Ain't Misbehavin': Phenomenological Inquiry Into Black Male Experiences of School

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

AIN’T MISBEHAVIN’: PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY INTO BLACK MALE EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

PROGRAM IN CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

BY
KELLY N. FERGUSON
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
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I happily submitted the first three chapters of my dissertation on my mother’s birthday and the final two chapters on the date of her departure, poetically signaling the
end…the end of this chapter in my story. After making many sacrifices to devote myself fully to my studies, I am entering a new chapter of my life, a chapter that could not have been accomplished without the support of so many.

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To my participants, eight examples of success epitomized, I thank these highly successful Black men for their time and investment into this research. I thank you for sharing your story. You are but a reflection of the unending potential of our people.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my Mother, Brenda Joyce Smith, who persuaded me endlessly to pursue my doctorate. You knew best! One of the best decisions of my life!
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .................................................................................................................. iii

LIST OF TABLES ............................................................................................................................. ix

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................................ x

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................................................... 1
   Statement of the Problem ........................................................................................................... 1
   Background for the Study ........................................................................................................... 3
   Critical Race Theory .................................................................................................................. 7
   Research Questions ................................................................................................................... 11
   Significance of the Study .......................................................................................................... 11
   Limitations of the Study ........................................................................................................... 13

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE ....................................................................................................... 15
   Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 15
   Literature Review ..................................................................................................................... 15
   Brown v. Board of Education ................................................................................................... 15
   Disproportionality in School Discipline .................................................................................. 17
   Patterns in School Discipline .................................................................................................. 20
   Impact on Learner Outcomes ................................................................................................... 25
   Areas for Exploration .............................................................................................................. 27
   Status of the Black Male .......................................................................................................... 28
   The Scholar Identity Model ..................................................................................................... 31
   Mentorship ............................................................................................................................... 33
   Culturally Responsive Pedagogy ............................................................................................... 34

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY ................................................................................................. 36
   Research Design ....................................................................................................................... 36
   Participants ............................................................................................................................... 38
   Data Gathering and Instrumentation ....................................................................................... 39
   Data Collection Procedures ..................................................................................................... 40
   Data Explicitation Procedures ................................................................................................. 42
   Procedure ................................................................................................................................. 42
   Validity ..................................................................................................................................... 43
   Methodological Considerations ............................................................................................... 46
   Ethical Considerations ............................................................................................................ 46

IV. DATA EXPLICITATION AND FINDINGS ............................................................................. 47
   Overview of the Study ............................................................................................................. 47
   Description of Participants ....................................................................................................... 48
   Research Questions .................................................................................................................. 49
Explicitation of Data Collected ................................................................. 49
The Black Male Defined ........................................................................... 50
The Role of Schools and Communities in Black Males’ Success .............. 61
The Influence of Mentorship .................................................................... 72
Summary .................................................................................................. 81

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS .......................................................... 84
Summary of the Study ............................................................................. 84
Overview of the Problem ......................................................................... 84
Purpose Statement and Research Questions ........................................... 85
Major Findings ........................................................................................ 86
Findings Related to Critical Race Theory ............................................... 92
Conclusions ............................................................................................ 95
Implications for Practice ......................................................................... 95
Recommendations for Further Research .................................................. 99
Concluding Remarks .............................................................................. 100

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL .................................................... 101
APPENDIX B: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH .................... 107
APPENDIX C: RESEARCH RECRUITMENT SCRIPT ................................ 110
REFERENCE LIST .................................................................................. 117
VITA ........................................................................................................ 121
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Critical Race Theory’s (CRT) Influence in Study</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Alignment of Study</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. List of Participants</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

Disproportionate representation of Black male students in subjective areas of discipline has long been documented. Research indicates that racial disparities in discipline have been found with insufficient evidence to support that Black or other minority students are simply misbehaving more than others. Differences in cultural orientations between Black males and their predominantly White and female teachers have been linked to bias that disproportionality impacts discipline for these students. Through phenomenological inquiry, this study explored the schooling, professional, and mentoring experiences of successful Black men to better understand how schools and communities contribute to their resilience. This research sought to uncover ways in which Black men have experienced defiance and have used these experiences to positively influence their development and guidance to their young Black male mentees. Data from the pilot study exposed defiance as an integral component of participants’ lived experiences from boyhood to manhood. More importantly, data demonstrated that channeled constructively, Black males’ use of defiance through educational, professional, and leadership experiences, played an instrumental role in navigating their success in each of these domains. This study yielded insights that prove valuable in minimizing cultural misunderstandings that lead to punitive and exclusionary disciplinary action for subjectively, and often times, inappropriate referrals for classroom discipline. This information can prove instructive for schools and communities in developing practices that support the academic, social, and professional maturation of Black males.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Disproportionate representation of minority students, especially African Americans, in a variety of school disciplinary procedures has been documented almost continuously for the past 25 years (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). Mirroring patterns of disproportionality in discipline, research demonstrates that boys are over four times as likely as girls to receive school discipline (Monroe, 2006; Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba et al., 2011). Literature reveals that those with membership in either of these categories are at increased risk for disciplinary action. Citing evidence that Black male students are most often disciplined for subjectively perceived and arbitrarily enforced infractions such as “defiance,” “disrespect,” and “insubordination,” (Skiba et al., 2011; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Losen & Martinez, 2013), this research questions these characterizations by challenging the assumptions underlying disciplinary policies. The behavioral styles unique to these populations are believed to be discrepant from mainstream expectations in school settings (Skiba et al., 2011) and are misconstrued and censured by the dominant culture. This research asserts that these perceived misbehaviors serve as identifiers for potential leadership qualities. Through phenomenological inquiry, this study explored the schooling, professional, and mentoring
experiences of successful Black\textsuperscript{1} men to better understand how schools and communities contribute to their resilience. This research sought to uncover ways in which Black men have experienced defiance and have used these experiences to positively influence their development and guidance to their young Black male mentees.

During spring 2015, a dissertation pilot study was conducted which began exploration into this phenomenon. Defiance emerged as a necessary process for achievement for minority males. Data revealed participants’ protest of pejorative understandings of what constituted being a Black man in America and the perceived expectations levied on their lives. Emerging along a continuum, defiance was revealed in participants’ lives as the following:

- Defiance as \textit{criminal/social deviance} (marked by behaviors that are punishable);
- \textit{Defiance} as \textit{assimilation} (defiance expressed in more socially acceptable ways).

\textit{“You can’t change a system without being from the inside”}; and

- Defiance as \textit{reform} (a positive type of defiance, that which fuels resilience).

Data from the pilot study exposed defiance as an integral component of participants’ lived experiences from boyhood to manhood. More importantly, data demonstrated that channeled constructively, Black males’ use of defiance through educational, professional, and leadership experiences, played an instrumental role in navigating their success in each of these domains. These findings provide promise in adding to the body of scholarship a positive perspective on how research can be used in the study of Black males to provide educational environments that support their academic, cultural and

\textsuperscript{1}The cultural referent, Black, is selected as a term generally used to refer to those who may not have close associations with Africa, such as those immigrants from Haiti or other Caribbean islands.
social maturation. Moreover, this research aligns with national priorities by prominent educational associations such as the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and their special interest group on race, class, and gender which solicits research around Black male success frameworks (Bonner, 2014). Data from this research can provide valuable input for practitioners in their understanding of and work with Black male students to help redress issues of disproportionality in discipline and provide a learning environment responsive to their educational needs.

**Background for the Study**

Upon completing my teacher preparation program, I began service as an educator in a predominantly Black and low-income school district. My decision to work in such a district was two-fold: (1) I desired to serve in the community in which I was raised and currently lived; and (2) I was determined to demonstrate that Black and low-income students were capable of academic excellence when supported by a competent and caring educator in service of social justice. This passion was fueled by both history and my positionality as a member of the Black community where I was inundated with a persistent and widespread belief in the inferior mental capacities of Blacks and their relegation to pejorative representations. These beliefs have persisted despite attempts to ground this concept scientifically that have largely been found untenable (Hall, 1997). Stuart Hall’s conception of race as a discursive concept summarizes well my decision to also work with students from a low-income background. Hall described the construct of race as always sliding in meaning such that race is an entire category of social classifications that draws meaning from its shifting relations to other categories (i.e., physical appearance, behavior, cultural styles, socioeconomic status, etc.). It had been my
experience that discussion of Black students necessarily became associated with that which was impoverished. This unfortunate marriage between the two heightened the impetus to demonstrate what I knew deeply: no social classification, race or economic status, can determine the capacity of any child to succeed. Given adequate supports, all children could demonstrate the genius that is resident in each of them.

This drive intensified during my service in the classroom and my observations of and experiences with Black males. Black males were failing academically, remained in trouble, deemed as perpetual miscreants by teachers and administrators alike. These Black males resigned from the hope that education was meaningful to their lives. Epithets such as “troubled” and “defiant” littered the discourse of those who had difficulty understanding their leadership potential. This leadership potential was often cloaked in what was characterized as miscreant behavior. These students often took the form of class clowns who were quickly ejected from classrooms to receive disciplinary action that many teachers hoped would grant them a reprieve for any period of time.

My ten-year professional tenure afforded me countless experiences with these students. Recognizing the treasures within these earthen vessels, I began to see the prowess required for these class clowns to command an audience with the ease and grace that they displayed. I began to recognize the intuition needed to determine what their audience needed and how much of it to give and when to give it. I understood the charisma required to arrest the attention of their captivated audience and the courage needed to be bold in their display. Those students, always by Black male students, were not kicked out of my classroom as they had become accustomed to with previous teachers. Those students’ skill sets were capitalized on and their desire to be the center of
attention granted them the opportunity to lead lessons in spelling, math, and other content areas. These skills were viewed as assets and not the deficits they had come to expect. These students, my Black male students, were allowed to display their inherent leadership abilities and began to flourish both socially and academically. My classroom subsequently became known as the room gifted with what others deemed as “the bad kids.” Through these gifts, I came to realize that people, many times unconsciously, act the way that others perceive them, giving the best version of themselves to those who focus on their good qualities.

What was clearly defined to my eye as an educator concerning Black males and their struggles with schooling, has increasingly gained national attention and has been prioritized as such. My Brother’s Keeper, a national initiative spurred by President Barack Obama in an effort to ensure that all of America’s young people can reach their full potential, regardless of background, residence, or circumstances into which they were born, is one such example (White House Council of Economic Advisers, 2015). President Obama called on both private and public sectors to identify evidence-based approaches (White House Council of Economic Advisers, 2015) to aid in this vein, focusing on the barriers that disadvantaged youth, particularly young men of color, faced (MBKT Force, 2014).

One can begin to understand the grounds for this initiative by looking at the state of education for Black males in Chicago. Black students, both male and female, account for 45% of the student body of Chicago public schools, yet they received 76% of out-of-school suspensions and graduated only 39% of its Black male students (Bonner, 2014). Chicago’s data is representative of that which is occurring nationally. Graduation rates
for Black and Hispanic students fall below those of White students by 16 percentage points and 12 percentage points, respectively and young men of color are also less likely to complete a college degree (White House Council of Economic Advisers, 2015).

The plight of education for Black males is further evidenced in their disproportionality in school discipline. Disproportionality is not just a problem of schooling, but is a far broader problem to which schooling contributes in concert with other institutions (policing, housing, consuming, etc.). The My Brother’s Keeper initiative recognized disproportionality for youth of color as a concern noting that the school discipline system has become more closely linked to the juvenile justice system (MBKT Force, 2014; White House Council of Economic Advisers, 2015). This has occurred, in part, as a result of increasing zero-tolerance policies in schools that disproportionately discipline and criminalize youth of color (White House Council of Economic Advisers, 2015). In large nationally representative samples of White, Black, Hispanic, Asian American, and American Indian students, findings from school discipline documented from 1991 to 2005 revealed that Black, Hispanic, and American Indian youth were slightly more likely than White and Asian American youth to be sent to the principal’s office and two to five times more likely to be suspended or expelled (Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008). Zero-tolerance policies in schools that disproportionately impact youth of color reflect overly punitive policies and have created what is known as the “school-to-prison pipeline,” meaning that affected disadvantaged youth can suffer the results of justice system involvement before they ever enter the labor market (White House Council of Economic Advisers, 2015).
The plight of education for Black males and the associated impacts are alarming, impacting their student achievement, opportunity gaps which hold back the U.S. economy, lowering aggregate earnings, shrinking the labor market, and slowing economic growth (White House Council of Economic Advisers, 2015). The My Brother’s Keeper initiative endeavors to redress these issues by ensuring children are able to read at grade level, providing college and career readiness and exploring ways to decrease the number of young people involved with the criminal justice system (MBKT Force, 2014; White House Council of Economic Advisers, 2015). In providing the necessary supports to our nation’s youth, President Obama believes that the nation’s youth will be safe, healthy, educated and prepared to succeed in their career while concomitantly enabling the U.S. to compete in a 21st-century global economy (White House Council of Economic Advisers, 2015).

The challenges faced by Black males in education are salient. Further investigation into how schools and communities influence Black males’ resilience is needed. Through participants’ reflections on their lived experiences, this research aimed to uncover ways in which schools and communities have accomplished this. While the data collected from this research is not intended to be generalizable, it can provide descriptive cases that can furnish meaningful and relevant data. This data can help inform practitioners’ personal understandings of this demographic to apply in their work and can also be used as a basis for conducting future research.

**Critical Race Theory**

Guiding this study of Black males’ schooling, social, and professional experiences is Critical Race Theory, a theoretical framework that can be traced back to the Critical
Legal Studies (CLS) movement of the 1970s. This movement was a response to the belief of many that American law was fundamentally unjust (Ladson-Billings, 2010; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). In CLS’s examination of American law, however, they offered a portrayal of U.S. society as a meritocracy, failing to include racism in its critique (Ladson-Billings, 2010).

CRT, an outgrowth of CLS, birthed and spearheaded with the early work of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, rested on the premise that racism is normal in American society to such a great extent that it appears normal and natural to people within this culture (Ladson-Billings, 2010). One’s strategy then becomes unmasking and exposing racism in its various permutations (Ladson-Billings, 2010). Within education, CRT has been used to critically examine a myriad of factors including educational opportunities, school climate, representation, and pedagogy (Duncan, 2002; Kohli & Solorzano, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2010; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). Such investigations are conducted by analyzing the experiences of historically underrepresented populations across the K-20 educational pipeline (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015).

A key tenet of CRT is its use in locating how race and racism manifest themselves in schooling experiences (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). In many instances, the racialized power structure is so deeply embedded that it is invisible to those to whom power is bestowed (James & Lewis, 2014). It can infiltrate curriculum, instruction and every facet of the schooling experience, producing environments that do not affirm the maturation of Black males, rather penalizing instead of promoting positive Black male identity development. The work of CRT offers tools that help researchers to engage these issues
in the classroom, in the context of policy, and in community work (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). CRT in education highlights the persistence of racism across education.

From a CRT perspective, society is racialized and whiteness is positioned as normative with people ranked and categorized in relation to these points of opposition (Ladson-Billings, 2010). While there is a fixedness to the notion of these categories, these categories are fluid and shifting (Ladson-Billings, 2010). In effect, race is viewed as a discursive construct, always sliding in meaning. Race comes to encompass a whole category of social classifications that draw meaning from its shifting relations to other categories. Race, therefore, is created through a dynamic constellation of connections to physical appearance, behavior, gender, and cultural styles, which become subsumed under the umbrella category of race.

CRT rests upon five key tenets which are used to guide CRT research: (1) the centrality of race and racism; (2) challenge given to the dominant perspective; (3) commitment to social justice; (4) value placed on experiential knowledge; and (5) the value of interdisciplinary knowledge and multiple perspectives (Kohli & Solorzano, 2012). Much of the work of CRT rests upon voice as an integral component of research. Voice is requisite for acquiring a deep understanding of the phenomena studied, in the case of this dissertation research, Black male participants’ experiences in the educational and professional domains. Voice provides a way to communicate the experience and realities of the oppressed, a necessary first step in understanding the complexities of racism (Ladson-Billings, 2010). In research, accessing voice is accomplished through the employment of storytelling. Storytelling is a means to analyze the myths, presuppositions and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race (Ladson-Billings,
2010) and that invariably render an incomplete depiction of that race. These stories are deemed essential in understanding, feeling, interpreting and affording those typically dispossessed and marginalized, an opportunity to have voice (Ladson-Billings, 2010; Kohli & Solorzano, 2012).

Counter-storytelling is another effective method in bringing voice to those on the margins of society. Based upon participants’ real-life experiences, counter-storytelling shares those experiences that have not been told (Love, 2004). Counter-storytelling is used to analyze and challenge stories of those in power and whose story is a natural part of the dominant discourse (Love, 2004). Powerful with counter-storytelling is the opportunity for commonly held assumptions held by the dominant culture, to be made more visible and explicit (Ladson-Billings, 2010; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Love, 2004). This is particularly important to those whose viewpoint is clouded by white privilege and domination as this precludes the ability to view the world from the presented perspective (Love, 2004). Moreover, counter-storytelling offers members of subordinated groups the opportunity to express their personal injury or wrongdoing in terms that the system will understand (Love, 2004).

Selected as the preferred framework to guide this study, CRT lends itself well in uncovering the plight of Black males in schools as an expression of the racism that is endemic to North American society (Duncan, 2002). With affordances for participants to counter the prevailing wisdom in society which suggests that the exclusion and marginalization of Black males from schools is a normal, albeit problematic, aspect of the education of this population of students, this research privileged the narratives of those
who have been silenced, helping scholars and practitioners to understand the world the way that they see it rather than the way we want it to be (Duncan, 2002).

**Research Questions**

1. How do Black males perceive themselves socially, academically and professionally?
2. How do Black males perceive the role of schools and communities in fostering their social, academic and professional success from boyhood through manhood?
3. How have the social, academic and professional experiences of Black males in schools and communities influenced their mentorship of young Black males?

**Significance of the Study**

Scholarship surrounding disproportionality of Black males in discipline has long been documented, adding heft to the argument that punishment is both racialized and gendered across public schools nationwide. The associated impacts on Black males’ entry into the school-to-prison pipeline, high school dropout rates and opportunity gaps even have bearing on oppressive responses toward this demographic across a variety of institutions. Given the diffuse nature of the problem that it is at once systemic, systematic, and self-perpetuating, research is needed that moves beyond identification of this disproportionality to that which explores the dispositions of this demographic that continue to render negative characterizations. Moreover, research is needed that examines the ways in which schools and communities contribute to Black males’ resilience. Taken collectively, this data can add explanatory power to scholarship regarding our
understanding of Black males and how we might foster more just and equitable schooling for these boys and young men.

This research charters new terrain in understanding how Black males’ “misbehaviors” can potentially serve as identifiers for leadership qualities. Through phenomenological interviews with successful Black males, an investigation is made into participants’ lived experiences to understand how schools and communities contribute to their resilience. Data from this investigation, if properly channeled, can be used to fashion learning experiences that foster the leadership qualities resident in Black males, qualities that will help navigate them toward success in both their personal and professional lives.

Additionally, this research offers participants’ perspectives from boyhood through manhood. A gap exists in scholarly literature that often separates the needs of young boys from the development of men that this research aimed to address. By exploring the perspectives of adult participants, this research gleaned insights from men who have had the opportunity to critically reflect over their social, academic and professional experiences in ways that maturity and experience preclude youth from offering. Phenomenological interviewing served as the data collection method for this research study. These two part interviews furnished insights into participants’ lived experiences and the meanings that they attributed to these experiences.

Based on the premise that in order to become a successful Black man, one must necessarily be defiant, participants for this study were selected who met the criteria as having demonstrated success. The first two criteria are based on research studies demonstrating that those, particularly, Black males earning an Associate’s Degree, seem
to be the breaking point in the inopportunity structure for urban Black males (Holzer & Offner, 2006). The final criteria are based upon qualities articulated by Bonner (2014) as essential in one who possesses a strong Black male identity.

Success, for the purpose of this study, is operationalized as Black male participants meeting the following criteria:

1. *Educational Attainment*- a minimum of an associate’s degree or professional certification;
2. *Employment*- working professionals, demonstrating participants’ ability to maintain active employment and involvement with the economics of society; and
3. *Leadership*- those who provide service in the community as mentors to Black male youth for a minimum of three years.

**Limitations of the Study**

Qualitative study offers opportunity to the researcher to focus on the particular: how individuals construct their worlds, how they interpret their experiences and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam, 2009). Focus on the particular necessarily limits the application of a study’s findings to other situations, its generalizability. Accordingly, this study poses a risk to the generalizability of the findings as it details the experiences of a single group of participants, that of Black males. Strategies exist which enhance the transferability of the results to other settings and will be employed in this study. The experiences depicted are offered as descriptive cases where rich, thick descriptions are furnished. Rich, thick descriptions encompass detailed accounts of research participants in addition to detailed descriptions of the findings, all of
which aid in transferability. Maximum variation was employed as a means to enhance generalizability. Maximum variation, a sampling strategy, allows the possibility of a greater range of application by readers of the research by giving careful attention to sample selection (Merriam, 2009). Accordingly, to maximize the Black male participant sample, participant selection included those across a broad range of age in addition to those working in a diverse set of industries. The descriptive cases and diversity of Black male participants provides examples to draw upon when conducting future research with similar racially/ethnically-diverse populations.

Employing phenomenological methods for this research requires depicting the essence of participants’ lived experiences. To this end, the researcher bracketed any prior beliefs about the phenomenon being studied so as not to interfere with seeing or intuiting the elements or structure of the phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, the researcher’s own experiences were examined to become aware of any personal prejudices, viewpoints and assumptions (Merriam, 2009) so as to not compromise data analysis. Paramount in this study was the importance of not “proving” a point, but rather, allowing the data to emerge and to use the information responsibly whether or not data supported the anticipated outcomes.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This focus of this section is the Literature Review. I begin by providing a historical context of the civil rights of education through the Brown v. Board of Education court decision of 1954 situated within the longer civil rights movement. Followed by an overview of Black males’ location in education, I furnish literature as it relates to their disproportionality in school discipline as well as an alternate framework for discussing Black male development contrary to one based in the traditional, deficit-based framework.

Literature Review

Brown v. Board of Education

Public schooling in the United States was characterized by a period of legalized racial segregation as a result of the Supreme Court case, Plessy v. Ferguson of 1896. It was during this time that some questioned the utility of providing Blacks with anything more than a rudimentary education, resulting in underfunded education for Black students: meager materials, inadequate facilities, unequal funding of schools and teachers, and lack of bus transportation (Walker, 1996). After years of grassroots mobilization, court battles, and political struggle, Brown v. Board of Education of 1954 overturned this separate but equal ruling with the belief that discrimination had no place
in educational settings (Lash & Ratcliffe, 2014). The inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities to students based on race was viewed as promoting educational disparities; creating a vicious cycle in which Black students were denied access to school programs that were essential to reaching their academic, intellectual, socio-cultural, and fiscal potential and one that could help close achievement gaps (Walker, 1996).

The Brown v. Board of Education court decision is often acknowledged as the genesis of the civil rights movement, a decade marked by Blacks’ struggle for equality (Hall, 2005). Chronicled by keen political organizing and public protests, the civil rights movement resulted in the passage of key landmark legislation, The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and The Voting Rights Act of 1965 (Hall, 2005). The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was enacted which outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. The culmination of the civil rights movement is often associated with the passage of The Voting Rights Act of 1965, established to overcome legal barriers at the state and local levels that prevented Blacks from exercising their right to vote under the 15th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States (Isaac, 2008).

This depiction of the civil rights movement, referred to as the “Brown to the Voting Rights Act” period, is but a narrow portrayal of struggles for justice that limit the civic activism to the South. Offered as an alternative, and more accurate depiction of the breadth and depth of this rich and textured movement, is the Long Civil Rights Movement (LCRM). Established in 2005 to recast the narrative of this movement, the LCRM extends the classical chronology of this period at both ends (Hall, 2005) and highlights the expanse of the movement reaching into every region of the country and around the globe (Isaac, 2008). The LCRM acknowledges civic activism during the
1930s and 1940s as evidenced in the anti-lynching campaign initiated by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s (Hall, 2005) to include struggles against economic, social and environmental injustice that continue even today (Hall, 2005).

While the Brown v. Board of Education decision is recognized as a step toward equalizing access to educational opportunities for all children, racial and ethnic disparities persist as evidenced in an achievement gap, disproportionality in discipline, and dropout and graduation rates (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014; Skiba et al., 2011). Such disparities shed serious doubt on the extent to which the promises of Brown v. Board of Education have been fulfilled (Skiba et al., 2011) and calls for an awareness to the persistence of these inequities.

**Disproportionality in School Discipline**

Education for Black males is faced with challenges; however, school discipline has surfaced as one of the most alarming challenges of all (Monroe, 2006). Literature abounds with more than 30 years of research documenting the overrepresentation of Black males on indexes of school discipline (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Losen & Martinez, 2013; Monroe, 2006; Teske, 2011; James & Lewis, 2014; Rocque, 2010; Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba et al., 2011; U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014; Wallace et al., 2008). Appropriately defined, the common criterion for judging whether a group is disproportionately represented is the ‘ten percent of the population’ standard that is, a subpopulation may be considered over- or underrepresented if its proportion in the target classification (e.g., suspension) exceeds its representation by 10% of that representation. Thus, if African American students constitute 20%
of the population, they will be considered to be suspended disproportionately if more than 22% of less than 18% of students who were suspended were African American. (Skiba et al., 2002)

Research has consistently uncovered a relationship between race and gender and disproportionality of behavioral sanctions (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Rocque, 2010; Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba et al., 2011; U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014; Wallace et al., 2008). Disproportionality based on race dates back forty years through the Children’s Defense Fund’s (1975) exploration highlighting suspension rates for Black students that far exceeded White students on a variety of measures (Skiba et al., 2002). Black students experienced suspension rates at three times that of White students across elementary, middle, and high school levels (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Skiba et al., 2002; U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). School discipline data from a 2011-2012 Civil Rights Data Collection reported that on average, 5% of White students were suspended compared to 16% of Black students (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014).

In another example, research uncovered that while 29 states suspended over 5% of their total Black enrollment, only four states suspended 5% or more of White students (Skiba et al., 2002). Wallace’s research (2008) documents teachers’ proclivity to send Black and other minority students to the principal’s office more than their White peers. An ominous parallel is evident in the examination of gendered differences in discipline. The distribution of referrals has not been found evenly distributed across groups: boys are referred to the office at significantly higher rates than girls and receive a wider range of disciplinary consequences than girls (Skiba et al., 2002; U.S. Department of Education
Office for Civil Rights, 2014). Boys and girls each represent about half of the student population nationally, however boys represent nearly three out of four of those suspended multiple times out of school and expelled (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014).

Parsing out individual research on both Black students and male students is troubling in isolation, however, examination of disproportionality when considering the intersectionality of these social identities, is even more disturbing. Research notes a gender by race interaction in the probability of being disciplined that suggests that this problem is most acute among Black boys (Ferguson, 2000; James & Lewis, 2014; Losen & Martinez, 2013; Monroe, 2006; Noguera, 2003; Skiba et al., 2002; U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). 2011-2012 Illinois school discipline data highlights this disproportionality with Black students who represented the highest percentage of out-of-school suspensions, 19%, greater than male students from all other races and ethnicities (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014).

National data mirrors these findings with Black males representing 20% of all students who received out-of-school suspensions (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). Maryland suspended the lowest rate of Black male students (12%) and Indiana and Missouri suspending the highest rate (27%), both statistics reflecting gross disproportionalities (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). These racialized and gendered differences endure across both elementary and secondary grade levels (Monroe, 2006; U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). Some literature even reveals the likelihood of teachers disciplining
Black boys over students of other races even when both participate in identical behaviors (James & Lewis, 2014; Monroe, 2006).

Patterns in School Discipline

In examining the disproportionate impact of discipline on Black males, it is important to consider disproportionality from two dimensions: (1) disproportionately as it relates to a category of discipline for which a group of students tends to be referred and (2) the behavioral sanctions that are meted out for said infractions. Behaviors warranting referrals for school discipline are both many and varied, objective and subjective. They include, but are not limited to bullying, intimidation, insubordination, defiance, vandalism, threat and assault. Differences among Black and White youth and their referrals to the office also vary with disobedience and disrespect among the most common of offenses for which Black males are referred for disciplinary action (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Losen & Martinez, 2013). In a 1995 study of 19 middle schools in a large Midwestern public school district, researchers found that Black students were referred for more subjective reasons such as disrespect and perceived threat while White students were more likely to be referred for more objective reasons (e.g. smoking, vandalism, and leaving school without permission) (Skiba et al., 2002).

Multiple studies indicate that racial disparities are far more likely to be found in the minor subjective offense categories with insufficient evidence to support that Black or other minority students are simply misbehaving more than others (Ferguson, 2000; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Losen & Martinez, 2013; Monroe, 2006:). Gregory and Weinstein’s (2008) research of a high school’s annual discipline data corroborates these findings: 442 students were referred for defiance of which Blacks were over-represented
in referrals for defiance. Many of these students received referrals from one or several teachers suggesting the situational specificity of referrals such that each case is very specific to the classroom situation.

Research into Black males’ over-representation in subjective categories of discipline such as defiance has revealed a number of possible explanations (Ferguson, 2000; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Losen & Martinez, 2013; Monroe, 2006). Using attendance, grades, and teacher reports, researchers have investigated the situational specificity of referrals and found that students behaved more defiantly and less cooperatively with teachers perceived as having untrustworthy authority (Ferguson, 2000; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008). Thus, predictors of students’ trust in teacher authority could be found in teacher caring and high expectations, offering implications to practitioners for lowering the discipline gap (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008).

Some scholarship (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; James & Lewis, 2014; Losen & Martinez, 2013; Monroe, 2006) posits teachers’ tendency to perceive Black middle school students as more defiant, disrespectful, and rule-breaking than other groups even though research suggests that there is no compelling research to support the claim that Black males are more disruptive than their peers. Such arguments gain currency when coupled with a small yet compelling body of literature revealing teachers’ likelihood to discipline Black boys even when students of other races participate in identical behaviors (Fenning & Rose, 2007; James & Lewis, 2014; Losen & Martinez, 2013; Monroe, 2006).

Still other scholarship offers insight into Black males’ disproportionality in the area of defiance and other subjectively perceived categories citing the lack of cultural synchronization between students and their teachers (Ferguson, 2000; Monroe, 2006).
Distinct cultural orientations belonging to those of African heritage have been cited as
dichotomous to those of White communities. Scholarship describes the African
orientation as laden with identifiable attitudes, speech, behaviors, and cultural referents:
overlapping speech, candor in language, animation, rhythmic presentation styles, cadence
variance, and interactions marked by physical expression, are highlighted examples from
this orientation (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Monroe, 2006). This stands in sharp contrast to
White communities who frequently uphold different communicative standards such as
linear conversations, deference to mainstream points of authority, and impulse control
(Monroe, 2006). With a teaching profession composed of predominantly White
professionals (Fenning & Rose, 2007) who have limited understanding of African
cultural orientations, misinterpretation of behavior can have a weighty influence on racial
disparities in school discipline. An example can be found in a study of a Texas
elementary school where Black children engaged in play fighting and ritualized insults
for amusement of self-defense (Monroe, 2006). Teachers perceived these actions as acts
of authentic aggression (Monroe, 2006). This example is corroborated by research
pointing to practitioners’ culturally based misunderstandings of Black males’
interactional patterns as “impassioned” or “emotive” as “combative” or “argumentative”
that end in disciplinary action (Fenning & Rose, 2007). Practitioners have been found to
mistakenly understand the intent behind students’ actions, which often has the most
deleterious effect on referrals for Black boys; there is a strong tendency to sanction Black
children both recurrently and inappropriately (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Monroe, 2006).

Differences in cultural orientations between teachers and their students have also
been linked to bias that disproportionality impacts discipline referrals for Black male
students (Losen & Martinez, 2013). Research illustrates differential judgments about achievement and behavior based on racially conditioned characteristics (Fenning & Rose, 2007). The “stroll” style of walking, closely associated with Black style movement, was found by Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson, and Bridgest (2003), to be assigned an aggressive characterization or to those who were lower achieving academically regardless of race (Fenning & Rose, 2007).

The cultural orientations unique to Black males have been cited as a system of cultural constructs discrepant from mainstream expectations of schools (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Ferguson, 2000; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Monroe, 2006; Rocque, 2010). These unspoken rules and expectations, the hidden curriculum, are what some believe to aid students in their successful navigation of schools. Black males’ noncompliance with mainstream expectations has been linked to several potential causes. Ferguson (2000) suggests that Black boys intentionally distance themselves from the school’s agenda, perceived as one that requires them to distance themselves from family and neighborhood, from their language, their style of social interaction and the connections in which their identities are grounded. While noncompliance can be attributed to deliberate acts of defiance, it has also been linked to a lack of awareness (Bonner, 2014; Fenning & Rose, 2007). Regardless of the reason driving student noncompliance these salient cultural characteristics and behaviors make Black male behavior easily identifiable as not fitting into the norm of the school and susceptible to disciplinary action (Fenning & Rose, 2007).

Disproportionality in school discipline impacts Black males in the categories for which they receive behavioral sanctions as well as the types of consequences issued
Disciplinary consequences run the gamut from conferencing and detentions to in-school and out-of-school suspensions and expulsion. For over 25 years, national data shows students of color, particularly Black students, are overrepresented in the use of punitive and exclusionary consequences, at rates two to three times that of other students (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Monroe, 2006; Noguera, 2003; Skiba et al., 2011; U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). In a 1994-1995 study of a major midwestern school district, although Black students constituted only 52% of the district population, they represented 66.1% of all office referrals, 68.5% of out-of-school suspensions, and 80.9% of expulsions (Monroe, 2006). Data on types of consequences for disciplinary infractions between minority students and their White peers indicates that Black and Latino students are more likely to receive expulsion or out of school suspension as consequences for the same or similar behavior (Skiba et al., 2011). Disciplinary action exacted on Black males specifically reflects a race by gender interaction. Their overrepresentation on indexes of school discipline nationally, range from classroom penalties such as verbal reprimands to institutional punishments including suspensions and expulsions (Noguera, 2003; Skiba et al., 2002; U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). This disproportionality dates back to 1975 from the Children’s Defense Fund’s research on Black males’ overrepresentation in schools’ most exclusionary consequences (Fenning & Rose, 2007). U.S. Office for Civil Rights data validates the disparity of types of consequences received between Black males and their peers: Black males were 16 times more likely to be subjected to corporal punishment than white females (Skiba et al., 2002). An ordering in the likelihood of suspension at both the
junior and senior high school levels reported Black males being most prone to suspension followed by White males, Black females, and White females (Skiba et al., 2002).

**Impact on Learner Outcomes**

Although disproportionality based on race and gender is independently disturbing, there is abundant evidence that students’ disciplinary trajectories influence additional problems such as dropout rates, standardized test scores, and teachers’ decisions to leave the profession (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Losen & Martinez; 2013; Monroe, 2006; Noguera, 2003; Rocque, 2010; Skiba et al., 2011).

Frequent suspensions, for example, appear to significantly increase the risk of academic underperformance (Fergusson, 2000; Gregory et al., 2010; Rocque, 2010). A research study followed two demographically similar cohorts that were matched on gender, race, grade level, family poverty and limited English proficiency, examining a cohort that had received at least one suspension and the other that had received no suspensions (Gregory et al., 2010). During Year 1 of the study, suspended students were three grade levels behind their non-suspended peers in their reading skills and two years later, they were five years behind (Gregory et al., 2010).

These findings are bolstered by Ferguson’s research (2000), which speaks to the daily experiences of being labeled a “troublemaker,” of being “regulated,” and “surveilled.” Such students are denied access to the full resources of the schools and are isolated in nonacademic spaces in school or banished to lounging at home or loitering on the streets (Ferguson, 2000). Effectively, suspensions strip students of valuable classroom learning experiences and negatively impact their academic performance. As gaps in skills grow wider and more handicapping, it encourages those who have problems to leave
schools rather than resolve them in an educational setting (Ferguson, 2000). In the long term, school suspension has been found to be a moderate to strong predictor of students not graduating on time and on school dropout rates (Gregory et al., 2010). These gaps in skills also encourage those who have problems to leave schools rather than resolve them in an educational setting, increasing one’s chances of ending up in jail (Ferguson, 2000; Rocque, 2010). Known as the school-to-prison pipeline, students are at increased risk for incarceration when removed from positive learning environments and are criminalized for normative immaturity (Teske, 2011). The connections between those directly impacted by disproportionality in school discipline and the demographics of those incarcerated are conspicuously clear: both are predominantly people of color and male (Ferguson, 2000; Rocque, 2010; Teske, 2011). While youth of color constitute one third of the adolescent population, they represent two thirds of all youth detained in secure facilities (Teske, 2011). When comparing rates of incarceration among youth for the same offenses, records from 1998 showed that Black youths with no prior criminal history were six times and Latino youth three times more likely to be incarcerated than White youths for the same offenses (Teske, 2011).

The inordinate punitive and exclusionary sanctions levied on Black males have proven injurious to learner outcomes with little to no redeeming educational value (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Ferguson, 2000; Rocque, 2010; Teske, 2011). Such sanctions raise questions about the civil rights of these students when suspending a major part of an already disadvantaged racial and ethnic group (Losen & Martinez, 2013). Accordingly, the Department of Education is enforcing civil rights protections where issues of discriminatory discipline arise through an analysis of disparate impact (Losen &
Martinez, 2013). The disparate impact analysis includes three core questions that help determine whether a school’s discipline policy or practice has violated antidiscrimination law because of its disparate impact. It is a step in the right direction to help ameliorate the injurious impact that lack of cultural synchronization can have on Black males and their education (Losen & Martinez, 2013). Given the historical association between exclusionary school discipline and later negative life outcomes (Rocque, 2010), this research aims to bring attention to the social, academic and professional needs of Black males as a means to inform practitioners’ understanding of this demographic and mitigate the attendant disciplinary issues.

**Areas for Exploration**

Monroe’s (2006) work in understanding the discipline gap encourages teachers to shift their thinking from “why can’t Black boys behave themselves?” to “How can my teaching and classroom ecology support Black male success?” This research seeks to build upon a promising information base intended to push educators towards a sound comprehension of the problem’s development and endurance (Monroe, 2006). Research conducted within this strand has been particularly useful in identifying recurrent trends, isolating reasons that prompt behavioral sanctions, and drawing connections to sociocultural factors that invite unequal treatment (Monroe, 2006). Yet despite the increase in scholarship focus on underlying motivations for disproportionality (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Losen & Martinez, 2013; Monroe, 2006; Skiba et al., 2002), little, if any, research has set forth to make connections between Black male development from boyhood through manhood. This study seeks to explore if and how Black males have experienced defiance from schooling experiences as youth to working professionals in
addition to exploration into the role and value defiance plays in Black male development. This knowledge can contribute to schools becoming conduits of change by working to develop Black males’ agency in their approach and use of defiance as well as helping to close the discipline gap (Monroe, 2006).

Status of the Black Male

The educational performance and progression of Black males has been recorded extensively, both locally and nationally (Duncan, 2002; Garibaldi, 2007; James & Lewis; 2014), rendering Black males as a population “beyond love, a condition of those who are excluded from society’s economy and networks of care and thus expelled from useful participation in social life” (Duncan, 2002). They are at times regarded as a strange fruit of sorts, a population which maintains a set of shared values and attitudes fundamentally different from other students and according with it marginalization and oppression understood as both natural and primarily of their own doing (Duncan, 2002). This rendering is one that James and Lewis (2014) harkened back to in the penmanship of the father of Black history, Dr. Carter G. Woodson’s 1933 timeless writing, The Mis-

Education of the Negro:

The same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worth while, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other peoples.

While modest educational progress has been made (Garibaldi, 2007), in almost four generations since Woodson penned this writing, the words captured by Dr. Woodson
continue to reflect a problem that is at once persistent and systemic, impacting the spark of Black male genius. It was during the early 20th century that Dr. Woodson forwarded that argument that Black Americans possess a latent form of genius that Euro-dominant schooling diminished (James & Lewis, 2014). Causes for this snuffed out potential lie in a myriad of reasons, including the cultural differences of Black students, their families, and communities, largely discrepant from the teachers and educational community that serve them. The lack of cultural synchronization has been found to yield deficit thinking about the Black community, one laden with ideologies that stereotype Black males as violent, untrustworthy, anti-intellectual, hyper-sexual and immoral, regardless of the content of their personal character (Duncan, 2002; Ferguson, 2000; Garibaldi, 2007; Lewis, James, Hancock, & Hill-Jackson, 2008).

Congruent with these dominant and pervasive typologies, American schooling is organized through a problem-based approach to teaching and learning, situating Black children, culture, and communities as inherently pathological, in part, due to an examination through White standards, philosophies, theories and research methodologies (Duncan, 2002; Ferguson, 2000; Garibaldi, 1992; James & Lewis, 2014). Educational policies, programs and other measures are designed to promote Black student achievement through these same pathological frameworks that attempt to redress the failings of this demographic, many times, through classifying Black communities and cultures as the risk factors that must be circumvented in order to achieve academic success (Ferguson, 2000; James & Lewis, 2014).

The attendant issues that render inopportunity for Black male students resides within entire school cultures that normalize poor instruction, low expectations, unfair
discipline, disconnections between communities and schools, and general disregard for Black males in schools (Duncan, 2002; Ferguson, 2000; James & Lewis, 2014). Most dangerously, it is done to the extent that the collective indifference becomes invisible (James & Lewis, 2014). This system of thought has been responsible for more than a century of education policies, practices, and programs that have failed to meet the needs of Black students, especially those of Black males in urban schools (Lewis et al., 2008).

Despite the educational consequences of inopportunity, Black males can navigate through them to obtain a measure of academic and career success (James & Lewis, 2014). Understanding Black male development through the lens of “blackmaleness” equips teachers with insight into Black males’ experiences, informing and even mediating their interactions with this demographic. Blackmaleness is theorized as a multidimensional, shifting, and oftentimes contradictory reality of Black males that consists of two extremes and a void that must be traversed through contemplation, choice and chance to solidify a truer Black male identity (James & Lewis, 2014).

Overall, the subtractive extreme of blackmaleness is a nexus of social limitations, messaged and materialized as an inescapable but navigable system of ideological, institutional, and individual inopportunities with the absolute disenfranchisement of Black males as a chief end. On the other hand, the productive extreme is theorized as a transgenerational collective force, organized to contest, defy, resist, and persist despite the presence of social barriers particularly constructed to make war with the potential of Black males in American society and education. Lastly, throughout their lives all Black males experience shifting identities in the void between these two extremes. (James & Lewis, 2014)
Blackmaleness furnishes insights into Black male identity development, a unique and necessary process for Black males. Knowledge of this construct can help teachers develop and embrace approaches informed by the complexities of blackmaleness (James & Lewis, 2014; Lewis et al., 2008). Teachers can examine and better understand how traditional hegemonic praxis, for example, may negatively influence Black males’ agency and attendant behaviors (subtractive blackmaleness). Teachers are also made privy to how their effective responsiveness to Black males’ educational needs can stimulate students’ sense of self-efficacy and agency, for instance, and can be used to a noble end in supporting Black males’ academic, cultural and social maturation (productive blackmaleness).

The established racialized power structure has yet to reconcile the possibility of being a Black male and a genius (James & Lewis, 2014). Insight into blackmaleness lends insight for teachers to understand the complex inner workings of Black male development that shed light on the depth and level of complexities that students grapple with. These are complexities that help explode myths and stereotypes of Black males as apathetic, defiant and the like, aiding Black males as they navigate their journey in through Black male identity development. It presents the opportunity to depart from outdated ideologies tethering Black male learners to expected mediocrity and away from behaviors that signal that prison and poverty are their expected futures (Duncan, 2002; Garibaldi, 1992; James & Lewis, 2014).

**The Scholar Identity Model**

In departing from perspectives that reflect a problem-based approach to working with Black male students, the scholar identity model (SIM) presents itself as an asset-
based approach to understanding and interacting with Black males students. SIM emerged as an outgrowth of Fred Bonner’s (2014) work at a small predominantly Black university in the Midwestern part of the United States. In working with Black and Brown low-income fathers and fathers-to-be, this model was developed to address the varied and complex issues surrounding Black and Brown men and boys’ academic underperformance (Bonner, 2014). Research at the university and the local fatherhood program for four years and six years, respectively, provided the foundations for the SIM framework. The theory related to the SIM model was initially designed to provide educators working with Black and Brown males with a road map for fostering scholar identities (Bonner, 2014). This model demanded that educators, families, communities, and eventually the mass media view the students through a different, more capable lens; hence, they would expect different efforts from the student and assist in instilling the idea of being a scholar, often by becoming better, more understanding teachers (Bonner, 2014).

The premise of the SIM is not to fix broken, less capable, less intelligent, or less desirous students, but to motivate, educate, and most importantly, relate to capable, intelligent students (Bonner, 2014). Moreover, in order to relate to a student, a genuine concern and belief in the unseen potential or talent must be developed and honed by the teacher, coach, guardian, or mentor (Bonner, 2014). The nine constructs that make up the pyramid are grounded in the foundational construct, self-efficacy. Self-efficacy has been researched as a driving factor which helps Black males push back against negative stereotypes about themselves and that implores them to seek new ways of challenging themselves (Bonner, 2014). It is from here that they are able to develop goals and
intentions which guide their efforts (future orientation), and traverse subsequent constructs encouraging their willingness to make sacrifices, build their internal locus of control, bolster self-awareness, place academic achievement over the need for affiliation (achievement greater than affiliation), bolster academic self-confidence, racial identity and pride, and masculinity (Bonner, 2014).

The scholar identity model offers a prototype for understanding Black male students in a way that acknowledges and builds upon productive ends of blackmaleness. Toward this aim, it extends the opportunity to reconcile the possibility of being a Black male and genius (James & Lewis, 2014) and away from the deficit thinking that is the governing epistemology, informing the quality of education and educational leadership for many economically, linguistically and culturally diverse children in America (James & Lewis, 2014).

**Mentorship**

The Scholar Identity Model highlights the role of a mentor as an integral component of a Black male’s life. In their stewardship capacity, mentors are able to guide, push, and support the young Black male in ways that schools cannot (Bonner, 2014). Literature on mentoring suggests that the presence of a structured program and caring adults who coach, sponsor, motivate, and/or serve as role models can positively influence the educational outcomes of their mentees (Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz, & Watson, 2014). Understood as a one-to-one relationship in which a more experienced, often older mentor supports a less experienced, often younger mentee, a mentor establishes a supportive relationship with his mentees (Bonner, 2014; Jackson et al., 2014; Whiting, 2006). This relationship fosters reciprocal exchanges of trust, respect, and commitment.
(Jackson et al., 2014) from which mentors can develop leadership and social skills, career development, and discuss notions of manhood or masculinity and ways to cope with social injustices (Whiting, 2006).

Formal mentorship is often prioritized through organizations such as fraternities, the Boys and Girls Clubs, 100 Black Men, National Urban League and YMCA in settings external to the school (Whiting, 2006). Other mentorship initiatives are embedded within schools in the form of all-male, in-school mentoring programs. Programs such as UMOJA, Project Avalanche, and the Brotherhood, have been found to buttress the success of school or district-level programs through their focus on social inclusion and emotional wellbeing (Jackson et al., 2014). Providing several key tenets of a healthy scholar identity, mentoring programs are helping Black males successfully negotiate their school environments by establishing positive academic and social identities (Bonner, 2014; Jackson et al., 2014).

**Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) acknowledges and builds upon the productive ends of blackmaleness linked to the success of Black male students. For over twenty years, anthropologists have examined ways in which teaching can better match the home and community cultures of students of color who have previously not had academic success in schools (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Understood as teaching that builds upon the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference and performance styles of ethnically diverse students, CRP makes learning encounters more relevant and effective for students (Gay, 2013). This strengths-based approach to understanding and interacting with diverse students presupposes that all students enter the classroom with
the intellectual capacity for scholastic achievement and accomplishes this end by valuing
the backgrounds and experiences of these students. Learning then becomes a medium for
creating community among individuals from different cultural, social and ethnic
backgrounds, developing students’ agency and empowerment and promoting educational
equity and excellence by connecting in-school learning to out-of-school living (Gay,
2013; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Central to CRP is the matching of educational practices with children’s culture in
ways which ensure the generation of academically important behaviors (Ladson-Billings,
1995). CRP specifies what makes learning relevant for different populations of students
and how and why these actions and ideas differ for other groups of students (Ladson-
Billings, 1995). Literature reveals that not all school practices must be completely
congruent with the respective cultural practices, but students’ backgrounds should be
used to guide the selection of educational program elements (Gay, 2013). These include
but are not limited to instructional materials, lesson adaptations, grouping strategies, and
standards for student behavior. The effective employment of CRP has been found to be
an effective medium for producing academically desired behaviors and avoiding
behaviors that are undesired (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Helping to redress the cultural
mismatch between teachers and students, CRP affirms students’ diverse backgrounds,
using them as instructional resources to improve their learning opportunities and
outcomes (Gay, 2013).
CHAPTER III
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Following a qualitative model, this study explored the ways in which schools and communities contribute to the social, academic and professional needs of its Black male demographic. Additional consideration is provided for how teaching and classroom ecologies can better support Black male success.

Research Design

This research design employs a phenomenological approach to understanding the experiences of Black males and their development. Phenomenology has its origins in the school of philosophy associated with Edmund Husserl, a twentieth century German philosopher (Merriam, 2009). Phenomenology holds that all knowing is at one level subjective as it is always related to, and constructed by, the person engaged in knowing (Willis, 1999). Thus, one can only understand a phenomenon by understanding and describing phenomena exactly as they appear in an individual’s consciousness (Willis, 1999). The role of the phenomenological researcher is to depict the essence of participants’ lived experiences, that is, how a phenomenon appears to them. Necessarily subjective in nature, some of this subjectivity focuses on the thing being experienced while some is focused on the person experiencing the thing (Willis, 1999). The phenomenological approach was selected for its alignment with the theoretical framework guiding this study-Critical Race Theory (CRT).
Table 1

Critical Race Theory’s (CRT) Influence in Study

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRT Key Tenets</th>
<th>Influence in Study</th>
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<tr>
<td>Centrality of race and racism</td>
<td>Disproportionality in discipline for Black male students</td>
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<td>Challenge given to the dominant perspective</td>
<td>Counter-storytelling</td>
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<td>Privileging voice</td>
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<td>Commitment to social justice</td>
<td>Offering a strengths-based perspective for Black male development</td>
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<td>Demonstrating the need for culturally responsive training</td>
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<td>Value placed on experiential knowledge</td>
<td>Perspective gained from schooling, professional and mentoring spheres</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Phenomenological research approach</td>
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<tr>
<td>Value of interdisciplinary knowledge and multiple perspectives</td>
<td>Participant selection from various age groups and professional backgrounds</td>
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<td></td>
<td>8 research participants</td>
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CRT analyzes the experiences of historically underrepresented populations (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015) to give them voice, an integral component of the CRT framework. This study is designed to give voice to Black males through a critical examination of their educational and professional experiences and the impact on their development. Data collection and explicitation procedures are also aligned with the phenomenological research approach.
Participants

This research study consists of one subject group, adult Black males. Participants were selected using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was utilized to ensure that participants had experience with the phenomenon being studied. Accordingly, participants were selected who met the following criteria: (1) adult Black males, over the age of 25; and those who demonstrate success as defined by: (2) educational attainment—a minimum of an associate’s degree or professional certification; (3) employment—current working professionals; and (4) leadership—those who provide service in the community as mentors to Black male youth for a minimum of three years. The first criterion is vital to the research proposed by this dissertation. The remaining criteria were added as a result of scholarship (Holzer & Offner, 2006) demonstrating that Blacks who are able to meet those criteria are situated to live in the middle class and for the purpose of this research are deemed successful.

Participants were recruited, some of whom I had existing relationships with and others whom were referred through professional acquaintances. Participants were telephoned regarding the research study at which time the study was explained as well as their responsibilities as participants. When participants expressed interest in the study, at that time, I read the recruitment script to them. Participants were furnished with informed consent documentation the day of the first interview and subsequent interviews were arranged.

In qualitative research, the number of participants selected is based upon the researcher’s ability to reach sufficiency in numbers to reflect the range of participants that make up the population as well as saturation of information (Seidman, 2006). This
study proposed eight participants to accomplish this end. This is consistent with a phenomenological study in which eight to ten participants are considered an appropriate sample size (Merriam, 2009).

**Data Gathering and Instrumentation**

To understand the experiences of successful Black males, I conducted in-depth phenomenological interviews as described by Irving Seidman (2006). All participants were interviewed using this same interviewing format. Each participant was interviewed on two separate occasions. The interviews were structured as follows:

- Interview One: Focused Life History
- Interview Two: The Details of Experience and Reflection on the Meaning

The intent of the interviews was for participants to describe their experiences in such a way that they can make sense of their experiences and how those experiences contribute to their success. The first interview established the context of the participant’s experience while the subsequent interviews allowed participants to reconstruct the details of the experience within the context in which it occurred and it encouraged participants’ reflection on the meaning their experiences held for them (Seidman, 2006). Each interview provided a foundation of detail that helped illuminate the next; appropriately, it helped take advantage of the interactive and cumulative nature of the sequence of the interviews (Seidman, 2006). I deviated from Seidman’s model of the three-part phenomenological interview. Necessitated by the schedule of participants, the phenomenological interviews followed an alternative to the structure as proposed by Seidman whereby a two-part interview was conducted. All three areas of exploration were traversed; however, they were completed across two separate in-person interviews.
As long as a structure is maintained that allows participants to reconstruct and reflect upon their experience within the context of their lives, alterations to the three-interview structure can be explored (Seidman, 2006). Specifically, semi-structured interviews were employed to accomplish this end. A mix of more or less structured interview questions was included, questions were used flexibly, and there was no predetermined ordering of the questions (Merriam, 2009). Each interview began with semi-structured questions that later led to open-ended questions as ideas emerged. Inherent in phenomenological interview questions is open-ended questions where the major task is to build upon and explore participants’ responses (Seidman, 2006). The questions guiding this research are listed in the interview protocol (see Appendix A).

The time frame between each interview was approximately one week. This time frame furnished participants ample time to process the interview while not sacrificing memory of the experience (Seidman, 2006). This allowed time for the participant to mull over the preceding interview but not enough time to lose the connection between the two (Seidman, 2006). Because alterations to the typical structure of the interview were made, I adhered to the 90-minute rather than the 60-minute proposed format for each interview.

**Data Collection Procedures**

The interview is an opportunity to obtain a special kind of information, granting the interviewer insight into the feelings, thoughts, and intentions that preclude the presence of me as an observer (Merriam, 2009). These feelings, thoughts, and intentions are valuable and lend insight into what can be very delicate and sensitive information. It is imperative to relay this information as it is shared with the interviewer. Accordingly, appropriate measures were implemented to ensure accuracy of participants’ responses.
Interview data was collected through two forms. The first of which was an audio recorder. Audio recordings lend themselves in recounting specific details and even the intonations of the exact words spoken where my memory might fail to recount.

Interviews were completed during March of 2016. Interviews were scheduled with participants following their submission of their consent forms. They were conducted at locations of participants’ convenience. As aforementioned, interviews were paced no more than one week apart.

Note taking served as the second medium for interview data collection. The value in note taking is found in the ability to capture moments not observable through audio recording. Recording gestures made when a statement is shared can help re-create the moment with as much accuracy as possible. Highlighting a particular phrase that is put forth can also prove useful when mining the data. Note taking is also an effective medium, providing detailed accounts of my perceptions during the interview as well as participants’ responses as they are shared. Taken collectively, these insights yielded insightful connections that stimulated additional probing and questions that served to clarify participant responses. Paper files were kept in a locked cabinet to which only I will had access.

Interviews served as the sole source of data. Congruent with Critical Race Theory (CRT), the use of interviews is an effective mode of data collection inasmuch as research participants are granted the platform to share their voice through their counter-story. The interview notes accomplished two ends: they supplement information that might become lost in an audio recording alone and they also serve as a preparatory tool for subsequent interviews. Their utility is found, for example, in noting places where misunderstandings
require clarification. All data, documents and other pertinent information, were kept together in a password-protected file on my computer.

**Data Explicitation Procedures**

Phenomenology is unique in its approach to the process in which data is mined. Understood as a space to describe an experience from the perspective of the participant and not as much an analysis of it (Moustakas, 1994), this section has been appropriately labeled to reflect this understanding (Groenewald, 2004). Participant voice is pivotal to this research and is prioritized as such throughout the entirety of this study.

**Procedure**

The data explicitation process began following the transcription of the interview data. This undertaking was performed by a professional and reputable audio recording transcription company. As a company that specializes in academic transcriptions, they ensure confidentiality of all data. Specifically, the company offers a “Non-Disclosure Agreement” for clientele that prohibits the company from releasing any content into the public domain. Upon receipt of the transcriptions, all transcriptions were reviewed for any errors and modified. Transcripts of the interviews were used for the data explicitation process. The data explicitation process employed in this study is aligned with that of other phenomenological qualitative research (Creswell, 2006; Merriam, 2009; Seidman, 2006). Data were organized and explained through procedures as outlined by Moustakas (1994):

1. Horizontalization-each transcription was separated into statements/units of meaning;
2. Clusters of meaning-descriptions of what is experienced was the basis from which themes were developed;

3. Textural description-clusters were described as what was experienced;

4. Structural description-clusters were described as how it was experienced; and

5. Composite description-this final step combines the textural and structural descriptions. This part focuses on the essence of the experience of all of the participants.

Coding of the interviews followed the aforementioned steps and assisted in the interpretation of the data. Coding was also guided by the five key tenets, which ground the theoretical framework of this study, CRT, as seen in Table 2 below. Accordingly, additional themes were developed around participant responses that aligned with said tenets and data explicitation addressed those areas elicited through participant responses. A web-based application, Deduce, was utilized for data organization and coding.

**Validity**

The effectiveness of a research study lies in its ability to convey information that is useful and even meaningful to academic scholarship. To effectively contribute to this body, research must be rigorously conducted and others must have confidence in the conduct of the investigation and in the results of the study (Merriam, 2009). To ensure that a study’s findings are sufficiently authentic, the researcher must employ validity and reliability checkpoints (Merriam, 2009). These checkpoints extend to the study’s conceptualization and the way in which the data are collected, analyzed and interpreted, and the way in which the findings are presented (Merriam, 2009).
Table 2

\textit{Alignment of Study}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Data Collection Methods</th>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Data Explicitation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical Race Theory (CRT)</td>
<td>How do Black males perceive themselves socially, academically and professionally?</td>
<td>Phenomenology</td>
<td>Phenomenological interviews</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>Open coding of words/phrases organized into categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do Black males perceive the role of schools and communities in fostering their social, academic and professional success from boyhood through manhood?</td>
<td>Audio recordings</td>
<td>Note-taking</td>
<td></td>
<td>Categories organized around CRT key tenets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How have the social, academic and professional experiences of Black males in schools and communities influenced their mentorship of young Black males?</td>
<td>Note-taking</td>
<td>Note-taking</td>
<td></td>
<td>Themes/patterns emerge naturally</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In a phenomenological study, the researcher has several measures to ensure this validity. The bracketing process, also known as epoche, can be employed whereby the researcher avoids making personal judgments throughout the study (Merriam, 2009; Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). Specifically, the researcher is attentive to the presence of any personal bias, viewpoints or assumptions regarding the phenomenon under investigation.
This suspension of judgment is critical in phenomenological investigations and requires the setting aside of the researcher’s personal viewpoint in order to see the experience for itself. Employing imaginative variation encourages seeing the object of study, the phenomenon, from several divergent perspectives (Merriam, 2009). Regarding this research, I maintain a set of beliefs concerning the misunderstandings of Black males, however, these biases were bracketed in interview protocol development, for example, to eliminate any leading questions that might inadvertently endorse my position and appropriately, allowing the data to emerge naturally.

Member checks served as an additional means to increase validity. As findings emerged in this study, participant feedback was solicited through follow-up and clarifying questions. Participants were asked to expound upon presented information and furnish examples. Responses were re-stated and confirmation was solicited to ensure that participants’ thoughts were accurately understood and portrayed. Additionally, validity was obtained through the use of digital recordings of interviews. Moreover, the nature of the three part phenomenological interview incorporates features that enhance the accomplishment of validity by placing participants’ comments in context, encouraging participants’ to check for the internal consistency of what has been said in between interviews, and by interviewing a number of participants, lending the opportunity to connect their experiences and to check the comments of one participant against those of others (Seidman, 2006).
Methodological Considerations

The social sciences often have accorded with it the limited utility of generalizability due to small sample sizes. They are believed to be rendered incapable of extracting a universal from a particular (Merriam, 2009). Offered as a means to buffer this perceived stumbling block to generalizability is the use of rich, thick description. This refers to a description of the setting and participants of the study, as well as a detailed description of the findings with adequate evidence presented in the form of quotes from participant interviews, field notes, and documents (Merriam, 2009). Rich, thick descriptions are viewed as a strategy to enable transferability (Merriam, 2009), which is particularly helpful in balancing out the small sample size of the eight participants in this research study. The setting and participants were described in as much detail as possible without compromising confidentiality. Aligned with phenomenological research, quality and depth are the goals which rich, thick descriptions provide.

Ethical Considerations

Participants were reminded at the beginning of each interview that their participation was completely voluntary. To protect participants’ confidentiality, the use of pseudonyms is included when discussing the research in writing or verbally. A password-protected file is where all documents and materials were stored during the data collection and explicitation procedure when not in use.
CHAPTER IV
DATA EXPLICITATION AND FINDINGS

This chapter details the format of the study as well as the study participants. This description is followed by the guiding research questions and explicitation of data. Organized around three research questions, data explicitation examined each of these questions as outlined in the first chapter of this dissertation.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the schooling, professional, and mentoring experiences of successful Black men to better understand how schools and communities contribute to their resilience. Through the use of in-depth interviews, participants described and made meaning out of their schooling, professional, and mentoring experiences. Specifically, participants were able to express their beliefs about traversing these experiences as Black males from boyhood through manhood with specific attention to the role that defiance played in each of these domains. Additionally, participants identified key elements believed to have been either supportive or suppressive in their development.

Profiled through direct quotations, participants’ responses are used to emphasize major themes emerged throughout the research. One of the guiding tenets of Critical Race Theory, the framework used in this study, is the importance of bringing voice to those on the margins of society. This research afforded participants the opportunity to engage in
counter-storytelling whereby experiences that have not been told (Love, 2004) have a platform. Participants were afforded space to communicate their experiences and realities through a first-hand account, to better help understand the complexities of racism (Ladson-Billings, 2010).

This study was conducted during March of 2016. Participant recruitment was accomplished through my professional network as well as that of professional acquaintances. All participants were contacted through telephone and consented to participate in the study.

Participants were interviewed in two separate meetings. Interviews followed Seidman’s (2006) approach to qualitative interviewing:

- Interview One: Focused Life History and The Details of the Experience
- Interview Two: Reflection on the Meaning

The study’s intended goal was for participants to describe their schooling, professional, and mentoring experiences and for participants to make meaning from them. Interviews were semi-structured in nature and data collection was solely handled by the researcher. The approximate timeframe between each interview was one week. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes in length at locations convenient to the participant and they were audio-recorded and transcribed.

**Description of Participants**

The participant pool was composed of successful Black men who mentored Black male youth for a minimum of three years. Eight participants agreed to participate in the study. Table 3 lists participants who participated in the study.
Table 3

List of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Professional Industry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>Byron</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Doctoral Degree (in progress)</td>
<td>Public Speaking/Nonprofit Sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>Business/Nonprofit Sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>David</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Juris Doctor</td>
<td>Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>Edwin</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>Religious Sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Master’s Degree (in progress)</td>
<td>Social Work/Nonprofit Sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>Grant</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>Author/Public Speaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>Health/Nonprofit Sector</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Questions

1. How do Black males perceive themselves socially, academically and professionally?

2. How do Black males perceive the role of schools and communities in fostering their social, academic and professional success from boyhood through manhood?

3. How have the social, academic and professional experiences of Black males in schools and communities influenced their mentorship of young Black males?

Explicitation of Data Collected

Phenomenological interview techniques were utilized to provide an emic account of Black males’ schooling, professional, and mentoring experiences. The data consisted primarily of audio-recorded interviews coupled with notes that were taken during the
interviews. The interviews consisted of two separate conversations each lasting
approximately 60 to 90 minutes in duration. The interpretation of data composed of
shared qualities and relationships are presented below.

The Black Male Defined

Participants forwarded perceptions of themselves as Black males. The perceptions
presented are a reflection of both their views of self as well as those believed to be held
by the larger society concerning them.

“Stop letting everybody else tell us how we’re to be and the way we’re supposed
to be” (Edwin). Black males are leaders and initiate the change that they want to see in
the world. This narrative was pervasive among participants.

We buy into a lot of the Eurocentric defining of us. There’s the lowered
expectation that [Black men] are gonna be good for nothing. You’ll be lazy,
you’ll go around and have babies everywhere, can’t hold a job down, doesn’t
wanna work and wants his woman to take care of him.

Edwin’s sentiments were echoed across each of the eight participants that Black men
“will not be a benefit to society in general” (Frank). Accordingly, several participants are
founders or leaders of organizations where they can set the standard for the expectations
established for Black men, images that cast them both as productive and contributing
members of society. Alex and Henry for example are the founders of nonprofit
organizations that specifically cater to minority male students. Byron and Jason are
public speakers and founders of professional speaking organizations. Alex, Edwin, and
Frank hold leadership positions in organizations where they are able to set positive
expectations of Black men. These leadership roles are what Edwin believes are instrumental in defining ourselves and setting our own levels of expectations. Not until Black men get to that place…don’t apologize for how God made you and the gifting that is intrinsic to you. ‘Til we learn to stop apologizing for that and stop allowing everybody else to define us and stop adopting everyone else’s value system, it’s going to be very, very hard to get off the endangered species list.

In their respective spaces, participants use their example to teach. Their life stories mirror many of the experiences of the mentees that they serve. Their life stories are used to encourage students in similar dire circumstances such as Alex. For Frank, who experienced a “privileged situation all of [his] life compared to that of [his] general peers”, he used his life story “for more of a force for empowerment and then for motivation and inspiration.” Regardless of the childhood rearing, participants used their leadership platforms to set the bar for expectations that people have for Black males. These are expectations that “contest society’s expectations of them.” Participants’ mentorship affords them to “coach them along the way, encourage them, open a door to bring them into [our] world” (David).

“With a smile on my face, I know that I have to outshine everybody else” (David).

As an extension of redefining society’s expectation of Black males, participants demonstrated qualities of those who are hard workers and determined. Hard work and determination appeared to be an outgrowth of the pejorative images of cast on Black men. Alex shared
A lot of folks think we’re lazy. A lot of folks think that we were given the opportunity that we have, that we were given the job because we’re Black. Some folks just think we don’t belong like why are you here? What are you doing? Some folks think we’re the help, like you can’t be a manager. You can’t be a leader you know, you just support. That’s just to name a few.

In contesting the stereotypes that beset Black male culture, participants articulated a mindset determined to counter these expectations. This mindset was coupled with actions that often required extra work on behalf of participants, more work than their majority counterparts. Alex offered that these are “things that as Black people in particular we have to think about that others don’t.” Edwin expounded

I was not only told this directly by my parents, but I found out early whatever you do with them and that being Caucasian people, I had to be at least ten times better. And I was told that but I experienced that and I found that out early on so it didn’t matter whether it was grades. I was always top of the class. In part, driven by that…you can’t just tie. There’s no such thing. Tie for us was losing so you had to be ten times better and that really motivated me and drove me in a lot of good pursuits.

These competitive efforts came in the form of arriving to work early, staying late, and exceeding sales quotas to name a few.

I try to be a realist as much as possible and understand the space in which I’m operating. So in accepting that preconceived notions exist in who I am, who I’m gonna be as a person my overall goal is that if I’m ever in trouble for something you’re gonna have a damn good reason for it! Right, like I try to disprove and
some people may say this may be unfair but again it goes to those things that as Black people in particular we have to think about that others don’t. I try to disprove any preconceived notion like I know walking in the door they’re gonna think I’m lazy so I’m at work earlier and I stay later than anybody. I know they’re gonna think that I don’t belong. Well I’ll show you my work, every day! I’ll show you what my contributions are every day. And that’s kind of just personal mantra.

Henry and David addressed their intentionality in their outward appearance, specifically in the clothes that they wear. Determined to cast a positive image of Black males, Henry indicated that he

…purposely dress[es] up all the time even in my own company. I dress up all the time because you never know who you gone meet and when I dress down, like when I have on a hoodie, some Tims…all my degrees go out the window. All that. I’m just nigga #4. I’m just sayin. It’s like that perception like it’s not about your accomplishment. It’s like the stereotype. You young, you Black, how you dress, what you are driving. It’s crazy. It’s crazy how they treat you. Your attire. It’s a reality check.

Henry spoke to an instance where he and his mentee were walking outside on a day where he happened to be dressed casually while his younger mentee was dressed up. He shared reactions by people who saw the two walking. Henry recalled passerby deferring to the younger mentee instead of him. He perceived that people “would look to him [the mentee] like he was helping me out.”
For participants, going beyond the required was viewed as a worthwhile investment and one that was perceived by participants to be a necessary process for Black males. The pervasiveness of this reality is supported by David who stated:

Every day is a fight in society for any one that wants to be productive and then you add, just add an additional layer that complicates it to just make sure that you have to continue to fight the good fight even harder and so it goes hand in hand with that.

Alex recounted sentiments expressed by one of his close friends who works in corporate America.

One thing he’s learned and is always willing to bet on is that if at any point you see a Black person, particularly a Black male within a certain role or on a certain team, he said and I quote ‘I’m willing to bet that they know more than anybody on that team just because of who they are. They had to work harder to get to where they are.’

The value in this hard work is found in disrupting negative imaging of Black males and replacing it with a different and more positive conception. Value was also found in the measure of professional success articulated by participants to have been attributed to their hard work and determination. Interestingly, throughout participants’ articulation of the extra efforts that they perceived necessary for their success as Black males, in none of the responses did participants appear incensed or even articulate anger about this reality. Participants’ responses reflected an acknowledgement that this reality existed followed by thoughtful and deliberate actions to mitigate perceived barriers and fuel them to their success.
“There is no success without struggle.” Pervasive throughout each participant’s narrative was their strength, resilience, and hopefulness. David recalled the aforementioned quote by the famed African American orator, author and abolitionist, Frederick Douglass. Speaking to his experience as a productive member of society, David stated

I mean, every day is a struggle. Every day is a fight in society for any one that wants to be productive and then you add, just add additional layer that complicates it to just make sure that you have to continue to fight the good fight even harder and so it goes hand in hand with that. It’s contested, you know, I don’t think that success is openly out there for you to just grab for African Americans. I think it really requires you to want it and to do positive things in order to obtain it but one thing that’s worth saying is it’s going to be gratifying.

Strength is demonstrated in participants’ acknowledgement that certain battles are inherent to productive members of society and moreover as that of being Black males. Necessarily requiring them to go beyond the required is something that requires astuteness to recognize, a will to goal-set and persistence to execute. Demonstrating strength rather than anger when encountering unfair expectations because of their group membership, was an indicator of participants’ resolve. Alex addressed the importance of strength when describing his experience in corporate America.

Corporate America is full of politics and corporate b.s. and you have to understand as a Black male many people have their preconceived notions of who you are and how you’re gonna react…if you could just stay ahead of that. If you could keep your head above the clouds it’s very important in navigating what you
want your career to become and that’s important. Like the whole navigating what you want cause a lot of us especially don’t realize the amount of control we have over what we want to become and once you acknowledge that control then 9 times out of 10 you start to see more success.

Staying ahead of the preconceived notions of Black males required participants to be proactive in their approach professionally and in life, generally. None of the participants indicated that this was an easy task to accomplish; however, each participant articulated their wherewithal to rise above these stereotypes to demonstrate to others a different type of Black male than what society has come to expect.

Inherent in each participant’s discussion around their efforts to set a new standard for Black men, was their hopefulness that their hard work and determination could help them transcend difficult experiences as Black males. David, for instance, currently manages a team of 40 people for a big four accounting firm and is “still fighting the good fight” trying to make partner at his firm. In part, David attributes his success to advice he employs from one of his mentors who

…always said ‘but then what?’ What are your actions going to be next? What it’s taught me is that it’s to minimize, eliminate victimization and take a different approach to it because in this world and particularly in this environment that I’m in this kind of high touch, kind of high brow, high caliber consulting firm, that you’re gonna face those challenges but it’s the tough that survive. You have to recognize it for what it’s worth and kind of move forward. Put a plan together and pedal faster.
David shared that he is “over the concept that’s something given to me,” putting in countless hours of work to obtain his goals. David’s experience has taught him that he has a choice and thus control over his future that if properly navigated will position him to receive the fruits of his labor.

“I always had a good GPA but I was that type of student, like I did what I had to do to get it done and get that good GPA” (Byron). Expressed by each of the eight participants was a high intellectual capacity and emotional intelligence, ability to focus, and a drive to set and accomplish both personal and academic goals. Frank for example shared that he “did well, about 3.6 average in school” and consistently maintained this grade point average throughout high school and college. He and other participants were well-positioned to apply to top-tier public and private universities. In fact, Frank attended an ivy league school for his post-secondary education.

All participants spoke to their high levels of achievement. While most participants demonstrated high academic performance for the entirety of their schooling, two participants spoke to a period within their schooling where grades were low albeit for an isolated portion of their schooling. One participant, Charles, spoke to such a time where the requirements of school, completing assignments and homework, for example, were not a priority.

Certain things don’t bother you because you have bigger problems. Like if you miss a homework assignment and a teacher gets mad and you really don’t care. It’s just about you, like I’m worried more so thinking about how I’m gone eat today, in the environment I grew up in.
Demonstration of lower academic performance for Charles was not a reflection of lack of scholarly prowess, but that of pressing issues related to his well-being taking precedence over the demands of schooling.

Interestingly, over half of the participants expressed that while they performed well academically, they did not do so as a result of a genuine interest in and passion for schooling. On the contrary, five participants spoke to a lack of interest and engagement in school. In reflecting on the types of things that he learned in his schooling experiences, Byron shared “I can’t really tell you. I did not learn nothing. Really. That’s a shame. I don’t know. I feel that I didn’t really start learning things that were valuable to me until grad school but undergrad and college, no.” David echoed this sentiment “quite frankly I didn’t think I learned anything until I got to law school.” Whether participants felt that they didn’t learn anything or simply anything of value, they demonstrated both a commitment and focus to succeeding academically. In many instances, it was to remain qualified to play sports. Participants articulated their athletic involvement in either track, football or basketball. David’s athletic prowess resulted in him being a “three-sport athlete… [who] lettered in track, football and basketball” and Charles was ranked as one of the top football players in his state during high school. Participants’ athletic involvement was more than just a casual activity. Participation in athletics provided promise that could serve as a gateway into a fully-funded college experience. It may come as no surprise to many to hear of academic promise from those students who love school and love learning. It may even not come as a surprise to hear of those who quit school because of lack of engagement. However, to hear of students who demonstrate
academic success contrary to lackluster schooling experiences, speaks to considerable focus and determination that many would not expect.

_They’re passionate about the community_” (Henry). In exploration of participants’ use of leisure time, several participants indicated their heavy involvement in the community. Frank for instance “participate[s] in quite a few civic organizations. It’s something I like to do.” He is writing a blog about the community where he lives, is involved in an organization that trains future young leaders to make their communities, cities, state, society better”, and serves on multiple organizational boards that support nonprofit development and African Americans in the technology industry. Commitment to the community is evidenced throughout each of the participant’s experiences. Frank, Alex, Bryon, and Henry are also members of one or more fraternities that engage in regular community service events, projects, and programs throughout the year. Alex, for example, serves as a support to his fraternity’s college preparatory program for minority males in his community. Twice per month he along with other fraternity brothers and high school students engage in a full schedule of community service, typically on the weekends. Participation in the community is something that participants described as enjoyable and something that they felt compelled their involvement. Each of the participants has full-time employment, mentors Black male youth, and four of the participants are fathers, serve as surrogate fathers and some are husbands for which a considerable portion of their time is prioritized. Leisure time is not something that comes in abundance. The common refrain amongst participants when asked how they spent their leisure time responded “leisure time, what’s that?” Bryon forwarded, “I really feel like I don’t have leisure time right now.” While this statement is an accurate one that
summarizes a reality for most participants, it is a reflection of the value that participants assign to community involvement. Participants have either prioritized time outside of their full schedule for community involvement or their commitment to community involvement is not viewed as an extraneous type of involvement, but rather one central to their priorities and not something done only in their spare time.

Consistent with Critical Race Theory’s guiding tenets, participants’ perceptions of themselves socially, academically and professionally as Black males are rooted in each of these components. Race and racism has shaped not only how participants perceive themselves but it has also shaped both their work ethic and their approach to life. Salient throughout participants’ responses was their awareness of society’s low expectations of them as Black males and their very conscious efforts to defy these negative conceptions of Black men. Participants were deliberate in their presentation of self via their style of dress and their words and actions to offer others a positive and more accurate depiction of who Black men truly are and what they are capable of accomplishing.

Participants also displayed a commitment to social justice through their active involvement in the community. Service to others was prioritized outside of participants’ full schedules as working professionals and in the case of some participants, their active involvement as family men. Involvement in civic organizations, community service or mentorship was viewed as an investment into others’ success. In many instances, participants’ acknowledged their success as a result of the investments made by the same organizations where they served. Participants’ investments into the community also revealed itself as a medium for defying society’s negative conceptions of the Black
community by pouring time and financial resources that supported communities’ growth and development.

**The Role of Schools and Communities in Black Males’ Success**

“I had teachers who were mindful about cultural awareness and competency” *(Frank)*. Consistent among all participants was their level of engagement in school and in learning through pedagogical practices that were culturally responsive in nature. Six of the eight participants recalled memorable learning experiences with teachers who contextualized learning. These teachers incorporated diverse perspectives, brought in texts such as *Native Son* by Richard Wright and engaged students in “dialogue around different issues that not only affected African Americans but underrepresented people and communities” as explained by Frank. Such teachers shared their personal experiences that connected to participants’ lived experiences, especially as that of Black males. When queried about the types of things learned in school, Byron’s focus went directly to the Black male teachers that he encountered.

I could only remember having three Black male teachers throughout my entire career, elementary school and high school. And those three Black male teachers really had a great impact in my life because it’s just how they interacted with us, like experiences as a Black man, the conversations, the stories were so different from the women teachers and I never forgot those three teachers. I had two teachers both named Mr. Collins and the other one named Mr. Brown. A similar narrative was shared by Edwin, 55, who recalled with a broad smile strewn across his face, his former teacher, Mr. Brown. Edwin was born “at the tail end of the baby boomers” and attended school at a time when Black students were bussed into
White schools. He recounted this experience. “My first days there were marked by White people picketing the school. Signs, there weren’t a whole lot of them, but there were signs out saying no niggers allowed. Niggers go home. That kind of thing.” Not only was Edwin bussed into this school but so was his favorite teacher, Mr. Brown.

He was very much pro-us [Black] and very much he felt compelled to make sure we not only knew but appreciated our history and our place in the world. With him, he would teach from a different perspective. Of course we got books and all of that...but more so…it would be like from experience…He just talked to you and showed you things as they were going on. You could be walking down the hallway and he’d pull you to the side and say now see there. You see what they’re doing. You know they’re talking about you right now. That kind of thing. He would go off on the teachers and he would say things like he confronted one of the teachers…who gave me an undeserved grade and he went to bat for me and he said you know you only did that because he’s Black. He said and you’re angry because he and I are smarter than you…he showed that kind of militancy. Loved that man.

I wish to God he was still here.

Edwin went on to share how during this time there were only “a handful of Blacks in this class” but Mr. Brown would engage students in discussions about the influence of media concerning “not only all of America but the Black community and how they [the media] impose on your understanding of how beauty is defined.” Mr. Brown’s teachings captivated him and built upon the natural love of learning that he displayed throughout the entirety of his schooling career and beyond. Byron expressed how he “literally enjoyed college” in part because of the meaningfulness of the learning and overall
Meaningful and authentic learning experiences were also shared by participants such as Henry. In sharing about the mentorship of Black male youth, Henry described experiences that were “centered around a task.” These activity-centered experiences included the gamut of college trips, basketball games, and going out to eat at restaurants. Henry’s personal experiences with schooling and his observation of his mentees and their responses to such experiences indicated their interest and full-on engagement when they were actively involved in learning. Frank, 35, who attended an ivy league university spoke to the importance and even relevance of such learning in his post-secondary learning. Using anthropology as an example, Frank recalled the meaningfulness of the information learned. Students were

   looking and understanding how relationships, systems and trends from the past helped formulate, shape what could potentially occur in the future…[we were]
   understanding through the lens of the people that were experiencing first hand and
   been through other macro and micro level issues.

Understanding the relationships between learned concepts helped Frank to see the relevance to his college major and thus his life’s work.

   Such culturally responsive teaching was instrumental in participants’ lives although this type of teaching happened infrequently. Common to the experiences of six of the participants were schooling experiences marked by lack of interest and engagement. Grant expressed
I was bored a lot of times. If I could be quite frank, I was very bored. Certain things kept my attention and certain things didn't. I know that we all have different learning levels and obviously there are different things that really provoke our thought process when it comes to learning. I was one of those kids you couldn't just put me down and say oh, here read this chapter, this chapter. That wasn't good enough. I need you to actually engage me in this because that's when I become active.

David's reflection on high school spoke to how “remedial or rudimentary” schooling was. “It’s just that…they’re not learning to learn. They’re learning to like take a test…just to complete a task, so once that task is over, they have no appreciation of learning” (David). Grant’s recollection of an example in school highlights this point.

Definitely like in reading class…I can tell you about the Great Gatsby now because of the movie not because of the fact that I had to read the book six times until grammar school and high school. It's just stuff that like that. I didn't comprehend when it came to certain things. I always did my work though, got good grades…I remember that.

David believed that schools needed to encourage “independent thought…mixed in with structure…start to challenge people and allow them to be challenged by themselves in order to have an appreciation of education.” Such an appreciation was not articulated by the majority of participants. In fact, six of the eight participants spoke directly to not feeling as though they learned anything until graduate school. David, 40 years old who attended school in Wisconsin, shared, “quite frankly I don’t think I learned anything until I went to law school.” This sentiment was echoed by Byron, 28, who attended a large
urban school in the Midwest recounted how it was “a shame…I feel that I didn’t really
start learning things that were valuable to me until grad school but undergrad and college,
no.” The two participants who recounted higher levels of engagement in school were
Frank and Brandon, both of whom received private education.

Interestingly, despite the lack of engagement in school, all eight participants
performed well academically. Responses indicated that factors outside of the curriculum
drove their academic prowess. Edwin, Brandon, and Frank for example, articulated a
genuine love of learning that transcended the relative lack of cultural responsiveness in
the curriculum. Others such as Charles, Brandon, Richard and Jason articulated a
commitment to fulfill requirements necessary for them to remain a part of the athletic
team where they wanted to remain student athletes. Still other participants were fueled by
accolades. “[I] liked to succeed, to have my name on the dean’s list.” Despite the lack of
interest and engagement with the curriculum, participants’ indicated focus on other
factors that drove their academic achievement.

“You get good grades by the work that you do but you get even better grades by
the relationships that you build.” The success or lack of success for participants in school
rested in part because of the relationships with teachers. Alex, the son of the mother
addicted to drugs and often left hungry, recalled the advocate that he had in his fifth
grade teacher, Ms. Lester.

I missed 54 days of school that year. After a certain point she didn’t bother me
anymore. She used to put me to the side. She didn’t let the other kids bother me or
call me dirty or whatever and when they went to go hold me back she told them
there’s no reason to hold him back. He knows the information and they said if he
gets all As and Bs they’ll push me forward. So she asked me questions. She helped me do my homework before I went home and she helped a lot. She helped tremendously. I don’t know what would have happened if I would have been held back. I really don’t. But her noticing that I didn’t, the solution wasn’t me being held back and re-teaching the information. The solution was going forward and coming to school every day. I wish I could find her.

Five participants recalled similar teachers who served as advocates and helped support them academically, socially, and emotionally.

Other participants indicated issues that they encountered through either the lack of relationship with teachers and school staff or from outright discouragement encountered by them. Take Frank, for example, and his experience with his guidance counselor. Frank shared that he had a 3.6 grade point average and was looking at premier colleges and universities such as Notre Dame, Cornell University, and Georgetown. His guidance counselor shared that “[he] didn’t know why [he] was looking at those schools,” which Frank perceived to be discouragement because he was a Black male applying for enrollment at prestigious institutions where effectively, was not believed to belong. Like Charles, Frank found an advocate in a teacher. Frank shared his encounter with his guidance counselor with a teacher to which the teacher responded that the counselor’s belief “was a farce” and that Frank should look into those institutions. Frank described this as the “type of subtleties I had to face.” Frank’s encounter with the teacher proved valuable in that he did not become swayed by the unsupportive guidance of his counselor.

While a few participants experienced good relationships with their teachers because of an investment spurred on by their teachers, other participants were responsible
for initiating such relationships with their teachers. Byron’s quote, used in the
development of this theme, forwarded that he “always made sure teachers knew who I
was. I call it shaking hands, kissing babies, the political thing. Just making sure to speak
to them after, after class.” This was a practice Frank began in 7th grade that resulted in
what he called “very strong” relationships between he and his teachers. Frank felt that
initiating relationships with his teachers was spurred on by the fact that his mother was a
teacher and also in part by his “desire to succeed.” He “became more and more close with
[his] teachers…I was very engaged and if I had struggles or challenges, I would reach
out. College was the same.” Teachers, for these participants were understood to be
supportive resources instrumental to their success.

Both schools and communities played a pivotal role in students’ success or lack of success. In the case of Grant, he recalled not feeling like he “had an outlet” in either his
teachers, in his family, or even in his church when he experienced depression beginning
his 6th grade year of school. Recalling a poignant account of an example of bullying,
Grant told the story of a group of boys who formed a ring around him in the restroom.
As he stood in the middle of the ring,

…they just attacked me from different angles and then I was laying on the ground
and I asked the ring leader why they were doing this and he said because you're
fat and people like you can't defend yourself. So he was like we do with you as
we please basically. I went home that day just furious, so upset and that was
actually the first time that I inflicted wounds on myself. So that was the start of
what would later on become self-mutilation and depression. I'm thinking I’m just,
I was, in my mind I said if I go home and cut some fat off my body I’ll be good, I’ll come back smaller and then they'll like me.

Grant expounded on this experience indicating that at the time he didn’t know what depression was. He remembered that he “was just always sad” and how that “lead to a lot of the self-destructive behavior that really brought me to where [he is] now.”

Things were good in my family as long as it was surface level stuff. So talking to my parents like if I was to tell them I was dealing with depression even though I didn't notice what it was or I had thoughts of suicide. I was fearful that I would get a whooping and then growing up in the church they tell you just to pray about it and that's it. So I didn't really have an escape and that held me down for a long time. So from that side I really tried to deal with a lot of things myself and then really kind of bubbled over after my father and I started clashing a lot as I got older, definitely around that high school time you know because now I’m trying to figure myself out.

The power that schools and communities had in transforming the learning and overall experiences of these participants proved influential in the lives of each of their development.

“People right now are terrified of African American males” (David). The images portrayed in the media of Black males are far from savory. Each of the eight participants articulated images portrayed in the media of Black males as savages, lazy, rowdy, unintelligent, disruptive, criminals and generally providing no meaningful contribution to society. As participants responded to how Black males were portrayed in the media, not a single participant hesitated to come up with descriptors, rather an entire litany of
pejorative characteristics rolled off of their tongues. The images of Black males in the media influence society’s expectations of them, according to participants. The stereotypes expressed by participants as it related to them professionally stem from these images and thus the obstacles and even barriers to success. Edwin even perceived a “corporate perception of the Black male” such that “corporate America looks down upon facial hair [because] it’s connected to the fear of Black men.” There was recognition by the majority of participants that the pejorative images are reflective of a portion of Black males, but certainly not all of them. This rendering of Black men is one that is not complete, neither through their personal endeavors or that of the organizations that support and produce positive examples of successful Black men. Four of the participants specifically connected a “positive ethnic and racial identity” to “learning to navigate and overcome both interpersonal and systematic discrimination.” David, for example, believed that “if people had continued to take and follow actions of our predecessors then we wouldn’t be in a situation where we’re at.” David expounded upon the centrality of Black males understanding their heritage and having a sense of self-worth and self-identity to know who they are. He believed that if Black males had a positive ethnic and racial identity that they would make more informed, wiser choices. They would, for instance, assume the “responsibility to be at home, responsibility to raise a family, responsibility to be present in the community.” David elaborated upon his strong opinion about being educated about Black history, “quite frankly I think that the plight of the African American male is the basis of the plight of the African American community” such that some have adopted a jailhouse culture with sagging pants and a yearning “to attain material wealth or material possessions…and unfortunately taking from others or putting yourself in a position to
obtain things because when you do wrong with others, it’s glorified.” Byron’s insights corroborated this position. In recalling his work as a professor at a community college, he was appalled when he encountered some students who “had never had a Black male teacher. I was the first one when they get to college and then we begin to wonder why we have issues with self-identity and why we’re acting out.” When bereft of a sense of self-identity which paints a picture of Black men as strong, capable, providers, participants believed that one is left with an option to take on a role that others have defined for them.

“Oh, you’re being smart mouth. No I’m not” (Grant). Participants were asked to share any leadership qualities that they possessed as students and teachers’ reception of these qualities. Grant offered servitude as one of his leadership characteristics that was supported by his teacher. He recalled instances where a teacher would ask him to stay and help with the classroom or when he was left in charge of the classroom when his teacher stepped out. Assuming these responsibilities instilled in Grant a sense of pride and self-confidence. For each of the participants, they forwarded a similar sentiment about the positive impact that such support had on their social-emotional well-being.

An equally impactful outcome was experienced by participants when their leadership qualities were misunderstood by their teachers. Grant cited his inquisitive nature as an example of a leadership quality that he possessed. Grant believed that this quality, “being able to ask the right questions, being intuitive” about things were traits of a leader. This particular quality was, in his opinion, misunderstood on a regular basis by his teachers. Highlighting one example, Grant shared

For example, if I had a question about something that I didn't understand. Just one of those things where they don't care to explain that beyond what the book says
but if I’m genuinely trying to know something, you know, you making me feel like I’m wrong for asking. Of course I’m gonna feel some type of way, and I responded accordingly. Oh you’re being smart mouth a little bit. Oh yes because I’d ask the question in class about history beyond the slave-ships or if Math didn't make sense for a certain portion and I’m asking how will I be able to use this later on in the life. Not to be funny but if you give me an entire algorithm I'm thinking to myself "what am I gonna do with this?" I wanna see the bigger picture and because of the fact that I wanted to see the bigger picture and I didn't understand and I'm automatically labeled as this rebellious kid or like you said a smart mouth.

In responding “accordingly,” Grant assumed a combative attitude towards his teacher.

School work became a means to an end. In classrooms like these, Grant’s scholastic investments were minimal with teachers by whom he didn’t feel supported.

The centrality of race and racism in the CRT framework was evidenced throughout participants’ perceptions of the roles of schools and communities in fostering their social, academic and professional success. David’s reflection that he could not remember a time where “it wasn’t omnipresent in his mind that he was a Black student” speaks to the permanence of race that existed for him throughout the entirety of his schooling experiences. Experiences with racism in their schooling, as a result of negative and even injurious images of Black males in the media, were believed to have influenced some participants’ capacity to apply for and receive acceptance to prestigious institutions. For others, it was an undeserved grade or the misidentification of leadership qualities as defiance. Without robust examples of positive examples of Black male images,
participants believed the negative portrayals of Black men to have influenced and even infected teachers’ perceptions and interactions with them.

**The Influence of Mentorship**

“Service is the price we pay for the space we occupy on this earth.” Frank’s refrain as he recounted a famous quote shared by his own mentor best describes a shared depiction of participants’ perceptions as responsible and committed individuals. Each of the eight participants spoke to their personal obligation to invest into their mentorship of young Black males. For Edwin, Frank, Harry, and Brandon, this obligation was rooted in a charge given them by their own mentors. Frank described a Black male mentor who was very instrumental in his development throughout college. His mentor provided support with career guidance among other areas. Recounting the words of his mentor, Frank recalled this charge, “you don’t have to re-pay me but you have to pay it back, forward.” Compelled by the support provided by their mentors, these four participants were willing and eager to engage in mentorship. Each of these participants has served in the role of mentor to young Black males for a minimum of five years and some have mentored for as much as 15 years.

According to Alex, responsibility as a mentor includes, “an opportunity to engage in a direct interaction and contact between one individual and other.” This interaction includes, but is not limited to “counseling, coaching and/or support to get them through their developmental stages in life.” David extends this definition of mentorship by describing it as “exposure to what you have,” including financial sponsorship. Six of the eight participants articulated financial backing for their mentees. Monetary support ranged from sponsorship for mentees’ tuition at scholarship-based schools for a minimum
of four years to providing sponsorship ranging from $3,000 to $10,000 for four years for the schooling of their mentees. Other mentors such as Charles have provided groceries for his mentees. Charles has even opened his home to two mentees who were put out of their parents’ homes.

Participants who didn’t indicate a compelling reason for mentorship via their own mentors offered that because of their own struggles growing up and the generosity of people such as teachers investing in them, they felt beholden to extend a similar olive branch, understanding in a very personal way, the impact that it can have on a young man’s trajectory. Charles is one such example. Raised in the housing projects of Chicago for the first 11 years of his life, Charles had an absent father and a drug-addicted mother. Often left alone with his younger sister, being hungry was an all-too-familiar narrative. In describing experiences that marked his childhood, Charles offered,

…just not having food for long amounts of time. That’s one thing I always said, I’d never go hungry. I think that’s one of the reasons I eat so much fast food now. I spend money on food like it’s ridiculous. It’s because as a kid I didn’t have any. When I got out of school I was just trying to find something to eat. And homework was just not a priority at all and some days I just didn’t go.

Articulating his inability to focus on schoolwork, Charles has prioritized a financial commitment to his mentees understanding the implications on his mentees’ success in school.

“I was one of those kids before” (Charles). Salient in participants’ narratives was their ability to see themselves in the younger generation of Black males which in turn compelled their mentorship. Alex recalled
I was one of those kids before and I remember my capacity all the kids I grew up with all of the individuals I seen throughout my time as an adolescent as a teenager that just needed some type of support or aid and they could have been pushed along but they didn’t so they fell by the wayside.

Founder of a nonprofit organization that supports underprivileged youth, Alex invests considerable amounts of time, energy, and money into the shaping of his mentees. Alex’s investment is viewed as a medium to help empower students with the belief that if students felt “empowered in a sense of internally, externally empowered” and “ha[d] options” like he did, that his mentees’ life’s trajectory could change for the better.

Grant, the participant who engaged in self-destructive behavior, felt that he had no outlet in his teachers, his family, nor his church, to unload his troubles. Grant recounted one of his mentees who gave him a Father’s Day card. After expressing that he wasn’t a father, his mentee articulated that he knew that he wasn’t a father but forwarded that he was “the closest thing to a dad that they ever knew.” Understanding the value of having an outlet from his personal experiences has influenced Grant’s prioritization of mentorship to several hundred youth throughout the community where he was raised.

Seeing himself in the lives of his mentee’s Edwin spoke to his priority as a religious leader of “making sure the immediate needs of people are stabilized if not met.” In many instances this has placed him “in more danger than he care[d] to admit,” recalling instances where he visited drug homes where guns were drawn. This investment, though risky at times, is an outward display of the inward investments that his own family and his community poured into him. Edwin, for some, has taken on the role of father at times, a role that Edwin understands very clearly, particularly in the loss
of his own father at the age of nineteen. A profound loss for him Edwin recalled the “sour
taste” left in his mouth without the presence of his father. Edwin’s efforts are worthwhile
in his estimation knowing that his investment helps navigate those under his stewardship
into the right direction.

The mentorship of Brandon, Byron, and Grant is influenced by their ability to see
themselves in their mentees, particularly as it related to their level of patience with their
mentees. Brandon recalled having fights when he was in school, being aggressive and
displaying those behaviors that he described as being part of “a survivalist mode”
connected with the African American community.

I mean, there is a sense that you can’t get punked. You have to like stand up for
yours now…[if]someone messes with you, you know, you have the green light to
respond and retaliate and that could be within physical violence. Which I guess I
still now think that I still believe in that mentality but I think that now I don’t
react [the same way].

Brandon didn’t perceive himself to be a rowdy or belligerent student; however, he did
prioritize defending himself so as to not be “punked” by anyone. For Brandon and other
participants, they demonstrated patience with their mentees as they helped them mature.
In retrospect, Brandon understood some of his decisions not to have been the wisest, but
it was time, experience, maturity, and investments from mentors to help him arrive at this
conclusion.

In seeing themselves in the mentees that they serve, Grant emerged as a huge
proponent of transparency in discussions with mentees. Grant stressed the importance for
…young Black men to get a chance to see and understand that people are like them. That even with all of these great titles and nice jobs, there are still struggles that we have that relate directly to what they deal with and go through…. I like to take this from a standpoint of really sometimes diving into my faults and being transparent about those too because I feel like in those moments that's where I see a lot of change take place with these young men that I work with.

Grant is intentional about sharing how his life is like that of his mentees, knowing that if his mentees can see themselves in him, they might become inspired and even encouraged in their journeys.

Grant’s transparency also serves an additional purpose, a personal one:

Being transparent full circle is probably one of the biggest pieces of advice that I got from them [mentors] and not being ashamed to be transparent because they say a lot of times as you continue to excel and grow and elevate in your career, in your field or whatever sometimes people will make you feel like you're doing too much for the Black boys.

Being able to witness the growth that results from his transparency serves as motivation for Grant to continue in the work that he does: the classroom visits, personal counseling, college tours and other guidance and exposure that requires a great deal of time and investment. This investment is viewed as one that can help propel his mentees out of the “state of emergency” that all eight participants used to describe the current status of Black males in our society.

“How to navigate as an African American in a predominantly White society” (Frank). Frank, who attended a predominantly white institution in both college and now
graduate school, who interacts with diverse audiences, networking and fundraising for organizations, has encountered a number of situations where he expressed a need to learn “how to be very diplomatic, mindful of interactions and relationship building…building connections to individuals that can either support, garner resources and/or to enhance what you’re doing.” Frank spoke to the need to be “very thoughtful and exert wisdom and sound judgment in how [things are] handled and managed.” Frank’s work in nonprofits and education positioned him early in his career to interact with predominantly White women. He explained his efforts

…trying to make sure that what you’re doing is just not good but it’s excellent cause it’s just a different standard to Black men. I feel sometimes as Black males you have to kind of code switch so you can’t be Black enough but you can’t be too Black either. So how to do that smart but also not discounting, giving away who you are as a person.

As a result of his experiences, Frank’s guidance to his mentees provides insights about “working with different populations and cultures to achieve certain goals whether it’s professional, social.” In the nonprofit organization where he serves in a leadership capacity, Frank prioritizes curriculum which prepares students accordingly. Frank recalled that in the last few years his organization has gone more towards culturally competent curriculum that talks about things such as identity, self-esteem, things now that are becoming more prevalent maybe that weren’t. So a good example is police accountability. So how do you interact with law enforcement? Things like that that a couple years ago weren’t as relevant as it is now. And also just infusing curriculum so that they understand the history,
how to navigate as an African American in a predominantly White society. We try to be very mindful of that, given some of our experiences. But teaching them as well too so that they are prepared for success and their trajectory as they move from high school…the majority of our students go to predominantly White institutions.

Frank’s experience successfully “navigating political and community systems as well as leveraging relationships” is advice learned from his mentors. It is advice that he hopes his mentees will use to steer their own success.

*It’s important to talk about current situations that surface around Black men”* (Byron). Each participant prioritized discussion with their mentees around matters that were relevant to their mentees’ lived experiences. When speaking about advice to his mentees that is specifically catered to them as Black males, Byron highlighted a mentoring session at a community high school just the day before our interview where he and his mentees discussed confliction resolution.

So I asked them to write down on a sheet of paper conflicts that they have, have dealt with or are currently dealing with and let’s all talk about resolutions as a group and one young man wrote about stereotypes as a Black male like fighting, not having people perceive me this way. Like one young man said when I was on the bus a lady put her legs over her bag and kind of was like looking at me on the side of the eye like kind of watching me. He was saying that he just don’t like that or another guy talked about how he lives in Englewood but they always talking about man what gang you in, who you with? And he’s like man I ain’t with nobody. I don’t even dress Black. I said wait what is dressing Black? And I think
just talking to them and then you have some that don’t see the point in school. They like what is the point in doing all of this and I think sometimes helping them to realize that it’s important to be successful to do what you gotta do because you are going to have to work a little bit harder because you are going to be generalized and stereotyped. So I have talked to them about that specifically in relationship to being a Black male cause I know how that can be especially with the negative images that are being put out there.

Understanding the importance of bringing up topics for discussion that students have encountered and how to navigate them successfully was priority for participants. Expressed by participants is the value of their mentorship when mentees employ their advisement. Frank remembered a young man who “would tell us about his stories and how he was building up his confidence and self-esteem and other things that really helped him apply in school.” Another mentee’s experience was recalled “that pretty much said he didn’t know why he got angry.” Frank described how they talked about as a group “in a very open and safe environment” through “confidential conversations” other mentees’ experiences and developed strategies for handling these situations.

He came back and reported that those instances had started to subside because he understood now had taken accountability and responsibility for his behavior but also how to channel when those triggers when they did occur in ways that are more healthy and not too adverse for his benefit.

Participants described several rewarding experiences where mentees applied their guidance specifically as it related to them successfully navigating their experiences as
Black males. Participants highlighted the pride that they felt knowing that they were able to help spare their mentees from avoidable challenges.

Very relevant to the lives of his mentees are their friendships and social circles. Henry prioritizes the role of these circles in his mentorship. Henry expects his mentees to “bring somebody else” to mentoring sessions, particularly those closest in the participants’ circle of influence.

So I will say, to whom you are you answering? Who are you talking to? Bring him over here. Or…bring me your girlfriend. Because I want to see their circle. Because it is all about the circle. It is the circles, yes, that is very important. So my mentoring is about you but it is about who you hang with and how you think. Henry expressed the importance of understanding influences on his mentees such that he can tailor his mentorship appropriately. During these mentoring sessions, Henry conveys the role of the mentee and friend as accountability partners, there to remind and encourage one another to do the right thing. “I will start to build a village around you so you could be a good person.” Conversations between just Henry and his mentees are not believed to be “the real world” according to Henry. This component of his mentorship is seen as an effective way to ensure that changes in mentees’ behaviors and mindsets are better sustained throughout his mentees’ lives.

Central to their mentorship of young Black males is the identification of CRT’s understanding of the permanence of race and racism. The guidance provided by mentors is underscored by that which relates to their unique experiences as Black males. The time, energy, and financial investments can be understood as an outward display of participants’ commitment to improving the experiences of their young Black male
mentees. Not a single participant expressed this commitment as a burden, but rather an obligation. It is an obligation that, in part, stems from a perceived hunger in their mentees to accomplish great things. “I do see there is a generation of males that are very hungry and they are very desirous to know and do well professionally because they know they can create a special effect in generation X millennials” (Frank). Participants expressed a drive to do their part to ensure that their mentees can accomplish great works and defy the odds. With the support of mentors who fueled their own success, participants are encouraged by and hopeful that their mentees can accomplish just that. This was often times accomplished through their commitment to their community and to their mentorship of young Black males in particular. Expressed as an obligation to equip their mentees with the guidance and resources that were poured into many of them, participants’ viewed their mentorship as a medium for impacting future and sustained change for the Black male persona, “not only setting the tone and pace but starting to train the next generation to combat those negative perceptions” (Alex).

And so as of out of respect for what they’ve [mentors] done to me I had thought I need to do that for them [mentees]. And then the second part of it is I just see that there is not enough people to act in this role. It just something that, it's not a burden it's just an obligation. (David)

Summary

This study sought to understand the schooling, professional, and mentoring experiences of successful Black men and how schools and communities contribute to their resilience. The study was comprised of a pilot study conducted in January of 2015 and a phenomenological study that began in March of 2016. Eight participants were
interviewed using a phenomenological approach over two separate occasions. Throughout the interview series, participants described their schooling, professional, and mentoring experiences. To this they added how these experiences were unique to them as Black males. Furthermore, participants discussed their beliefs concerning how schools and communities contributed to their academic, social, and professional development from boyhood through manhood. Participants identified various elements that promoted or inhibited their success as Black males in each of these domains. Speaking directly to how their experiences were influenced specifically as Black males; participants used this information in their guidance to their mentees and offered recommendations for how schools and communities can positively contribute to Black male development.

Several themes emerged when participants were asked to make meaning of their academic, professional, and social experiences. The participants in this study expressed contrasting depictions of their perceptions of Black men versus society’s perceptions of them. Their descriptions of Black males were positive in nature. These positive depictions were reflective of their high intellectual capacity and emotional intelligence, strong work ethic, civic-mindedness and their resiliency among other characteristics. Participants embodied these qualities in their examples as well-educated, gainfully employed Black men who demonstrated a strong commitment of service to their communities. Contrastingly, participants’ understanding of others’ perceptions of Black males was an outgrowth of images in the media casting them as criminals, lazy, unintelligent, incompetent, and even incorrigible. These perceptions were believed to both fuel and inhibit the success of Black males academically, socially, and professionally. For those Black men who demonstrated success, they were fueled to
contest society’s negative expectations of them through subtle or direct means. Participants acknowledged through their personal experiences or those observed in their mentees, that those who were not successful had accepted, internalized and succumbed to society’s pessimistic expectations of them.

Participants offered factors which contributed to their success academically, socially and professionally. Participants attributed academic success to teachers who served as personal advocates, the cultural responsiveness of teachers and curriculum, mentors who provided guidance, and an internal locus of control that propelled them past perceived barriers. Participants’ success socially was attributed to their commitment to the community, including the mentorship of young Black males as a way to invest in and support the development of future generations of Black males. Participants’ success professionally was associated with mentorship that helped them anticipate and successfully navigate around barriers unique to Black males as well as an internal locus of control, driving their focus and determination.
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This final chapter presents a summary of the study in addition to key findings discussed in the previous chapter. Additionally, highlighted in this chapter are findings germane to the theoretical framework for this study, Critical Race Theory. The chapter concludes with implications for practice and recommendations for further research on Black male development.

Summary of the Study

Overview of the Problem

Disproportionate representation of Black male students in subjective areas of discipline has long been documented. Research indicates that racial disparities in discipline have been found with insufficient evidence to support that Black or other minority students are simply misbehaving more than others (Ferguson, 2000; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Losen & Martinez, 2013; Monroe, 2006). Differences in cultural orientations between Black males and their predominantly White and female teachers have been linked to bias that disproportionality impacts discipline for these students (Losen & Martinez, 2013).

Investigation into Black male development is needed as a way to better understand the cultural orientations that are discrepant from the teachers who serve them. These insights prove valuable in minimizing cultural misunderstandings that lead to
punitive and exclusionary disciplinary action for subjectively, and often times, inappropriate referrals for classroom discipline. This information can prove instructive for schools and communities in developing practices that support the academic, social, and professional development of Black males.

**Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The subjective patterns of school discipline which disproportionately impact Black males needs to be examined. Challenge must be given to deficit explanations for the discipline gap by exploring Black male development and educators' perceptions, attributes, and decisions that contribute to the dismal rates of discipline action against them. This study’s focus on Black males allows us to hone in on the unique strengths and challenges faced by this group.

This study aims to benefit practitioners in their understanding of and work with Black male students in providing learning environments responsive to their academic, cultural and social maturation. To explore these topics, the following research questions were posed:

1. How do Black males perceive themselves socially, academically and professionally?
2. How do Black males perceive the role of schools and communities in fostering their social, academic and professional success from boyhood through manhood?
3. How have the social, academic and professional experiences of Black males in schools and communities influenced their mentorship of young Black males?
Major Findings

Academic. The participants in this study shared their schooling experiences from their perspective as Black males. The data explicitation processes for each set of interview series by the eight participants led to several findings. One of these was that Black male students hold a positive academic identity contrary to the negative imaging of Black males articulated by participants as incompetent, unintelligent and lazy. Despite this challenge, participants in this study demonstrated high intellectual capacity through their high grade point averages, leadership roles within school organizations, their athletic achievements connected to school-based sports activities, and their ability to balance these responsibilities. The role of their mentors and teacher-advocates, as well as their internal drive to succeed was pivotal to their positive academic identity. Specifically, the role of mentors and teacher-advocates assisted participants in planning and attaining future career goals. Mentors and teacher-advocates provided insights into what their journey might look like navigating their paths as Black males as well as suggestions for navigating these paths successfully.

Participants in this study also identified the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) throughout their elementary through post-secondary schooling experiences. Understood as teaching that uses the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective for students (Gay, 2013), CRP was found to be appealing to participants. Participants articulated the value of their cultural backgrounds being affirmed, describing culturally relevant texts, and the practical application of knowledge that heightened both their interest and engagement throughout
their schooling experiences. In some cases, there were teachers who, through discourse with students, were even motivated to excel because of guidance that was tailored to them as Black males. When probed and asked to describe key elements of an ideal school for Black males, participants cited the inclusion of culturally responsive teaching practices. While CRP was found to enrich the learning experiences of the Black male participants, it was found to be an irregular occurrence throughout their schooling, oft citing that student voices and images of others like them were conspicuously absent in the curriculum.

**Social.** According to the participants in this study, having a network of supports assisted them in successfully navigating their social lives. For some participants, it was the mentorship received from trusted individuals, Black males, who provided guidance about traversing a predominantly White society. This led a participant like Frank to be able to successfully fundraise for his nonprofit organization. The role of fraternity brothers for four of the participants were particularly instrumental to their success beginning in college and impacting them present day. Participants expressed a sense of belonging through this brotherhood of men with shared experiences, particularly as Black men. This group consisted of individuals, who Byron described were, like-minded...they are really spiritual, they’re in the church, they love God like I love God. They’re passionate about the community. They are successful African Americans who are trying to progress, maybe entrepreneurs, whether it’s through the ranks of moving up through their jobs but they all are like-minded like me.

This network of brotherhood was described as being supportive of one another and frequently cited as the gateway to their involvement with mentoring and community
service that has remained a priority to participants following their matriculation through college.

The role of the church was also identified as an important part of participants’ success in the social sphere. Five of the participants described their church involvement, their love for God and service to others, in shaping their spiritual identity. The church, as described by Edwin in his role as a spiritual leader, has been to hear and respond to the needs of its members. Many times, this support has taken the form of being an outlet to hear the issues of its members and to provide the needed resources. The church was described as being pivotal in the development of a strong concept of self, one that through the help of God, they were able to traverse difficult circumstances as Black males. Participants articulated a resolve and a commitment to their purpose, one that transcends any obstacles that may be presented.

**Professional.** One aspect of participants’ success as professional Black men was attributed to an awareness of the stereotypes concerning them as Black males. This awareness equipped participants with an understanding of how they needed to present themselves to others. Participants employed advice received from mentors concerning challenges faced as Black men in their respective professions as well as suggestions for navigating through these barriers to aid them in their success. Some participants such as David spoke to professional organizations designed specifically for Black employees that provided supports believed to fuel their success. Often requiring extra work, participants articulated what they perceived to be a clear connection between these extra efforts and their professional success. Although participants expressed a positive professional
concept of themselves, being positive, putting in additional time, effort and energy was perceived as a necessary process in demonstrating their capacity to others.

**Mentorship.** Mentorship played a pivotal role in navigating participants throughout their success academically, socially, and professionally, even influencing participants’ decision to assume the role of mentor to Black male youth. In their mentorship capacity, participants’ guidance to their mentees was informed by the guidance received by their own mentors as they successfully maneuvered through the social, academic and professional sectors. Participants’ guidance was understood to be valued by their mentees who in many cases had limited social capital. Grant, for instance, helped his mentees understand some of the “lifestyle choices that [his mentees] make,” that “while other people might be able to get away with,” the standard is not the same for Black people and more specifically Black men. This study demonstrated the valuable role that mentors played in providing their mentees with insights that their mentees, through a lack of experience, had yet to understand. Mentors’ guidance afforded their mentees with the knowledge and skillsets that they would need to successfully navigate their paths as Black men.

Similarly, Grant provided an example of his work in getting his mentees to “understand the bigger picture because they are Black men.” Specifically, he encouraged his mentees to consider how their attitudes, dispositions and behaviors feed into the existing stereotypes of Black men, creating roadblocks to their own success. Grant expressed to his mentees how it can be difficult for others to take them seriously when they “can’t even take [themselves] seriously.” He used the current social climate of Black males and the Black Lives Matters movement to express to his mentees the impacts of
people’s perceptions of their lives. “God forbid, what happens if you’re the next Mike Brown or the next Trayvon?!” Highlighting the examples of Mike Brown and Trayvon Martin, two Black males who gained national attention as victims of gun violence because of their perceived threat as Black males, Grant wanted to help his mentees understand the importance of their presentation of self to others to avoid becoming victims as these young men did. In other instances, participants’ roles as mentor has served to fill a void in the lives of participants in the cases of a mentee’s parent who passed away or in the absence of an uninvolved father.

The role of mentor also emerged in helping Black male youth become better equipped with using existing leadership qualities to productive ends. Participants described leadership qualities that their mentees possessed. Grant for instance noted leadership qualities in one of his mentees in the form of being vocal about important matters and displaying confidence when standing up to others. Although recognized as qualities of a good leader, Grant observed that his mentee channeled these qualities often in combative, negative ways. Grant believed that these leadership qualities, “when used in the right area [could] be effective.” As a result, Grant helped his mentee understand these characteristics as leadership qualities when channeled constructively. He offered productive examples of these leadership qualities being channeled through protests for Black Lives Matter or in instances of “calling the police out for doing wrong things” or “standing up to community violence.” Mentors played an important role in seeing latent leadership potential cloaked as what others might deem as defiant behavior and supported their mentees leadership development.
Participants articulated strong, positive conceptions of self and their various capacities to weather difficult and unsupportive environments. Although their experiences academically, socially and professionally didn’t always recognize their value and affirm their worth, participants’ internal drive to succeed and to contest society’s expectations of them motivated them to become accomplished individuals. This success, however, could not have been achieved without participants’ network of supports found in their families, mentors, fraternity brothers, churches and the larger community.

**Defiance.** Defiance emerged as an integral component of Black male development and achievement from boyhood through manhood. Emerging along a continuum, defiance revealed itself in minimal instances through behaviors that were punishable, known in this study as “defiance as criminal/social deviance.” Alex, for instance, displayed defiant behavior in his refusal to complete assigned homework during his elementary schooling because of pressing issues at home that preempted his attention.

Often taking the form of protesting negative perceptions of Black males in society, a significant number of participants expressed their protest in more socially acceptable ways, referred to as “defiance as assimilation.” A more subtle form of defiance, participants allowed their behaviors to speak for themselves. These behaviors were deliberate in nature and were intended to disrupt the stereotyped actions that others had come to expect of Black males. Defiance as assimilation allowed participants to counter the negative messaging around Black males through arriving to work early and exceeding sales goals, for instance. Through consistent and intentional efforts to contest society’s expectations of Black males, participants hoped to counter negative messaging around Black men with positive and more accurate depictions.
“Defiance as reform” emerged throughout participants’ experiences as another positive form of defiance. This manifestation of defiance was marked by initiatives, often in the form of nonprofit organizations that were developed and allowed participants to set their own standard of expectations for Black men. These standards stood in sharp contrast to those that society had come to expect. Within this form of defiance, participants were intentional in shaping the mindset of others by promoting positive messaging around what it meant to be a Black male. Though different in their orientation, these various forms of defiance emerged as integral throughout participants’ development as Black males. This study revealed Black males’ strategic use of defiance in navigating their academic, social and professional success.

Findings Related to Critical Race Theory

Guiding this study, Critical Race Theory (CRT) was the theoretical framework employed, with several key elements used to structure the study. Focusing on the schooling, social and professional experiences of Black males acknowledged CRT’s prioritization of the experiences and realities of those typically dispossessed and marginalized (Kohli & Solorzano, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2010). The commitment to social justice was evidenced in the desire to inform researchers’ and practitioners’ understandings of and practices with Black males in ways that promote their social, academic and professional maturation. An interdisciplinary perspective was taken in the use of interviews and counter-storytelling as the main data sources for this research. Inherent in phenomenological research is prioritization of participants’ lived experiences which supports CRT and the centrality of experiential knowledge.
CRT places a premium on locating the nuanced ways that race and racism manifest themselves in schooling experiences, infiltrating curriculum, instruction and every facet of the school experience. Accordingly, this study was designed to understand the schooling experiences through the narratives of Black male participants. The use of storytelling afforded participants the opportunity to analyze the myths and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about the Black race and that invariably render an incomplete depiction of this race (Ladson-Billings, 2010).

Participants shared a plethora of epithets used throughout media to describe Black men in America. Images of criminals, uninvolved fathers, and incompetent and callous individuals reflected society’s prevailing beliefs concerning Black men. These images were addressed by participants as stereotyped perceptions of Black males that are controlled by the dominant culture. A shared sentiment among participants was that these images are “controlled by individuals or decision makers that do not look like us and/or do not have the best intent [for us] even though they may not vocalize it” (Henry). These images do not render an accurate or complete depiction of the productive, civic-minded, intelligent, and ambitious men that this study’s participants personified.

As seen in the aforementioned example, the use of counter-storytelling offers members of subordinated groups the opportunity to express their personal injury or wrongdoing (Love, 2004). Through these interview series, participants offered multiple accounts of wrongdoing, in many instances, through stereotypes held against them as a collective group. As expressed in his counsel to his mentees, Byron shared “you are going to have to work a little bit harder because you are going to be generalized and stereotyped…especially with the negative images that are being put out there.”
Acknowledged through participants’ comments, was the unfair playing field and opportunities for advancements that the dominant group does not have to face. These challenges are many times compounded because “you have to understand what the unspoken rules and messages are being communicated” (Henry). If one is not adept at understanding these unspoken rules and messages, opportunities for advancement become an even more unlikely reality.

While all participants communicated personal injury or wrongdoing done by the dominant group, counter-storytelling also revealed wrongdoing experienced by individuals from their own race. Two participants shared their experiences with such instances. When responding about the challenges faced as a Black male in his profession, Byron stated, “I hear a lot of people talking about the White man bringing them down a lot but I’ve actually a lot of times being done wrong more times by my own people than I have by White individuals.” Byron recounted a time when his graduate school supervisor “threw [him] under the bus” recalling conversations where he thought he was having conversations that were between just the two of them, however, the content of these conversations was later written up in a report about him.

Henry offered a different example stemming from his resignation from a long-term position at a community college. Choosing to pursue an entrepreneurial endeavor by developing a nonprofit organization benefiting underprivileged, minority youth, Henry expressed being met with opposition from his colleagues.

Prime example, some people told me I was stupid for leaving the college. You stupid. Why would you do that? You had benefits…and they don’t get the
spiritual side of it. So I think if they see a Black man, you successful, you got something, you stay there til you die.

In Henry’s example, the discouragement received from his colleagues was described in part as the result of Black people who subscribed to the belief that opportunities and thus success for Black males are difficult to come by. Accordingly, one shouldn’t take risks that others can afford to take. Byron and Henry’s comments provide insights into personal injury and perceived wrongdoing that counter-storytelling afforded them. Underpinning participants’ comments is their ability to perceive and speak to injustices imposed on them by not only the dominant group but also by others who look like them.

Examining participants’ responses through the CRT lens is necessary as it reveals the nuanced ways that race and racism permeates the experiences and realities for underrepresented groups. It offers insights into the explicit and implicit permutations of racism that infiltrate the academic, social and professional experiences of Black males.

**Conclusions**

**Implications for Practice**

As educators, parents, coaches, mentors and administrators, we must first understand young Black males through a positive, strengths-based lens (Bonner, 2014). Countless studies demonstrate the creative reasoning, abstract understanding, and pragmatic thinking of Black boys prior to their introduction to the fourth grade that through object-centered education, and de-emphasis of holistic learning shuts down the creative spark in many Black children, especially our boys (Bonner, 2014; James & Lewis, 2014).
Important in developing an asset-based understanding is consideration of the settings where Black males flourish. Whether in schools, on jobs, or in athletics, as was the case for participants in this study, Black males flourish when their instructors demonstrate an ethic of care, a genuine concern and even love for them as individuals. This is in part due to the nature of African culture which has a high relational pedagogy: the student cannot learn until he or she knows that you care (Bonner, 2014). Black male students’ disengagement with classroom learning should not be readily ascribed to stereotyped behaviors. Teachers must make proper investments into their students and cultivate a classroom environment that affirms them as individuals and demonstrates their support of them as teachers. As evidenced in this study, the academic success of the participants was influenced in part by the care demonstrated by teachers and other adults through daily practicalities: small acts of kindness, financial support, and investments of time beyond schooling.

Facilitating the development of strength based perspectives of Black male students can be achieved through the development of culturally competent educators. Cultural competency allows teachers to develop a set of behaviors, attitudes, and understandings that allow them to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. The use of culturally responsive curriculum and teaching strategies necessarily mediates students’ interest in and engagement with learning. The participants in this study spoke more times than not about the lack of cultural responsiveness in their schooling experience; however, participants articulated external factors and/or an internal drive that propelled them past the lack of culturally responsive schooling that they received. Other students may not
have these same set of supports for which schooling becomes irrelevant and their interest and participation in schooling wanes.

The coupling of culturally responsive practices with mentorship for young Black males is important in designing schooling environments that support their maturation. Participants demonstrated that their success, in part, was due to the guidance received by mentors who poured into them the emotional, financial, professional, and social support that they either lacked or were altogether missing. Several participants described examples where they played a key role in helping their mentees accomplish their goals. Byron shared one account. “I’ve had at least two young men that I worked with personally and helped get into college and I know if I hadn’t worked with them…that they would not be in school right now today.” A successful mentor is able to guide, push, and support young Black males, which is central to success. The counsel of mentors also helps develop a strong sense of Black male identity which has proven through research (Bonner, 2014) to be equally effective in navigating Black males to their success.

The Scholar Identity Model (SIM) should be among the frameworks introduced to practitioners that provide an asset-based approach to understanding and interacting with Black male students. SIM would help practitioners understand the role of defiance in the lives of Black males from boyhood through manhood. Defiance has been demonstrated through participants’ narratives, to be an ever-present and integral component of their lives, playing a key role in their social, academic and professional success. SIM helps practitioners to reframe their thinking around would-be defiant behaviors to conceptualizing how these behaviors can be refashioned into more productive behaviors that would support the leadership development of Black males.
SIM also highlights the importance of explicit instruction concerning Black males’ racial identity and pride. Participants’ addressed the value of knowing their history and providing exposure to the positive examples of Black male figures throughout their heritage. This exposure was believed to help instill a sense of pride in students and also allow them to become familiar with positive examples of Black male leadership. The latter point becomes particularly significant when considering the negative portrayals of Black males pervasive in the media. Some participants believed that the fragile state of the Black community was due in part to the lack of positive imaging from which Black males had as examples from which to model their behavior. SIM contends that self-efficacy helps Black males push back against negative stereotypes about themselves. Furnishing students with positive portrayals within the Black heritage equips them with the navigational capital to do so. It also allows students the opportunity to seek new ways of challenging themselves and counter the negative imaging that many are inundated with.

Finally, the voice of Black males is needed in schooling initiatives that promote their social, academic, and professional development. Participants offered insights into schooling experiences which they perceived to be most effective in educating Black males. Speaking to students regularly and surveying them should be a component of all schooling initiatives. Including students’ perspectives in program evaluations would give schools a better understanding of students’ needs, their specific goals and what they are gaining out of their schooling experiences. Teaching students to engage in self-assessment would also help students to internalize these skills, an important lesson for students.
Recommendations for Further Research

It is recommended that future research prioritizes the study of Black males and their social, academic and professional experiences from their perspective. This study focused on only a small group of adult Black male participants which is too small to be generalizable to the larger population of Black males. Expanding the scope of this study to understand the leadership qualities of Black males and how they are best supported will offer insights into Black male development. Conducting a similar study with adolescent males would also be worth exploring. Further recommendation for research is suggested concerning the intersectionality of race, gender and sexuality. Black males’ perceptions of self academically, professionally, and socially, could render insightful data in understanding Black homosexual males and their experiences with defiance. Taken together, all of this information can prove incredibly instructive in determining how schooling experiences can be fashioned to better support their maturation. Data can inform understandings of Black male development and the curriculum and instructional strategies that best support their learning.

A final recommendation is to consider the voices of Black males who have not demonstrated academic success. Participants in this study were successful Black males who had additional supports that carried them beyond their unsupportive learning environments. It would be informative to hear the perspectives of those students who struggle academically or even chose to drop out of school to better understand the supports that these students felt were needed for their academic success.
Concluding Remarks

By sharing their counter-stories, the Black male participants in this study articulated and made meaning of their experiences across academic, social, and professional spaces. Participants expressed how their schooling, social and professional experiences promoted their development as Black males. They also shared ways in which their development could be better supported across these three domains. Additionally, participants spoke of ways in which they used their guidance from mentors and teachers as well as their internal drive to succeed in each of these areas. For educators, this is a reminder that Black male students possess strengths that we should tap into in our classrooms because these assets can lead to their academic achievement. To this end, a strengths-based approach must be employed when working with Black male students to tap into the brilliance of their DNA (Bonner, 2014). Finally, concerning schooling initiatives and reforms, we must not tell the story of what works for Black males. Prioritization must be given to providing space for them to tell their stories and make them more central so that they are no longer the exception.
Ain’t Misbehavin’:
Phenomenological Inquiry into Black Male Experiences of School

*Interview One: Focused Life History*

Please tell me your name, occupation and age.
Tell me about your family. How did you grow up?
Were there any experiences that really marked your childhood? Adolescence? Adulthood?

*Mentoring*

How long have you served as a mentor?
Which organization is your mentorship affiliated with?
How do you understand mentoring?
How did you come to serve as a mentor with this organization?
Describe your role as mentor within this organization?

*Work*

What is your current profession?
How long have you served in this capacity?
How did you come to work in this career?

*Education*

What level of education have you obtained beyond your high school degree?
Why did you decide to pursue post-secondary studies?
Describe your schooling experiences? Were these experiences positive or negative? How so?
Will you describe any leadership qualities that you displayed as a student (grammar school, middle school, high school)?
Interview Two: The Details of Experience

Mentoring

Could you describe your relationships with your mentees? Other mentors in the organization? Mentees’ parents? The wider community?

Could you reconstruct a day in your mentorship from the time you arrive until the time that you leave?

Describe one of your most rewarding experiences as a mentor.

Describe one of your most difficult experiences as a mentor.

In what ways have you observed leadership qualities in your mentees?

How do you support your mentees who are leaders and those who you believe have the potential to become leaders?

Is any of your guidance to your mentees specifically related to them as Black males? Please explain.

Have your mentees described instances where they have used your advice to them as Black males in their schooling or other experiences?

How is your support of your mentees’ development received by your mentees? Why do you believe that it is received as such?

Work

Could you reconstruct a typical day at work from the time that you walk in to work until the time that you leave?

Can you describe your relationships with your colleagues? Your supervisor/boss? Supervisees?

What has your experience as a Black male been like working in your profession?

How have these experiences as a Black male influenced you professionally?

Have you ever received guidance from someone regarding your role as a Black male and your success or potential challenges in your profession? Please explain.

Have you used this advice during your career?

How frequently (regularly, occasionally, rarely, never) have you experienced situations where you have used this advice throughout your career? Could you provide an example?
Education

Could you reconstruct a typical day of school? (grammar school, middle school, high school)

What were your relationships like with your teachers?

What worked for you as a student? Why?

What didn’t work? Why?

You shared _______ as leadership qualities that you possessed as a student. Were any of these qualities recognized by your teachers? Please explain.

How did you respond to any support provided?

Did you perceive any lack of support? If so, please explain.

Were any of your leadership qualities unnoticed by your teachers? How did you respond? Please explain.

Were any of your leadership qualities misunderstood by your teachers? How did you respond? Please explain.

Describe your experience as a Black male throughout your schooling. (grammar school, middle school, high school)

Have you ever received guidance from your teachers/instructors that were explicitly catered to you as a Black male? Please explain.

Did you understand the relevance of this advice? Please explain.

How did you respond to this advice?

In what ways have you used this advice throughout your schooling experiences?

How frequently (regularly, occasionally, rarely, never) have you experienced situations where you have used this advice throughout your schooling experiences?

Interview Three: Reflection on the Meaning-Reflect on the Meaning of Your Experiences

[Intellectual and emotional connections between the participants’ work and life]

[Look at how factors in their lives interacted to bring them to their present situation]

Mentoring

How would you describe the current climate around Black males?
Has this impacted your mentorship? In what ways?
How do you see your mentorship as being impactful for your mentees lives?
In what ways have you been impacted by your mentees?
[Additional questions will be developed and personalized based upon Interviews 1 & 2. See below]

Work
What do you think society expects of Black men generally? What do you think society expects of Black men professionally?
On your job, what do you think people expect of Black men?
In what ways, if any, have you lived up to those expectations? How has this impacted you?
In what ways, if any, have you countered those expectations? How has this impacted you?
Have you ever been promoted on your current job? If so, why?
Have you ever felt passed over for a promotion? If so, why? Did you address this? Please explain.
Have you ever felt treated unfairly as it relates to being a Black male?
Describe an experience.
Did you address this issue? Please explain.
How often has this happened? (regularly, occasionally, rarely, never)
Have you ever felt you received special treatment because of your status as a Black male?
Describe an experience.
How did you respond?
How often has this happened? (regularly, occasionally, rarely, never)

Education
What do you think society expects of Black male students?
What has influenced this understanding?
Has this impacted you in any way? How?

Various & Sundry

How do you make sense of the following statement?

“Success is a contested reality. In order for you to be a person of color in America, you have to contest society for your place, your rightful place.”

In what ways have you contested society for your rightful place?

What are your thoughts about images of Black males in the media?

If you had to give advice to Black males on the challenges they face, what would you say?

If you could design a school to improve the educational experiences of Black males, how would it look? What would be unique about it?

What is that based upon?

What do you feel is causing the current spike in violence against Black men?
APPENDIX B

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Project Title: Phenomenological Inquiry into Black Male Experiences of School

Researcher: Kelly N. Ferguson

Faculty Sponsor: Ann Marie Ryan, PhD

Introduction:
You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Kelly Ferguson for a class project under the supervision of Ann Marie Ryan in the Department of Teaching and Learning at Loyola University of Chicago. You are being asked to participate because you have been identified as a member of an organization that mentors Black male youth. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate in the study.

Purpose:
The purpose of this study is to understand your early experiences in family, school, friends, and work, how you came to participate in mentorship and the meaning that you have made of these experiences.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to:

• Participate in an interview with topic areas that include your background, schooling experiences, and your role as a mentor. The interview will consist of three separate interviews lasting no more than 90 minutes each time and will be conducted at a location of your choosing.

Risks/Benefits:
There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life.

There are no direct benefits to you from participation, but your participation can help inform the work of educators in understanding Black male leadership potential.

Confidentiality:

• Information gathered will be confidential through the use of a pseudonym to protect your identity. This pseudonym will be used on interview transcriptions so that no names appear on any documentation.

• The audio recordings of the interviews will be accessible by only the researcher and will be deleted at the conclusion of the research.
**Voluntary Participation:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty. Your decision to participate or not will have no effect on our current relationship.

**Contacts and Questions:**

If you have questions about this research project or interview, feel free to contact Kelly Ferguson at kferguson@luc.edu or the faculty sponsor, Ann Marie Ryan, at aryan3@luc.edu. If you have questions about your 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 agree to participate in this research study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Participant’s Signature Date ________________________________________________

Researcher’s Signature Date ________________________________________________
APPENDIX C

RESEARCH RECRUITMENT SCRIPT
RESEARCH RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

My name is Kelly Ferguson and I am asking individuals to participate in a research study. As the investigator, I am trying to understand the schooling experiences of Black males and the leadership qualities that are unique to this group.

Participants are being asked to participate in a 2-part interview with topic areas that include your background, schooling experiences, and your role as a mentor. Each interview will be audio recorded, will last no more than 90 minutes and will be conducted at a location of your choosing.

There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. There are no direct benefits to you from participation, but your participation can help inform the work of educators in understanding Black male leadership potential.

Information gathered will be confidential through the use of a pseudonym. The audio recordings will be accessible by only the researcher and will be deleted at the conclusion of the research.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw at any time without penalty. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty. Your decision to participate or not will have no effect on our current relationship.

Consent:

Will you consent to participate in this research study?

Interview:

The first interview will focus on your life history. Questions will be asked that elicit information related to you experiences in education, career, and as a mentor. These experiences will be put into context by asking you to reconstruct these early experiences.

Interview One: Focused Life History

Please tell me your name, occupation and age.

Tell me about your family. How did you grow up?
Were there any experiences that really marked your childhood? Adolescence? Adulthood?

**Mentoring**

How long have you served as a mentor?

Which organization is your mentorship affiliated with?

How do you understand mentoring?

How did you come to serve as a mentor with this organization?

Describe your role as mentor within this organization?

**Work**

What is your current profession?

How long have you served in this capacity?

How did you come to work in this career?

**Education**

What level of education have you obtained beyond your high school degree?

Why did you decide to pursue post-secondary studies?

Describe your schooling experiences? Were these experiences positive or negative? How so?

Will you describe any leadership qualities that you displayed as a student (grammar school, middle school, high school)?

*Interview Two: The Details of Experience*

**Mentoring**

Could you describe your relationships with your mentees? Other mentors in the organization? Mentees’ parents? The wider community?

Could you reconstruct a day in your mentorship from the time you arrive until the time that you leave?

Describe one of your most rewarding experiences as a mentor.

Describe one of your most difficult experiences as a mentor.
In what ways have you observed leadership qualities in your mentees?

How do you support your mentees who are leaders and those who you believe have the potential to become leaders?

Is any of your guidance to your mentees specifically related to them as Black males? Please explain.

Have your mentees described instances where they have used your advice to them as Black males in their schooling or other experiences?

How is your support of your mentees’ development received by your mentees? Why do you believe that it is received as such?

Work

Could you reconstruct a typical day at work from the time that you walk in to work until the time that you leave?

Can you describe your relationships with your colleagues? Your supervisor/boss? Supervisees?

What has your experience as a Black male been like working in your profession?

How have these experiences as a Black male influenced you professionally?

Have you ever received guidance from someone regarding your role as a Black male and your success or potential challenges in your profession? Please explain.

Have you used this advice during your career?

How frequently (regularly, occasionally, rarely, never) have you experienced situations where you have used this advice throughout your career? Could you provide an example?

Education

Could you reconstruct a typical day of school? (grammar school, middle school, high school)

What were your relationships like with your teachers?

What worked for you as a student? Why?

What didn’t work? Why?
You shared ________ as leadership qualities that you possessed as a student. Were any of these qualities recognized by your teachers? Please explain.

How did you respond to any support provided?

Did you perceive any lack of support? If so, please explain.

Were any of your leadership qualities unnoticed by your teachers? How did you respond? Please explain.

Were any of your leadership qualities misunderstood by your teachers? How did you respond? Please explain.

Describe your experience as a Black male throughout your schooling. (grammar school, middle school, high school)

Have you ever received guidance from your teachers/instructors that were explicitly catered to you as a Black male? Please explain.

Did you understand the relevance of this advice? Please explain.

How did you respond to this advice?

In what ways have you used this advice throughout your schooling experiences?

How frequently (regularly, occasionally, rarely, never) have you experienced situations where you have used this advice throughout your schooling experiences?

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**Interview Three: Reflection on the Meaning**

*Reflect on the Meaning of Your Experiences*

[Intellectual and emotional connections between the participants’ work and life]

[Look at how factors in their lives interacted to bring them to their present situation]

**Mentoring**

How would you describe the current climate around Black males?

Has this impacted your mentorship? In what ways?

How do you see your mentorship as being impactful for your mentees lives?

In what ways have you been impacted by your mentees?

[Additional questions will be developed and personalized based upon Interviews 1 & 2.]
Work
What do you think society expects of Black men generally? What do you think society expects of Black men professionally?

On your job, what do you think people expect of Black men?

In what ways, if any, have you lived up to those expectations? How has this impacted you?

In what ways, if any, have you countered those expectations? How has this impacted you?

Have you ever been promoted on your current job? If so, why?

Have you ever felt passed over for a promotion? If so, why? Did you address this? Please explain.

Have you ever felt treated unfairly as it relates to being a Black male?
   Describe an experience.
   Did you address this issue? Please explain.
   How often has this happened? (regularly, occasionally, rarely, never)

Have you ever felt you received special treatment because of your status as a Black male?
   Describe an experience.
   How did you respond?
   How often has this happened? (regularly, occasionally, rarely, never)

Education
What do you think society expects of Black male students?
What has influenced this understanding?
Has this impacted you in any way? How?

Various & Sundry
How do you make sense of the following statement?

“Success is a contested reality. In order for you to be a person of color in America, you have to contest society for your place, your rightful place.”
In what ways have you contested society for your rightful place?

What are your thoughts about images of Black males in the media?

If you had to give advice to Black males on the challenges they face, what would you say?

If you could design a school to improve the educational experiences of Black males, how would it look? What would be unique about it?

What is that based upon?

What do you feel is causing the current spike in violence against Black men?
REFERENCE LIST


Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 U.S. 537 (1896).


VITA

Kelly N. Ferguson is the daughter of B.S. Ferguson and M. Ferguson. A native of Washington, D.C., Kelly was raised with her sister, M. Ferguson. Having relocated to California, Kelly attended elementary and middle school in southern California. She later moved to Illinois where the majority of her family currently resides.

Upon her early graduation, Kelly attended Spelman College, a historically Black women’s liberal arts college in Atlanta, Georgia where she majored in Child Development. It was here that she developed her passion for teaching and advocacy work. Upon graduation, Kelly pursued her Master’s degree at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign where she majored in Curriculum and Instruction. Her professional teaching tenure began in the community where she was raised. After a ten year teaching tenure, Kelly decided to complete her Doctorate at Loyola as a full time student.

Kelly is currently an adjunct professor at Loyola University where she teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in the School of Education. She has a passion for advocacy work, particularly for that of marginalized groups. She has a commitment of service to others and looks forward to using her gift to help transform the human condition.
DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

The dissertation submitted by Kelly N. Ferguson has been approved by the following committee:

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