists and others to the diversity found within communities of color and generate more studies on the complexities of black men and their communities.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I want to express my deepest appreciation to the men of this dissertation, who generously opened up their lives and feelings to me. This study could not have been successfully executed without their honest responses and cooperation and we are all richer for their willingness to be so candid. The greatest debt though is to Dr. Susan Saegert, my dissertation chair, who championed the dissertation's comprehensiveness and relevance and provided guidance and insights as I struggled to make sense of the data. Her direction, editorial leadership, trust in me and encouragement over the years were invaluable and from her guidance I grew tremendously as a researcher. A special thanks to Dr. Anderson J. Franklin and Dr. Pamela Reid, of my dissertation committee for their ongoing commitment and support. Certain ideas in the work they contributed, sparked over the years in my conversations with them and after they exposed me to the writings of significant Black scholars. They also taught me how to tell the men's story in an exciting way and to make the broader conceptualizations. My gratitude is also to Dr. Roscoe C. Brown and Dr. John Cardwell, who took the time to read, edit and give freely of their time and insights in the later stages of my work.

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, the late James D. and Nora Hobson Taylor. Their love, support and belief that I could do anything, led me to this moment from my early beginnings. It is also dedicated to my husband, Percy Griffin for providing an unending source of support. He was there with me from the beginning, encouraging me to never give up and helping me in a variety of ways during the many stages of my research. I thank my daughter, Kammara for her encouragement and for putting up with my late nights and the other oddities of having a mother "in school". And, a special thanks to Kathleen Gaynor and Marie Martin for their patience, assistance, diligence and especially support in the typing of this document. Lastly, I thank God for giving me the strength to persevere.

# CONTENTS

<b>1 INTRODUCTION</b>	1
1.1 Statement of the Problem	2
<b>2. LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	5
2.1 The Factors within Community That Discourage Adolescent from Achieving	5
2.2 The Factors within Community That Encourage Adolescents to Achieve	6
2.3 Adolescents and the Environment: Basic Issues	7
2.4 Adolescence As a Time of Rapid Developmental Change	8
2.5 Lewin's Theory of Psychological "Life Space"	8
2.6 Barker's Theory of Behavioral Settings	9
2.7 Theoretical Rationale	9
2.8 Conceptual Framework	10
<b>3 METHODS</b>	13
3.1 Research Procedure	13
3.2 Description of the Research Instrumentation	16
<b>4 CASE PROFILES</b>	21
4.1 Introduction of Case Profiles	21
<b>5 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS</b>	49
5.1 The Role of the Men's Adolescent Neighborhoods in the Socialization Process	51
5.2 The Role of Family in the Men's Adolescent Socialization Process	56
5.3 Mother's Role	59
5.4 Other Factors Related to Place Use	62
5.5 Academic Levels: School Environment	66
5.6 The Impact of Racism on the Socialization Process	69
<b>6 THE ADOLESCENT SETTINGS</b>	73
6.1 Recollections of the Most Influential Settings Used	73
6.2 Setting Types Further Explored	77
6.3 The Utilization and Role of Significant Adults and Peers in the Settings	80
6.4 Men's Reasons For Using Settings and the Lessons They Learned There	84
<b>7 HOW THE MEN FELT THEIR BEHAVIOR CHANGED AFTER USING THEIR SETTINGS</b>	91
7.1 Developed A New Sense of Self	92
7.2 Opened Up Awareness of a Society They Wanted To Be In	92
7.3 Gained New Socialization and Friendship Skills	94

7.4	Recognized That The World Has Rules and Respected Them	94
<b>8</b>	<b>CONCLUSION</b>	97
8.1	Review of the Research Purpose and Objectives	97
8.2	Summary of Findings	97
8.3	Limits of the Study	106
8.4	Implications for Future Research	107
<b>APPENDIX 1</b>		
	<b>DEMOGRAPHICS</b>	109
<b>APPENDIX 2</b>		119
	<b>FOCUS GROUP INSTRUMENTS</b>	
<b>APPENDIX 3</b>		123
	<b>PARTICIPANT INSTRUMENTS</b>	
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>		129