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Shaping Black Boys: Exploring School Construction of Masculinity and the Impact on Black Male Scholastic Perceptions Toward Academic Achievement and Schooling

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SHAPING BLACK BOYS: EXPLORING SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINITY

AND THE IMPACT ON BLACK MALE SCHOLASTIC PERCEPTIONS TOWARD

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND SCHOOLING

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY

BY

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Finally, to Brie (my sister in the struggle), Kizin, and Dr. Corey Steele, thank you for making yourself available to assist in this process. I am truly grateful.

To all the African American boys who have been (mis)understood, (mis)judged, and (mis)classified.

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ABSTRACT

African American boys face unique challenges. They are more likely to be suspended or expelled from school than any other racial group (Losen, 2015). Equally disturbing, African American male students are largely suspended for more subjective and ambiguous reasons such as appearing "threatening or disrespectful" (Verdugo, 2002, p. 60). Research on teacher bias in the classroom has indicated that, "African American males are generally viewed as possessing characteristics incongruent with academic success (e.g., laziness), valuing athletics over academic accomplishments, and having a propensity toward aggression and violence" (Thomas & Stevenson, 2009, p. 162). These issues experienced by African American males underscore the important role of education, which is likely to be predictive of life trajectory.

Using a qualitative case study design, this study sought to: (1) explore how young African American males conceptualize masculinity, (2) how they make sense of the school's role in constructing Black masculinity, and (3) its impact on their feelings and attitudes toward school. Results of this study indicated that teachers had a vital role in shaping and reinforcing negative constructions of Black masculinity, and that African American boys' perceptions of Black masculinity strongly paralleled these negatively perceived teacher constructions. In addition, the intersectionality of race and gender had a major role in instances of teacher favoritism relative to girls and during occasions of relational aggression, in which teachers did not intervene when girls bullied boys. Implications are presented along with recommendations.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The tragic death of Trayvon Martin ignited a crescendo of outrage and galvanized a movement and heralded a message that "Black Lives Matter" (Schott Foundation, 2015). The systematic shooting of unarmed African American males, resulting in unprecedented media attention, spurred a maelstrom of protests nationally. These incidents, and others like them, underscore the fragility of Black males in American society. This fragility is demonstrated on practically every social marker of well-being and suggests that the prognosis for African American males is one of critical condition (Noguera, 2009).

Despite representing 6% of the U.S. population, African American males constitute 50% of the U.S. prison population (Noguera, 2009). Given current trends, the NAACP forecasts that, "one in three black males born today can expect to spend time in prison during his lifetime" (NAACP, 2014). These dismal statistics has led researchers such as sociologist Joe Feagin to deduce that "being black means living with racial oppression from cradle to grave" (Feagin, 2001, as cited in Feber, 2007, p. 11).

Complicating matters, 38.2% of black children live in poverty, the highest rate for any racial or ethnic group (U.S. Census, 2010). The unemployment rate for young black males is twice that of all young males (Joint Economic Committee, 2008). Schott Foundation's 50 State Report on African American Males indicates that only 59% of African American males graduate from high school in comparison to 70% of white males (Schott Foundation, 2015). Even when

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controlling for poverty, the academic achievement gap between African American males and White males is significant (Moore, Henfield, & Owens, 2008). Not surprisingly, African American males are also more likely to be overrepresented in special education and underrepresented in honors or advanced placement courses (West-Olatunji, Baker & Brooks, 2006). Furthermore, African American males in special education are more likely to be diagnosed with an intellectual disability or emotional disturbance (Ladner & Hammons, 2001).

In addition to overrepresentation in special education, African American males have the highest office referrals, suspension and expulsion rates than any other racial or ethnic group (Losen, 2015; Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May, & Tobin, 2011). And when juxtaposed with their peers from other racial and ethnic groups, African American males are more likely to receive more severe discipline for even minor infractions (Rocques & Paternoster, 2011). Equally disturbing, African American male students are largely suspended for more subjective and ambiguous reasons such as appearing "threatening or disrespectful" (Verdugo, 2002, p. 60), while their Caucasian peers "are suspended for guns, weapons, and drug violations" (Verdugo, 2002, p. 60).

Paradoxically, schools are emblems of learning and development, however many of the issues that beset African American males are largely induced and perpetuated by the educational system itself, or as Nogeura (2009) notes, "rather than serving as a source of hope and opportunity, schools are sites where black males are marginalized and stigmatized" (p. 22). Love (2014) drawing from Foucault's (1977) landmark work *Discipline and Power*, notes that schools function to control African American male bodies and are "structured spaces where deviant

behavior, which is classified subjectively based on one's positionality, is fundamental to the dynamics of classroom power" (p. 296).

Additionally, schools are often spaces in which students learn about and experience racial differences through implicit and subliminal messages communicated to students regarding unofficial and acceptable social norms (Wren, 1999), as well as through the process of sorting and classifying students against a hierarchy of orthodoxies and established norms (Wren, 1999). Through this hidden curriculum, school systems communicate "to students the knowledge that is most valued, and the behaviors and practices that are considered appropriate. Students learn these rules, norms and characteristics through the school socialization process and school organization" (Rahman, 2013, p. 661).

For students, these messages are often communicated through curricula and school and classroom structural policies and practices (Rahman, 2013). The hidden curriculum can also manifest in teacher perceptions of students, which is often filtered through a racialized prism (Ferguson, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1999). According to Villegas (2007), ''Black students tend to receive less attention, less encouragement, less praise, less time to respond, less eye-contact, and more verbal and nonverbal criticism (especially Black boys)'' (p. 375). Research on teacher perceptions of African American males is troublesome. According to Love (2014) teachers often view African American boys as oppositional, intimidating, and less academically capable than white males. Moreover, the U.S. Department of Justice found that racial disparities in school discipline emerge as early as preschool. While only 18% of African American children comprise preschool enrollment, data indicated that 48% received suspensions, and for every four out-of-school suspensions, boys received at least three of these suspensions (U.S. Department of

Education, 2014). These actions are a manifestation of microaggressions, a term coined by psychiatrist Chester Pierce to characterize subtle, commonplace indignities, has become so interwoven into the American educational system as to become normalized (Noguera, 2009). This is noteworthy as racial stereotypes can have a profound negative impact on student academic achievement. The impact of stereotypes on academic and test performance has been chronicled in the work of researchers Steele and Aronson (1995) who refer to this phenomenon as "stereotype threat". According to Steele, stereotype threat is defined as a "socially premised psychological threat that arises when one is in a situation or doing something for which a negative stereotype about one's group applies" (Steele, 1997, p. 614).

Stereotypes of African American boys can place them at odds with the dominant school culture as "the socially constructed racial and gender identity of Black males has permanently cast them as violent criminals, too aggressive to educate" (Love, 2014, p. 300). Majors and Billson (1992) theorize that African American males have been conditioned to adapt to oppression and inequality by adopting what they refer to as "cool pose." According to Majors and Billson, cool pose is a coping mechanism that African American males have constructed to channel their masculinity within a white supremacist patriarchal society, of which the school system is a microcosm:

> By cool pose we mean the presentation of self many black males use to establish their male identity. Cool pose is a ritualized form of masculinity that entails behaviors, scripts, physical posturing, impression management, and carefully crafted performances that deliver a single, critical message: pride, strength, and control. (p. 4)

Because of a lack of cultural sensitivity and understanding, within most school systems, young African American males are often perceived as behaving in a manner running counter to the acceptable standard of majoritarian norms (Majors & Billson, 1992). Given the cultural

incongruence between White teachers and underrepresented students, "this possible mismatch in values can increase the likelihood of a discrepancy between what minority students perceive as being "appropriate" behavior and what teachers and administrators hold as acceptable standards for student behavior" (Bradshaw, Mitchell, O'Brennan, Leaf, & Graesser, 2010, p. 509). In reality, some young African American males may be expressing celebrated or acceptable cultural mores rather than cultivating contemptuousness or insubordination (hooks, 2004). With these factors considered, black masculinity within the school system is a complex issue.

Despite its complexity, exploration into the school's role in the construction of masculinity and its impact on the perceptions of African American boys is a critical issue that merits examination, especially given the state of African American boys. Another area worthy of exploration is the phenomenon of disidentification. Steele (1992) examined disidentification, which he defined as "the lack of a relationship between academic self-esteem and global self-esteem, with the implication that there has been a relationship in the past" (Osbourne, 1997, p. 728). In a longitudinal study, Osbourne found that more than any other racial or ethnic group examined, African American boys were found to disidentify with academics the most. Similarly, Cokley, McClain, Jones, and Johnson (2011) investigated racial and gender differences relative to disidentification. Findings indicated gender differences relative to academic disidentification, as African American boys exhibited these characteristics. These characteristics however, were not significantly demonstrated among African American female students. This suggests that, when juxtaposed with African American boys, African American girls placed higher value on educational achievement and attainment.

While the notion of how schools construct masculinity has been researched, (Ferguson, 2001; Schnyder, 2012) how African American boys make sense of these constructions, and the impact on their attitudes toward school and the connectivity to academic disidentification is an under researched area that has yet to be explored. Thus, this study will not only explore African American boys' perception of the school's role in the shaping of masculinity, but also how this affects their feelings and attitude towards school. This is a significant aspect of the research on school construction of African American masculinity, as it will provide insight into the role schools and institutions play in the under examined phenomenon of academic disidentification.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how young African American males conceptualize masculinity and how they make sense of the school's role in constructing Black masculinity. Additionally, this study will also explore how their understanding of the school's shaping of, and impact on masculinity, affects their attitude towards school. The study will seek to fill the knowledge base in this area by employing qualitative analysis through a case study design of a racially diverse American middle school. The study will seek to answer the following research questions: how do young African American boys conceptualize masculinity? From their standpoint, to what role does the school play in the construction of black masculinity? And finally, does this construction impact their feelings and attitude toward scholastic achievement? If so, how?

Delimitations

Although the focus of the study is an important and under researched area, there are several limitations that should be noted. Given that African American males are the focal point

of this analysis, and the population from which the sample will be drawn is only representative of that setting, results are not generalizable. Additionally, while the veracity of participants' responses is assumed, responses may be impacted by the researcher's gender as participants may be uncomfortable disclosing their experiences relative to issues of masculinity. Response truthfulness may also be influenced by hegemony, which is defined as, "The influence researchers have on others. Who has the power in inquiry and what is required" (Lincoln, Lyhman, & Guba, 2011, p. 111). Thus, it is imperative for the researcher to always express objectivity.

Researcher Positionality

As an African American, I bring my own personal biases to this research. Attending predominately African American K-12 schools, and residing in a community that mirrored this constituency brought exposure to educational inequity and knowledge of the socio-political issues impacting urban education universally and African American boys specifically. These experiences profoundly impact my world-view relative to race and racism and systemic inequalities. As Lincoln and Denzin (2005) aptly note, "How we know is bound with what we know, where we learned it, and what we have experienced" (p. 1059). While personal experiences remain salient, as a researcher, I am most interested in what emerges from the data and how this information can help enlighten current school practices relative to the education of African American boys.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The notion of Black masculinity is a highly involved, complex issue. As will be described in this chapter, more than any other group, Black males are confronted with major challenges jeopardizing their academic and economic potential, as well as their psychological, emotional, and physical well-being.

Navigating a White supremacist patriarchal society, Black males are wrongly characterized within society as intellectually inferior, dangerous, aggressive, animalistic, and criminally inclined. The educational system, which instinctively should serve as a space for nurturing and development, is oftentimes complicit in aiding and abetting negative outcomes for African American males as a sociocultural institution that reflects society. Practices such as exclusionary discipline and special education referrals, wherein African American males are removed from the general education setting, is an outgrowth of negative stereotypes and biases that have become normalized within the educational system (Noguera, 2009; Skiba et al., 2011).

Accordingly, this chapter will provide an overview of Black masculinity in America, identity formation theory and racial identity, as well as school practices such as racial disproportionality in school discipline and the overrepresentation of African American males in special education, both of which are moderated by implicit bias, which refers "to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner" (Kirwan Institute, 2014), and are issues that besiege African American males. Before

highlighting these areas, it is important to provide a brief, but succinct overview of critical race theory, which has become "an epistemological and methodological tool, to help analyze the experiences of historically underrepresented populations across the k-20 educational pipeline" (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015, p. 206) and will serve as the study's theoretical framework and help guide the exploration of Black masculinity construction within the educational milieu.

Conceptual Framework

To explore the concept of Black masculinity and how this construct impacts the educational experiences of Black males, the organizing framework for this study will be Critical Race Theory (CRT). Given that CRT seeks to center the narrative of communities of color, and is grounded in a commitment to social justice, contextualizing the exploration of Black masculinity construction using a critical race lens, serves to "center" the voices of African American males (Ladson-Billings, 1999). According to Smith-Maddox and Solórzano (2002), viewing inequity in education through the prism of critical race theory helps to "identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom" (p. 68). Since a critical race theory is an appropriate framework for examining school construction of black masculinity, it is important to provide an overview of this conceptual framework, which will guide this investigation.

CRT recognizes that white privilege and white supremacy permeate society and perpetuate oppression and disenfranchisement of persons of color, and rejects the notion of liberalism and post- racial formulations or "color-blind" ideology, which ignores the perniciousness and pervasiveness of institutionalized racism (Ladson-Billings, 1999).

CRT emerged in the mid-1970's in response to stagnation of the Civil Rights Movement and what many perceived as the increased dismantling of racial progress (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993). Many believed that the era necessitated a paradigm shift and conceptualization of the complex intersection of "race, racism, and American law" (p. 461).

Beginning with the influential work of Alan Freeman and Derrick Bell, who had become frustrated and discontented with the laggard movement of racial progress, critical race theorists "argued that the traditional approaches of filing amicus briefs, conducting protests and marches, and appealing to the moral sensibilities of decent citizens produced smaller and fewer gains than in previous times" (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Consequently, the work of Bell and Freeman galvanized other theorists and scholars, who were equally frustrated with conventional civil rights strategies and sought a reconceptualization the intricacies of racism. As an outgrowth of the critical legal studies movement, which critiqued American meritocracy, however failed to acknowledge the importance of race in their critique (Ladson-Billings, 1999), "CRT became a logical outgrowth of the discontent of legal scholars of color" (p. 3). CRT has been applied to education (Ladson-Billings, 1999), and exists in various incarnations including Asian critical theory (AsianCrit), Latinx critical theory (LatCrit) (Bernal, 2002), American Indian/ Indigenous people critical theory (TribalCrit), Feminist critical theory (FemCrit), Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) and White critical theory (WhiteCrit) (Annamma, 2015; Yosso, 2006).

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), there are five essential foundations of CRT: (1) the notion that racism is commonplace and not anomalous, (2), the view of interest convergence, (3) the social construction of race, (4) intersectionality, and (5) storytelling or

counter narratives. The following sections briefly highlight each of these essential elements of critical race theory.

Normalcy of Racism

While some scholars who investigate issues of race may perceive racism as a random occurrence perpetrated by evil-doers (Ladson-Billings, 2013), a distinction of critical race theorists is the notion of the inherency of racism as "the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this country" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, pp. 6-7). CRT assumes that racism is not anomalous, that is, it is so deeply woven into the fabric of society that it has become normalized. According to Ladson-Billings (1999), "racism is a permanent fixture of American life...the strategy of those who fight for social justice is one of unmasking and exposing racism in its various permutations" (p. 213).

Interest Convergence

Another assumption of CRT is that of interest convergence. According to the late Harvard law professor Derrick Bell, considered a progenitor of Critical Race Theory, White America will herald social justice only when mutually beneficial, or as Gloria Ladson-Billings (2013) suggests, "interest convergence is about alignment, not altruism" (p. 38). An example of interest convergence arose when then Arizona Governor Evan Mecham halted the observance of the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday, citing the state's inability to finance another paid holiday and King's unmerited recognition for a day of honor. In response to this, several conventions were cancelled as well as the National Basketball Association's All-Star game, which constituted millions of dollars in lost revenue for the state. Not surprisingly, the King Holiday was

reinstated, albeit as an unpaid holiday. Thus, the state of Arizona was not demonstrating magnanimity so much as an alignment with its own economic interests (Ladson- Billings, 2013).

Race as a Social Construct

Critical race theorists hold that while biological and anthropological research indicates that there are no biological differences, aside from phenotype, between humans, there is an acknowledgement that the social construction of race draws a line of demarcation in which marginality is ascribed to some groups and privilege to others who are positioned highest on the hierarchy of whiteness (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Accordingly, Brown and Jackson (2013), point to research by Harris (1993) in which she argued that whiteness is "an intangible property interest" which "carries with it greater economic, political, and social security" (p. 19). To illustrate this point, Harris recounts the story of her grandmother, a light-skinned Black woman, who pretended to be White to secure employment at a department store serving middle class whites. Further, Harris noted that white privilege, through the American legal system, sustains and protects the notion of whiteness as a commodity forming the basis upon which "legal disputes are framed, argued and adjudicated" (p. 19).

Intersectionality

According to Solórzano and Bernal (2001) "Intersectionality means the examination of race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation, and how their combinations play out in various settings" (p. 312). Intersectionality recognizes the complexities of oppression and that disempowerment is not limited solely to race. As we are comprised of a constellation of identities (race, gender, ability, and so forth) we cannot assume that societal responses to us is

based on only one facet of our identity. Instead, each identity/category "may be operating simultaneously" (Ladson-Billings, 2013, p. 40).

Storytelling and Counter Narratives

Another proposition of CRT is the notion of storytelling or counter narratives. Historically, the underrepresented groups have used storytelling as a means of resisting oppression and to "challenge prevailing myths" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013, p. 30). An important function of storytelling is to "counteract" the voices of the dominant society and center persons of color, whose voices have been historically stifled by White supremacy and experiences delegitimized by "the valuing of daily experiences with racism as necessary…" (Stovall, 2006, p. 244). Further CRT utilizes counter narratives "as valid forms of 'evidence' and thereby challenge a 'numbers only' approach to documenting inequity or discrimination that tends to certify discrimination from a quantitative rather than a qualitative perspective" (Dixon & Rousseau, 2005, p. 11). These narratives are contextualized personal accounts providing "social-political critiques based upon experiences described in the stories" (DeCuir-Gunby & Walker-DeVose, 2013, p. 252).

Given that CRT seeks to provide voice for communities of color, it is a particularly relevant conceptual framework in examining the dynamics of African American males and the educational system as Love (2014) notes, "CRT reveals how teachers' color-blind or race-neutral views allow them to insist that racism does not exist and that Black males have an equal chance to succeed as their White male counterparts" (p. 299). By centering the societally delegitimized voices and experiences of African American males, this study is foregrounded by the understanding that racism is endemic and is a permanent societal fixture, and that "Black and

male in America has always been a "sociopolitical issue" (Clatterbaugh, 1997, p. 159). As the

focal point of this study is Black masculinity construction, it is important to provide a historical

context of Black masculinity in America.

Black Masculinity in America

The construct of "blackness" in America originated during the interactions between

Africans and Europeans prior to the transatlantic slave trade. The idea of race is a relatively new

concept that emerged as a means of "reconciling chattel slavery" (Alexander, 2012). The

archetype of the Black brute uncivilized workhouse, was augmented by the incompetent and

lazy, ''Step and Fetch It, Coon, uniform wearing servant, dancing entertainer, the sexual predator

(whose prey, of course were White women), and the always accommodating Uncle" (Isom,

2007, p. 409. In his book, *Black Masculinity and the U.S. South*, Riché Richardson (2007),

postulates that the insidious prototype of the "black rapist" configured Black masculinity as

inherently pathological as the Black male body became patently sexualized, and ushered in

Darwinian manifestations of Blacks as inferior and subhuman along the continuum of humanity.

Richardson notes:

> This myth was dehumanizing to the extent that it marked black men as predatory and
> bestial. It linked them to an inherently perverted sexuality. In the period after
> Emancipation, this script of black men as lustful and sexually insatiable…That is to say,
> its content as a raced, sexed, and gendered ideology was fed on some levels by the
> material conditions of a slave system that has defined some black men as bucks and
> breeders and linked the black male body to sexual excess and licentiousness. (p. 36)

The incessant characterization of the lustful, incompetent, and mentally deficient Black

male was furthered by actions to maintain their subordination such as public beatings, public

stripping at slave auctions, the emasculation and usurping of power to protect enslaved Black

women from rape from slave masters, and the perpetuation of degradation and deterioration of

manhood by the adoption and utilization of the terms "nigger" and "boy":

> When masters whipped slave men in front of their families, they undercut male slaves'
> pretense of authority over their wives and children. Moreover, despite the efforts of
> enslaved men to provide necessities and material comforts for their families, they
> typically did not supply the bulk of the family's essential needs. All these factors
> restricted the power male slaves maintained in their day-to-day lives. For masters, the
> ideal slave man was the perpetual "boy", the childlike, dependent, and submissive
> Sambo. (Forret, 2011, p. 26)

Enslaved black men reacted to these norms by cultivating a consciousness that enabled them to

navigate this complex system:

> In the slavery period of the old South and later in the harder-to-read North, the black
> male learned through almost daily experience that, somehow, he had been assigned a
> restricted role. He learned to play that role with finesse and artistry that became part of
> his culture. Around whites he mastered the art of concealment, his mask constructed…of
> innocence and ignorance, childishness and humility, and obedience and deference.
> (Majors & Billson, 1992, p. 59)

Underpinning these conceptualizations was the pathologized subversion of White, male

patriarchal authority by enslaved black men. This "resistant masculinity" conflated Black

masculinity with violence and aggression as enslaved insurrectionists such as Nat Turner figured

prominently in these associations (Forret, 2011, p. 27). As Isom (2007) notes, "It has thus been

argued that masculinity for the African American male became constructed around aggression,

lack of success, sexual prowess and always knowing one's place in comparison with the White

man" (p. 409). However, violence became a tool for enslaved Black men to militate against the

continual confrontation of emasculation as Bell hooks notes in her essay, Reconstructing Black

Masculinity:

> Frederick Douglass did not feel his manhood affirmed by intellectual progress. It was
> affirmed when he fought man to man with the slave overseer. This struggle was a
> "turning point" in Douglass's life: "It rekindled in my breast the smoldering embers of

liberty. It brought up my Baltimore dreams and revived a sense of my own manhood. I was a changed being after that fight. I was nothing before—I was a man now" (Douglass, 1994, p. 286, as cited in hooks, 2004, p. 3).

Post-Slavery Construction of Black Masculinity

Post-slavery constructions of masculinity sustained an impenetrable undercurrent of Black men as inherently violent, aggressive, hypersexual, and lazy (Majors & Billson, 1992). Despite these characterizations, the Reconstruction period saw an unprecedented number of African American men ascend to political positions. The Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteen Amendments created a passageway for Black men to serve in the U.S. Congress and Senate. Unfortunately, these advancements were short- lived as federal troops in the South, who had been put in place by the federal government during the administration of President Ulysses S. Grant to protect newly freed Blacks, were removed because of the Compromise of 1877—a compromise designed to resolve the bitterly contested presidential election, which resulted in the election of Rutherford B. Hayes. These actions marked the nadir of the Reconstruction period, and ushered in an era of resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan, the usurping of political rights and freedoms, and dooming African Americans to decades of terror and disenfranchisement.

In the decade following Reconstruction, the clear majority of media depictions of Black men embodied the continuation of ubiquitous stereotypical caricatures. Although promulgation of these caricatures continued, some efforts were made, with little success, to invert racial stereotypes by authors such as Charles W. Chestnutt in works such as *The Marrow of Tradition*, an allegorical tale recounting the 1898 Wilmington, North Carolina coup d'état by White racist insurrectionists (Caster, 2011). However, these satirical works unwittingly and unintentionally perpetuated stereotypical images of Black men.

Perpetuation of these stereotypical images continued to persist with the rise of Jim Crowism in the South as appropriation of "blackness" in the form of minstrelsy by White performers became a popular commodity (White, 2011). However, as African Americans began to demand their civil rights, the looming "black power" movements saw the recirculation and amplification of the dangerous black male archetype (hooks, 2004). This archetype figured prominently in the commodification of the hypermasculine Black male in hardcore rap who was characterized, according to Nofleet (2006) "as exotic, dangerous, and feared, yet simultaneously appealing and marketable" (as cited in White, 2011, p. 25).

The notion of the dangerous and aggressive Black man assumes a patriarchal White supremacist preoccupation in which Black men are given "the most attention when they are violently acting out" (hooks, 2004, p. 57). That is, unless this violence is against other Blacks. Convincingly, hooks argues this point when recounting media obsession with O.J. Simpson:

> Mass media never cared or called attention to O.J. Simpson's violent abuse of black female partners, but when he was accused of murdering a white woman, the documentation was already in place to prove his violence toward her. Had the patriarchal state checked his violence when it was just a black-on-black thing, he might have learned nonviolence and never hurt another woman physically, including his white wife. (p. 57)

Moreover, "the darkening of Simpson's face on the cover of a popular magazine reinforced the correlation between blackness and danger" (Feber, 2007, p. 19).

In the sporting arena, blackness and danger evokes historical depictions of the Black "buck" and "savage" whose "representations, built upon physicality is the centrality of the Black body" (Isom, 2007, p. 417). Black male athletes are revered for their athletic prowess as it reinforces the "Black savage" and big "Black buck" symbols and mythology, however at the same time they are feared. Athleticism becomes a means by which White America can be

entertained by Black males, while simultaneously controlling Black bodies. Thus, the fear and

dangerousness associated with Black males are tempered, as sports are considered the "natural

domain of the African American male, the height of his purpose and place in society" (p. 417).

Feber (2007) argues "depictions of African American athletes may also reinforce the traditional

hierarchy by reifying stereotypes of their animal-like nature, emphasizing their sexuality,

aggressiveness, and physical power" (p. 19).

Collins (2005) concludes that White coaches function as father surrogates, particularly

for Black male athletes. She argues that Black males are imagined as children who must follow

the rules instituted by their father surrogates to be deemed "acceptable" and "non-threatening"

"good blacks." Those who fail to conform to White male domination are then vilified as

untamed:

> The disproportionate media coverage focused on violent or sexual assault charges
> brought against Black male athletes, compared with similar charges against White male
> athletes, reifies this stereotype of Black men as inherently dangerous and in need of
> civilizing. The message is that all Black men are essentially bad boys but that some can
> become "good guys" if tamed and controlled by White men. (p. 20)

Or as Ladson-Billings (2011) contends, "The love–hate relationship that we have with Black

males is buffered by two equally strong sentiments – fear and the need for control" (p. 9).

According to Love (2014), "these racial constructions…are fundamental to America's

conceptual narrative concerning Black males as criminals inside and outside of school walls" (p.

300). These images are distorted and commoditized by the music, television, and film industries.

Hip Hop culture is one the tools used for this distortion and is "rooted in the Eurocentric psyche

and imagination, in that the hegemonic images disseminated by rap music are rooted in centuries

of Black males being cast as Black brutes" (p. 300). Consequently, these symbols attached to

Black males are reinforced in the school system as efforts are made to control black bodies

wherein Black males are cast as criminals:

> …schools begin to mimic prison with dress codes (e.g., no hoodies allowed), limiting or
> prohibiting social interaction between students in hallways and cafeterias, removing
> ''disruptive'' students from classrooms in handcuffs, using Tasers on elementary school
> students, and regulating students' recess or free time in a manner reminiscent of a prison
> yard. (Love, 2014, p. 301)

This externalized imaging of Black males of which little is of "his own or defined by his own

values of humanness or maleness" (Isom, 2007, p. 409), oftentimes is internalized as a self-

fulfilling prophecy wherein Black males become complicit in the reinforcement of stereotyped

images (Noguera, 2004).

Societal amplification of these images creates a narrative of suspicion (Isom, 2007) in

which Black males become targets of surveillance as they are "driving while black", "talking

while black" and "walking while black." According to Feber (2007), "the depiction of Black men

as inherently inferior, violent, and hypersexual and the need to control Black men remain

common and central across the spectrum" (p. 19). Thus, the systematic shootings of unarmed

Black males are symptomatic of societal fear and the need to exert control over black male

bodies.

In their seminal work, Majors and Billson (1992) postulate that African American men

have developed a means of coping with societal oppression through self-preservation schemas.

Majors and Billson refer to this coping strategy as "cool pose":

> By cool pose we mean the presentation of self many black males use to establish their
> male identity. Cool pose is a ritualized form of masculinity that entails behaviors, scripts,
> physical posturing, impression management, and carefully crafted performances that
> deliver a single, critical message: pride, strength, and control. (p. 4)

For Majors and Billson "cool pose" serves as a means for increasing one's self-worth, and is, "comparable to the kind White males more easily find through attending good schools, landing prestigious jobs, and bringing home decent wages" (p. 5). By appearing emotionally detached, African American men can reclaim emotional power that has been stripped from them as a consequence of oppression and the perpetual after effects of slavery. The consequences of Black male self-expression however "often fuel pejorative stereotypes that distinguish Black males as troublesome and threatening" (Monroe, 2005, p. 46), or as West (1994) notes:

> For most young black men, power is acquired by stylizing their bodies over space and time in such a way that their bodies reflect their uniqueness and provoke fear in others. To be "bad" is good not simply because it subverts the language of the dominant white culture but also because it imposes a unique kind of order for young black men on their own distinctive chaos and solicits an attention that makes others pull back with some trepidation. This young black male style is a form of self-identification and resistance in a hostile culture; it also is an instance of machismo identity ready for violent encounters. (p. 128)

Essentially, Black males who do engage in deviant behavior, in some ways, may be exerting their own sense of power within a White male patriarchal system of oppression.

Identity Formation Theory

A discussion regarding Black masculinity must include an exploration into identity formation theory, given that identity development may differ for African American males due to the historical legacy of slavery and stereotypical characterizations of Black males. In his theoretical framework for the stages of identity development, Psychologist Erik Erikson, who formally presented his theory in his book Childhood and Society, posited eight stages of development: Trust vs. Mistrust (ages 0-2); Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt (ages 2-4); Initiative vs. Guilt (ages 4-5); Industry vs. Inferiority (ages 5-12); Identity vs. Role Confusion (ages 13-19); Intimacy vs. Isolation (ages 20-39); Generativity vs. Stagnation (ages 40-65); and

Ego Integrity vs. Despair (ages 65-death). According to Erikson, individuals can advance from one stage to another. However, at each stage an individual is confronted with a "crises", or opposing or conflicting forces. Psychosocial development is dependent upon successful resolution of the "crises." The outcome of successful resolution at each stage was the development of a "basic strength" or virtue. Conversely, unsuccessful resolution resulted in "pathology." For Erikson, psychosocial development paralleled the epigenetic principle, an embryological term referencing the development of an embryo to a fetus, and then to a child (Fleming, 2004). If there were physiological disruptions during a critical period of development, the disruption would negatively impact the child's further growth. Likening the epigenetic principle to his own psychosocial development theory, Erikson postulated that at each stage, an individual faces a crisis that must eventually be resolved. As each stage builds upon the next, resolution of the crisis, according to Erikson, would impact the ensuing stages of development.

According to Erikson, adolescence is capsulated during the Identity vs. Role Confusion stages of his psychosocial theory. This stage has the adolescent questioning who they are in relation to society as they experience rapid developmental changes (Erikson, 1950). This period of tumult may lead to rebelliousness and turmoil (Block, 2011). For Erikson, socialization and interactions with adults (other than parents) and peers help facilitate self-discovery. Unsuccessful resolution of the quest for identity, according to Erikson may lead to an "identity crisis" or unhealthy role formation while, positive identity resolution results in "fidelity" or "truthfulness and consistency to one's core self or faith in one's ideology (Fleming, 2004, p. 12).

Erikson's (1980) identity development theory is a useful lens to contextualize identity development and the influence of schooling as Erikson's theory focuses on how an individual's

interaction with their environment impacts, either positively or negatively, identity development. The limitation of Erikson's theory is that it fails to acknowledge the impact of racial biases on human development or integrate racial identity development. Therefore, before continuing a discussion of Erikson's theory, it is helpful to incorporate racial identity development theory.

Racial Identity Development Theory

Noguera (2009) contends that awareness of race emerges during early childhood, but it is dependent upon context. Children in heterogeneous settings develop an awareness of racial differences as they interact with peers from different racial and ethnic groups. Comparatively, young children from less diverse environments are less likely to develop an awareness of racial difference when they "see their race as the norm" or "perceive characteristics associated with it…as markers of inferiority" (p. 4).

According to DeCuir-Gunby (2009), "Racial identity theory involves the examination of the extent to which people of color perceive themselves to share a common racial heritage with their ascribed racial group" (p. 103). Conceptualizing Black racial identity (BRI) through this lens, BRI can be defined as commonality of heritage, phenotype, experiences, and one's feelings regarding his or her place within the "Black race individually, the Black race collectively, and their perceptions of other racial groups" (p. 103). Relating Black racial identity to schooling, BRI is "impacted by the school context, including interactions with teachers, relationships with peers, and academic issues" (p. 118). Research on racial identity for African American adolescents and the impact of schooling has produced conflicting findings. While some racial identity research has concluded that African American adolescents with strong racial identity development fare well in school because racial identity serves as a protective factor, other research has indicated

that African American adolescents disidentify with academic achievement "especially when they view being African American as antithetical to doing well in school" (Nasir, McLaughlin, & Jones, 2009, p. 74). Thus, the schooling practices and norms within a student's educational environment have a significant impact on academic outcomes as "school contexts…make different configurations of identities possible, through modeling, norms, and social interaction" (p. 77).

According to Isom (2007), "schooling emerges as a place where identity is both formed and played out" (p. 410). African American males receive externally constructed messages that communicate stereotyped misrepresentations of African American masculinity, which become internalized. Consequently, African American males must navigate ''multi-textured socialization experiences from which complex identities develop'' (Stevens, 1997, p. 146). These complex identities are what DuBois (1903) referred to as "double consciousness," which he described as the ''peculiar sensation...of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity'' (p. 2). DuBois speaks of not only the notion of "othering," but also the notion of viewing one's self through a misconstrued prism constructed by others as Isom (2007) concludes:

> …internalized sense of a racialized self emerges from a cauldron of racial projects. Children develop their sense of self in a school context marked by race. Social interactions with White children tell them that Whites have the power to name and that ''Black'' is imaged as the physical, as style and humor. Engagements with their teachers, curriculum, and school structure remind them that representations of Whiteness equate with knowledge, while ''Blackness'' is not only oppositionally constructed, but criminal to boot. (p. 421)

The complexities of Black racial identity are also mirrored in the theories that promulgate racial identity development. Cross (1971) was one of the first theorists to examine racial identity

development. In his Nigresence theory, Cross conceptualized a process of racial identity in which an individual wholly embraces their Black identity. Each stage comprises a countering negative and positive self-identification outcome. Criticisms of Cross' framework has led to an augmentation of his theory (Cross & Vandiver, 2001) to encompass the complexities of Black racial identity development. The expanded framework includes identity clusters at each stage, which are impacted by interactions within one's environment "and result from conversion experiences" (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009, p. 105). The model also reflects the potentiality of individuals re-entering stages across one's lifetime. The theory comprises the pre- encounter stage with three identity outcomes: assimilation, self-hatred, and miseducation; the immersion-emersion stage with identity outcomes (intense Black involvement and anti-White bias); and internalization with identity outcomes: afrocentricity and multiculturalism (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). Cross' Nigresence theory provides a framework for the development of Black racial identity, which has served as a stimulus for contemporary research involving black racial identity development (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009).

The confluence of racial and identity development is an undeveloped area of research requiring further investigation. While Erikson's (1950) psychosocial development theory does not overtly address racial identity, he alludes to the influence of race on identity development in his description of the period of adolescence noting that this period "bridges the stages of childhood when the bodily self and the parental images are given their cultural connotations" (p. 235). The period of adolescence is a critical time, characterized by pubescent changes, which influence self-image and cognitive development spurring increased capacity to manipulate and store social information about the world (Berzonsky, 2008).

Identity formation is a multifaceted negotiation process that asks questions regarding one's present, past, and future. This formation process begins at birth, peaks during adolescence, and continues to develop throughout adulthood, thus allowing an individual to fully negotiate multiple identities. While identity development occurs over one's lifetime, the period of adolescence has been considered the most critical. (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009, p. 104)

As Erikson theorized, it is during this period that adolescents begin to question who they are, and who they are in different contexts. Additionally, according to Erikson, identity is moderated by social interactions and is constantly influenced by others. However, once an individual formed an identity, they would be able to successfully navigate a variety of social contexts (Erikson, 1980).

The process of identity development is complex. Although this study will focus on the impact of school on the masculinity development of African American males, no study will fully capture all issues that are impactful on masculinity construction. While African American masculinity is the focal point of this study, there are several issues that disproportionately impact American male students that are important to highlight such as the importance of school and relationships therein, in driving views of Black masculinity.

Teacher Bias and Microaggressions

Within the classroom, Black male self-expression is impacted by the interactions between African American students and their teachers. African American students face a greater prospect of being educated by individuals who are not of their same race (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). In fact, the National Center for Educational Statistics indicates (2011) that 82% of the United States teachers are White, while only 7% of teachers are Black. This racial incongruence is further highlighted by the fact that only 16% of students are African American. Thus, the ratio of White teachers to African- American students is estimated to be 41 to 8 (National Center for

Educational Statistics, 2011). Given that racism is endemic in American society, it is deeply

enmeshed in the American educational system (Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott, & Garrison-

Wade, 2008). As such, teachers often bring implicit and explicit biases into the classroom, which

are fortified by stereotypical media depictions and historical misrepresentations of African

American males:

> Teacher perceptions of students are grouped in their own location in social categories of race, class, and gender. They make sense of their interactions with pupils and the conditions of their work from these social locations. Teachers bring different experiences and knowledge of racial structures into school that provides a framework from which to interpret, to organize information, to act. These factor into the creation of hierarchies of culpability of rule-breakers. (Ferguson, 2001, p. 89)

Research on teacher bias in the classroom has indicated that, "African American males are

generally viewed as possessing characteristics incongruent with academic success (e.g.,

laziness), valuing athletics over academic accomplishments, and having a propensity toward

aggression and violence" (Thomas & Stevenson, 2009, p. 162). Casteel (1998) found that White

teachers in a public school had more positive interactions with White students, specifically White

male students, and conversely had more negative interactions with Black students, with the most

negative interactions being with Black male students. Vavrus and Cole (2002) found that

suspensions were moderated by "sociocultural relations in the classroom that affect whether a

nonviolent event will be singled out for a suspension by the teacher" (p. 109).

Given that the school system is often a microcosm of society, the notion of Black male

failure has become normalized to the extent that many educators exercise complacency with

respect to Black males, perceiving them to be uneducable troublemakers who will become school

dropouts (Nogeura, 2004).

Teacher bias against African American students can manifest in a myriad of ways. Researcher Chester Pierce coined the term "microaggressions" which refers to common, subtle everyday occurrences of racism with which persons of color must contend (Noguera, 2008). According to Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, and Willis (1978) microaggressions are:

> …subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges, which are 'put-downs' of blacks by offenders. The offensive mechanisms are often used against blacks are innocuous. The cumulative weight of their never-ending burden is the major ingredient in black-white interactions. (p. 66)

Research on microaggressions has been furthered by Sue et al. (2007) to include types of microaggressions such as, microassaults, which are blatant derogatory sentiments (e.g., racial epithets); microinsults, unintentional insults that demean an individual's identity (e.g., indicating that an African American presidential candidate is articulate and "clean"); microinvalidations, (e.g., dismissiveness of an individual's experiences of discrimination). Examples of microaggressions include instances wherein a person of color is told that they are "so articulate" or that they are "not like others in their race," as well as in instances when a white woman clutches her purse closer to her when she encounters an African American man, or an African American graduate student being asked by one of her group members if she needs unsolicited help with the group's assignment.

Adams (2010) explored instances of microaggressions among African American male middle class high school students at a predominately White and a predominantly Latinx school. Students noted experiences of "invisibility" in which teachers failed to correctly identify them by name or often misstated their name without regard to identifying correct pronunciations (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012), differential treatment on the basis of dress, "applying a double standard" with regard to behavioral infractions, and being tracked into trade schools and community colleges,

which perpetuate low expectations, and deny access to social capital such as information provision about universities and available scholarship opportunities.

The fostering of low expectations because of a belief that a racial group lacks the intellectual capacity to be academically successful impacts students' belief about their scholastic abilities. Steele and Aronson (1995) found that students of color "face the threat of confirming or being judged by a negative societal stereotype – a suspicion – about their group's intellectual ability and competence" (p. 797). In some instances, students of color may underperform academically in situations where they must transcend negative stereotypes about their race. This phenomenon coined as "stereotype threat" by Steele (1992), "can affect a student's sense of self-efficacy in that domain and eventually result in academic disidentification" (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009, p. 116). Disidentification occurs when an individual "disidentifies" or detaches from academic achievement paradoxically despite possessing elevated global self-esteem (Steele, 1992). Disproportionately, African American males disidentify, which Steele argued is due to a fear of failure (Osbourne, 1995). This notion of a "failure complex" is cultivated in schools where African American males "are perceived as lacking in intellectual skills" (hooks, 2004, p. 33), and is reminiscent of Majors and Billson's (1992) cool pose postulation in which some black men may construct defense mechanisms to cope with societal oppression.

Teachers, both white and African American, often hold biases against African American males, associating them with negative media depictions of Black masculinity (Ascher &Branch-Smith, 2005), and "regularly interpret the behaviors and style of Black male youth as aggressive, disrespectful, defiant, and intimidating even when such behaviors were not intended to be so" (Adams, 2010, p. 131).

In a study by Lynn, Bacon, Totten, Bridges, and Jennings (2010) researchers found that teachers had a negative perception of African American male students viewing them as apathetic and responsible for their own academic failures. The perpetuation of majoritarian ideology spurs hierarchal rankings of students against prevailing standards of acceptable behavior, with those students aligned closest to the idealized white majoritarian norms, situated highest on the hierarchy. This process of sorting students relative to behavior according to Foucault (1977) is designed not to preclude unwanted behavior but exert control and normalize judgments about behavior:

> It introduces through this "value-giving" measure, the constraint of conformity that must be achieved. Lastly, it traces the limit that will define difference in relation to all other differences, the external frontier of the abnormal…The perpetual penalty that transverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it *normalizes*. (p. 183)

In applying Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977) to classroom dynamics, behavior is subjectively classified based on hegemonism, or one's perceived supremacy over another. For Foucault, rather than discipline serving as a mechanism to create a conducive, orderly environment, instead the focal point is in exerting control based on sorting and creation of a hierarchal system based on societally constructed norms of acceptability: "In this space of domination, the disciplinary power manifests its potency, essentially, by arranging objects…the role of the political ceremony had been to give rise to the excessive, yet regulated manifestation of power" (p. 187). The process of ranking, according to Foucault functions to individualize and separate individuals into categories through normative expectations.

Ranking is accomplished through the process of examination and surveillance:

> The examination, surrounded by all its documentary techniques, makes each individual a 'case'…it is the individual as he may be described, judged, measured, compared with

others, in his very individuality; and it is also the individual who has to be trained or corrected, classified, normalized, excluded, etc. (p.191)

It's interesting to note, that although Foucault's work is nearly four decades old, his theoretical perspective is even more salient in chronicling what is currently seen in terms of racial disparities in school discipline (Losen, 2015; Skiba et al., 2011).

Research has also indicated that teachers make subjective judgments about students based on appearance, linguistics, and SES (Ferguson, 2001; Villegas 2007). Cartledge, Tillman, and Johnson (2001) found that cultural incongruence between teachers, particularly White female teachers, and students of color often lead to normalized judgments and subsequent removal from the general education setting through office discipline referrals, which are often a gateway to exclusionary discipline practices and special education "placement".

Wright, Weekes, McGlaughlin, and Webb (1998) suggest that given White male patriarchy, the educational system prizes masculinity, however Black masculinity is devalued, delegitimized and cast as deviant and highly sexualized:

> …work on schooling masculinities suggests, not all male pupil identities have equal validity…'dominant' masculinities underwrite educational policies and, subsequently, some teacher perception, suggests that masculinity, in whichever form, will have more status than femininity in schools. For young Black males, however, the alternative masculinities which they adopt in schools have less validity than their White working-class peers. Important questions arise, therefore, as to why such conflict exists between Black male masculinities and those legitimized within schools which, though also affecting white working-class males, lead to the disproportionate representation of Black males in statistics relating to exclusion; and also lead Black males to be positioned by teachers, White male peers and themselves, as highly aggressive and sexualized. (p. 78)

In addition to being cast as hyper-sexualized, African American males may also be labeled as intellectually inferior. These perceptions perpetuate historical representations of the "black buck" who is "all body and no mind" (hooks, 2004, p. 40). In an ethnographic study at a California

public school, Schnyder (2012) observed the experiences of three Black male high school

students and examined how one school constructed masculinity and promulgated

heteronormative exhibitions of malehood across the educational milieu. Through participant

observation, Schnyder found instances of Black males being positioned as acceptable and

respectable when their identities aligned with white interests, specifically in relation to sports:

> …sports function as a limiting reagent for Black masculine respectability as Black male athletes are directly linked with the social desire and material interest of White supremacy… The archetypical construction of the Black man as the violent, rage-bound entity is fully displayed within the arena of sports. The commercial impetus of Black male dominated sports of basketball and football is marketed as the unity between the violent and the athletic. Rather than promoted as thinkers, Black male bodies are conceptualized and marketed as athletically endowed entities that react and are naturally prone to attack any target. (p. 8)

Interestingly, the students in Schnyder's study were valued for exhibiting aggressiveness within

the context of athleticism, however when these same students demonstrated these hyper-

masculinized behaviors outside of the sporting arena they were deemed deviant and in need of

correcting. Another interesting finding was the perpetuation of anti-intellectualism among

African American male athletes. For Black male student athletes who were performing poorly

academically, "a blind eye" was turned to their academic failure as not to disrupt their

participation in sports:

> …youth likewise adopted a similar attitude toward education. Therefore, even if they had ample time and therefore the energy to complete assignments and stay awake in class, their direct example of masculine performance was a posture of antieducation. The result is that Black male youth… learned very quickly that achievement in school is defined by maintaining the lowest grade point average (GPA) possible to play sports. (p. 10)

African American male students, who chose to suspend their participation in sports to focus on

elevating their grades, were vilified as being "unmanly," a prevailing myth of White patriarchal

manhood (hooks, 2004).

Racial Disproportionality and School Discipline

The issue of racial disparity in school discipline has origins in the racial desegregation of schools. Kaeser (1979) and Larkin (1979) contend that public schools were ill equipped to handle this adjustment. The racial differences between student and teacher and student and student dyads compounded this issue as increasing tensions arose precipitated by the shifting constituency of classrooms. Culturally unprepared to address racial tensions and conflicts, teachers resorted to office referrals to address disciplinary issues with students of color; this was particularly evident in schools with higher socioeconomic statuses (Larkin 1979).

In 1975, the Children's Defense Fund, one of the first investigations into racial disparities in disciplinary practices, found that African American students were suspended double the rate of Caucasian students. Almost 20 years later, Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Peterson (2002) found similar results indicating that the issue of inequity in school discipline continues to be perpetuated. Drawing from a large national sample of four hundred thirty-six schools, Skiba et al. (2011) investigated incongruent discipline practices among African American, Latinx, and Caucasian students, in schools employing School-wide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPBS) and utilizing the SWIS data management system. Researchers found that African American and Latinx students were overrepresented in suspensions/expulsions and office discipline referrals at the elementary and middle school levels in comparison to their Caucasian peers. However, African American males were the most overrepresented in exclusionary discipline practices. Referrals for African American males were often for subjective offenses such as class disrespect or class disruption. Whereas White males were more likely referred for overt offenses such as vandalism and weapons violations. A decade prior, Skiba et

al. (2002) yielded similar results, which suggest that the issue of racial disparity in school discipline may be tied to a lack of cultural understanding and implicit bias.

As African American students became disproportionately represented in school suspensions and expulsions, increased employment of these disciplinary actions served as a default choice (Gregory, 1995; McFadden & Marsh, 1992). Moreover, the ambiguities of discipline policies are problematized in that the door has been opened for multiple interpretations (Skiba et al., 2011; Skiba et al., 2002).

This issue was underscored in a study conducted by Skiba, Peterson, and Williams (1997) who found that administrators in one school varied in their interpretation of what defined defiant behavior. Additionally, exclusionary discipline policies disproportionally affect students of color, particularly African American male students who are largely suspended for subjective offenses such as appearing "threatening or are disrespectful" (Verdugo, 2002, p. 60), while their Caucasian peers "are suspended for guns, weapons, and drug violations" (p. 60).

Complicating matters, African American males are 31% more likely to be suspended than "White students even though no evidence supports the notion that African American students misbehave more" (Pane, Rocco, Miller, & Salmon, 2014, p. 299). The discipline gap between African American males and White males may be largely due to inherent racial bias with this disparity originating in the classroom, as "teachers who misunderstand students' cultural goals refer African American males to the office more often than Whites" (p. 299). Rocques and Paternoster (2011) found that when juxtaposed with their peers from other racial and ethnic groups, African American students were more likely to receive more severe discipline for even minor infractions.

Comparatively, other studies have investigated the interplay of race and poverty in school discipline practices. Mendez, Knoff, and Ferron (2002) examined suspension rates in a large, urban school using a mixed method design and found a correlation between school suspension rates and demographic factors, as low income and minority students were more likely to be suspended than students who were Caucasian and from higher income brackets.

Similarly, Nichols (2006) explored suspension and discipline data from a large urban school. Results indicated that minority and low-income students were overrepresented in discipline data. However other studies have still found that African American students, particularly males, are overrepresented in exclusionary discipline even after factoring for socioeconomic status (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Lynn et al., 1987; Skiba et al., 2008). Consequently, the schools' increasing discretion in decision making to criminalize student infractions further exacerbates the issue of race and school discipline. The notion of criminalizing misbehavior contributes "to student push out, dropout, and ultimately to what researchers call the "school-to-prison pipeline" (Fowler, 2011, p. 16). The school to prison pipeline phenomenon subsumes a direct linkage between exclusionary discipline practices and the prison industrial complex. It is a phenomenon where increasing numbers of juveniles are interacting with the criminal justice system as a result of exclusionary discipline practices propagated by schools (Fenning & Rose, 2007), in which "minority youth comprise over 60 percent of children detained by juvenile justice systems across the United States" (Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier, & Valentine, 2009, p. 1003), making them "more than eight times as likely as their white peers to be housed in juvenile detention facilities" (p. 1003).

Racial Disproportionality in Special Education Referrals

A subtler way African American males are excluded from the general education setting is through special education referrals, which "has become a form of segregation from the mainstream" (Blanchett, 2006, p. 25) and "relegation to a stigmatized land of no return" (Harry & Anderson, 1994, p. 606). Overrepresentation of African American males in special education has occurred since the origins of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Harry & Anderson, 1994). On the whole, African American males are referred and deemed eligible for special education services under the Emotional Disturbance and Specific Learning Disability categories. Most troublesome, these categories are the most susceptible to subjectivity (Whiting, 2010). According to Love (2014):

> Teachers make their special education referrals based on subjective and unreliable measures, such as whether they believe a student is "teachable" or non-threatening. Given teachers' perceptions of them as threatening, inevitably Black boys represent a large number of those referred for removal from the general education environment and funneled instead into labels such as "mentally challenged," "emotionally disturbed," and "learning disabled." (p. 302)

The lack of cultural congruence between African American male students and their teachers is often cited as a reason for special education overrepresentation and office discipline referrals (Vallas, 2009; West-Olatunji et al., 2006). Artiles (1998) suggests that many White teachers operate from a deficit model viewpoint in relation to students of color. Majoritarian norms are upheld as the standard and any deviation from this norm is perceived as deviant, inferior, and in need of correction.

Needless to say, the issues that beset African American male students are highly involved systemic processes and "it is clear that 'race' acts to position Black masculinities as illegitimate, rather than merely subordinate. It is on this basis that young Black men find themselves excluded

from the schooling process…." (Wright et al., 1998, p. 84). These issues experienced by African American males highlight the important role of education, which is likely to be formative, predictive of life trajectory. Moreover, the historical context of racism and slavery and research on microaggressions and conceptions of masculinity among African American males and schools has yet to be investigated. Thus, this study bridges these disparate areas of literature.

Research Questions

Given that schools are institutions reflecting the biased and racist nature of American society, this study will seek to answer the following research questions: how do young African American boys conceptualize Black masculinity? From their standpoint, to what role does the school play in the construction of Black masculinity? And finally, does this construction impact their feelings and attitude toward scholastic achievement? If so, how?

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

In Chapter Two, the purpose of the study and rationale for research was highlighted as well as a description of the conceptual framework, Critical Race Theory (CRT) and issues impacting African American boys in the educational system. Additionally, the methodological and analytical procedures, the setting, and characteristics of the sample are indicated.

Setting

Description

The setting for this study is a racially diverse, suburban, Midwestern middle school. The setting is one in which a pre-existing relationship exists between the researcher and the school district, as the researcher completed her clinical training within the district, but not at the school in which data were collected.

Demographically, the school's total student enrollment for the 2015-2016 school-year was 377 students**.** The socioeconomic status of students was reflected as 32% low income. With respect to race/ ethnicity, the school population was 35% white, 32% Hispanic, 26% Black, 2% Asian, 3% two or more races, and 0% Pacific Islander. Additionally, 10% of students have disabilities, 2% are English Learners, and 1% are homeless. Percentages for teachers indicate that 85.9% are female, 14.1% are male. White teachers accounted for 91.9%, while Black teachers accounted for 2.7% (information indicated in Table 1). Additionally, 75.8% of teachers

held a Master's degree or higher, while 24.2% of teachers held a Bachelor's degree (Illinois State

Board of Education, 2015). Please see Table 1 for school demographical information.

Table 1. School Population Percentages (2015-2016 School Year)

Total Student Population—377

	White	Black/African American	Pacific Islander	Asian	Two or More Races	Latinx
Race/Ethnicity of Students	35%	26%	0%	2%	3%	32%
Race/Ethnicity of Teachers	70.2%	2.7%	0%	1.3%	0%	4%
Gender of Teachers	**Female**	**Male**				
	85.9**%**	14.1%				
Educational Attainment of Teachers	**Master's Degree or Higher**	**Bachelor's Degree**				
	75.8%	24.2%				
Students with Disability	**% With Disability**					
	10%					
Students Eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch	**% Free and Reduced Lunch**					
	32.1%					

Table 2. School District Characteristics

Category	District
Number of Schools	3
Number of Students	1,157
Student/Teacher Ratio	19:1
Total Expenditures/Student	$6,302
Percent Low Income	31%
Students with Disabilities	15%

In addition, the school has two administrators: a principal and assistant principal. The principal, who is Caucasian, provides leadership and administration to school staff and is involved with planning and coordination of the school's vision and improvement efforts. The assistant principal, who is Caucasian, assists with leadership and administration and serves as the chief disciplinarian of the school. According to the district's code of conduct, disciplinary issues are handled within the classroom by classroom teachers, more severe occurrences that cannot be handled by the classroom teachers, are deployed to the assistant principal.

Each building within the district has implemented Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). PBIS is a school wide comprehensive approach that emphasizes positive and not punitive disciplinary practices and focuses on teaching behavioral expectations and generalizing these expectations to various settings within the school (lunchroom, classroom, recess, etc.). PBIS incorporates a multi-tiered approach of increasing levels of support for students to address their behavioral needs (Darensbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010).

To address disparities in school discipline on a state-wide level, the state of Illinois passed legislation (Senate Bill 100) requiring the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to report discipline data from each school district within the state annually (Fenning & Johnson, 2016). Data must be disaggregated by race, gender, grade level, English language proficiency and indicate out of school suspensions, expulsions, and alternative setting placements. ISBE is required to annually identify the top 20% of districts with expulsions and suspensions. Districts with high suspensions and expulsions must implement disciplinary reforms and annually inform ISBE of its progress (Fenning & Johnson, 2016). In reviewing ISBE discipline data from 2016 for the school district participating in this study, there was a total of one in-school suspension

and seven out of school suspensions. Racial and ethnic data was redacted per ISBE privacy reporting stipulations, as the number of students within racial sub-groups receiving discipline fell below 10.

Procedure

Given a pre-existing relationship, the researcher contacted the school principal to obtain permission for data collection. After the researcher described the study and purpose, and indicated the benefits of the study's findings to the school district, the school principal signified interest in the study and requested permission from the district superintendent. Once permission had been obtained at the district level, the school principal and the researcher drafted a letter to be sent home to parents once potential participants had been identified. The principal informed teachers at grade level team meetings about the research study and indicated his endorsement of the research. The principal also provided the researcher with the email addresses of the grade level team meeting leaders, who the researcher emailed to provide additional information about the study and to request nominations of students. To obtain a representative sample of students, 7th and 8th grade teachers were asked for student nominations for participation in this study. Given teachers' daily interactions with students and knowledge of students' academic, social and behavioral functioning, they were appropriate individuals to provide student nominations.

After 7th and 8th grade team members developed a list of potential students. The school principal coordinated brief meetings with the researcher and the two groups (one 7th grade group of 10 students, and one 8th grade group of 9 students). During these meetings, the researcher briefly explained her research, why the students were chosen as potential participants, the benefits to them as participants, and provided an opportunity to voice questions and concerns. After each meeting, the researcher provided each student with the letter drafted by the school

principal and researcher to be given to parents requesting the student's participation in the study.

Once parental permission had been obtained for the focus groups and individual interviews, the

school principal coordinated a schedule for two focus groups and individual interviews. Focus

groups and individual interviews were scheduled at times when core instruction did not take

place.

Participants

Nineteen students (African American boys) were nominated for participation in this

study, ultimately 10 African American boys (5, 7th grade and 5, 8th grade). To ensure data

saturation, which is "the point in data collection when no new or relevant information emerges

with respect to the newly constructed theory" and "a researcher looks at this as the point at which

no more data needs to be collected" (Saumure & Given, 2008, p. 196), the researcher developed

a saturation grid (Brod, Tesler, & Christiansen, 2009) in which a spreadsheet was constructed

and interview questions were inputted into cells vertically and participants' responses was

entered into each cell horizontally to monitor trends emerging from the data. As similar trends

were reflected from the data, and new trends were not emerging, it was at this point that the

researcher indicated that saturation was achieved. For qualitative research, Hill, Thompson, and

Williams (1997) suggest a sample of 8-15 as sufficient for data saturation. Analysis of data for

this study indicated that saturation was achieved with a sample size of 10.

Given that seventh and eighth grade students are typically more developmentally acute to

conceptualize the concepts being measured in this study, and are on the cusp of identity

formation, this age cohort was chosen for this study. Ten students participated in this study. The

students consisted of 7th and 8th grade African American male students of varying academic

achievement levels and socio-economic strata within the school, and were also students who teachers believed could offer substantive contributions during both the focus groups and individual interviews.

Design

As the focal points of this study was the experiences of African American boys and their perspectives on these experiences, a qualitative study provided an inductive process, multiple sources of data, rich descriptions of the students' experiences, and allowed for a purposeful, more nuanced, and naturalistic inquiry. As Merriam (2009) notes, qualitative research concerns itself with "understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (p. 13). The notion of masculinity required students to understand themselves and where they are positioned within the context of not only school, but also the world. Given that this inquiry pivoted around the experiences of 7th and 8th grade students at a middle school, a case study design was used as a case study involves the "in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system…a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries" (p. 40).

Instrumentation

Focus Groups

Ten questions formed the basis of the focus group interviews (see Appendix G). The researcher piloted focus group questions with three 7th and 8th grade African American boys to test developmentally appropriateness of the focus group questions. Focus group questions were revised for clarity and framed using wording to align with the developmental level of typical students in this age range.

Recruitment letters and informed consent forms (see Appendices A and C) were sent home with nominated students. After parental consent was obtained, two focus groups of five nominated students each were conducted to introduce the researcher to students, help facilitate rapport prior to individual interviews, provide details about the study, and explore the current school climate within the context of a group setting. Focus groups allow participants to build upon and consider each other's responses and provide a setting in which participants are more likely to provide candid responses (Leung & Savithiri, 2009). In addition, the focus group provided an additional strand of data, which allowed the researcher to make comparisons between groups and observe alignment between focus group and individual interviews to triangulate data (Morrow, Hansen, Haverkamp, & Ponterotto, 2005).

Two focus groups, one consisting of the 5, 7th grade participants, and one comprised of the 5, 8th grade participants were conducted. The purpose of the focus groups was to acquaint participants with the researcher, glean general information about the current school climate, and answer any additional questions participants had about the research study. Prior to the beginning of each focus group, students were given the opportunity to provide assent for participation in the focus group, by signing an assent form, as well as consent to audio-recording (see Appendix E), unless parents declined audio-recording. Students also signified if they wished to participate in a follow-up individual interview by providing their name in the appropriate area on the assent form. Given that one parent declined audio-recording, notes were taken during the 8th grade focus group. This student was also given the opportunity to provide assent and indicate his interest in participating in a follow-up interview by completing the assent form (see Appendix E). Focus groups took place in a private area of the school and was facilitated by the researcher.

The researcher was solely responsible for posing questions to participants, note taking, and ensuring that all participants had an opportunity to respond to questions. The duration of the two focus groups ranged from 45-60 minutes. Refreshments were provided to students in both focus groups as a token of appreciation for participating in the study.

Interviews

Thirteen questions, which were piloted by the researcher with three 7th and 8th grade African American boys to test developmentally appropriateness, were constructed for semi-structured individual interviews (see Appendix H). As with the focus group questions, revisions were made to facilitate clarity and meet the developmental level of students within this age range. The follow up individual interviews were conducted after the two focus groups, with the 7th and 8th grade focus group participants, who indicated interest in participating in the follow up interview and whose parents provided consent. These interviews were conducted in a private office in the school. Additionally, prior to the beginning of the interview, participants were also asked for permission to have the interview audio-recorded. Three participants declined audio-recording and one parent did not provide consent for audio-recording. In these instances, notes were taken to document participants' responses. Interviews ranged from 15-35 minutes and occurred during a period when participants did not miss core instructional time. Participants were asked to provide perspective on their own educational experiences and how these experiences have impacted them.

After interviews and focus groups had been conducted, the audio recorded focus group and interviews were transcribed. Typed notes were prepared for interviews and the focus group that was not audio-recorded. Any identifying information was expunged from transcripts and

notes. In addition, participants were assigned a code number (Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.) to protect identity and facilitate confidentiality.

Analysis

Analysis of interview and focus group data followed steps outlined by Hill et al.'s (1997) consensual qualitative research (CQR). Hill et al. note several features that comprise CQR: (1) open-ended data from interviews are divided into domains or topical areas, (2) core ideas are developed for each domain, and (3) a cross analysis is conducted to construct categories and describe consistencies and frequencies in the data. The CQR method is predicated on the assumption that multiple perspectives drive awareness and approximate "truth." Moreover, CQR is an ideal analytical procedure "because it involves a rigorous method that allows several researchers to examine data and come to consensus about their meaning, thus reducing the biases inherent with just one person analyzing the data" (Hill et al., 2005, p. 204).

Aligned with Hill et al.'s (1997) notion of researcher neutrality and diversity of perspectives in data analysis, the researcher, coders, and auditor reflected diversity in terms of gender and academic programs. The researcher is an African American woman in a School Psychology doctoral program, the two coders in the study include an African American woman, who is a doctoral candidate in an EdD School Psychology program, with years of experience serving as a practitioner in urban school districts, and a multiracial woman, who identifies as White and African American, and who is a doctoral student in Cultural and Educational Policy Studies. The auditor for this research was an African American male professor in a Counseling Psychology program. The researcher and the two coders consisted of the coding team and carried out data analysis procedures. The auditor, who was outside of the analytical procedures,

reviewed the data analysis and offered feedback and recommendations through the lens of an African American male.

Following focus groups, member checking was completed, which consisted of two debriefing focus groups (one for the 7th grade group, and another for the 8th grade group) in which results were presented to participants who had the opportunity to augment or clarify information to ensure "trustworthiness" (Lincoln & Denzin, 1985). In both debriefing sessions, participants indicated that results were consistent with their overall sentiments and added few additional details. Moreover, throughout the data collection and analytical process, the researcher used reflexivity as a tool to enhance qualitative rigor, validity of findings (Berger, 2015) and account "for [the] researcher values, beliefs, knowledge, and biases' (Cutcliffe, 2003, p. 137). Thus, the researcher maintained a journal for self-monitoring to document "reasoning, judgment, and emotional reactions" (Berger, 2015, p. 222). As Hammersley (2004) notes, "the researcher must reflect on how he or she has influenced the situation and the people being studied in order to monitor REACTIVITY, so as to minimize any distorting effect on the research findings" (p. 934). Trusell (2014) emphasized this point citing Allen (2000), "Reflexivity about our own social positioning is necessary as a means to invoke a critical reflection on the ways we bring to the research our own position of privilege, our vulnerabilities, and ideological commitments" (p. 344).

Focus Groups and Interviews

Developing Domains

After transcripts and notes were prepared, the researcher and her coders began the analytical procedure with focus group data, and followed the same procedure with interview

data. Broad categories were developed and then collapsed into more precise topical areas. This process included adjusting categories to align with data through redefinition to ensure specificity, deletion of categories not fitting data, consolidation of indistinguishable categories, and augmenting categories that emerged from data.

The researcher and her coders independently reviewed transcripts, assigning phrases and blocks of data to domains. After this process was completed, the researcher and coders met to discuss and develop a consensus on coded items. After which, a final version of consensus items with domain titles and raw interview data was constructed.

Constructing Core Ideas

The next step in CQR was the construction of core ideas, a process known as "abstracting," or creation of a short summary of the interview content for each category. According to Hill et al. (1997) the purpose of "abstracting" is to highlight the substance of the interviewee's comments in a clear and concise manner. Thus, the researcher and her coders independently constructed abstracts for each category and sub-category, using participants' responses to support the abstract. After core ideas were constructed, the researcher and coder met to establish consensus of core ideas. After consensus was reached, a codebook containing domains core ideas (abstracts), was constructed.

Auditing Domains and Core Ideas

After the process of consensus of domains, categories, and core ideas was completed, the case was given to the auditor, an individual trained in CQR (Hill et al., 1997) and outside the consensual procedures. The auditor, an African American male professor, who reviewed raw material for each domain, established if raw material was correctly placed in proper domains and

categories, that all substantive material was abstracted, that the wording of core ideas was reflective of data, and iterated recommended or suggested changes. After the audit, the researcher and coders met again to come to a consensus to consider or contest the recommendations and comments of the auditor.

Cross Analysis

After the auditing process was completed and consensus had been reached, the researcher and coders reviewed cases to establish similarities. To accomplish this, the researcher and coders independently reviewed each domain and category and met to determine which categories were the most sensible. During data analysis, categories were continually modified, as categories needed to be divided, merged if they overlapped, dropped or combined with similar categories, if representative of fewer than two cases, or construction of additional categories enveloped data. Additionally, throughout the analytical process, the researcher maintained a memo of her impressions about insights that emerged from the data to facilitate the construction of "meaning of the data" (Hill et al., 1997, p. 551). The researcher and coders met for several rounds of coding, updating categories and subcategories as needed, until reliability was achieved. Reliability was set at 90%, and was ultimately established at 100% on categories and subcategories. Representativeness of the sample was established by a cross analysis of data. Hill et al. identified frequency labels of general (applies to all cases), typical (apples to half of the cases or more), and variant (applies to less than half but more than one of the cases). Tables 3-7 provide a listing of categories and sub-categories along with category frequencies for focus groups and individual interviews. Consistent with Hill et al., categories and sub-categories fell

within the "general" category if applied to all 10 participants, "typical" if attributable to 5-9

participants, and "variant" if applicable to 2-4 participants.

Auditing of Cross Analysis

At this stage, the auditor reviewed the cross analysis to determine if category labels were

adequately captured and contested instances in which core ideas did not align with a given

category, whether further subdivision of dissimilar categories was warranted, or if protraction of

categories was necessary due to similarities. The researcher and coders met again to consider

inclusion of the recommendations of the auditor and to reach consensus thereof. This process

continued until the team and the auditor reached satiation that an understanding of data had

emerged (Hill et al., 1997). Data was entered into the Qualitative Solutions & Research (QSR)

NVIVO software to assist with coding, data storage, organization, and for the creation of data

maps to provide a visual illustration of findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

In Chapter Three, the study methodology was highlighted along with rationale for using a qualitative methodology to explore African American boys' schooling experiences. Additionally, data collection methods and analytical procedures, the setting for the study, with demographical characteristics, the study participants, and study procedures were also indicated.

Chapter Four presents results first from the focus group interviews, which functioned to establish rapport with research participants, obtain school climate information, and provide an additional source of data. Results from the individual interviews are then presented within the context of each research question postulated in Chapter Two.

Focus Group Results

The procedures set forth for obtaining results aligned with Morrow et al.'s (2005) model in which participant's quotes are used to support the researcher's summation. Results from the 7th grade focus group will be presented first, followed by results from the 8th grade focus group. Eleven domains based on focus group questions were examined. These domains included: "Activities involved in"; "Like most about school"; "Like least about school"; "Best memories about school"; "Worst memories about school"; "Important things to know about your school"; "Interactions with teachers"; "Interactions with school principals"; "What to change about school"; and "Incident that tells what school is like."

Seventh Grade Focus Group

From these domains, analysis of focus group data yielded 21 categories and sub-categories from the 7th grade focus group. Please see Table 3 which illustrates domains and categories and sub-categories. Data is presented with domains listed first, and categories and subcategories are listed second.

Table 3. Seventh Grade Focus Group Domains/Categories

Domains/Category/ Sub-categories	Cross Analyses of Code Frequency	Illustrative Code Idea
Activities involved in • Sports	General	"Participate in sports"
Like most about school • Developing friendships	General	"Making friends"
Like least about school • Teacher practices o Being targeted/labeled as troublemakers by teachers	Typical Typical	"How teachers act" "Picks you out"
Best memories about school • Establishing new friendships • Overcoming peer teasing	Typical Variant	"Being new and having a friend" "Peers teased"

Worst memories about school
• Negative teacher interactions
   o Lack of positive feedback from teachers
   o Lack of teacher intervention during instances of bullying/peer harassment
	Typical
	
	Variant
	
	Typical
		"Taking out anger on students"
		
		"Criticizing work"
		
		"You're the one that gets in trouble"

Important things to know about your school • Peer harassment	Typical	"People make fun of you"

Interactions with teachers
• Positive relationship with supportive teachers
• Less positive interactions with non-supportive teachers
   o Made to feel incompetent and inferior (individual level factors vs. system level factors)
   o Barriers to getting academic
	General
	
	Typical
	
	Variant
		"Some teachers helpful"
		
		"Talks about us behind our backs"
		
		"Teacher says, 'why aren't you understanding this'"
		
		"White person asks for help will

support o Favoritism	Typical General	give help" "They play favorites"

Interactions with school principals
•   Positive interactions
   o   Open communication
   o   Fair treatment
	General
	
	General
	General
		"You can go to them and won't judge you"
		"You just talk it out"
		"Doesn't jump to conclusions"

What to change about school • Teachers unfairness and racially unbalanced treatment of students	Typical	"School not racist, just unbalanced"
Incident that tells what school is like • Teachers can be supportive and provide academic help • Lack of reciprocal respect from teachers	Typical Variant	"Teachers can be helpful and friendly" "Teachers don't show you respect"

Current school activities. When participants were asked current involvement in school activities many participants indicated that they were involved sports. Each participant who signified their involvement in sports stated that their involvement stemmed from interest, as Participant 3 stated in a representative comment: "Our passion is to play basketball when we are older." Building off this comment, Participant 4 shared that sports provides an opportunity for exploration: "I play three different sports here and I just wanted to get to like—try different things. I never know what I want to do when I get older so I just want to try everything and see what I like." While most participants stated involvement with sports, one participant indicated that he served on the Yearbook committee.

What is liked most about school. Most participants indicated that developing friendships was the best aspect of school. Participant 3 shared his experiences of establishing friendships:

> What I like most about school is being able to go out and make new friends. It doesn't just have to be your group of friends inside and outside of school. Because when I first came here—I came here first or second grade. And when I first came here I thought, 'I'm

not going to make new friends' Or I'm basically going to be lame. Then I met (student V, student X, student y), so I like how you have the ability to make new friends.

Similarly, Participant 2 added that having different friends from a variety of age groups is also an appealing aspect:

> You can see some people hanging out with different groups and you don't have to be like being in one group at a time—it's not like 6th graders only have 6th grade friends, and 7th graders only have 7th grade friends, and 8th graders only have 8th grade friends. It's like I have 6th grader friends, 7th grader friends and 8th grader friends. So yeah—how we all get to interact.

What is liked least about school. When recounting aspects about school that was least liked, various teacher practices was an emergent category. Many participants shared instances of being targeted and labeled as "troublemakers." In a representative comment, Participant 3 reported being targeted during lunch time:

> …at my table, we were playing a game where we were just sliding a bottle across a table and it wasn't anything because we were trying to get it to that person, but everyone kept grabbing it and throwing it to other people and Mr. X—he basically tried to give my whole table a detention or a Five O'clock basically because we were sliding a Gatorade bottle, and I kind of feel like that was stupid and pointless.

Continuing, Participant 3 recalled another experience of being singled out and targeted:

> I feel like the…Black people are getting picked out. For example, there's another Black kid at my table, it's me and him, and Mr. Y. said a word that I don't understand, and I said, 'I don't understand that'… and we were like what word is that. And he went off on us and called us troublemakers and he said I have a huge attitude and I didn't understand that at all.

Similarly, Participant 2 noted:

> And they pick out tables, they pick out the "trouble maker" table even though they're not trouble makers…Every single day when I'm just eating my lunch and talking with my friends and I may do something like giving my lunch to my friend because maybe he wants that lunch, and Mr. Z will say, 'Don't do that' and I'm like 'Why?'

Participant 4 recounted being the target of frequent monitoring during lunch time, with more attention paid to boys than girls:

> I feel like, the teachers only pay attention to the boys, because I've see that girls get away with a lot more stuff than boys do. And at my table, there's at least two people spying at our table at all times. There's like two lunch ladies, and they just stare at us, whenever we do something, not even bad and they'll tell Mr. X. It defeats the purpose of having fun with friends at lunch because we don't really see each other during the day.

Best memories about school. While participants noted aspects of what they liked and disliked most about school, when asked about their best memories of school, most participants recalled establishing new friendships and overcoming peer teasing. Participant 2 shared being befriended on his first day of school:

> My best experience in school, it was (student W and student Z), they were really cool to me back in second grade. It was like one of my best moments. I was a new kid—I was the youngest kid—I'm still the youngest kid in 7th grade, and I asked (student W) if I could play kickball and he said 'sure'. And that really made me day, and that made me really happy because he and I are still friends.

Similarly, Participant 3 conveyed:

> Probably my favorite moment was not at this school, but at my old school that I transferred in from. And it was a new school and I was really worried, 'Am I going to get to class on time', and my friend to this day still, his name is (student A). He was like, 'what's your name?' and I said my name is…and we started talking and then I realized that I actually have a friend to talk to and help me with my homework and that basically made pretty much my whole life because I know that he has my back no matter what.

In a representative comment, Participant 4 reported an experience of overcoming teasing received from peers:

> When I was in primary I would always get teased because how I'm really short and stuff, and middle school made me feel like that doesn't matter because being short to me—it's kind of hard to like shine out because you're the one that everyone looks down to and people don't think that you're that good or anything. But middle school helped prove that I'm actually worth something and not a nobody.

Worst memories about school. After recounting their best memories about school,

participants were asked to indicate their worst memories about school. An emergent category

was negative teacher interactions, which resulted in several sub-categories. One sub-category

was a lack of positive teacher feedback. Participants noted teachers being highly critical of work.

In a representative comment, Participant 2 noted constant teacher criticism:

> I was doing my work and I got a 'B' on it and she says, '(student) you could have done
> better.' And I was like, 'It's a 'B'. A 'B' is good for me', and she said, 'You still could
> have done better'. And if I think it's good then I don't understand why she's saying I
> should have done better.

Echoing similar sentiments Participant 3 shared:

> Another teacher Mrs. D, she's kind of old, and I feel like she's cranky. Like in our class
> today, me and my friend (student W), we were doing our work and she didn't like the
> way we did it, and she called us, 'slugs' and keep calling us different names…like lazy
> bums.

Another emergent sub-category was lack of teacher intervention during instances of peer

harassment/bullying. Participants recounted instances of peer harassment in which teachers

either minimized bullying or reprimanded them for their efforts in trying to put an end to the

harassment and bullying. Participant 4 recalled an experience of being harassed by a peer and

teachers not intervening:

> I think this was like 4th grade, and there was this girl that would always make fun of my
> appearance and point out what I did wrong or something like that or critique me. And it
> was this one particular day and I didn't put any lotion on my hands and she just kept
> talking about it, it was really annoying and she would always go back to that and it would
> really make me sad and stuff and I would always want to change, but whenever I would
> change, she would always find something else to make fun of me, so it made me wonder
> what did I do to deserve this. I never talked to that girl, and she started being mean to me
> and I couldn't understand why. And like I said earlier, this whole district and stuff and all
> the teachers and stuff, are so lopsided. She'll be mean to me and teachers will see that,
> but they won't think that the girls will do that—I told them, and I yelled, 'Stop!' and then
> somehow, I got in trouble for trying to put an end to something, that was like getting
> bullied and I tried to stop it, and teachers made it even harder.

Participant 3 also recalled being bullied by a peer and feeling his only recourse was to address the situation himself:

> I kind of had the same experience as (student) but I handled it a different way—like the way I look and the way I wear my clothes, and I had to say something back to them and I just kept on picking on them over and over again, because I wanted then to know this is not right. I'm trying to show you what it feels like to get picked on, and I was like, 'will you leave me alone now', and she never talked to me for the rest of the year. Because if I wouldn't have done anything to stop her than she would have just kept going at it over and over.

Similarly, Participant 5 noted being bullied by a peer and receiving little to no help from teachers to end the bullying: "This kid…kept taking my hat. I told him to stop and told the teacher so many times and they didn't do anything."

Important things to know about your school. Participants were asked to indicate things that a new student should know about their school. Peer harassment was one category that emerged. Participant 2 noted the prevalence of harassment in the school:

> …some people try to bring you down…people make fun of you…if someone is bothering you if you ask them to stop three times, and then just leave them alone, leave that person alone because you're going to start something, you're just going to stir the pot…we don't have any fighting bullies at this school just a lot of people who talk crap, but they never finish it out. Like this one kid—every time he looks at me and he walks away and starts laughing, and I get so worked up because he keeps doing this every single day. But he looks at me, and he starts laughing and I say, 'what are you laughing at', and he's like, 'I'm not laughing at you' but he keeps laughing and I know he's laughing at me and it's stupid how people just how people just think they can take over people and just and talk whatever they want.

Participant 4 also recalled being an eye-witness to instances of bullying:

> …there's this person he's like one of my friends like if I was new here I would try to be as nice to anyone as possible because I don't want to have a bad reputation or anything so the kid I was talking about—there's a girl in our school and he's kind of mean—not like talking to her but mean talking about her and stuff if you were in that position you wouldn't like to be like talked to like that…

Echoing similar sentiments Participant 2 shared his experience of observing a friend by bullied:

…he got picked on and it just wasn't right— I don't know why people picked on him though he didn't deserve it, he was a nice kid, he was really good in school, he was really good in math too. I don't know why people picked on him though.

Interactions with teachers. When participants were asked about their interactions with teachers, two categories emerged: positive relationship with teachers who are supportive and less positive interactions with non-supportive teachers. Teachers who were characterized as supportive were those who positively interacted with participants and were accessible to students as noted by Participant 3: "I'm kind of cool with some of my teachers…I'm really cool with them and I can talk to them and go to them for specific things and I don't have to be afraid to ask questions in class." Similarly, Participant 2 stated: "Mr. Y, Ms. N., and Ms. L. Like I make jokes with them, they laugh at my jokes—it's all cool…". While supportive teachers engendered openness and accessibility, teachers who were considered non-supportive had frequent negative interactions with participants, which resulted in several sub-categories emerging. One sub-category was the perpetration of feelings of incompetence and inferiority in which individual level factors (student's competence) were blamed for a student's lack of understanding and comprehension of course content as opposed to system level factors (teaching style, curriculum). Participants recounted instances of being accused of not paying attention in class and being belittled for not comprehending course content, as Participant 2 shared:

> …in some of my classes, when I don't know the answer and I get it wrong, especially in…class, I'm speaking out the answer—like it happened today—I was speaking out the answer and then I got it wrong because I didn't know what it meant. And she rolled her eyes because she thought I wasn't paying attention and I was. I just didn't know the word and she—just because you're mad at somebody, just because you're mad when you come to school and you're a teacher doesn't mean you have to take it out on your students. That's what school is about it's like you're supposed to learn, so if you don't know something, then why is the teacher getting mad at you because you don't know something. It's like a test and you keep failing a test. I still don't think it's okay to get mad at somebody about that.

Continuing, Participant 2 indicated:

> We'll be taking notes and everything and then she'll be like—if you don't know an answer, she'll be like let me see your notes, and like she'll see all the notes and then she'll say, 'How do you not now that?' Because, we just didn't know… No, here's the thing—if it looks like we're not paying attention even though we are, she'll call on us. And when we're learning a new subject like we're doing now, she'll call on us and expect us to know the answer.

Similarly, Participant 3 noted:

> …if I don't answer the question, I'll have to wait after class because she thinks I'm not paying attention and then I show her my notes and then she's like, 'you're not understanding this because why?' and I'm like 'because I don't speak (class name) and I'm not really fluent in it' and then she'll be like, 'well you should be because we've been doing this for umpteenth months.'

Participant 4 shared, "She'll give us notes and everything, but she won't explain."

Another emergent sub-category was barriers to getting academic support. These barriers including teacher's inaccessibility for the provision of academic help and offering to provide help during abbreviated times (i.e. lunch). Participant 2 noted his challenges of trying to obtain academic support:

> …sometimes I don't understand some things in (class) and then like when times up-- I'm like can I go after school for extra help, but then like—when I asked her she was like, 'I'm kind of busy after school', and then I asked her the next day and she's like, 'I'm kind of busy after school', and it was like only one day that I could actually go to her class and actually learn stuff.

Similarly, Participant 2 shared:

> But when we ask she'll say come during lunch and I will help you, and we have 30 minutes of class left and she won't help me. So, it's like when we ask her to do that—for the White people she'll give a full explanation on it. But when it's Black people she'll just give a terrible example of it.

Echoing similar sentiments Participant 4 indicated, "And I've asked for help one time—let's say a White person asks for help—she'll absolutely give them help." Participants also noted

instances of favoritism, which emerged as a sub-category. Citing an example of allowances

being made for one of his peers, Participant 3 recalled:

> This kid … asked to go get his notebook from his locker and then she said yes. Five
> minutes later I asked, 'I don't have my notebook can I go get it' and she says, 'no you
> can't why are you not ready' and I said, 'but (student) was allowed to go get his
> notebook', and she was like, 'don't tell me what another student has done, why aren't you
> ready?'

Similarly, Participant 2 noted:

> She said that to me and I was like, 'I forgot my stuff because I thought we still had MAP
> testing that day.' And I went upstairs because there wasn't enough time to make it up to
> my locker in time so I went back, and I asked her and she was like, 'why aren't you
> prepared?' and she gave me the mean eye too. And I said, 'oh, I thought we were MAP
> testing today and I didn't have enough time to go back down to my locker and get my
> notebook, so I was just asking you if I can get my stuff' and I asked to--if I get my stuff,
> and she was like, 'OK, you can get your stuff, but wait until we get an example' and I'm
> like, 'how am I supposed to write it down?'

In these instances, participants expressed differential treatment from teachers in which certain

students were permitted to obtain supplies necessary for class preparedness.

Interactions with school principals. When asked about their interactions with the school

principal and assistant principal, most participants indicated having positive interactions with the

school principals. This category resulted in two sub-categories: open communication and fair

treatment. Open communication was characterized by the accessibility of the principals as

Participant 3 expressed:

> …you can go to them—and it doesn't have to do with school—you can go to them with
> outside problems and they won't try and judge you or they will try and basically have an
> attitude about it. They'll give you a full explanation and then they'll actually help you
> finish the problem. I kind of like that about principals and they're really chill, and they
> won't get mad about anything.

Similarly, Participant 2 noted:

> If you get a detention for tardiness they won't get mad at that and then like, Mr. O he's really cool with me… So that's how you know the principals are really cool here. And then Mr. E, people think that he's really mean but he's actually really nice.

The second sub-category, fair treatment, was indicative of the school principals showing objectivity and not making hasty decisions. In a representative comment, Participant 2 shared:

> They won't be like, 'you did this so I'm going to have to call or email your mom.' They'll pull your mom in but they'll talk about it. And then they're like, 'if this happens again then I'm going to have to call your mom about it', and then like it doesn't really happen a second time because they're so chill about it.

Expressing similar thoughts, Participant 3 noted:

> They don't really jump to conclusions like some of the teachers do in our school. They'll give you a chance to explain yourself and why you did it, and then they'll say, 'well maybe next time you should do this differently', and then you won't have to come to their office next time.

Among participants there was consensus that the school principals executed fair discipline practices and maintained open dialogue with students.

What to change about school. When asked about what they would want to change about their school, many participants indicated the emergent category of teacher unfairness and racially unbalanced treatment of students. Participants noted differential treatment of students based on race. Participant 4 indicated that, 'It's not that the school is racist, it just unbalanced…Like the teachers at our school…they'll talk the talk, but they won't walk the walk.' Furthering this sentiment, Participant 3 shared:

> Like with a teacher, they'll say, 'Johnny don't do that next time', but if it's a Black person, they'll say, 'why would you do this this makes no sense' and we'll say, 'we didn't really do anything wrong', and they'll say, 'why are you taking back to me? Why are you giving me attitude?'

Participants noted that while they felt that the school itself overall was not racist, implicit practices executed by certain teachers such as differential treatment of students based on race, was an area in which school efforts should be concentrated.

      Incident that tells what school is like. Participants were prompted to recount one incident that encapsulated what school was like for them. Two categories, teachers can be supportive and provide academic help and lack of reciprocal respect from teachers, arose from participants' responses. Most participants noted that while there are teachers with whom they have had negative interactions, many teachers can be helpful and supportive. Reflecting this view, Participant 3 discussed:

> I was frustrated, and my teacher was kind of busy with all these different students and she saw I was frustrated and finally she came over and was like, 'what do you need help with?' and I was like, 'I need help with blah, blah, blah' and she explained it really good and I got my grade up and I got a bunch of my worksheets—good grades on it and she's one of the teachers that's chill, but will help you in serious moments if you're failing or you're having— you're struggling with a topic.

Similarly, Participant 2 noted that teachers, "can be helpful, friendly, cool, and funny at the same time." Participant 5 also indicated an experience of being able to resolve an issue with his teacher: "I had a problem and I went to Mr. Y and he explained why it happened and we solved the problem." By contrast, it was emphasized that a lack of reciprocal respect from teachers exists, as Participant 4 noted in a representative comment: "Teachers will stress, be respectful to the teachers and stuff, but they really won't return the favor to us, and that just questions—why do we care to show respect when they don't give us respect at all." Thus, participants offered mixed reactions about incidents that captured their school experiences.

Eighth Grade Focus Group

From these domains, analysis of focus group data yielded 18 categories and sub-categories from the 8th grade focus group. Please see Table 4 which illustrates domains and categories and sub-categories. Data is presented with domains listed first, and categories and subcategories are listed second.

Table 4. Eighth Grade Focus Group Domains/Categories

Domains/Categories/ Sub-categories	Cross Analyses of Code Frequencies	Illustrative Core Ideas
Activities involved in • Sports	Typical	"Mainly sports"
Like most about school • Some teachers • Peer relationships	General General	"Some teachers are nice" "Peers are cool"
Like least about school • Discipline practices/ consequences	Variant	"Detentions"
Best memories about school • Sports	Typical	"Sports and winning championship"

Worst memories about school
• Teacher Practices
  o Misinterpretation of actions/behavior
  o Preferential treatment of girls
	General
	Typical
	
	General
		"The things teachers do"
		"They'll say that's threatening"
		
		"Teachers favor the girls"

Important things to know about your school • Teacher behavioral expectations o Classroom expectations not effectively communicated • Labeling and grouping: Black boys labeled as "bad" • Groups segregated by race	Typical Typical General Typical	"Know what you can and can't do" "Expected to already know" "They always think we act bad" "All Black table, all White table"

How you get along with teachers		
• Differential treatment of Black boys	General	"Black boys always get in trouble"
• Monitoring/surveillance of actions and conversations	General	"Stares at us during lunch and listens in on conversations"
Interactions with school principals		
• Positive interactions	General	"Pretty good interactions"
• Fairness in discipline practices	Typical	"Talks to you and asks questions"
What to change about school		
• Teacher training/ Teacher diversity	Variant	"The way teachers are trained; Increased diversity of teachers"
• Sexism	Variant	"This school is sexist"
One incident that tells what school is like		
• Provision of opportunity to grow as a person	Variant	"Can look back on how you used to be"

Current school activities. When prompted about current involvement in school activities most participants signified involvement with sports. Participants who indicated being involved in sports stated that their involvement was due to interest. One participant indicated participation in the student council because he "was involved in it last year and wanted to have a bigger role" (Participant 7).

What is liked most about school. Participants indicated that peer relationships and some teachers are the most positive facets of school, as Participant 8 indicated in a representative comment: "…the people here they're pretty nice, and the teachers…" But Participant 9 stressed, "it depends on the teacher."

What is liked least about school. Participants indicated that the least appealing aspect of school are disciplinary practices, specifically detentions. According to some participants, teachers often use detentions too frequently. Participant 6 emphasized that while there are good

teachers in the school, "it's just certain things they do" such as overzealousness and hypervigilance in executing discipline.

Best memories about school. When asked about their best memories about school, most participants indicated their participation in sports and "winning the championship" (Participant 8). According to participants, sports are an important aspect of the school environment prompting Participant 3 to state: "Our sports are pretty intense here."

Worst memories about school. After indicating their best memories about school, participants were prompted to indicate their worst memories about school. There was one category, teacher practices, which subsumes two sub-categories that developed from participants' responses. These sub-categories were misinterpretations of actions and behaviors by teachers and preferential treatment of girls. Participants noted that when they are being playful with peers, teachers will often misinterpret their actions and deem behaviors as a threat. In a representative comment by Participant 6: "We could be air-fighting and they'll say that's threatening." Furthering this sentiment Participant 8 stated: "Or we could just look at each other and they'll get mad." Participant 6 also indicated that if boys are "holding hands" teachers will reprimand them and tell them to "stop touching each other." However, Participant 9 stated: "But when the girls do it then it's OK."

Participants noted disparate treatment of girls and boys by teachers. Participant 9 indicated: "This school is sexist. You can see sometimes where teachers favor the girls." Emphasizing this point, Participant 7 shared that during an award ceremony the overwhelmingly majority of students being recognized were girls, "They had some award ceremony for people doing this and that and I'm not saying people shouldn't be awarded, but I find it suspicious that 8

out of 9 of them were girls." Echoing similar sentiments Participant 8 indicated: "…in class a bunch of boys raised their hands to help with a project and she picked all girls and there was 5 or 6 boys who hand their hands raised." Some participants indicated that the differences between how teachers treat and interact with girls and boys was "bothersome" and "annoying", however they attempt to ignore these occurrences as there is nothing they can do to stimulate change.

Important things to know about your school. When prompted to indicate things that a new student should know about their school, teacher behavioral expectations was one category that emerged. This resulted in one sub-category: classroom expectations not effectively communicated. Labeling and grouping of Black boys as "bad" and groups segregated by race were also emergent categories. Participant 7 indicated that a new student would need to have an awareness of what is prohibited and permitted, however these expectations are often not communicated: "Most of them expect you to know what you should and should not do in school." Consequently, this results in reprimands by teachers as Participant 9 indicated:

> Mr. P is always trying to start something. I walked past 3 different teachers and they didn't say anything, but he—I finally get to the classroom and he's like, 'walk back down the hallway', I said, 'alright', and he's like, 'no, go get your books' and I put my books down and get ready to walk back out the classroom, and he's like, 'no go get your books'. And I said, 'what did I do?' And my main teacher was like, 'he didn't do anything.'

Participants also indicated that racial segregation exists in their school as different racial groups tend to congregate with one another as Participant 9 shared: "There's a lot of groups in our school, we don't try to segregate ourselves, but there's a lot of different groups in our school." Echoing these sentiments Participant 9 noted: "It's like and all-Black table, an all-White table…there may be this one table with the Asians, Hispanics…"

In addition to racial segregation, participants noted that Black boys tend to encompass most students receiving office discipline referrals as Participant 9 noted: "They always think we act bad." This prompted Participant 6 to suggest that, "most of the Black boys are bad." When the researcher followed up with Participant 6, by stating that since he was a Black boy, should one assume that he is "bad". Participant 6 indicated that he had been in trouble in the past, and would not say that he "was the best kid." These sentiments reflected internalization of racialized bias of the inherency of African American boys as "bad".

Interactions with teachers. When participants were asked about how their interactions with teachers, two categories emerged: Differential treatment of Black boys and the monitoring and surveillance of actions and conversations. Participant 7 noted: "The teachers I know can cause trouble, I just sit back there. Like some of the teachers like Ms. F will just stare at me. The minute I get up she's like, 'Go sit down'". Building off this comment Participant 9 stated: "You can ask any teacher how many times have they sent the Black boys, they'll give you an answer, because Mr. X sees them everyday." Participant 9 also recalled an interaction he had with one of his teachers:

> He told me, everything I learned, I learned in the streets. He said, 'why do you have this attitude?' and I said, 'what attitude' and he said, 'did you learn this attitude in the streets?' and I asked him, what he said and he said, 'nothing'.

In addition to differential treatment, participants indicated the prevalence of surveillance and monitoring of Black boys. Participant 10 recounted an incident in which the conversation of one of his peers was monitored by a teacher during lunch time:

> My friend…he got in trouble for saying they're trying to keep the Black man down…we were in the lunchroom. And Ms. Y heard him and she said, 'does that mean something that I don't know about?, and he was like, 'no, it's straight up they're trying to keep the Black man down.'

Participant 9 reiterated this point and indicated that lunch time served as an opportunity for frequent monitoring of students, particularly Black boys:

> At our table during lunch, all we do is just sit there, and we say one thing and they're like, 'Oh my God we heard you'. I had a conversation with Mr. X about it and he said, 'what do you mean they just sit there and watch you?' Out of 19 tables they choose this one table to watch, and we say one thing, and they try to ease in on our conversations.

Similarly, Participant 10 recounted his experience of being surveilled:

> I remember last year we had this one teacher and she kept staring at us, and they weren't looking at anybody else, everyone was just eating their lunch and they kept staring at us…In our lunchroom that's all they watch.

Participant 7 noted, that while some of them are not "always the best kids," surveillance practices and disparate treatment should not be consistently occurring: "…just because you get into trouble a couple times doesn't mean that the teacher needs to always be watching you."

Interactions with school principals. In addition to being asked about interactions with teachers, participants were also asked about their interactions with the school principal and assistant principal. Participants indicated having positive interactions with the school principals and holding the belief that the principals executed fairness in discipline practices. In a representative comment, Participant 6 noted: "…he (assistant principal) actually talks to you and asks you questions about stuff you say." Participants also highlighted the investigative prowess of the assistant principal, as Participant 9 stated:

> He'll get you to admit it sooner or later. If I get in trouble and I don't admit to it, he'll let you go and then he'll call you back down. He'll ask you again, you don't cooperate he'll call your parents. And then he'll ask you again and then he'll tell you that he called your parents or he'll make it seem like he called your parents.

While participants indicated that their interactions with the school principal were limited, the few exchanges they had with him were positive.

What to change about school. When asked about what they would want to change about their school, two participants indicated that teacher training, specifically multicultural training and how to handle better address disciplinary issues in the classroom. In addition, participants noted the need for teacher diversity, not only on the basis of race, but also gender as Participant 6 noted: "We have only have one or two male teachers", and Participant 10 indicated: "…we have no African American teachers." In addition, participants reiterated the need to address teacher preferential treatment of girls, as to eradicate what they referenced as, "sexism."

Incident that tells what school is like. Participants were asked to recall one incident that captured what school was like for them. Rather than provide specific incidents, several participants simply indicated that school served as a time for "self-reflection" and an opportunity for growth as Participant 6 stated in a representative comment: "I think how much you've grown because you can look back on how you used to be."

Cross-Analysis of Commonalities and Differences Between Focus Groups

Between the two focus groups there were several commonalities. See Figure 1 for a visual illustration of common categories between each focus groups. In both focus groups, students indicated involvement and interests in similar extracurricular activities—sports. Only two students specified involvement in non-sports related activities (Yearbook and Student Council). In both cases, students had previous involvement in these activities and wanted to expand their participation and leadership scope. Seemingly, sports were at the epicenter of many participants' extracurricular activities--and in some cases their future ambitions. Rather than being involved in activities that were more academically focused (Yearbook and Student Council), most participants were involved in sports.

- Favoritism
- Labeling of Black boys as "trouble makers"
- Unfair/unwarranted discipline

Unfair teacher practices

Positive interactions with helpful/supportive teachers

Positive peer relations

Perceptions of administrators

- Positive relationship
- Fairness in discipline practices
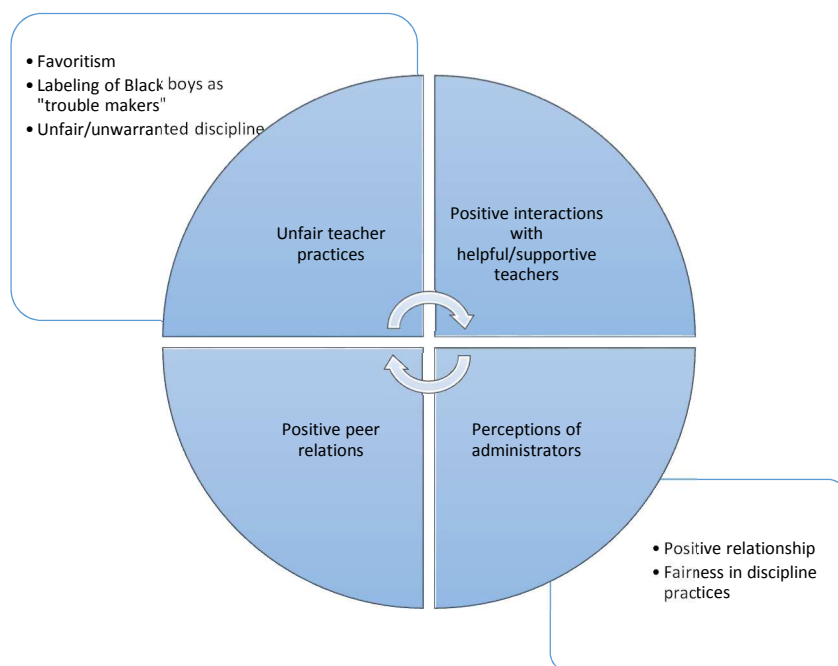
Figure 1. Venn Diagram of Common Categories between Focus Groups

Another commonality between focus groups was the importance of peer relationships. Participants in both focus groups recalled that some of their best memories and most positive aspects of school involved being befriended by peers and having positive peer interactions. In addition, participants in both focus groups discussed having positive interactions with teachers whom they deemed supportive. These teachers were referenced as "helpful" as they provided needed academic supports to students without the creation of barriers to impede academic help. Moreover, participants expressed affinity for the school principal and assistant principal, denoting a belief that the principals executed fairness in disciplinary practices and fostered a sense of open and honest dialogue with students.

While there were several parallels between each group relative to positive aspects of their academic experiences, they were also some negative occurrences that were concurrent. Participants spoke of teacher favoritism based on race and gender, specifically instances in which

girls or white students would commit similar offenses, however not receive the same disciplinary actions as African American boys. Additionally, participants indicated being targeted and singled out as well as being labeled in a negative connotation (i.e., "bad" or "troublemaker"). Both groups indicated a need for change in teacher practices, specifically the way in which teachers interact with students of color.

In addition to similarities between focus groups there were also a few contrasts. The participants in the 7th grade focus group discussed instances of peer harassment/bullying and a lack of teacher intervention to resolve harassment/bullying. Participants in the 7th grade focus group also discussed barriers in receiving academic support in a time of need, and a lack of perceived reciprocal respect from teachers. By contrast, participants in the 8th grade focus group discussed frequent surveillance and monitoring of actions as well as misinterpretation of actions and behaviors by teachers, and students segregating themselves by racial/ethnic groups during lunch time. It is a possible that 8th grade participants experienced greater incidents of surveillance and monitoring than did 7th grade participants because they may appear older and developmentally resemble men, which could be perceived as more threatening to teachers and trigger more instances of surveillance.

Individual Interviews

In this section, results from individual follow up interviews, which took place after the two focus groups, will be presented within the context of each research question. Please refer to Tables 5-7 and Figure 2 for a complete listing of categories and sub-categories organized by research question.

Prior to the beginning of each interview, participants were given the opportunity to provide assent and consent to being audio-recorded by signing an assent form (see Appendix F). Two participants declined audio-recording and one participant's parent did not provide permission for audio-recording. Thus, notes were taken during these interviews. After participants provided assent, they were asked demographic questions regarding how long they were a student at their school, current grades, and what they wanted to be when they grew up. Students' grade averages ranged from A to C, and only four participants indicated a future career interest. Each of these career interests either involved becoming a basketball player with the National Basketball Association (NBA) or playing for the Major League Baseball (MLB). Three of these students added that they were interested in pursuing other careers (engineering, physical therapy) as a contingency plan if they were unsuccessful in pursuing a career in sports.
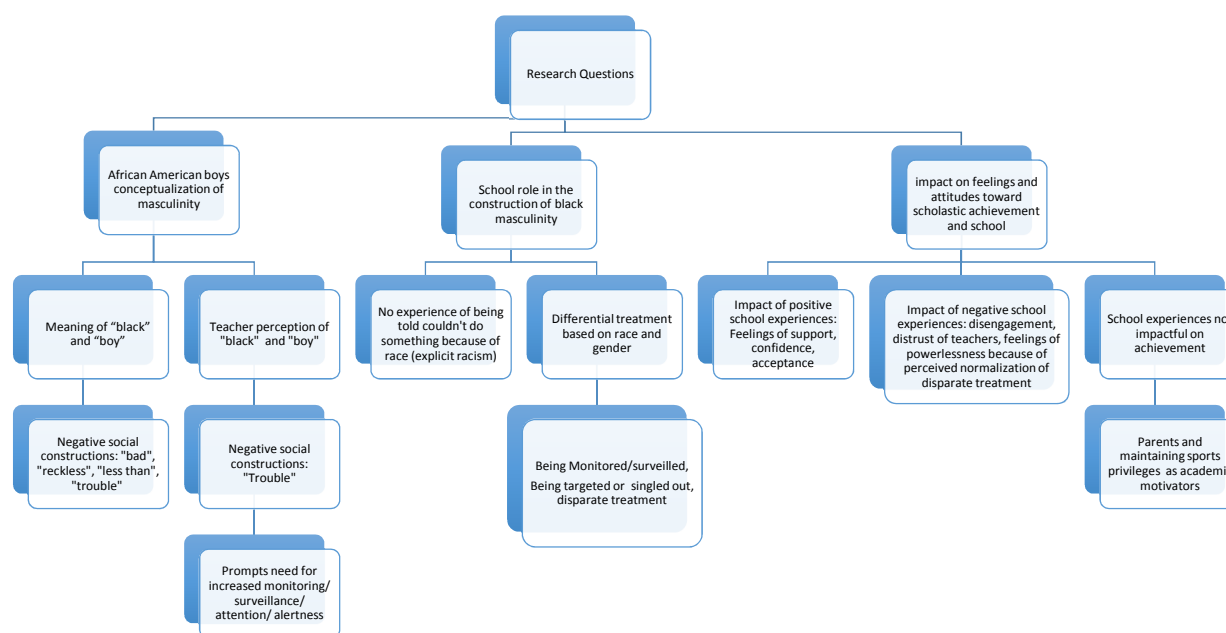
Figure 2. Thematic Map

Research Question 1: How do young African American boys conceptualize Black masculinity?

Participants were asked to identify their conceptualizations of the word "Black." All participants assigned race to the term "Black." The term "African American" was an emergent category, along with skin color and shared cultural and historical traditions as articulated by Participant 7:

> …the word black means that we fought back, earned our spot in this world and all the things we had to go through like slavery and punishment. We've kind of got through all of that now, even though some of the things are still happening, we kind of made a name for ourselves and now we can establish our dominance in the world.

Similarly, Participant 8 noted: "It means—like a religion, a tradition, that's who you are, that's what you can from—a Black community that means races or color…" Participants 2 and 3 also referenced the term "Black" as "skin color" and a "group of people" sharing traditions. Thus, the term "Black" was conceptualized in racialized terms with specific cultural markers for each participant.

When prompted to indicate their perceptions of how others viewed the term "Black," two categories developed: negative constructions and positive constructions. When discussing negative stereotypical constructions Participant 4 shared: "To a lot of different people they may have different opinions—maybe sometimes ignorance, athletic, fast, some of those stereotypes, typical things like that." Similarly, Participant 5 stated: "To some it's like African American, to others it's something bad…They don't like Black people, they think they're less." Participant 8 also indicated that others perceived the term "Black" as "Not equal. That he's not equal to anybody. That he's different, he's an outsider, he's a stranger." Participant 2 used the term "nigger" to indicate how others' perception of "Black" and Participant 10 referenced "Black" as

an offensive term. While participants cited others' perception of the term "Black" in negative

constructions, Participant 6 suggested that some may view the term positively and believe that

"Black is beautiful." Similarly, Participant 7 indicated that others may view constructions of the

word "Black" as having equality with others or being "better than other people in this world."

Table 5. Domains/Categories Research Question 1

Domains	Categories/ Sub-categories	Cross Analyses of Code Frequencies	Illustrative Core Ideas
Black Masculinity Conceptualization RQ1	Construction of word "black" to self • Racialized term: African American • Shared history • Skin color	General Variant Variant	"A term to call African Americans" "Shared culture" "Skin color of a people"
	Construction of term "black" to others • Negative stereotype constructions: "bad", "different", "outsider", "nigger", "less than/unequal" • Positive views: distinct culture with traditions	General Variant	"They shouldn't be here, they're below us" "A group of people sharing a culture"
	Construction of term "boy" to self • Gendered term: male/young male • Affectionate term shared with peers: "homie", "my boy"	General Variant	"A young male" "My homie"
	Construction of term "boy" to others • Athlete • A young male • Racialized term depending on context (e.g. Black men in the south were often referred to as, "boy".)	Variant General Variant	"An athlete" "Young male" "What they called us back in the day"

	Construction of "Black" and "boy"		
	• Duality of "Black boy"		
	○ Negative social constructions: "bad", "reckless", "less than", "trouble"	General	"A male who is African American and less than"
		Typical	"This person is less than"
	Construction of "black" and "boy" to teachers		
	• No meaning construction for teachers/teachers view Black boys as they view other students	Typical	"It holds no meaning"
	• Negative social constructions: "Trouble", "need to be on alert", "need to separate them"	Typical	"Trouble"

Participants were prompted to discuss what the word "boy" meant to them. Responses indicated the intersectionality of gender and age. Participants either cited "young male" or "younger male." Two participants referred to "boy" as a shared identity with peers and a term of affection and endearment as stated by Participant 2: "Sometimes we use it to say, 'my boy' or 'my homie'." Paralleling this sentiment Participant 6 noted: "There's this thing where whenever somebody does something funny or stupid to just be funny—like if someone says, 'boy-eee' like that, then that's just a funny thing we do here."

When asked about how others conceptualized the term "boy," responses paralleled their own references of the term "boy" (young male). Participant 3 added that others may perceive the term as "young males who share things in common," Participants 4 and 9 added that others may connect the term with athleticism: "People think boys are athletes or something—because they always assume that boys are going to play sports and that all are athletic" (Participant 9). Two

participants indicated that depending on context, the word "boy," can have a negative connotation, as Participant 2 noted: "I think white people use it as "boy" in a derogatory way, like how they used to call us in the South." Echoing similar sentiments, Participant 1 indicated: "It can go to different ways depends on how that person looks at it. If the person is racist they probably try to use it like back in the day…" Consequently, participant's conceptions of the term "boy" aligned with what they believed was the viewpoint of others, while two participants added that the term was very context dependent and could convey offensive meanings depending on usage and the individual employing the term.

Participants were asked to describe what they believed the merging of the two terms "Black" and "boy" meant. From this question, the category: the duality of "Black boy" emerged with negative constructions of the merging of the terms serving as a sub-category. The duality of "Black boy" references the notion of being an "African American boy who is less than" (Participant 3), who is "trouble" (Participant 4), "bad" (Participant 5), someone who others have a "grudge against" (Participant 5), who "doesn't get as many chances or opportunities," and who will change people's perceptions of them "if they make a mistake" (Participant 9).

When participants were asked how they believed others perceived the integration of these two terms, specifically their teachers, two categories developed from participants' responses: no meaning construction and negative social constructions. About half (n=4) of participants indicated that they believed that, for teachers, the term "Black boy," carried no meaning as noted by Participant 9: "I think for some teachers they are fair, so the words 'Black boy' wouldn't mean anything to them." Similarly, Participant 8 indicated that the meaning for teachers was that "you're the same as everyone else, you're just a different color." Echoing this, Participant 4 cited

that he believed it had not "made a difference to teachers." The remainder of participants (n=6)

differed in their assessment, with the majority using the term "trouble" to cite teachers'

impressions of the term "Black boy." Participant 3 noted that "for teachers it may mean a group

of Black students that you don't want to be together because they may cause trouble for other

people. Participant 2 indicated that for teachers, "it means trouble…you have to pay close

attention to them…you have to pay more attention to them than anyone else." Participant 9

shared that for teachers the term is,

> …like a warning—you better watch out because they might do something immature or not really what they (teachers) expect when it comes to school…you have to watch out. You have to be more alert—like when you hear a Black boy is coming—teachers were more alert at (school), because my friends now are saying that the school wasn't as strict, but when I started coming and different Blacks started coming, they started to get more strict and angry, because they didn't want to have to watch out and be extremely alert about the Black boys. They were angry about that.

For Participant 6, he believed the term "Black boy" had a derogatory meaning:

> I think it can be used—if they're going to say that especially if it's a white person then I think they're referring to back in the day where people—where we worked for them and we were called property not people.

> In sum, the term "black" was perceived by most participants as a racialized term

associated with African Americans. When reflecting on what the term meant for them, most

participants referenced positive constructions such as culture and traditions. However, when

discussing how others perceived the term "black," two categories emerged: positive

constructions, which was referenced in participants' responses citing "culture" and a "group of

people sharing a culture," and negative constructions such as being viewed as "less than," a

"nigger," or "something bad." For the term "boy" responses reflected a gendered term

intersecting with age: "young male." While the term "boy" had innocuous constructions as a

single word or entity, when integrated with the term "black," conceptualizations of the terminology "Black boy" became racialized with negative social constructions about Black male identity. These negative descriptions included the notion that Black boys are inherently "bad," "trouble," or "less than" others.

When asked about how they believed their teachers conceptualized the term "Black boy," about half of participants indicated that they believed that the terminology had no meaning for teachers and teachers that viewed Black boys as "the same as everyone else" (Participant 8). The other half of participants referenced "trouble" and the need for increased "monitoring and surveillance" as well as the need to separate large congregants of Black boys as they may "cause trouble for other people" (Participant 3). Thus, participants' own constructions of "Black boys" aligned with their perceptions of their teachers' conceptualizations.

Research Question 2: what role does the school play in the construction of Black masculinity?

In this section results are presented for research question two. For a listing of categories and sub-categories for research question two, please refer to Table 6.

Participants were then asked if they believed they had experienced disparate treatment because they were a Black boy. Over half (n=6) of participants indicated that they had not experienced differential treatment based on race. One participant indicated that he was "mixed" (Black and White), and consequently believed that his biracial identity privileged him from receiving disparate treatment (Participant 8), which aligns with the CRT assumption of whiteness as property. It should be noted that while the student identified as biracial, his teachers nominated him as a potential participant in this study, which focused on African American boys.

Table 6. Domains/Categories by Research Question 2

School Construction of Black Masculinity RQ 2	Differential Treatment because of race/being black boy • Not experienced • Disparate treatment • Being monitored/surveilled	Typical Variant Variant	"Have not experienced" "A lot of favoritism" "You are watched all the time"
	Differential treatment feelings • Aggravation/frustration • Not wanting to return to school	Typical Typical	"Frustrating" "Didn't want to come back"
	Time when someone said couldn't do something because of race/being Black boy • No experience • Different raced peers' assumption of ability to play certain sports	Typical Variant	"Have not experienced" "Thought I couldn't play because I was Black"
	Feeling about time when someone said couldn't do something because of race/being Black boy • Overcame negative perceptions by succeeding in task that was challenged	Variant	"Anything is possible"

Presumably, his teachers reference him as African American despite his racially ambiguous phenotype (light-skinned, curly hair), his self-identification as "mixed", and his distancing of himself from categorization of "Black." Of the remaining students who indicated they had experienced unequal treatment, several categories emerged: preferential treatment based on race and gender, surveillance and monitoring, and being targeted or singled out. Participant 1 noted receiving reprimands and disciplinary consequences for actions that, when committed by a white student, were ignored: "…it could be a Caucasian person that's doing something and if I do it, I

get in trouble for it. But if the other person do it, it's all cool with him…" Noting similar

sentiments Participant 7 indicated:

> If they're like a Black boy and they're extremely nice—they'll be extremely strict with them and that's like a stab in the back and if it's a white boy and they're a loose cannon and they break a window or something in the classroom, then the teachers aren't as alert with that.

Continuing, Participant 7 shared an incident in which his teacher treated him unfairly:

> My teacher—she was a little more strict with me that other students, and she would basically be more on top of me…she was mostly on me and (another Black male student). Like there was this one time I think I forgot a worksheet and she yelled at me and said, 'why didn't you bring it' and stuff like that when me and (another Black male student) forgot it. But when it was a white boy who forgot it she was like 'oh, just bring it tomorrow', and I said how come you mistreated us, and she kind of ignored me.

Participant 2 indicated feeling as if he was "under a radar" or being surveilled or monitored more

than white students, as teachers believe that Black boys are more susceptible to causing trouble.

Echoing these sentiments Participant 3 noted:

> I feel like I am watched more to make sure I am kept on task. I'm stared at by teachers in different settings to make sure I'm not getting in trouble. A lot of times during lunch, our table will be watched by teachers monitoring in the lunch room as if they know we will get in trouble.

Participants who expressed disparate treatment indicated that these experiences were

"frustrating" and "unfair." Participant 3 noted: "It's not fair (Black) boys are being treated

differently for being themselves." Participant 7 also shared feeling frustrated by teacher's lack of

trust in him following through on handing in a homework assignment stating:

> …you (the teacher) don't put your trust in me to get my homework done and let me give it to you tomorrow, but you put your trust in this person you barely even know…But you put your trust in a new kid and I've been here—at the time I was there for like two years. And that was kind of like a stab in the back to me.

Participants 1 and 2 noted feeling as if they did not want to return to school the next day and having a negative perception of school as a result. For Participant 1, it caused him to question some of the practices, however given the current system, he indicated that he "can't do anything about it" so he just "rolls with it". This viewpoint is evocative of Majors and Billson's (1992) "cool pose" social-psychological framework in which Black males construct a stoic and emotionally armored stance as a coping mechanism that allows them to navigate structural barriers and inequality.

When participants were asked if there had been a time when someone decided that they could not do something because of their race, most participants (n=8) indicated that this had not occurred. Only two participants (Participants 6 and 7) noted being singled out by white and Hispanic peers who assumed that, because they were Black, they were unable to play certain sports (hockey and kickball). In each of these scenarios, participants noted overcoming peers' negative perceptions by succeeding in the task that was challenged.

It is important to note that in previous responses, participants did indicate disparate treatment, however in response to this question, participants indicated not receiving explicit messages that they could not do something because of their race. Accordingly, participants noted experiencing more forms of implicit racism (i.e., monitoring and surveillance) rather than explicit forms of racism (not being able to do something because of race). Many of the practices (monitoring, surveillance, disparate treatment) articulated by participants, aligned with earlier responses to questions regarding how participants perceived Black boys (i.e., "trouble," "need to be more alert"), as well as their perceptions of how their teachers perceived Black boys (need for increased monitoring and surveillance). Thus, there is seemingly a mirroring of participants'

perceptions of Black boys (Black masculinity) and current school practices, specifically disparate treatment of African American boys. Consequently, participants' assessment of Black masculinity could be influenced by the prevalence of stereotypical perceptions that different raced peers and teachers hold of African American boys (Wright et al., 1998).

Research Question 3: How does this construction impact their feelings and attitudes toward scholastic achievement? If so, how?

In this section results are presented for research question three. For a listing of categories and sub-categories for research question three, please refer to Table 7.

Table 7. Domains/Categories by Research Question 3

School constructions and impact on feelings toward school RQ3	Defining school • Positive constructions: A place to learn and grow and become educated, a place to make friends • Negative constructions: Boring	Typical Variant	"You can learn and make friends" "Boring"
	Positive teacher experience • Academic, emotional, and social support from caring teachers in time of need	General	"Get help if you need it"
	Impact of positive teacher experience on feeling about school • Feeling supported	General	"Support and help"
	Negative teacher experience • Differential treatment/double standard (based on race and gender) • Disparate treatment from teachers: 1. Being targeted or singled out Grouping/categorizing 2. Unfair/unwarranted disciplinary sanctions	Typical Typical Variant Variant	"Teachers favor girls" "Treat us differently" "Under a radar" "Included in group of Black boys" "Get in trouble for no reason"

	Impact of negative teacher experience on feeling about school • Disengagement from school • Questioning fairness	Typical Variant	"Don't want to come back" "I'm in trouble, but not him"
	Impact of experiences on doing well in school • Family more impactful/Maintenance of grades to keep privileges • Others doubting of ability impacts need to work harder academically	Typical Variant	"Will get pulled from sports" "People are doubting ability"
	Experiences with teachers of same race • Positive relationship 1. Feeling of connectedness and understanding	General Typical	"Positive relationship" "Felt connected"
	Experiences with teachers of different race • Teachers acquaintance with students (Black boys) to overcome misperceptions and stereotypes • Cultural incongruence	General Variant	"Once they get to know you" "Won't say anything sounding aggressive"
	Impact of experiences on career ambitions • Not negatively impacted by school experiences	Variant	"No impact"

Participants were asked how they would define school. Many participants defined school in positive terms, often describing it as a setting for learning and growth as well as life preparation. Participant 9 stated that school is, "A place to go and learn and to have an education so that when you go out into the real world you know all the stuff you need to know." Similarly, Participant 4 characterized school as a place of: "Growth, education. It's time for you to grow as

a person and as a student." Participant 3 noted that school is, "a place where students come to learn…all ages learn together and sometimes there is a lot of interaction with others during learning." Likewise, Participant 10 shared that school is "A place of learning that is open to everyone." Participant 8 indicated that school serves as a compendium of many things such as establishing friendships and involvement in extracurricular activities: "School is about many things. It's about friends, learning, education, about you can do sports, be involved in activities that you would not have out of school." Participant 1 noted that school is not only a place for education, but also "a place where you can feel safe." Although noting that school engenders "a lot of homework," Participant 6 also believed that at school, some teachers can serve as a supportive system in propelling students' success: "Some teachers are chill. They want you to push harder, they want you to do your best, and never give up, and do the best you can."

While most participants referenced school in positive terms, other participants characterized school as boring and unengaging. Participant 2 cited school as "A cruel 6 hours of life—boring and long." He noted that, although he enjoyed learning in general, the strategies and methods teachers used were not "engaging…not interesting." Participant 5 also believed that school was unengaging and simply identified school as a "place I come everyday."

Participants were then asked to provide an example of a positive experience they had with one of their teachers. All participants noted instances of teachers providing academic or emotional support during a time of need. Participant 6 recounted a time wherein his teacher, after the death of a close classmate, provided him and other peers, time to process their loss and grieve:

> My teacher Ms. X, she's probably my favorite teacher of all time. Always did nice things for us because when a friend of mine died she was there—she like gave us time. She let

us leave class for the rest of the day because it was so hard on us…We were really close and then he died…she was there for us and she said we could take—she was like there for us and I think that was my best experience because it was a hard time for us and she was there.

Participant 9 cited a time when he was struggling academically and received support he needed to succeed:

> I think I was struggling in a class and I asked for help and the teacher was like, come after school or something like that for help, and I came after school because I want good grades, I don't want to fail or anything. And so, when she helped me out I was—I felt like—because I didn't really like school at the time so when she helped me out, I felt like school was not really bad. As a middle schooler, the stuff they teach you doesn't seem that important to you then but more towards when you get older and stuff like that. When they helped me out, it's more like a life lesson to keep trying and always be positive about what you're doing.

Similarly, Participant 8 recalled receiving academic support in a class that challenged him:

> So, it was math class and I was having trouble with a worksheet and I told the teacher and she said, 'after school'. I asked if I could get some help with math after class and at that time, I was failing—I had a 'D' in that class. And after math class, my teacher helped me with all the things I needed to get caught up with, and that really affected my school career.

Participants 3 and 5 also cited receiving academic support, while Participant 1 noted instances in which teachers make phone calls to his parents to share positive news when he is doing well in school:

> When I got all B's, all my teachers went to tell, because I usually get a phone call home if I do something good or if you do something bad. And I got a phone call home—not that I did something bad, but it seemed like it. But it was really something good about my grades in school.

In each case, participants noted feeling supported by teachers as Participant 8 cited in a representative comment: "That made me feel like you could get help from any teacher. It's not just one teacher you can go to and get help from many teachers."

When participants were asked to provide instances of negative experiences with teachers, all but two students indicated having negative interactions with teachers. From this question, one category emerged: disparate treatment based on race, and two sub-categories: grouping and categorizing based on race and unfair disciplinary sanctions. Participant 6 recalled an instance of unfair disciplinary sanctions when he was reprimanded for accidently dropping a small rock in science class:

> We were doing a science experiment with crystals or whatever they were or rocks. And then she was like put the rocks back into the box, and I tried to put the rocks back into the box and I accidently dropped the rock and then she gave me a 'trouble card', basically a minor, and I said I accidently dropped it and that was just terrible. It was terrible because I didn't do anything. I accidently dropped the rock and she was like, 'that's a minor' and I was confused because how do you get a minor for accidently dropping a rock? A small rock…I dropped it and then she had a problem with it and gave me a minor and I was like, 'I accidently dropped it.' And then she sent me down to the principal's office that day and I got a minor and that just made me feel terrible.

Participant 7 noted an experience of a having a fight with a white student and receiving disciplinary consequences, while the white student, who had instigated the fight, was not disciplined:

> …this kid…was basically trying to fight me. He said, 'Let's play a game called punch', and he started hitting me and I finally got tired of it and I started hitting him back. Well the teacher was looking…and she didn't say anything about it, but when she saw me hitting him back she actually stepped in…and basically tried to give me a detention.

Echoing similar sentiments Participant 1 noted a disciplinary double standard: "Some teachers try to slow you down—meaning like you can do one thing and the other person do it, depending on who the teacher is, you can get in trouble."

Participant 5 discussed a time in which he and a group of African American boys were seated together at lunch and all students at the table were grouped together and were reprimanded because one student at the table laughed too loudly. Participant 3 recounted a time

in class wherein his teacher was monitoring a group of African American boys who were talking

during class and included him in the group of scolded students:

> I noticed he was watching a group of Black boys in the class, and even though I wasn't talking, I was doing my work, he included me in the group with them and said I did something when I didn't do anything. Now, I try to distance myself the other Black boys in class so I will be less likely to be included in that group.

Offering parallel comments Participant 2 noted:

> In one of my classes, I was in class sitting in the back and everyone was talking, but I was just minding my business and not talking to anyone, but because I was with that group, he called me out and I wasn't doing anything. He said I was talking when I wasn't…

> Of the participants who indicated a negative experience, most stated that these

experiences either made them question the fairness of the teacher's actions or feeling disengaged

and not wanting to return to school the next day, as Participant 1 noted:

> When it first happened, I'll get mad. But now when it happens continuously—it ain't nothing really to get in trouble for, so I really won't care or show any interest in the conversation they are having with me.

Participants 2 and 4 cited not wanting to return to school as Participant 4 indicated in

representative comment:

> It makes me feel kind of iffy towards school. Makes me feel like being noisy for the rest of the day and not come back tomorrow. But it is what it is. You just have to come back and forget about it.

Participants 6 and 7 reflected on the perceived unfairness of their teachers' actions:

> It made me feel like the teachers are out to get me for no reason. Because if in modern day, if you drop something in this science class that's that tiny, she would not get a problem about that she will say, 'pick it up'. She will not give you a detention for dropping a tiny rock. It was ridiculous (Participant 6).

> In a follow up question, participants were asked if these experiences made a difference in

how they feel about doing well academically. Most participants indicated that these experiences

were not impactful as their parents and family was more of a motivating force in trying to

succeed academically. Participant 6 indicated that his parents have strict rules regarding maintaining extracurricular privileges:

> I'm on a travel team…and here's how it goes: A's you don't have to worry about in our house. B's you're still good and don't have to worry about anything. C's you lose your phone or something like that. D—you're kicked off the (team). F—you're not going anywhere, you're not leaving the house, you're in your room studying for every single test.

Participant 9 indicated that his father was a motivating influence to do well in school: "…my dad motivates me to be the best I can be. Because like I said earlier, if you do this now it will be effective in the long run of life." Participants 3 and 10 noted being motivated by parents with Participant 10 also indicating being motivated by, "seeing others do well in school."

While most students indicated that parents and family, and not negative experiences, were more impactful relative to doing well academically, two students cited the need to overcome teachers' negative perceptions about academic ability as factors that motivate them to do well as Participant 7 noted in a representative comment:

> Yeah, because now that I know some people are doubting me, they think I'm not going to do well in school or that I'm going to do well in life—now that just pushes me harder to be good at what I'm good at.

Thus, participants were influenced by familial or parental factors rather than negative experiences or interactions with teachers.

Participants were then asked to reflect on experiences with teachers who were of the same racial background as them. Most participants (n=9) indicated having a positive relationship with a teacher, usually one African American male teacher, of their same race. Participants noted having a strong connection with teachers of a similar race and cited a cultural connection: "I understood him and the way he talked because we were the same race" (Participant 2). Similarly,

Participant 3 noted that because he and his teacher were of the same race they "were able to have a connection." Participant 10 referenced this connection as "a different kind of chemistry—a good chemistry." Although participants cited a cultural connection as a conduit to the positive relationship they had with teachers of the same race as them, the participant who identified as biracial indicated that the positive relationship was attributed to his (the student's) good behavior and being a "good kid" (Participant 8).

While participants noted positive experiences with teachers who were of their same race, a common theme emerged when participants were prompted to recall experiences with teachers of a different race. The notion of teachers needing to become acquainted with students before they could treat them fairly was emphasized in the comments of Participant 7:

> For the most part, I feel that once a teacher has gotten to know you a little bit, then they're actually cool with you. I actually have a white teacher…When I first got to this school, bunch of teachers were expecting Black kids to be immature and basically talk back to all the teachers, but when she actually met me…she realized that not all the Black kids are bad, not even most of them, only a small group of them.

Echoing similar comments Participant 3 noted: "With teachers of a different race, sometimes they treat you differently but once they get to know you, for the most part, they will treat you the same." Mirroring these sentiments Participant 10 indicated: "When teachers first meet you, they don't know what to expect—they don't know what type of person you are and then after they interact with you, they may feel more comfortable." Two participants highlighted the notion of cultural incongruence between themselves and teachers who were of a different race. In a representative comment, Participant 1 emphasized this point noting how the cultural differences impact how messages are communicated with teachers: "…here you gotta say all your words, you can't talk in slang or anything like that or anything that shows you're aggressive."

Finally, participants were asked if their schooling experiences (either positive or negative) had any influence on future career ambitions. Only four participants cited future career interests. Of the four participants, two noted that school had no influence. They cited their interests in sports as impactful (all three participants cited interest in a future career in sports). This speaks to the importance of recruiting and retaining educators of color, particularly African American males who can serve as mentors and role models, exemplifying successful career choices outside of the sporting arena. One participant who noted that his schooling experiences had impacted his career interests, indicated that his experiences with teachers providing him with an opportunity to get feedback regarding his career interest:

> School is what helped me get my head out of the clouds and make me think—this basketball thing is not a guarantee. I need to consider something else that I like to do…(it) just made me think more about real life…because they always keep it real and that's the best thing you could ask for (Participant 4).

Summarily, participants noted positive characterizations of school, citing school as "place of learning" and a "place of growth" (Participants 3, 6, 8, and10). When recounting positive experiences with teachers, participants cited instances of teacher provision of academic help in times of need and these experiences giving them a sense feeling supported by their teachers. When reflecting on negative teacher experiences, participants recalled disparate treatment such as being grouped and categorized with others of the same race and receiving unfair and unwarranted disciplinary actions. Consequently, these negative teacher experiences made them feel disengaged from school and led them to question unfair teacher practices. Despite these negative experiences, participants indicated that these occurrences had not impacted their feelings about scholastic achievement and doing well in school. Most participants cited parents and family as main influencers, which seems to serve as a buffer and resilience factor against

disparate treatment and negative teacher interactions. While two participants suggested that negative experiences with teachers facilitated the need to squelch the negative perceptions of teachers who doubt their academic ability.

Recalling experiences with teachers who were African American, participants recounted positive interactions and sense of cultural connectedness. However, when reflecting on experiences with teachers who were non-African American, participants emphasized the need for teachers to become acquainted with them before they could treat them fairly and establish a comfort level with them. Moreover, some participants underscored a cultural mismatch that oftentimes prompted participants' need to self-censor and minimize use of slang and cultural language as not cause misperceptions of aggressiveness. And while most participants cited no specific career interests, participants who had indicated future career ambitions said their school experiences were not impactful on these decisions. However, one participant noted that his experiences and interactions with his teachers enabled him to receive feedback on the feasibility of career options.

Summary

Across both focus groups and individual interviews, participants noted positive interactions and experiences with supportive teachers. According to participants, these teachers engendered accessibility in relation to the provision of academic help and emotional support in times of need. While participants recounted positive experiences with some teachers, they also recalled negative experiences with teachers that were characterized by disparate treatment such as frequent monitoring of actions, targeting and singling out participants, creation of hindrances to academic support, preferential treatment of girls, and

labeling of Black boys as "bad" or "trouble." Seemingly, these negative teacher experiences were more salient and had a profound impact during this stage of development as evidenced by participants' narratives of negative occurrences that were remarkably descriptive and ignited emotional responses such as anger and frustration. Additionally, participants' characterization of Black boys strongly coincided with their perceptions of how they believed their teachers viewed Black boys. Taken together, the imprinting of perceived constructions of African American boys, manifest by disparate actions of teachers, suggests how pivotal these experiences were on participants' assessment of Black masculinity.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Participants in this study provided rich descriptions and counter narratives of their

educational experiences and the current school climate. In this section, focus group data and

results from each research question will be presented within the context of main findings

and where relevant, the study's theoretical framework, Critical Race Theory (CRT). It

should be noted that the terms "Black boys" and "African American boys" will be used

interchangeably.

Focus Group Results-Main Findings

In deconstructing focus group data, there were several patterns that emerged.

Two interconnected patterns were the notions of monitoring and surveilling African

American boys' behavior and labeling. Participants suggested that these instances of

monitoring were executed to hinder African American boys from instigating trouble.

Participants recounted feelings of, what many referenced as, being "under a radar" and

finding that teachers surveilled them more frequently not only during class, but also during

lunch, a time for socializing with peers. The intersectionality of race and gender was

prominently reflected in most participants' sentiments regarding teachers' perceptions and

labeling of African American boys as inherently "bad" or "troublemakers." These

perceptions often resulted in hypervigilance, which was manifest as a "stake-out" of actions,

behaviors, as well as conversations. These actions executed by teachers coincide with the

nuances of Foucault's work (1971), in which he describes how the process of discipline functions, not only as a system of control, but also to impede individuality and shape bodies to align with majoritarian acceptable forms of behavior. Accordingly, this facilitates hindrance of Black male self-expression and individuality—individuality that often counters majoritarian norms of acceptability. This notion of impeding the individuality was noted in the responses of participants who indicated the self-censoring of slang and any other expressions that could be misperceived as a threat.

Another emergent pattern was perceived occurrences of favoritism. Participants cited several examples of teachers providing preferential treatment to White students as well as girls. Participants made no racial distinctions or intersectionality regarding teacher preference of girls, specifically, African American boys perceived that girls of all races, including African American girls were treated preferentially. When recounting instances of reprimand, participants often noted that girls, who committed the same infractions faced no disciplinary consequences.

Cornwell, Mustard, and Van Parys (2012) reviewed longitudinal data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) the 1998-99 ECLS-K cohort and found gender disparities in subjective and objective measures. Notably, teacher preferences were reflected in test scores and in observations of teacher classroom behavior. The author suggested that these disparities could be attributed to the fact that the teaching profession is predominately female and consequently teachers "develop assumptions about typical boy and girl classroom behavior. Girls may be expected to possess a better 'attitude toward learning'" (p. 20). But what accounts for the differences in teacher responses to infractions between African American boys

and girls? Several participants in the study indicated that their behavior, even innocuous behavior such as hand holding with one another, was viewed as "threatening." Thus, it could be that the intersectionality of race and masculinity are interpreted by teachers as more dangerous and sinister than race alone. In viewing this through the lens of CRT, race and racism "often occurs at intersections with other forms of oppression" (Pérez-Huber & Solorzano, 2014, p. 310). Thus, the actions of teachers may be based on raced and gendered positioning of African American boys as dangerous and criminally inclined.

Research Question 1-Main Findings

Research question one asked: how do young African American boys conceptualize Black masculinity? There were several important categories that arose from this research question. One finding was that participants' conceptualization of "boy" was relatively innocuous and responses reflected the intersectionality of age and gender (i.e., young male), however when the term became racialized, the intersection of race and gender resulted in responses that reflected stereotypical and negative constructions of Black masculinity, as well as the duality of "Black boy" as being an African American boy and being "less than." In addition, these constructions converged with participants' perceptions of how teachers conceptualized Black maleness. This aligns with the DuBoisian notion of a double-consciousness wherein one views himself or herself through a misconstrued lens constructed by others. These negative perceptions "exist in relation to each other, and they serve to categorize, essentialize, and disenfranchise Black young male students as they navigate and negotiate the school system…and functions as an incubator for the stereotyping that takes place" (James, 2012, p. 484). The confluence of participants' constructions of Black maleness and their perceptions of teacher constructions of Black maleness

resulted in participants' beliefs that teachers needed to execute hypervigilance in their

interactions with Black boys such as separating large congregants into smaller, more palatable

units as they may "cause trouble for other people" (Participant 3).

According to racial threat theory, "social control typically assumes that individuals,

particularly members of the dominant or majority group, perceive a sizeable racial minority

group as a viable threat to existing social arrangements and thus both informal social control"

(King & Wheelock, 2007, p. 1256). Seemingly, African American boys were "over-

pathologized" as participants often noted that African American boys were perceived as

dangerous and a threat to many of their teachers, which aligns with the historically constructed

threatening Black male archetype, and correlated with increased punitive actions [i.e., detentions,

frequent reprimands, office discipline referrals (ODR's)], and with over 40 years of research

documenting discipline disparity in relation to African American boys (Children's Defense Fund,

1975; Losen, 2015; Skiba et al., 2011; Verdugo, 2002).

While the African American boys in this study had negative constructions of Black

masculinity, which aligned with their perceptions of how they were viewed by teachers, the

notion of sports and the African American boy were also salient, as sports, rather than

academics, seemed to be a focal point in their experiences. It could be that sports served as an

avenue not only as a potential way of finding success economically, but also as a space for

receiving positive feedback that seemed to elude most participants in the classroom. Perhaps, this

was an instance of interest convergence in that African American boys received the respect and

admiration for their athletic prowess and were perceived as less of a threat in the sporting arena,

while simultaneously fulfilling the stereotyped construction of Black males in sports, by serving in their societally accepted roles (Ferber, 2007).

Research Question 2-Main Findings

Research question two asked, what role does the school play in the construction of Black masculinity? Participants cited several examples of teacher practices that aided and sustained the negative constructions of African American boys. These practices include disparate treatment which was manifest as monitoring and surveillance of participants. This subsequently impacted participants' level of school engagement in that some indicated feelings of frustration with the school environment and "not wanting to return to school" (Participant 10). Further, inequity in teacher practices reinforced how participants perceived teachers regarded them.

However, given the racial dynamics between participants and teachers, it was revealing that participants could not cite instances (beyond two participants noting examples of different raced peers suggesting that they could not perform certain "white" sports that were typically played by Caucasians and not dominated by African Americans), in which teachers or others suggested that their race precluded them from completing a given task or achieving in a certain area. It could be that such instances had occurred, however were manifest in an implicit (or covert) manner and participants may not have had the sophistication to understand the nuances of these occurrences, due to their current stage of development.

The prevalence of monitoring and surveilling African American boys seemingly functioned as a means of racial profiling, which is resonant with the notion of a police officer targeting an African American male of whom he or she is suspicious. As the school is a microcosm of society, many of the disparate practices executed by teachers could be reflective of

societal perceptions and resulting preconceived notions teachers have of African American males that are then perpetuated within the school, as Love (2014) suggests: "…teachers' beliefs, conscious or unconscious, inform their pedagogical practices and behavior. Thus, teachers' beliefs function as a set of understood rules, explicit or not, which informs students about their educational, social, and cultural position within schooling and society" (p. 3). Accordingly, most participants seemed resigned to the fact that they would receive disparate treatment from teachers because of their race and gender to the extent that disparate treatment was normalized for them (and expected).

An assumption of CRT is the "normalcy of racism" in that racism is so pervasive that it permeates every aspect of society, including schools, in various permutations (i.e. targeting and singling out of African American boys, monitoring and surveillance). The labyrinth of stereotypes and preconceptions of teachers were seemingly impactful and engrained into the consciousness of participants, as James (2012) noted:

> This "web of stereotypes" in which Black students are caught is part of the cultural structure of society in which they and their teachers operate… [it] is a schooling situation where preconceived ideas and formal evaluation measures supported by an inequitable social structure contribute to gendered labels from which it is difficult for many Black male students to escape. (p. 485)

Thus, the interconnection of teacher practices and racial stereotypes functioned (either consciously or unconsciously) to position Black masculinities as devalued, which in turn, created a sense of frustration and powerless amongst some participants.

Research Question 3-Main Findings

Research question three asked, how black masculinity construction impacted participants' feelings and attitudes toward scholastic achievement. Participants generally had positive views of school despite disparate treatment. These positive feelings toward school were largely due to positive peer interactions, extracurricular activities (i.e., sports), and teachers who were accessible and provided academic support when needed.

While participants recounted some positive experiences with teachers, specifically instances in which academic support was provided, negative experiences with teachers seemed more salient as participants were able to recall demonstrably more episodes of negative interactions with teachers, which included instances of a surveillance of behavior and conversations, targeting and singling out African American boys, grouping and categorizing based on teachers' preconceived notions about the inherency of African American boys as "bad" and "troublemakers," and gendered and racial double standards in relation to disciplinary practices. According to participants, teachers favored girls (of all racial and ethnic backgrounds) over boys, prompting some participants to reference the school as "sexist." Participants noted that teachers often ignored infractions committed by girls, as girls, were, perhaps, deemed less threatening. Relational aggression committed by girls against boys was also often ignored. This can be attributable to the fact that the great preponderance of teachers were female, and possibly had their own assumptions about the behaviors of girls and boys (Cornwell et al., 2012).

Negative experiences with teachers often resulted in participants feeling disengaged from school and questioning disparate practices. It is interesting to note that participants who questioned unfair practices were often stymied in their attempts to highlight

discrepancies and were labeled as "troublemakers." This finding aligns with Vavrus and Cole (2002) who found that students who questioned the authority of teachers were singled out and labeled as "troublemakers." While participants' experiences with teachers who were African American were limited, these experiences were characterized as positive because of cultural connectivity based on shared heritage and vernacular. Interactions and relationships with teachers whose race differed from participants were impeded by a lack of cultural synchronicity such that participants were relegated to self-censoring speech to preclude misperceptions. Along with this, participants noted that once some teachers became acquainted with participants, they felt more "comfortable" with them. In other words, baseline acceptance and understanding that might be afforded to students of other races was not rendered to participants from teachers, given negative preconceptions.

Further, school experiences, even instances of disparate treatment, were not impactful in relation to academic achievement or doing well in school. There were only two instances in which participants reported that negative schooling experiences impacted feelings of doing well in school. In these two examples, experiences influenced participants in a positive sense, such that these participants were motivated to prove academic ability to teachers who doubted their aptitude.

For students indicating that school experiences were not an integral aspect of motivation to succeed in school, familial and extracurricular activities emerged as important focal points. Seemingly, strong family units served as a resilience factor buffering students from disparate treatment they experienced from teachers, and along with maintaining grade averages to retain privileges of playing sports, helped facilitate the centering of academics

as an important factor in their schooling experiences. The familial unit as a resilience factor is an important finding and counter narrative, given the oft belief that parents of underrepresented students lack of involvement in their child's education.

It is important to note that a few participants' individual interview responses were not congruent with responses they provided during the focus group. In particular, two respondents noted experiencing disparate treatment such as being monitored, surveilled, and receiving unfair or unwarranted discipline during the focus group. However, when asked about experiences of receiving disparate treatment because of race and gender, these two participants indicated that they had not experienced such treatment.

So, what accounts for this discrepancy? Hollander (2004) noted that there are two ways in which participants' responses during a focus group may belie their thoughts and experiences. These two ways are problematic silences and problematic speech. Problematic speech references participants not articulating their thoughts and experiences during a focus group. Problematic speech is indicative of participants providing information that may not align with their thoughts and experiences. It is possible that these participants indeed had these experiences, but felt more comfortable speaking about these occurrences amongst peers who had similar experiences, rather than on an individual basis with the researcher, who is a woman. It could also be possible that participants offered socially desirable responses as not to be discrepant from other group members. As Gergen and Gergen (1984) noted:

> Even though it is common practice to speak as if each individual possesses a 'life story', in fact there would appear to be no one story to tell. People appear capable of adopting multiple perspectives and selecting events so as to justify the selected narrative. (p. 183)

Similarly, Hollander (2004) suggested that:

Participants may exaggerate, minimize, or withhold experiences depending on the social contexts. Indeed, they may do the same things when completing a survey, participating in an interview, or talking informally with a researcher; all research situations are social contexts and subject to social pressures…. (p. 626)

Triangulating focus groups with individual interviews allowed the researcher to note discrepancies in participant responses. As an added strand of data, allowing participants to reflect on both the focus groups and individual interviews, utilizing another data collection tool such as a survey, would have helped to disentangle inconsistences and provide more meaning about the contexts in which data was collected. Focus groups are spaces for "analyzing collaborative construction of meaning" (Hollander, 2004, p. 632). Thus, discrepancies between interviews and focus group data "cannot be classified in terms of validity vs. invalidity or honesty vs. dishonesty" (Kitzinger, 1994, p. 173). Or more specifically,

It is certainly true that the same people might say different things in individual interviews than they would in a group discussion, but that does not mean that one set of statements is distorted and the other is not. (Morgan & Krueger, 1993, p. 151)

Areas for future study should explore the nuances and social context of focus groups to account for incongruences and excavate the deeper meanings of participants' responses.

Implications

The purpose of this study was to explore how African American middle school boys conceptualized Black masculinity within the context of their school experiences. Results of this study indicate that teachers have a vital role in constructing and reinforcing negative stereotypes about African American boys. This was evident in the ways students believed teachers perceived them and how participants shared these same perceptions. While this imprinting did not influence how students felt about succeeding in school, in some cases, participants noted having a sense of powerlessness, which necessitated self-censoring of

dialogue and speech. This lack of freedom and devaluing of Black male self-expression

cultivated a sense of frustration, and at times, psychological disengagement amongst many

participants who resigned themselves to the belief that disparate treatment was the

expectation and the norm. Consequently, participants were relegated to a learning

environment that was, at times, self-defeating and invalidated their voices and concerns, and

either consciously or unconsciously sought to extinguish or contain the very masculinity that

had been cultivated.

James (2012) noted that current educational practices negatively impacting Black

boys necessitates greater awareness of policies and practices that reinforce stereotypes and

oppression:

> What is needed is for educators to recognize how the hegemonic schooling policies,
> programs, and practices perpetuate stereotyping that are oppressive to racialized students,
> who through their paradoxical responses and actions seek to register their needs,
> concerns, and interests so that their schooling experiences can be meaningful, self-
> validating, relevant, safe, and empowering for them. (p. 485)

Taken together, the next section will highlight some recommendations schools can employ

to improve the educational environment for African American boys.

Recommended Actions

School Administrators

Skiba, Chung, Trachok, Baker, Sheya, and Hughes (2014) noted that schools "would be

well advised to seek interventions that focus on school policies and practices—principal

leadership, achievement orientation, and the possible contributions of implicit bias—rather than

on the characteristics of students or their behaviors" (p. 664). Accordingly, school

administrators have a critical role in setting the disciplinary tone in schools. Given that students

viewed the school principals in positive terms, the school administrators are well positioned to facilitate and model positive relationship building between teachers and students. Administrators should cultivate a school environment that reinforces a norm of respecting others regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender, and also a school culture in which disparate treatment of students is not tolerated. Moreover, school administrators can also communicate the importance of reforming systems level practices that perpetuate inequality and racial and gender bias. As such, administrators should support and promote professional development opportunities that further the adoption of teacher (and systems level) practices that align with culturally attuned models. Using professional development resources such as the Courageous Conversations About Race Field Guide (Singleton, Linton, & Ladson-Billings, 2006), which offers tools to help facilitate difficult conversations about race and the development of system wide plans to address racially disparate practices. Most participants believed that African American boys were disproportionately represented in office discipline referrals. Administrators can conduct a Root Cause Analysis (Osher et al., 2015), which uses a systematic, problem solving process of guiding questions and an action plan template to steer efforts. This federal guide is entitled *Addressing the root causes of disparities in school discipline: An educator's action planning guide:* National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments and can be tailored to fit the needs of schools.

Restorative Practices

Restorative practices focus on repairing harm between the victim and the disputant by providing an avenue for the two parties to collaboratively problem solve disputes and rule infractions. Several participants noted inconsistent, unclear, and ineffectively communicated classroom expectations by teachers. In using restorative practices, teachers and students share

ownership in improving the classroom climate by sharing in the development of classroom expectations and consequences for not adhering to these expectations (Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2016). Restorative practices can also impact the classroom environment by fostering a sense of equity by the adoption of a "participatory form" of classroom environment in which all voices all valued and heard. Gregory and colleagues found decreases in office discipline referrals in 29 high school classrooms implementing restorative practices, which translated into improvements in overall school climates.

Implicit Bias/Cultural Competency Training

Some participants noted the need for teacher training to more effectively engage culturally with African American boys specifically, and students of color more broadly. Cultural competency training is a possible means of addressing the disparate school practices. According to Ingraham (2017), "Multicultural competence involves examining one's own cultural identity and perspectives, learning about those of other groups, and applying culturally appropriate and culturally responsive strategies and practices" (p. 75).

Researchers have noted participation in professional development activities focused on building cultural competence and awareness as well as advancing cross-cultural communication and learning are important steps in this process, as well as recognition of the implicit biases that all individuals hold (Losen, 2015; Noguera, 2009; Skiba et al., 2011). Teacher can also be guided in utilizing culturally relevant pedagogy that rejects a "color-blind" and post-racial mentality that posits that "all children are the same" and deficit based practices that elevate "whiteness as normal [and] anyone who is not white as abnormal" (Dixon & Rousseau, 2005, p. 16), as well as "conceals and obscures the preconceived ideas that inform educators' understanding of the

learning needs and interests of particular students…[and] also serves to negate the social and cultural capital that students bring to school and to their learning" (James, 212, p. 485). Love (2014) aptly notes: "we should educate all students differently as we recognize and celebrate their cultural, social, sexual, religious and class identities—or just simply their otherness" (p. 303).

Teacher Consultation

Participants noted several examples of negative teacher interactions inside and outside of the classroom, which oftentimes resulted in participants' decreased levels of engagement. Teachers should be trained in classroom management techniques and de-escalation strategies to more effectively handle classroom exchanges with African American boys and attenuate office discipline referrals. Teaching consultation is one way in which student and teacher exchanges can be improved. One method of consultation is a consultee-centered model, which "emphasizes a nonhierarchical, nonprescriptive helping role relationship between a resource (consultant) and a person or group (consultee) who seeks professional help with a work problem involving a third party (client)" (Newman & Ingraham, 2017, p. 2). The consultant (i.e., school psychologist) serves as a facilitator in helping the consultee (i.e., teacher) process solutions to problems with clients (i.e., student). Problem solving is done collaboratively and is an ongoing process. Ultimately, the goal of consultee centered consultation is the promotion of not only client outcomes, but also "consultee outcomes such as conceptual or behavioral change" (p. 5). Thus, teacher consultation using a consultee-centered model may involve the teacher collaboratively working with the consultant to brainstorm solutions to a problem with a client (i.e., negative exchanges with a student) and in the process, is moved to behavioral change (i.e., using more

effective communication methods with the student). My Teaching Partner (Gregory, Allen,

Mikami, Hafen, & Pianta, 2014) is a promising instructional teacher consultation model in which

teachers receive individualized coaching and regular feedback utilizing videotaped interactions

of teachers with students. In an efficacy study conducted by Gregory et al. found increases in

student behavioral engagement after 1 year implementation of the program compared to the

control group.

Instructional consultation is another form of consultation which is a subgroup of

consultee-centered consultation. Instructional consultation focuses on providing support, either

individually or as part of an instructional consultation team, to educators. According to

Rosenfield (2014):

> The goal is to reconceptualize the problem so that the teacher-consultee can gain new
> knowledge to be used not only with the referred student but potentially with other
> students of the teacher as well. The larger objective of Instructional Consultation Teams
> is improving and enhancing staff competence as a route of both systems improvement
> and positive individual student outcomes. (p. 509)

It is important to note that consultation should be driven with a multicultural lens, which

means "supporting consultees' development of cultural competence, practicing cultural

responsiveness, and co-constructing new understandings of the problem" (Ingraham, 2017, p.

74). While instructional consultation models often lack interconnectedness with multicultural

consultation, one way to bridge this disconnect is through a consultee-centered model in which

cultural competence is embedded in the consultation process.

Study Limitations

There are several study limitations that should be highlighted. Given that the focus of

this investigation was African American middle school boys, results may not translate to

students from other age groups. In addition, since the study pivoted around African American boys at one middle school, results cannot be generalized to other schools. Further, the intersection of race, gender, and socioeconomic status was not fully explored in this study. While the socio-economic strata of participants ranged from low-middle to upper-middle income, this dynamic did not emerge from the data.

Future Directions

Future research should focus on comparative analyses of schools in predominately Black and predominately White communities to explore differences and similarities in experiences of African American boys to help further inform school climate reform efforts. Future investigations should also explore black masculinity construction and its impact on African American boys in economically depressed schools to analyze the intersection of race, gender, and poverty. Additionally, research should utilize longitudinal designs such that African American boys are followed over the course of several years in school. This information can highlight trends and patterns that occur over time, and inform school climate efforts, teacher training and consultation, as well as intervention planning as teachers work with African American boys.

Future studies should also promote a paradigm shift from a deficit view of African American boys to an acknowledgement of the cultural wealth they bring to the classroom. Moreover, research should pivot discussions from student level factors and focusing on systems level factors that perpetuate oppression through stereotyping and labeling of Black boy and focus on how administrators can lead efforts to promote a mindset shift from "color blind" and deficit thinking about Black boys amongst school staff members. Including African

American boys in the conversation about ways to improve school climates and designing interventions that will help facilitate positive schooling experiences for Black boys.

Efforts should also be concentrated on classroom interactions between White teachers and African American boys to gain better understanding of the problems plaguing classrooms. Professional development opportunities and training programs should underscore the unconscious bias and stereotypes educators hold about Black boys and provide opportunities for reflection relative to how their positioning and privilege interconnects with race and gender in the classroom. Moreover, Guy (2014) suggests that:

> Curricula used in educational and training contexts should be culturally relevant and inclusive. Ensuring that curriculum materials reflect the experiences and knowledge of Black males and do not contain various forms of bias can send a strong message to Black male participants that they are valued and are considered capable of achievement. (p. 24)

Culturally competent school based mental health professionals such as school psychologists, social workers, and school counselors can also be used as building level resources in leading teacher training consultation efforts. Organizations such as the American Counseling Association have prioritized commitment to multicultural competence by adopting multicultural competencies to guide counselors in their practice (Ratts, Singh, Nasser-McMillan, Butler, & Rafferty McCullough, 2016). The National Association of School Psychologists has adopted a social justice vision for school psychology with five strategic aims, however the field has not yet developed or prioritized cultural competency standards to guide school psychological practice. School based mental health professionals can also help with identifying and implementing interventions and restorative practices to improve teacher and student exchanges and help to mitigate African American boys' removal from the classroom, as well as challenging teachers to acknowledge and reflect on biases.

Administrators can also incorporate McIntosh, Girvan, Horner, and Smolkowski's (2014) Vulnerable Decision Points model as a guiding paradigm, which is a dual process conceptual model that "has direct implications for addressing explicit and implicit bias through multicomponent interventions… understanding how they work is fundamentally necessary for identifying interventions that are most likely to reduce or eliminate disproportionate discipline" (p. 8). Vulnerable decision points references events and situations (i.e., subjective student behavior) in which the likelihood that bias will enter disciplinary decisions is increased. These "vulnerable decision points *momentarily* increase the likelihood that an adult will make a biased discipline decision" (p. 8).

Guidance can be provided to teachers in pivoting from making biased decisions in subjective contexts and using "neutralizing routines" such as a self-check before a discipline decision (i.e., office discipline referral) is rendered, especially in ambiguous circumstances where there is often a tendency toward snap decision making. McIntosh et al. (2014) recommend the use of if-then statements such as the following: "Is this a vulnerable decision point? If so, use [predetermined alternative strategy] to keep this student in class" (p. 16).

Further, given disparities between focus group and interview data, future studies should also explore participants' perceptions of the group and individual process to disentangle what participants are truly conveying and draw better conclusions from data. Most importantly, reforming the school culture such that African American boys consider school as a place that respects their humanity, supports future ambitions, and finds value in their cultural identity is a positive step school can take to become a space that fosters the academic and social emotional functioning of Black boys.

APPENDIX A

LETTER OF SUPPORT FROM SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

DATE XXXX

To Whom It May Concern:

As principal of XXXX, this letter is being written to indicate my awareness and support of the IRB protocol entitled "Shaping Black Boys: Exploring School Construction of Black Masculinity and the Impact on Black male Scholastic Perceptions Toward Academic Achievement and Schooling" which is being submitted to your office by primary investigator graduate student Kisha Jenkins. I have been informed of, and support participant recruitment, informed consent, and data collection and analysis procedures. I am very happy that this research project is occurring at XXXX and feel that the information obtained through these interviews has the potential to be a significant benefit to our school and district.

If I can provide any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,
XXXX

APPENDIX B

TEACHER RECRUITMENT/NOMINATION LETTER

Dear Teachers,

My name is Kisha Jenkins, and I am a doctoral student at Loyola University Chicago. Currently, I am working on my dissertation research which will involve exploring how the schooling experiences of African American male middle school students impact their perceptions of academic achievement and their attitudes towards school. My data collection process will be two-pronged. I am hoping to conduct three focus groups as well as individual interviews with 15-20 7th and 8th grade African American boys. Two of the focus groups, will consist of 8-10 students each, and I estimate that the focus groups should last no more than 60 minutes. The individual interviews are anticipated to last no more than 30 minutes, and the two final focus groups with 7th and 8th grade participants, which will serve as a debriefing session, is anticipated to last approximately 60 minutes each. I am hoping to conduct the focus groups and individual interviews during a time when students are not receiving core instruction, and I am interested in recruiting students who will likely have a lot to contribute to both the focus groups and individual interviews, as well as students from various socioeconomic backgrounds. I am seeking your nomination for students who you think would be strong group members and would benefit from this experience.

If you have students that you would like to nominate, please let either XXXX or XXXX know, and based on schedule match and parental consent, 15-20 students will be chosen.

This will be a great opportunity for the students and I thank you for taking the time to read this letter and in advance for nominating potential strong group members. If you have any questions about this project, please contact XXXX at XXXX or you can contact me Kisha Jenkins at kjenkins3@luc.edu.

Thank you,
Kisha Jenkins

APPENDIX C

RECRUITMENT LETTER TO PARENTS

Dear Families,

If you are receiving this letter, it indicates that your child has been selected to participate in a study regarding the educational experiences of African American male middle school students. The study is being conducted by Kisha Jenkins, a graduate student at Loyola University Chicago for her dissertation project (under the supervision of David Shriberg, a Professor of Education at Loyola University Chicago).

Your child's participation in this study is extremely valuable and will provide information that will help positively impact the educational experiences of African American males. The project will consist of three parts: 1) a focus group (with other students who have been nominated to participate in this study), which is expected to last no longer than 60 minutes 2) a 30-minute individual interview, 3) a debriefing focus group which is expected to last no longer than 60 minutes. The goal is for your child to miss limited instructional time if he participates in this study. However, it is important that you know that your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you do not wish for your child to participate in either the focus group or the individual interview, that is totally fine and there will be no negative impact. Similarly, if you give your permission for your child to participate but at a later point either you or your child change your mind, your child can leave the focus group and not participate in individual interviews at any point and there will be no negative impact.

If you wish for your child to participate, please sign the attached consent form and ask your child to return the signed form to his teacher by XXXX. The results of the focus group and interviews may be used for research purposes. If you are willing for your child to participate in the focus group and/or by interviewed, please check the box that indicates this. If you do not wish for your child to be in the focus group or interviewed, please check that box.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Kisha Jenkins at kjenkins3@luc.edu or XXXXX. Thanks, in advance for taking time to read this letter and for considering participating in this project.

Sincerely,

Kisha Jenkins   XXXXX
Graduate Student   Principal

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Project Title: Shaping Black Boys: Exploring School Construction of Black Masculinity and the Impact on Black Male Scholastic Perceptions Toward Academic Achievement and Schooling.

Researcher: Kisha Jenkins

Introduction:
Your child is being asked to take part in a focus group and individual interview for a dissertation under the supervision of Dr. David Shriberg in the Department of School Psychology at Loyola University of Chicago. Your child has been nominated as a student who will have a lot to contribute during both the focus group and interview.

Purpose:
The purpose of this study is to gain the perspective of African American male middle school students' schooling experiences and the impact of these experiences on their attitudes toward academic achievement and education in general. You can provide permission for your child to participate in the focus group but NOT to participate in the interview if you wish.

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether you child should participate in the study.

Procedures:
If you give permission for your child to be in the study, he will be asked to participate in a focus group that is expected to last approximately 60 minutes. Additionally, your child will be asked to participate in an individual interview that is expected to last approximately 30 minutes, and a final debriefing focus group that is expected to last 60 minutes. Neither the focus group nor the individual interview will take place during a time when your child is in a core academic subject.

With you and your child's permission, I am asking that both the focus group and the individual interview be audiotaped. However, you and/or your child are free to decline this or participation overall. Once the focus group and interviews have been completed, the de-identified findings will be shared with the school's administrative team to help in school climate efforts. It is also possible that the results of this work will be published or presented as research findings.

Risks/Benefits:
There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. A potential direct benefit of your child's participation is that he will have an opportunity to positively influence the school's climate. An indirect benefit from your child's participation is that the data will add to a gap in the research as to how their schooling experiences of African American males impact their perceptions of academic achievement and education in general.

Confidentiality:
Focus groups and interviews will not include any of your child's identifying information. Data collected will be confidential, though audio recordings are considered identifiable information. In addition, if you and your child give permission for audiorecording during the focus group and/or individual interviews, all audiofiles will be uploaded into a password protected file that only Kisha Jenkins and her graduate research assistant will have access to. If you or your child elect not to be audiotaped, the interviewer will make notes that ultimately will be entered into a password file that only Kisha Jenkins and her graduate research assistant will have access to. While the researcher will provide confidentiality, focus groups have a risk that other participants may share what is said in focus groups with others. The researcher will encourage participants in focus groups to respect the confidentiality of other focus group members. At the conclusion of this study, all audiofiles and any other data files generated and associated with this study will be deleted.

Voluntary Participation:
Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want your child to be in a part of this study, he does not have to participate. If you agree for your child to be in this study, but do not wish for them to be audiorecorded, this is fine as well. If you agree for your child to participate in the focus group and interview, he is free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

Contacts and Questions:
If you have questions about this dissertation research study, please feel free to contact Kisha Jenkins at kjenkins3@luc.edu or her faculty sponsor Dr. David Shriberg at dshribe@luc.edu. If you have questions about your child's rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

Statement of Consent:
Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and give permission for your child to participate in this research study**.** Your child will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

I agree for my child to participate in the focus group:

_____   _____
Parent's Signature   **Date**

I agree for my child to be interviewed for this study:

_____ _____

Parent's Signature   **Date**

*If you have agreed to permit your child to be interviewed, please **check** the appropriate space regarding your audiotape preferences.*

_____I **AGREE** to allow my child to be audiotaped for research purposes.

_____I **DO NOT AGREE** to allow mychild to be audiotaped for research purposes.

APPENDIX E

FOCUS GROUP ASSENT FORM

While I will provide confidentiality, the focus group does have a risk that other participants may share what is said in the focus groups with others. However, I will encourage everyone participating in the focus groups to respect the confidentiality of other focus group members.

Do you give your permission to be a part of this group? If yes, do you give your permission to be audiotaped (only asked if parents have checked permission to be audiotaped. If no parental permission to audiotape, this question will not be asked of students and the focus group will not be audiotaped)?

I _____give my permission to be a part of the focus group and be audiotaped.

I _____give my permission to be a part of the focus group but I do NOT give my permission to be audiotaped.

Please provide name below if you are interested in participating in an individual interview:

Name: _____

APPENDIX F

ASSENT SCRIPT FOR INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW

Thank you for meeting with me. I really enjoyed having you be a part of the focus group. The reason for this meeting is that your parent has given their permission for you to interview with me about your educational experiences. I am really interested in hearing what you have to say and I believe that your perspective is very important. Everyone who was in the focus group whose parents gave us permission to do so will be interviewed too. But no names or any other identifying information will be used.

Although your parent has given permission for you to participate in this interview, you have the right to decline to participate. Participation in this interview is completely voluntary. You can choose not to participate or not to respond to one or more interview questions without any penalty. Also, you can choose to participate in the interview but not to be audiorecorded. If you choose to be audiorecorded the audiorecording will be stored in a password protected that only my research assistant and I have access to. Any information you provide will be destroyed

The interview will last about 30 minutes. There are no risks to you being a participant in this research, but by providing information about your experiences you can benefit other research on this topic.

Do you have any questions?

Do you give your permission to be interviewed? If yes, do you give your verbal permission to be audiotaped (only asked if parents have checked permission to be audiotaped. If no parental permission to audiotape, this question will not be asked of students)?

I _____give my permission to be interviewed and

audiotaped.

I _____give my permission to be interviewed but I

do NOT give my permission to be audiotaped.

APPENDIX G

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

If students indicate that they are interested in participating in the focus group:

1. Are you involved in school activities? What are they? What made you interested in these activities?

2. What do you like most about school? What do you like least about school?

3. Thinking back on some of your experiences in school. What are some of your best memories about? What made these good experiences for you?

4. Tell me about some of your worst memories about school. What made these bad experiences for you?

5. If I were a new student coming into your school, what things do you feel would be important for me to know about your school? What makes you say that?

6. How do you get along with your teachers? What makes you say that?

7. How do you get along with the school principals? What makes you say that?

8. If you get in trouble at school, do you feel that teachers/principals treat you fairly? How do you decide if the principal treats you fairly? How do principals show they are fair or unfair?

9. What would you change about school? What makes you say that?

10. If you could picture, in your mind, one incident that would really tell me what school is all about for you, what would it be?

APPENDIX H

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Introductory Questions

Before we begin I would like to ask you a few questions:

How long have you been a student at XXX? Do you like school?
What grades are you getting in school? What do you want to be when you grow up?

Now I would like to ask you some questions related to your experiences in school:

Research Question 1: How do young African American boys black conceptualize masculinity?

1. Tell me a little bit about what the word "black" means to you? What do you think the word "black" means to others?
2. Tell me about what the word "boy" means to you? Describe for me what you think this word means to others?
3. When you put the two words together—black and boy. Describe for me what you think this word means to others? What do you think these two words together (black boy) mean to others? Your teachers?

Research Question 2: From their standpoint, to what degree does the school play a role in the construction of black masculinity?

4. Has there ever been a time in school in which you feel you were treated differently because you are a black boy? Describe how were you treated differently? What about this situation made you feel like you were being treated differently because you are a black boy? Describe how this made you feel?
5. Thinking of your experiences in school (now and when you were younger), has there ever been a time when someone treated you differently because you are a black boy? What happened? How did this experience make you feel about school?
6. If you have had this experience, talk to me about a time that you felt that someone in school decided that you couldn't do something because of being black. Describe this situation for me? What did that feel like?

Research Question 3: How does this construction impact their feelings and attitudes toward scholastic achievement? If so, how?

7. How would you define the word "school"? Why do you define school that way?
8. Give me an example of a positive experience that you have had with one of your teachers. How did this experience make you feel about school? In what ways?
9. Give me an example of a negative experience that you have had with one of your teachers. How did this experience make you feel about school? In what ways?

10. Have these experiences with teachers made a difference in how you feel about doing well in school? In what ways have they made a difference (or not made a difference)?
11. Describe your relationships and experiences with teachers whose race is different from yours. From those whose race is the same as yours?
12. How has your experiences in school impacted what you want to be when you grow up?
13. What haven't we discussed about your educational experiences that you would like to add?

APPENDIX I

ASSENT FOR DEBRIEFING FOCUS GROUP

Thank you for meeting with me. The purpose of this meeting is to make sure that I have reflected everything you have told me correctly, or if I need to change or add any information that you may have forgotten to tell me.

The focus group will last approximately 60 minutes. Your participation is voluntary. If you wish not to participate, that is OK you do not have to be in this group at all and you are free to go back to class. If you participate in this group, but then change your mind that is OK too. This focus group will NOT be audiorecorded, but I will take notes if I need to add something or correct something that you have told me. The notes I take will be stored in a locked file cabinet that only I have access to.

While I will provide confidentiality, the focus group does have a risk that other participants may share what is said in the focus groups with others. However, I will encourage everyone participating in the focus groups to respect the confidentiality of other focus group members. And not repeat to anyone outside the group what is said in the group. OK?

Again, you will NOT be audiorecording during this focus group. Do you give your permission to be a part of this group?

I _____give my permission to participate in this focus group session and NOT be audiorecorded.

APPENDIX J

FOCUS GROUP ASSENT SCRIPT

Thank you for meeting with me. My name is Kisha and I am from Loyola University Chicago. I am here because I am interested in learning about your experiences in school.

There are no risks to being a participant in this group, however you will be providing information about your experiences that will benefit future research on this topic. You have been nominated as students who would have a lot to contribute to this group.

Your parent(s) have provided permission for you to be a part of this group. However, your participation is completely voluntary. The focus group will last approximately 60 minutes. If you wish not to participate, that is OK you do not have to be in this group at all and you are free to go back to class. If yes, I would like to ask you a few more questions to learn more about your school experiences and how you feel about your school. If you agree to participate, I would like to audio-record our group. The audio recordings will be stored in a password-protected file that only me and my research assistant will have access to. No one will be able to hear what you say except for my research assistant and me. While I will provide confidentiality, the focus group does have a risk that other participants may share what is said in the focus groups with others. However, I will encourage everyone participating in the focus groups to respect the confidentiality of other focus group members.

If you wish not to be audio-recorded, that is completely fine, I'll just take notes to reflect what you say. If you participate in this group, but then change your mind that is OK too. Any information you provide will be destroyed.

APPENDIX K

DEBRIEFING FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT

FOCUS GROUP INTRODUCTION WELCOME

Thanks for agreeing to be part of the focus group. I appreciate your willingness to participate.

INTRODUCTION—Facilitator

PURPOSE OF FOCUS GROUP

The reason I am having this focus group is to summarize some of what we talked about in our focus groups and interviews. I need your input and want you to share your honest and open thoughts with me. I want to make sure that what you have told me is accurate and reflects what you want to say. If there is something that is not accurate or you think should be stated in another way, then you can let me know and I will correct it. Or if I forgot to add something or if you thought of something that you would like me to add then you can let me know that too. Ok? Does anyone have any questions?

I need to let you know that while I will provide confidentiality, the focus group does have a risk that other participants may share what is said in the focus groups with others.

However, I will encourage everyone participating in the focus groups to respect the confidentiality of other focus group members.

Before we begin, I need to provide you with some information and ask if you would like to participate in this group. (Pass out assent form and read).

The focus group will last approximately 60 minutes. Your participation is voluntary. If you wish not to participate, that is OK you do not have to be in this group at all and you are free to go back to class. If you participate in this group, but then change your mind that is OK too. The group will not be audiorecorded, but I will take notes if I need to add something or correct something that you have told me. The notes I take will be stored in a locked file cabinet that only I have access to.

Do you give your permission to be a part of this group?

(Have students sign if agree to participate, any student who wishes not to participate will not be required to sign form and is free to return to class).

REFERENCE LIST

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VITA

Prior to attending Loyola University Chicago, Dr. Jenkins earned a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology at Eastern Illinois University, a Master of Arts degree in Human Services, and a certificate in Management of Non Profit Organizations at the University of Illinois at Springfield, where she served as a Whitney Young Fellow. Following her studies, she pursued a career in social services.

During her tenure at Loyola University, Dr. Jenkins earned a Master of Education in Educational Psychology and was the recipient of the Diversifying Faculty in Higher Education Fellowship. She also conducted research in relation to the application of social justice in school psychological practice, school disciplinary practices, and school bullying prevention as a member of several research teams. Additionally, she served as a reviewer for the *Contemporary School Psychology* journal, co-chair of the Illinois School Psychologists Association African American Affairs Committee, and as a member of the Illinois School Psychologists Association Practice Survey Workgroup. Dr. Jenkins also received certification as a trainer in restorative practices.

Currently, Dr. Jenkins is completing an American Psychological Association (APA)-accredited internship with the Livingston County Special Services Unit through the Illinois School Psychology Internship Consortium (ISPIC). Following her internship, she will continue research and advocacy relative to the adoption of culturally relevant responses to suspensions and expulsions, restorative practices in schools, and targeted interventions for African American boys.