BLACK MALE VOICES: CULTURAL CONNECTIONS, DEVELOPING CHARACTER AND DEFINING MANHOOD IN AN URBAN ALL-MALE HIGH SCHOOL

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Abstract

Much of the literature and research dedicated to the academic achievements of Black males primarily focus on factors that negatively impact their overall success in secondary schools and the choices they make academically and professionally post-graduation. The issue of failing Black males is often associated with conflicting environmental factors, as well as the lack of programs designed to meet their academic, cultural and personal needs. This qualitative narrative study captures the experiences of Black males through one-on-one interviews, who revealed how they excelled and overcame society’s unfavorable stereotypes of them in an environment focused on cultural identity, character development and civic action. The constructs of social identity were utilized as a theoretical framework and the themes that emanated from the study disclosed their academic and personal success due to the support they received from caring teachers and administrators of color in a culturally responsive learning environment while in a setting of their peers.

Keywords: Black boys, single-sex schools, academic achievement, urban educators, culturally responsive teaching, social identity, urban schools
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Chapter I: Introduction

The academic performance and educational success of an African American male in today’s racially contentious society often proves to be a challenge. Each day, Black males are dying, either at the hands of their own or the hands of law enforcement (Schott, 2015). This disturbing reality significantly reduces the survival rate of African American males today. Pedro Noguera (2003) noted, “They lead the nation in homicides, both as victims and perpetrators” (p. 431). And the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2013) reports that Black students continue to trail White students with respect to educational access, achievement and attainment. The forecast for Black males has posed a concern and it has been demonstrated by a consistent low level of performance evident through national assessments, low college enrollment rates, overrepresentation in special education programs, and gravely low representation in honors and gifted programs (Gregory, Skiba, and Noguera, 2010; Noguera 2008). Overall, Black males are challenged by significant societal and academic challenges.

Various factors have contributed to the cyclical academic failures facing this ethnic group. In his report on the education of Black and Latino male students, Pedro Noguera (2003) explores how factors such as “harmful environmental and cultural forces” (p. 433) may suggest that student academic performance and success may depend on strategies that circumvent the effects of the forces that would otherwise act as an obstacle for them. In the 2012 Schott Foundation Report, *The Urgency of Now*, the unsettling statistics revealed that only 52% of Black and 58% of Latino male ninth graders graduated from high school in a four-year span while 78% of White/non-Latino male ninth graders graduated within the same time frame (Schott Foundation, 2012).
Too often boys have been found to fall behind girls in elementary and secondary schools, and are increasingly outnumbered in presence on college campuses (Mead, 2006). The groups of boys who are in “real trouble”, according to Mead (2006) are Black [and Hispanic] boys, mainly due to their race and class, not their gender. To answer the call for a resolution to “save” Black boys, a surge of single-sex schools have been growing over the years as an outcome to closing the achievement gap faced by Black [and Latino] males in urban school districts (Fergus, Sciurba, Martin, & Noguera, 2009). With a goal of increasing retention and high school graduation rates of this demographic group, more districts have resorted to promoting academic achievement compared to their White male counterparts across the country by developing more gender-based schools.

Background

A myriad of culprits contributing to the systemic failure of males are explored from preschool to high school in author Peg Tyre’s candid novel, *The Trouble with Boys: A Surprising Report Card on Our Sons, Their Problems at School, and What Parents and Educators Must Do* (2008). Tyre observes, analyzes and uncovers a system that is not intended to meet the needs of male students such as technology-poor learning environments, the unrealistic demands of No Child Left Behind (2001), a strong emphasis of data-driven assessments, a lack of physical exercise and kinesthetic learning, and a curriculum not designed to address male academic and personal achievement. And with all of the research conducted through limited empirical studies, none of the studies offer sustainable strategies on how classrooms should be organized and managed, and how curriculum should be designed to address and meet the needs of males in single-sex settings (Fergus, Sciurba, Martin, & Noguera, 2009).
Additionally, Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu (1985) conducted research of Black males and discovered through the study that a “conspiracy to destroy black boys” existed in public education. Kunjufu asserts that the process of instilling academic inferiority begins in the third grade and eventually becomes heightened in the fourth grade, hence the concept of the “fourth grade failure syndrome” in his book, Countering The Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys (1985). Many in the field of education have refused to believe a conspiracy theory against the Black male child exists in the public education system and society refuses to address the issue of educational inequity, academic inferiority and the segregation of marginalized people because of the discomfort it may cause in academic circles. According to Kunjufu, issues of institutionalized racism has led to the development of the conspiracy theory as it stems from “historians, politicians, academicians, and writers who have provided the theoretical justification for White supremacy,” (p.2).

As Hayward (2012) writes, “Institutional racism is deeply embedded in the established cultural norms and values of our society” (p. 17). And since we don’t like to talk about our history and race because it causes division, we are unwilling to commit to a process of truth, (Stevenson, 2012). Coupled with the increased incarceration rates and unlawful deaths of Black males, particularly by law enforcement officials, this conversation is not only relevant but crucial. This study captured the experiences of Black males who graduated from an all-male high school focused on cultural identity, character development and civic action. Through the voices of the scholar-graduates who advanced from this unique educational environment, new strategies for implementing programs that cater to the needs of Black males to succeed academically and personally are explored.
Statement of the Problem

Unfortunately many young, urban Black males are being deterred from their educational dreams or are being discouraged from being enthusiastic about achieving academic success, mainly due to the history of racism and oppression that exists in American society (Kunjufu, 1985). Historic marginalization and mistreatment of Black males has taken place for centuries (Woodson, 1933; Noguera, 2008). The conspiracy theory identified by Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu (1985) asserts that the United States public education system has systematically programmed Black males to fail, and based on societal assumptions and beliefs, he is made to feel inferior. Kunjufu goes on to say that black boys face a cultural disconnect from school, often lacking inspiration, motivation or being held to high expectations. In his book, Changing School Culture for Black Males (2013), Kunjufu firmly states that school culture “communicates a message and quality of life and learning, and it powerfully influences all who work or attend as students” (Kunjufu, p. viii). The culture of a school is a crucial component in the overall success and motivation of black males to set goals towards academic achievement. American schools have attempted to solve the deficit by opening numerous single-sex schools in urban, low-income communities over the past fifteen years.

Over the past twenty years, leaders in the field of education such as Dr. Leonard Sax with the National Association for Single-Sex Public Education have decided to implement educational environments and experiences for these Black males so they could continue to thrive and be academically successful. In 1999, there were only four public schools that offered a single-sex education and by 2006, 223 single-sex public schools were operating across the country (Fergus, Sciurba, Martin, & Noguera, 2009). California attempted to create some of the first all-male ex-
experimental schools, but were unsuccessful because of “poor planning and lame execution” (p. 210, Tyre). Advocates of single-sex education state that a learning environment crafted around a boy or girl toward his or her natural learning style is critical to their overall well-being. Research has shown that boys and girls learn differently and boys are in schools that are stifling their natural learning style (Palmisano, 2014). Single-sex schools officially became legal in 2006 by the Department of Education (Schemo, 2006) under the Bush administration, and one all-male urban public high school in The Bronx, NY which was designed to be grounded in character development, cultural identity and civic-mindedness, set out to increase the graduation rates of this at-risk population and joined other educational leaders in the pursuit to save Black (and Latino) boys. That school was the Urban Assembly Academy of History and Citizenship for Young Men (UAAHC).

Schools, such as UAAHC, center around building a “brotherhood” among their students “to develop and sustain their emerging academic identities” (Fergus, Noguera, & Martin, p. 48, 2014). By creating a peer culture that countered the effects of external pressures, many schools that cater specifically to Black and Latino males often adopt practices that establish a family-type setting, with each scholar supporting and encouraging each other so they could achieve academic success collectively (Fergus, Noguera & Martin, 2014).

This identified problem of practice, which is specific to Black males in the inner-city urban secondary school system, stretches far and wide. And in order to understand the impact of this issue on this demographic of students, examining the factors that lead to failure early on as well as the stereotypes associated with others’ perceptions of them is critical (Jenkins, 2006). Black males are dropping out or failing before they complete high school, and those that make it
to a level of higher education become lost and eventually disappear from the advanced educational setting (Davis & Jordan, 1994). Previous research conducted has supported either one particular area or another concerning the systemic failures and the contributing factors of African-American males. For example, Pedro Noguera (2003) discusses the need to change the academic outcomes of Black and Latino males by “counteracting the risks” (p. 437) they experience, as well as shifting the attitudes they have towards failure. He states that they often adopt harmful behaviors and attitudes which may indicate the hand they play in their own failures. Additionally, when they are unmotivated, unengaged and lack the confidence needed to view themselves as intellectual beings, they will be less persistent and more likely identified as “at-risk” (Whiting, 2006). Interventions and programs are being designed to alleviate some of the risks, yet strategies are often absent that push Black males into actively taking responsibility to improve their circumstances.

Other research engages in more discourse on the laundry list of facets effecting young Black males and their minimal achievements in urban educational settings, yet fail to offer a viable solution. A number of researchers agree that educators who show bias against black males may in fact contribute to the poor educational outcomes of these young men (Ladson-Billings 2006, 2009; Kunjufu, 1985; Delpit, 1988). Limited research exists which presents the perspective from the scholar-graduates themselves, and research of this kind could shed light on whether gender-based schools with a focus on personal and academic achievement are an effective “way to improve the educational attainment and social mobility of Black and Latino males” (Noguera, 2012).
The disparaging inequalities that exist in the urban public school systems across the country remain to be astounding. Kozol (2005) as well as other reformists (Mann; Dewey; Banks; Noguera; Delpit; Darling-Hammond, et al) have reported the duplicitous behaviors perpetrated in the public school systems. Jean Anyon (1980) candidly examined the separation and segregation that exists in schools for upper and middle class students vs. low-income and poverty stricken students. Additionally, she built a strong foundation for the inequities that have manifested itself in schools across the nation, particularly when it pertains to historically marginalized students.

Too often, what fails to be explained is the reason why so many students fail to pursue the opportunity of a higher education and what factors prevent their progression. This research will explore answers to the question of what happens after experiencing high school in a single-sex environment that catapults the eager to learn Black male student into the discouraged and disconnected Black dropout. Coupled with the institutionalized oppression that exists in and outside of the American public education system, the African-American male faces a drastic cycle of failure (Ladson-Billings 2006, 2009). As Whiting (2009) puts forth, much of this self-doubt comes from a poor self-concept and a lack of guidance by educators who understand the obstacles and hindrances faced by young black males. Recognizing that a major component in the overall academic achievement and success as Black males is their self-perception and motivation to learn.

The purpose of this research is to examine the contributing factors to the academic success of Black males who graduated from a single-sex urban public high school with a focus on character development, civic engagement and cultural identity and the impact it has had on their
post-high school academic and personal pursuits. The history of systemic failures of Black males in the urban public secondary school system has caused this demographic to drop out or fail to pursue higher learning in colleges and universities (Schott Foundation, 2012). Pedro Noguera (2012) highlights the relevance of this type of research, as it could shed light on the concept of improving educational achievement of Black and Latino males by placing them in single-sex educational environments. In a 2005 report, the Educational Equity Center of the Academy for Educational Development stated that boys around the country are increasingly falling behind girls academically, and are more likely to get suspended or drop out (Froschl & Sprung, 2005).

A careful examination of the conspiracy theory against Black males presented by Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu (1985) and the lack of inclusion and backward progression of Black males within American society continues to surface as a trend that demands immediate attention (Jenkins, 2006). All educational stakeholders (students, parents, administrators and reformists) can begin to think about the consequences of providing culturally, civically and self-reflective educational experiences that will promote success for Black and Latino males in urban school districts.

Research that is in support of or against single-sex schools is beneficial to Black and Latino males and their academic achievements in high school. A viable solution has yet to be presented beyond the under achievements of Black males at all educational levels (Mandara, 2006). By taking on the voice of the Black male as the subject and using a qualitative approach to this research through Narrative Inquiry, the research will explicate social, emotional and historical racism, as well as misconceptions of black males and their academic achievements which have often contributed to the negative self-concept of education held by this group. Most urban
public high schools are consistently failing their Black and Latino male students. With the increase of various theme-based schools emerging over the past twenty years single-sex schools have seem to become the solution to many of the problems facing districts with low graduation rates. This research will capture the lived experiences of the first graduating class of one single-sex urban public school in the Bronx, NY and the impact this particular learning environment had on their subsequent lives.

**Significance of the Problem**

As Pedro Noguera (2003) states, “The good news is that not all Black males are at risk”. In other words, Noguera and other researchers believe there is hope for Black males to achieve academic success and personal development, but these young men need to be in an environment meant that helps them understand and embrace their capabilities. Keith Hayward, author of *I Am Who I See: The Underachievement of Gifted African American Males* (2012), asserts that many of us assume self-perception comes second to ability, but it is “one’s giftedness that has to intersect with one’s confidence in order for the person to be successful” (p. 14). A major component in the overall academic achievement and success of African American male students is their self-perception and motivation to learn (Edwards & Jones, 2009). When given the opportunity to enjoy and participate in a learning experience in a school culture that encourages academic success, African American students from low-income families and communities possess a level of flexibility when adapting to a negative learning environment (Lewis & Kim, 2008).

Numerous researchers have engaged in discourse on the many facets affecting young African-American males and their minimal achievements in urban public secondary educational settings, yet fail to offer a viable solution to the problem. Although there is some research ad-
dressing gifted African American children who attend K-12 schools, few studies address high-achieving and gifted African American male college students. Moreover, the vast majority of research highlighting the schooling of African American students focuses on their negative educational outcomes instead of their educational successes (Corra, Carter, & Carter, 2011).

A disconnect between race and cultural awareness between a learning environment and its students appear to be an underlying factor in the lack of academic success and achievement of African American males. Many researchers have discovered that relationship building will be beneficial to the educator and the student in the long run. There is the notion that many educators do not believe African-American males have the ability, nor desire, to be academically astute. This is both a disturbing and fearful thought. Milner (2013), encourages us to reframe our thinking and discourse around student achievement because it dictates how we perceive and understand students of color. When Ladson-Billings (2014) addressed the fiascos occurring in classrooms across the country, she made it clear that alternative approaches to teaching methods were necessary, where teachers infused student culture throughout the entire teaching and learning process. These approaches would be crucial to student achievement and the overall achievement of young black males.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) set the tone for a flood of educational reforms in school districts across the United States, including an increase in funding for same-sex schools. When Title X was adopted as an amendment in October 2006, school districts saw an increase in the flexibility of offering single-sex public schools as an option that was previously directed mainly in the private and parochial sector (Goodkind, Schelbe, Joseph, Beers, & Pinsky, 2014). Educational systems across the country resorted to constructing single-sex schools that
would hopefully address identity and self-concept, culture and awareness and college and career readiness.

**Urban Assembly Academy of History and Citizenship for Young Men.** In her article on single-sex schooling, Michelle Davis (2006) indicated that programs geared towards a single-sex model must be developed to improve the achievement of students while providing diverse educational opportunities or meeting the needs of particular students. One of these new single-sex schools, Urban Assembly Academy of History and Citizenship for Young Men (UAAHC), was on a mission to meet those needs when it opened its doors in September 2004 to a small number of at-risk, resistant urban Black and Latino males from low-income communities in the Bronx, New York. The purpose of the school was to “build culture and character” in a single-sex environment that would prepare its scholars to graduate from high school (UAAHC, 2004). According to the school’s recruitment pamphlet, their mission was to “nurture, educate, and graduate young men who [were] civic-minded, critical thinkers, skillful problem solvers and of exemplary character” (UAAHC, 2004).

When UAAHC partnered with New Visions for Public Schools in order to develop and propose the idea of a new all-male high school for the at-risk population: Black and Latino males in the Bronx, the school’s planning team had a clear focus of being a unique all boys school, opening as a small school in the former Taft High School in 2004 with a goal of “helping students develop a strong sense of the African heritage, brotherhood and civic responsibility” (Wheaton, 2014). New Visions For Public Schools, a New York City support and charter management organization which has been in existence since 1989 offering assistance to newly designed and developed public schools in mostly high-need urban school districts, under-
stands that the U.S. system of education “must prepare students to be engaged citizens and to succeed in the high-skilled jobs that are increasingly required in the global economy” (New Visions for Public Schools, 2016). Unfortunately, UAAHC “never reached its potential” (Wheaton, 2014), and the New York City Department of Education decided to phase it out in September 2011. It was officially closed in June 2014 due to overall poor performance rates (NYCDOE, 2011). It has become more apparent through the closing of poorly performing schools in urban districts across the nation, that many school systems are quick to give up on this group and mislabel them based on behavior, thus limiting their academic potential.

**Black Males in the college setting.** Black males graduate from high school and enter colleges with the hopes of being the first in their family to graduate, building up a GPA to transfer into a four year university or to just prove that they made it (Urias & Wood, 2014). Fast forward to life beyond high school for those Black males who graduated according to state standards of achievement. These young people enter community college with the hopes of obtaining a degree that could lead to employment advancement, higher learning or prospects of a new career. With those hopes often come a great deal of deficits - academically, emotionally and socially.

Most students enter college directly out of high school with various skill sets and academic strengths. Then there are students who enter college as “non-traditional” students – students who are academically deficient due to various financial, academic, professional and personal reasons. These students are ill-equipped to meet the rigorous demands of college-level coursework (Daiek, Dixon & Talbert, 2012). Additionally, being academically prepared for a “college-level” curriculum involves having a strong K-12 foundation, a solid sense of self and a robust relation-
ship with faculty and/or staff that could assist with the navigation of the higher education world (Strayhorn, 2008).

Unfortunately too many, Black males are entering community college unprepared and are suffering academically. Not everyone is capable of completing college-level courses at an average mastery level in a semester, and not everyone is prepared to sustain the pressure challenging courses may lend itself to have. All of these factors combined can lead to either students dropping out or failing the course (Bloom, 2007). Whiting (2009) reveals the rare classification of what it means to be an African American male student. He explores the ‘scholar identity model’ – a model for achievement and self-assessment – which requires support and guidance to master the challenges faced on an educational and socio-cultural level.

Concerned educators may ask how one can lose their motivation or desire to learn and pursue a college education because they have no sense of self or live in constant doubt. Feintuch (2010) answers the question and gives hope to black males entering college for the first time by offering a program that connects to the students before they begin classes so that they begin to build a link to higher education and their academic achievement. By recognizing a need for mentoring programs and putting resources in place to provide students with opportunities to excel academically and navigate the social nuances of college life, students who may be first generation college students will benefit greatly from the opportunity to become acclimated with the university environment early on and throughout their college career.

Negative circumstances effecting Black males. The duplicitous behavior of American society towards Black males is also critically examined in the abrasively candid article, Mr. Nigger (Jenkins, 2006). Our system of education poses itself on the crisis with the failures of Black
males and the desire to purge the negativity targeted towards them, yet it postures itself as a key proponent to the consistent failures and attitudes of inferiority projected on them. Jenkins exposes how this ideology manifests itself in the incarceration, slayings and emotional persecution of the African American male in educational settings. The underachievement, lack of inclusion, and backward progression of Black men within American society, and particularly within the educational arena, has once again surfaced as a trend that demands immediate attention (Jenkins, 2006). In essence, the challenges of reversing the negative circumstances facing Black men requires transforming a broad array of social, political, economic, psychological, and educational issues that are deeply rooted in the very power structure of America. On one hand, the society espouses rhetoric of concern and desire to elevate Black males, but, on the other hand, practices a policy of oppression, prejudice, and disregard. Put differently, the experience of the Black man in America seems to be one in which he is called “mister” but is treated with a “niggardly” regard. And the result is the positioning of Black males at the lower rungs of society and their experiencing underachievement in almost all aspects of life. According to Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera (2010), the low-income status, low achievement, and rates of misconduct are contributing factors in the disciplining of Black males.

With this focus, educational stakeholders, and the students themselves, often begin thinking about within-student deficits, which, in turn, leads to expectations of failure. Researchers and educational institutions should highlight the successful educational characteristics of high-achieving African American male students and promote success for all students. These types of research and programs might not only encourage others to think more intentionally about push-
ing African American students toward educational success, but more importantly, it also would encourage stakeholders to think differently about African American students and their families.

It is the researcher’s hope that inquiry into this systemic problem will unveil the hindrances and barriers these young men have encountered and continue to encounter, as well as possible solutions to increase the retention rate and graduation level of African American males from two and four-year colleges. The future looks bleak for many, as they are often ill-prepared for the higher education environment. If this country is preparing young people for the endless possibilities an advanced degree can afford them, why are we continuing to fail to provide them with the tools necessary for their success?

**Positionality Statement**

My role as a founding teacher and administrator in this single-sex environment puts me at an advantage due to my ethnic, cultural and racial connections. Yet, this same positionality leaves me at a disadvantage because my educational experiences and background was very different from the population I will be researching. As a mother of two Black sons and key player in the creation of this school setting serve as a catalyst in my quest to unveil the success of Black and Latino male scholars who graduated from high school in four years and defeat the odds stacked against their demographic group.

When taking a stand or posturing oneself on a given civil issue, public practice, religious view or the state of education, it is important to not only have a vested interest and reason for concern, but also a personal relationship with the topic of discourse. My educational experience has afforded me the opportunity to study pedagogy in various settings. I earned my undergraduate degree in Liberal Arts from the City College of New York, my first Master’s Degree in Sec-
ondary Education from Mercy College in New York and my second Master’s Degree in School Administration and Supervision from the University of Scranton, Pennsylvania. This self-proclaimed gypsy child relocated numerous times throughout Harlem and the Bronx, New York and Los Angeles while growing up in a single parent home. Therefore, I am cognizant of how important it is for educators to “connect” with the students they teach. The cultural disconnect between schools and students and the many misconceptions and preconceived prejudices that exist prior to the first day of school, may be a few of the underlying factors in why young people, especially black males, are failing system-wide. Problems that exist where racism and discrimination are in the forefront are “exacerbated when the observer comes from a position that is privileged in comparison to the group being observed” (Briscoe, 2005).

As a child, my mother consistently instilled the “value of education” in me from as long as I can remember, so it was no surprise when I was accepted to various advanced academic programs and was skipped from the sixth to the eighth grade. It has never been my experience to witness many of the disparities faced by African American males. According to Mickelson & Greene (2006), “on average, Black males earn lower grades and test scores, are disproportionately placed in Special Education classes, are assigned to lower academic tracks, and graduate from high school and college at lower rates than their female counterparts” (pg 35). I was fortunate enough to attend Catholic school for grades five through eight and was thrust back into the public education system at the age of twelve as an entering freshman. Ethnically, I identify as “Other” – a multi-racial blend of courage, pride and purpose sprinkled with a Native American, European and African-American heritage. My positionality puts me at an advantage due to my ethnic, cultural and racial connections. Yet, this same positionality leaves me at a disadvantage be-
cause my educational experiences and background were very different from the population I will be researching.

My personal experiences with discrimination were revealed a few times during my childhood and one notable time, as a mother. Unlike a few of my friends, family members and associates, I have been fortunate enough not to be called “Nigger” to my face, but the biased behavior was evident in a few of the elementary classrooms where Caucasian and Asian students were my competition. Corra, Carter & Carter (2011) found that “White students score significantly higher on achievement tests than their African American counterparts at all levels of education” (p 33) when conducting their research on the education gap that exists between Black and White students. Perhaps this is the gap that my teachers put great effort into maintaining by discouraging me from achieving and surpassing my less successful classmates. My teachers often implied that I should be content with not being first and should not spend so much time studying and socialize more. “Teachers are certainly biased against certain children, especially if they don’t know them, and often are surprised at the amount of intelligence and cultural awareness of minority children who have been raised in ‘the right way’” (Jupp, 2006). This biased behavior was fuel for me to excel.

Many years later my oldest son was the object of racial discrimination at the age of five. An older, Caucasian librarian interrogated my son and me as he was registering for a library card. She questioned whether he was capable of writing his own name and if he knew how to use the library services. I felt a sense of frustration come over me as the covert discrimination started to surface. If he was of age, could sign his own name and I knew the responsibility – and influence – that little card held, then what could be the problem with him registering. The mere
implication of the power that library card held and how it was being transferred to a young male of color was infuriating to her. Eventually, she had no choice but to grant my son a library card, but the bias that was demonstrated to this five year old Black male child was an indication of what he could possibly face in an educational setting as he grew older. This incident alone served as a catalyst in my participation as a proposal writer and curriculum developer for the Urban Assembly Academy of History and Citizenship (UAAHC), a proposed all-male high school in the Bronx, New York in 2003. This single-sex environment would open its doors to an at-risk population that failed to serve the needs of the Black and Latino males in the community; it would be one of two schools opening in September 2004. I eventually became the Lead Teacher and Dean in that particular school when it opened its doors in September 2004. These experiences, observations and professional accomplishments still served no purpose in my quest to promote academic achievement in the young black males I educated. According to Ravitch and Riggan (2012), my personal interests encompassing institutional positions, epistemological assumptions and social location have fueled the framework for my research.

**Research Questions**

Two research questions informed and guided the collection and analysis of data in this study:

1. What do graduating students from an urban single-sex high school with a focus on developing their students' "strong sense of their African heritage, brotherhood, and civic responsibility" attribute to their successful graduation from the school?

2. How do graduating students of an urban single-sex high school with a focus on developing their students' "strong sense of their African heritage, brotherhood, and civic
responsibility” perceive their experience as having impacted their identity, subsequent educational decisions, and lives after graduation?

Theoretical Framework

By adopting Social Identity Theory (SIT) as the foundation for a theoretical framework in this dissertation research, the purpose of this qualitative study will be to examine the perceived contributing factors to the academic outcomes of Black males in the urban secondary (9-12) public educational system and the impact it has on their presence in a college setting. The use of SIT makes it possible to understand how an individual will think, act and conform to his (or her) connected group, particularly Black males in secondary and post-secondary educational settings. While Social Identity theory explains one’s sense of who they are in particular to their membership in a certain group, it will provide a deeper, more critical lens into the failures and successes of Black males in urban public education settings. It will also examine the impact their self-identified classification has had on their overall educational experience in both the K-12 and college settings.

When Doug Anglin filed a federal civil rights complaint with the Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights in 2006, citing that his high school, Milton High School in Milton, MA, had Advance Placement courses comprised of almost 60% female and that the school system favored girls over boys, the nation took notice. The 17 year old complained that boys were more likely to be punished and teachers needed to be trained to change their attitudes towards male students. His claim noted that teachers should “look past boy’s poor work habits and rule breaking, and find ways to encourage boys academically” (Tyre, 2008. p. 231). He charged that
the system was biased against boys and was designed to position itself as a disadvantage to males.

**Social identity theory.** Black males are dropping out or failing before they complete high school, and those that make it to a level of higher education become lost and eventually disappear from the advanced educational setting (Bloom, 2007). Social Identity Theory will provide a framework for understanding the development of self-esteem with Black males (Lezama, 2014).

Social Identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) is based on the concept of one’s sense of who they are, particular to their membership in a specific group. Social Identity Theory emphasizes how an individual will think, act and conform to his (or her) connected group. It is a social psychological theory originally designed to understand the psychological cognition and behaviors of an individual in relation to his or membership in a certain group. Tajfel & Turner (1979) posited that the groups in which people belonged to were an important source of self-esteem and pride, yet stereotyping is based on a normal cognitive process of grouping things together. These groups give individuals a sense of social identity; a sense of belonging to the social world. Hogg & Abrams (1988) extended the definition of Social Identity Theory by including the psychological cognition and behaviors of an individual in connection to the relationship they have to a certain group.

McLeod (2008) enhanced the definition by affirming SIT as a person’s own sense of who they are based on their group membership. In order to increase one’s own self-image we enhance the status of the particular group in which we belong. The primary focal point for Social Identity Theory is the way in which one clearly embeds themselves in a group according to the
framework of American society. There is also a distinction made between the “in group” and the “out group”; the “in group” will discriminate against the “out group” in order to augment their image. This leads to the conceptualization of the “Us vs. Them” social categorization. Social categorization is the foundation for how one self-identifies, which eventually leads to social identification. Once Black males identify with a group that is historically discriminated against and treated as inferior, their classification of being in the “out group” eventually leads to a poor self-concept and ultimate failure in society.
Chapter II: Literature Review

Educationally, Black males are consistently falling behind their Black, female counterparts. In addition, they are failing academically and not completing high school. The 2010 Schott Foundation report revealed that the drop-out rates were well above 50% for Black and Latino males, and that they were less likely to enroll in or graduate from college than any other group (Schott Foundation, 2010). The public education system and its relationship to the social and academic failure of the black male has previously been questioned by preceding researchers. The changes brought about from previous research have been minimal considering the continuing decline of Black male academic success. Review of previous research leads one to note that it has supported one particular theme concerning the systemic failures and contributing factors impacting Black males’ achievement in our current schools. One goal within this educational problem is to discover the hindrances and barriers these young men face. Many young males of color are being drawn to the streets and a path of delinquency at an early age because many of the socio-economic problems posed in their communities often present challenges (Noguera P. A., 2012).

This literature review will examine the research related to the documented under-achievement of young Black and Latino males in urban public schools and their minimal presence in academically successful studies, reviews and post-secondary communities. It will also review literature that presents an alternative view to the conspiracy theory to destroy black boys that Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu proposes exists throughout the public school system (1985). A view that examines the educational curriculum and instructional strategies that often embodies particu-
lar teaching and learning styles and cultural biases held by many educators that have a tendency towards lower expectations for marginalized students (Hayward, 2012).

The chief elements this review will uncover are causal factors for the systemic “mis-education” and deterioration of the Black male child in urban public schools and the effect it has had on their successful completion of high school and college by: infusing mentoring programs and services for academic achievement and personal success; developing more single-sex schools and programs that provide a community of members with academic success as their main goal; instituting programs that will empower Black and Latino males to become academically successful based on environments that promote culture and self-confidence; and providing an overall insight as to why more black males should pursue higher education possibilities.

It is this researcher’s opinion that numerous predecessors questioning the public education system and the academic and social failures of the black male in secondary education have targeted the very same problems of practice, yet the impact from research has been minimal and ultimately this demographic is still underachieving, dropping out and failing to achieve academic success at surging numbers compared to their white counterparts. Even though Asians and Hispanics are also considered minorities, research and studies significant to African American males will only be included in this review.

Diving into a strong foundation laid by Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu introduced as the conspiracy theory to destroy black boys originally in 1985, the literature will then analyze the Black male culture and single-sex schools in urban communities, institutionalized oppression that exists in and outside of the American public education system, the often unidentified gifted Black male child, and the role culture and climate plays in the development of their behaviors and attitudes.
towards academic success. The historical root causes behind the black male child’s internalization of an academic inferiority complex as it relates to the “culture of power” (Delpit, 1988) will serve as a catalyst in promoting student achievement and academic equity. This analysis will then be summarized by including recommendations for future practice based on information to support student academic success.

**The Conspiracy Theory**

Within the history of segregation in American schools, it is believed that white males have internalized a strong sense of fear and uncertainty White males have historically been recognized for their oppressive dominance and have consistently postured themselves as being superior to black males because they were allowed to pursue an education, amongst other “freedoms”, without fear, allowing them to achieve any level of success (Kunjufu, 1985). If the Black male student fails to reach a height of academic superiority there is often the possibility that many of them may become dropouts. This is partly due to an assumed disconnect they may have felt in their educational experiences. This process in the development of academic inferiority basically begins in the third grade, and becomes heightened in the fourth grade, when the concept of “the fourth grade failure syndrome” emerges (Kunjufu, 1985). Many times this occurs because African-American males have different learning styles and are often misinterpreted or misunderstood when it comes to their behavior. Coupled with being taught by mainly White female teachers who often see the Black male as a threat rather than a developing student, the combination of misinterpretation, lack of rapport and effective communication, and this systemic destruction manifests itself into the tumultuous educational experience of the young black male child in urban public school districts. Various researchers agree that educators who show bias against Black
males may in fact contribute to the poor educational outcomes of these young men (Gay 2000; Ford 2011; Ladson-Billings 2006, 2009). Black males must understand that in order to achieve academic success, they must have a strong sense of self, culture and capability. With that said, a strong and positive sense of racial identity is necessary for Black males and schools are urged to provide opportunities for teachers to develop their cultural competency knowledge and skills (Williams, 2003).

The concern with academic failure, mostly with Black males, has been an issue that continues to be debated. Many times the educator responsible for educating, molding and preparing young people has a preconceived notion that the black male will fail, based on their own biases or prejudices, thus transferring his or her own beliefs on the students in the classroom. Many times this occurs because Black males have different learning styles and are often misinterpreted or misunderstood when it comes to their behavior. The conspiracy theory identified by Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu (1985) asserts that the United States public education system has systematically programmed African American males to fail and based on societal assumptions and beliefs, he is made to feel inferior. Dr. Kunjufu also reveals in his research on the conspiracy theory to destroy Black boys that too often a third or fourth grade student, views the classroom as a “comfort zone” or safe haven, with the teacher serving in the role of academic provider, nurturer, and possibly the absentee parent. When the individual in that extremely important role begins to label students, or allows them to become stigmatized based on their negative behavior, they then make the student begin to feel as if they’re less qualified than the other students. This in turn manifests itself in black boys who have a weak and negative sense of racial identity. He goes on to say that
Black boys “face a cultural disconnect from school, often lacking inspiration, motivation or being held to high expectations” (Kunjufu, 1985).

Society is well aware of the inequities that exist around the country, carefully woven throughout racial, religious and social classes. The public education system is not exempt. Vast numbers of young men of color systematically fall through the cracks of the very organization designed to perpetrate the factors that influence their failure. Dr. Carter G. Woodson informed America that blacks were not being educated, they were being programmed and indoctrinated to become inferior and dependent on the greater society (Woodson, 1933).

When analyzing a few root causes to the black male child’s internalization of academic inferiority, one must review the work of Carol Dweck (2010), who argued that a student’s view of their academic self-confidence plays an essential role in how well they will achieve academic success. Her studies demonstrated that when students believe in their intelligence and capabilities, they are most likely to be more comfortable and confident in academic settings. Black males who are lacking this self-confidence allow their weaknesses to distract them from pursuing and attaining an equivalent education as their White counterparts (Whiting, 2009). Some may agree that this lack of self-confidence and inferiority complex can be traced back to slavery when Africans were denied an education, largely because of a fear slave owners had of literate slaves. A literate slave could then read, expose slavery for its criminal acts and become abolitionists (such as Frederick Douglass, Frances Harper, Sojourner Truth, and countless others). African Americans were never considered to be citizens even as America grew from the very torturous labor slaves had to endure. A subsequent history of inferiority, isolation, inadequacy, and emas-
calculation evolved (Jenkins, 2006). History books are filled with the anguish countless blacks endured during the epoch of slavery in the United States.

This legacy of subordination and inferiority has been passed down through generations and the black male child is a direct descendant of this complex. As Whiting suggests, “a scholar identity model must be adopted to address low achievement, underachievement and academic disengagement among Black males” (Whiting 2009). This scholar identity model focuses on generating initiatives that focus on assisting young men of color develop behaviors, values, and attitudes that will aid them in functioning at maximum educational and social levels in and out of the school setting.

Additionally, the lack of adequate training on the secondary level has led to the systemic failure of young black males, which has greatly affected their academic performance on the community college level (Bloom, 2007). African American males are not fully prepared academically, mentally and emotionally to navigate their way through the community college system without support from the college.

Single-Sex Schools and Mentoring African-American Males

When examining the influence of single-sex schools on the low-income African-American male student in urban public schools, research has found that there are some benefits to placement in gender based institutions of learning (Billger, 2009). Even though research on single-sex public education for low-income youth of color is very minimal, Noguera (2012) provided information on a number of New York City schools geared towards working with Black and Latino males. He found that those schools who were high performing with students achieving great success was mainly due to the notion of how well educators served the population, not nec-
essarily who the population was. Many proponents of all-male schools, including Dr. Spencer Holland of Morgan State University, advocated for all-male schools with classes being taught by males of color. His efforts to uplift, educate and prevent young, black men of color from imprisonment began as early as 1990. Other researchers echoed his concept, stating that male students should have teachers who are of the same sex in more classrooms to serve as role models (Strain, 2013), and that single-sex schools have the ability to improve academic performance of African-American students when examining its long term effects post-secondary school (Billger, 2009).

Mentoring programs such as the My Brother’s Keeper (MBK) initiative implemented by President Barack Obama in 2014 confront “persistent opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color” by partnering with various organizations across the country to connect young people with networks and skills necessary for success in school and beyond high school. The initiative serves as a deterrent for young men of color to lag behind in academics, feel overwhelmed with academic demands, and receive the skills necessary to thrive as educated American citizens. As unveiled by Gordon et al. (2009), “interactions with successful Black community members could nurture a sense of connectedness with others to provide educationally successful positive role models.” It is the services and interactions such as these that offer young black males “protective factors” (p 280) in order to achieve academic success and a feeling of accomplishment.

Factors that foster the academic success and achievement of black students included mentoring, the understanding of racial identity, how it connects to academic performance and high stakes testing. Gordon, Iwamoto, Ward, Potts, & Boyd (2009) conducted a study of sixty-one Black middle school males where it revealed that those who achieved greater success did so by participating in a mentoring program than peers who did not. During the research study, it was
discovered that an Afrocentric mentoring program builds self-esteem, self-discipline, provides role models, and provides a spiritual and cultural connection to black males, and increases responsibility and motivation. Gordon, et al. (2009) demonstrate how mentoring should be used as a proactive intervention to connect the young man to his academic success, and a celebration of the black male’s success by including families and building support mechanisms will inevitably promote academic success. The researchers seem to agree that some sort of character education should be included in the curriculum, as well as more research conducted in various geographical locations (more urban) to achieve more perceptions based on environment.

According to Villegas & Lucas (2002), “an affirming attitude towards students who differ from the dominant culture is [a] fundamental orientation for teaching successfully in a culturally diverse society” (Villegas & Lucas, p. 23). It is crucial to understand that the socio-cultural context of teaching and learning, particularly as it relates to middle childhood and urban education, is one of the most disheartening thoughts a conscious citizen could imagine accepting.

Effective mentoring programs and meaningful relationships need to be established to assist with academic achievement and success that is extremely critical on the secondary level. As noted in Davis & Jordan (1994), “many Black males continue to lose ground academically and often give up altogether by dropping out of school” (p 586). Their research suggests that disciplinary policies on the secondary level be revamped to minimize suspensions and remedial courses for an increase in student engagement and “behavioral outcomes”. When risk factors are minimized and this demographic is in a nurturing, non-hostile environment, the desire to learn is increased and the pursuit of education beyond the secondary level is magnified.

**Black Teachers and Black Male students**
It may seem discriminative, however studies have shown that it is important for some students to see and be taught by people that look like them (Milner, 2012) and it is important for the student of color to know their history and how others excelled by experiencing oppression and overcoming adversity. He continues, “Black teachers are diverse and bring a range of views and instructional practices into the classroom” (Milner, 2012). Even with the negative connotation attached to placing more teachers of color in urban school settings, it is important to realize how these educators connect not only with black students, but those from various racial and ethnic backgrounds. These relationships build trust, assist with the alleviation of negative teacher perceptions and limit potential risk factors in student failures.

Many believe that classrooms should be led by a diverse group of teachers who can connect and identify with the population of students they will be teaching. However, the assessment of incoming teachers entering the (urban) public school system have since lost their real meaning (Eckert, 2013). Novice White teachers are unable to connect race and the role it plays in the achievements of their students (Watson, Charner-Laird, Kirkpatrick, Szczesiul, & Gordon, 2006). The absence of Black teachers in classrooms is prevalent. The need to have educational role models that also share familiar, comparable appearances is sizeable. These meaningful learning experiences are nominal and in time, this will lead to an educational crisis. Teachers of similar cultural backgrounds and shared experiences are able to explain new concepts and skills by using relevant examples to elicit responses and engage students who normally may not feel connected to the lesson. Black teachers have often been criticized for their perceptions and instructional decisions in research literature, and their role as models to students of color is often misunderstood (Milner, 2012). However, some research has been found to further support the concept of
having teachers of color teaching students of color because the classroom lessons are designed and depicted through cultural connections in order to aid in learning. These teachers of color build rapport and serve in multiple capacities, not just as a classroom teacher.

**The Achievement Gap versus The Gifted Black Male**

Linda Darling-Hammond (2010) continues the argument for the inequalities in education based on race, class, economics and opportunity. She raised valid points, all particularly intriguing because she highlights how America pays too much attention to the omniscience of the “achievement gap”, which has been another component of targeted reform for many years. Darling-Hammond states that the opportunity gap that exists in our school systems is due to the “differences in access to key educational resources [such as] expert teachers, personalized attention, high quality curriculum opportunities, good educational materials, and plentiful information resources” (p. 28).

Lynn et al (2010) address the “minority achievement gap,” which is an extension of the beliefs that public schools are becoming re-segregated. Since teachers’ perspectives have a huge impact on the achievement and personal expectations set by students (Darling-Hammond, 2010), it is important for educators to be trained to be culturally responsive to the needs and responsibilities of educating young men of color in urban schools. The term “achievement gap” becomes a reality when results from standardized assessments fail to explicate the reasons why some students do not perform well based on what they should know, rather than what they actually know (Milner, 2013). Kozol (2005) calls for action to close the achievement gap, first having individuals recognizing the problem, as it exists, bringing it to public attention, and then shaking it up enough so that society has no other choice than to take action. And since the achievement gap
speaks to discrimination, mislabeling and fallacies, the cavity could be bridged through proper training and retention of teachers who fit the needs of this particular group of students (Henfield, 2013). The interactions between teacher and student throughout the educational process will prove to be most beneficial and productive to students of all ethnicities and races once this is realized (Goldenberg, 2014). The achievement gap continues to widen in high poverty/high minority urban districts due to inexperienced and ill-prepared teachers (Eckert, 2013).

A number of classifications may be designated to Black and Latino males that attribute to their negative outcomes, such as having low test scores and grades, less likely to enroll in college and drop out, to be labeled learning disabled, missing from honors and gifted programs, and show an over-representation in numbers for suspensions and expulsions (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Additionally, the “underrepresentation of Black and Latino males in Advanced Placement Courses and Gifted and Talented programs” is only a mirror to a few of the smaller gaps that contribute to the larger gaps in the “achievement gap”, such as high school graduation and student academic achievement (Sanzone, et al., 2015).

Ford (2010, 2013) has consistently argued against the underrepresentation of Black males in gifted/advanced education programs and an overrepresentation in the expelled and suspended categories. Gifted Black males must be taught to “recognize their natural gifts, address their deficiencies and nurture the greatness that lies within them” (Hamilton, 2012, p. 12). Grissom and Redding (2016) highlight how teacher expectations and “faith” in students’ capabilities are catalysts in students of color being placed in gifted programs.

Hebert (1998), explains how research on gifted and talented Black males is scarce, yet the issue still remains a stumbling block in schools designed for young men of color (Fergus, &
Martin, 2014). If schools are working to send more Black males to college, exposure to advanced classes, a more rigorous curriculum and teachers who have high expectations for their academic success is paramount (Strauss, 2017).

**Culture, Climate and Character Development**

According to Keith Hayward (2012), culture matters. Promoting or improving school culture is key in helping Black male students succeed academically (Hayward, 2012). Urban school systems tend to operate uniquely in culture, climate and instructional practices. A school culture is described as “a set of norms, values, beliefs, ceremonies, stories and symbols that make up the persona of the school” (Peterson, 2002, p. 10). Kent Peterson (2002) writes about prototypical school culture and how all members of the school community are seen as learners in his article outlining characteristics of successful school cultures. He explains that a “toxic school culture blames students for lack of progress and discourages collaboration among staff” (p. 10). In other words, in order for a school to promote a healthy school culture, it must celebrate the success and accomplishments of all members of the school community – students, staff, parents and other committed members – involved in student achievement. As Kotter (2002) postulates, “when people begin to understand and act on a change vision, you remove barriers in the paths” (pg. 101). Based on the research provided above, one can conclude that in any school a healthy culture can determine how well students will or will not perform, interact with each other, build relationships, and develop a sense of self-efficacy. These opportunities gauge student progress and gear students who are vested towards academic achievement.

When Gloria Ladson-Billings addressed the fiascos occurring in classrooms across the country, she made it clear that alternative approaches to teaching methods were necessary, where
teachers infused student culture throughout the entire teaching and learning process (Siwatu, 2011). These approaches to cultural development would be crucial to student achievement.

Davis & Jordan (1994) clearly examined the connections between academic performance and social behaviors of African American males and the structural, contextual influences in school settings in their study. They found that urban school administrators and teachers should begin building school communities to foster relationships that require less discipline in class, as well as the distinct relationship between school climate and student achievement in relation to student success.

Lezama (2014) states that the academic success of Black males can be achieved when school culture is reversed to address the needs of this demographic group. Examining the lives and academic experiences of six academically successful Black males assisted the researcher in “understanding the psychological cognition and non-cognition behaviors of Black boys in relation to membership in their ethnic culture” (Lezama, p. 108). By readjusting curriculum and programming, and encouraging the building of relationships and promoting a growth mindset for high expectations, the research demonstrated that Black male students can be just as successful as their White counterparts.

Paulo Freire (2000) speaks of communicating and engaging with one’s students and having “faith in the abilities of our students” will separate the mavericks from the oppressors. Without open and engaging communication, “no true education exists” (p 160). Ultimately, educators who are not culturally, socially or ethnically connected to the students they teach may encounter difficulty when attempting to make classroom lessons and material relevant and worthwhile. This addresses the rapport building and the culturally responsive teaching that occurs. The reten-
tion of teachers who are committed to educating young people of diverse backgrounds and the
courage to push the boundaries of scripted curriculum that is disconnected or intangible is a fac-
tor that leads to the segregation of schools that bell hooks (2014) speaks of. She also asserts that
it is the task of the educator to "refuse to bureaucratize the mind" (pg. 12) and to serve as a
"healer" and "teach in a manner that empowers students" (pg. 15). Alfie Kohn (2013) also ques-
tions the courage of educators to dig deep and take responsibility of the success of their students.
Courage and commitment are crucial factors educators must regularly practice in order to evoke
the very best in students. If educators are afraid and not courageous enough to dismantle the cul-
ture of power and permanence of racism that exists in urban school districts then the struggle for
equitable education is for nothing. Community building is a crucial aspect in establishing a cli-
mate of social justice.

A restructuring of school culture, climate and curriculum should occur to foster academic
and behavioral outcomes that are successful. Schools are falling short of promoting and structur-
ing the intellectual development of students and socializing young people for their roles and re-
sponsibilities in society (Davis & Jordan, 1994). Patterns of relationships are consistent with the
success and failures of Black males in middle and high school.

Summary

Students who have a low-level of self-concept risk having lower grades, delinquency and
the strong possibility of dropping out. When young Black males are reminded of their possibili-
ties and capabilities, a vested interest in academic achievement can be pursued. It is safe to con-
clude that the conspiracy theory does exist. However, the issue needs to continue to be addressed
in the educational system now so that fewer numbers of young Black males will “opt out” of pursuing their educational right.

Recognizing that males, in particular Black males, have different learning styles and bring other experiences (cultural, socio-economic and historical) to the classroom, many schools with a population of predominantly poor minorities (particularly Black and Hispanic) must be cognizant of these variances, and adopt strategies and supplemental programs to meet the needs of this population. When considering research concerning student self-concept and achievement in single-sex settings, it is suggested that segregation of the sexes has no effect on how well students achieve (Belfi, Goos, De Fraine, & Van Damme, 2012). There was no research available to truly support this suggestion regarding black males in urban public schools. By developing more same sex schools, even classes within co-educational settings, that focus on educating and preparing young black males to become educated MEN becomes attainable. These single-sex environments “enhance the academic performance and achievement” of black males (Gordon, Iwamoto, Ward, Potts, & Boyd, 2009).

In order to fully encompass the true issues affecting young black males in urban public schools, thorough research must be conducted on the numerous factors impacting the projected failures from emotional, socio-economic, environmental and historical standpoints (Jenkins, 2006). Griffin & Allen (2006) implied that the way in which black students identify with academics is based on their self-esteem, thus having a great impact on their academic motivation, performance and success. Their reduced exposure to “risks” and failure options, statistics espousing the differences between successful, educated young black males in comparison to uneducat-
ed, unsuccessful young black males is disturbing, and the numbers continue to point in a staggering direction.

Although there is some research addressing gifted African American children who attend K-12 schools, few studies address high-achieving and gifted African American male college students. Moreover, the vast majority of research highlighting the schooling of African American students focuses on their negative educational outcomes instead of their educational successes. With this focus, educational stakeholders, and the students themselves, often begin thinking about within-student deficits, which, in turn, leads to expectations of failure. Researchers and educational institutions should highlight the successful educational characteristics of high-achieving African American male students and promote success for all students (Fergus, Sciurba, Martin, & Noguera, 2009). These types of research and programs might not only encourage others to think more intentionally about pushing African American students toward educational success, but more importantly, it also would encourage stakeholders to think differently about African American students and their families. And even though previous research has examined the root causes in the lack of successful academic achievements of Black males, further conversation needs to take place amongst researchers and educators (Hillard, 2003).

When it comes to a learning environment that promotes staff and student learning, schools should develop a culture that will promote overall success, where a sense of purpose and values are shared. As Kent Peterson (2002) states all stakeholders must commit to collaboration, sharing personal practice and create stories that reinforce the mission. Cheryl Hamilton (2012) firmly states that “improving classroom climate, providing positive role models, fostering positive self-perception and addressing resource disparities are key to closing the achievement gap.

For most, the conspiracy theory conjectured by Kunjufu is an unwanted, unaccepted and misinterpreted theory, however, White male educators such as Jonathan Kozol and Barry Goldberg acknowledge its existence and prominence. Kozol who is adamant about schools failing students based on their socio-economic status and clearly deflates the notion that the system is equitable. He expresses how schools are no longer concerned with "equality in education"; the American educational system is returning to the segregation of schools (Kozol, 2005). Quite a reversal in the direction our founding educational fathers built the system on, one could say. If students, mainly students of color, are being denied basic resources to thrive in the system and compete internationally with their counterparts, how is their natural capacity of continuing an education and expansion of intellectual growth being fed? There is no empowerment in denial.
Chapter III: Research Design

Narrative Inquiry is a methodology that has the sole purpose of examining and studying lived experiences through storytelling. Author Wes Moore (2011) creatively crafted a novel of how two black males with the same name, from the same neighborhood wound up following two distinctly different paths based on circumstance and opportunity. Narrative stories divulge experiences (Clandinin, 2013). For example, in the tradition of African history, villages would listen to historical accounts of ancestors in order to determine what to do and what to avoid as young men (and women) matured (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1992, pg. 84). The student stories in connection to their lives and lived experiences in school are significant to this research and follow the oral tradition of storytelling. The examination of their social conditions in and outside of the school setting that serve as challenges to an equitable educational opportunity will also benefit the research surrounding cultural development and self-identification for Black males in society.

The research was conducted using a qualitative, Narrative Inquiry approach in order to explicate and comprehend how Black males perceive their secondary educational experiences in connection to graduating from high school and eventually deciding to pursue college or other life-altering career decisions post-graduation. The authenticity of the research is accentuated through the use of storytelling and was captured by way of former graduates of the Urban Assembly Academy of History and Citizenship for Young Men. Through the interviews, each participant unveiled factors and school experiences that contributed to their success. Understanding the connections between curriculum and relationships experienced in secondary education helped make sense of what their individual experiences were like, which ultimately led to their academ-
ic success in high school as graduates. The catalyst for this qualitative research study evolved through the following questions:

1. What do graduating students, from an urban single-sex high school (with a focus on developing their students' "strong sense of their African heritage, brotherhood, and civic responsibility") attribute to their successful graduation from the school?

2. How do graduating students of an urban single-sex high school (with a focus on developing their students' "strong sense of their African heritage, brotherhood, and civic responsibility") perceive their experience as having impacted their identity, subsequent educational decisions, and lives after graduation?

**Study Context**

The first graduating class of the Urban Assembly Academy of History and Citizenship for Young Men walked across the stage in June 2008. They were selected as participants in this research study based on their successful completion of all New York State high school requirements and being the first graduating class to do so from this school. The scholar-graduates participating in this study represented the highest graduating class in UAAHC’s ten year history at 55%, with 50% of its class pursuing a two-year college degree post-graduation (New York City Department of Education, 2010). The 2009 graduating class average was 46% and in 2010, the average number of graduates was 43%. The school witnessed a decline each year with every graduating class from 2009 – 2014.

Many of the scholars entered the single-sex, culturally based school with hesitation and trepidation. Urban Assembly Academy of History and Citizenship was one of two single-sex schools opening in September 2004 to cater to the urban, low-income, “at-risk” population in the
Bronx, New York. In February 2011, the New York City Department of Education approved a phase out for UAAHC due to poor performance (New York City Department of Education, 2010). Compared to the New York City average of 63% of high school seniors graduating on time, only 43% of students graduated from Urban Assembly Academy of History and Citizenship for Young Men in 2010. Additionally, a 2011 survey conducted by the school revealed the school had a high suspension rate and about one-third of the students said they did not feel safe.

This study focused on what one single-sex school did to develop a school culture designed to address the social, emotional and academic needs of Black (and Latino) males in an urban school district.

**Research Tradition**

There are a variety of research approaches that could have been employed to discover similar beliefs and characteristics amongst participants in this study. In my opinion, the best way to truly “feel” the experiences of the Black male student is via the Narrative Study Design. Buchmann and Floden (1989) believe a research tradition may be defined as, “a group of scholars who agree themselves on the nature of the universe they are examining, on legitimate questions, problems to study and legitimate techniques to seek solutions (p. 241). This is a practice that has been employed by researchers who are in search of answers that may assist in the building and/or expansion of a body of literature. Narrative inquiry lies in close similarity to phenomenology, whereas it seeks to understand lived experiences and how an individual (or individuals) describe and make sense of their experiences (Clandinin, 2013). A narrative study design allowed the participants to share their experiences via the spoken word.
Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin began the journey into Narrative Inquiry in 1988 while trying to find a way to give an “account of teacher’s experiential knowledge” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 9). They believed, “Narrative is a way of characterizing phenomena of human experience” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2) and the field of study is referenced as narratology – a term that defies boundaries in areas of study.

Making use of a qualitative study, there was a small participant pool. This allowed the researcher to find hidden reasons behind participant behaviors in a more personal setting (Creswell, 2012). By taking on a more personal theoretical perspective, student voices were heard. These voices – voices of the scholar-graduate – are voices that are not traditionally included in critical conversations about their own performance.

Methodology

This research study was conducted through a qualitative, Narrative Inquiry approach in order to inquire and explicate how Black males perceived their academic experiences and how they contributed those experiences to their academic and personal achievements. Additionally, the research revolved around six participants who were successful at combating negative influences and completed high school by being enveloped in a school environment that focused on culture, identity and civic awareness. Creswell (2007) defines qualitative research as “an intricate fabric composed of minute threads, many colors, different textures, and various blends of materials” (p. 35). He asserts that this form of research study is a more favored form for assessing the complex and condensing it to a simpler form.

When Webb (1999) outlines qualitative research, he declares that it utilizes a potpourri of methods that include interviews and/or observations that target the opinions, attitudes, behaviors
and feelings of an individual or a larger group. This study focused on student perspectives regarding the influences in and out of school that either supported or hindered their academic performance.

It was also this researcher’s intent to explore internal and external motivating factors (or tools) participants used to influence their decision as to whether or not to pursue a college education after graduating from high school. Understanding the connections between curriculum and relationships experienced in secondary education helped to make sense of what their K-12 experiences were like, which ultimately led to their academic demise or lack of presence in the college setting. Qualitative studies afforded me an opportunity to listen to and observe, first hand, accounts of students who would greatly contribute to the research around the identified problem of practice. The use of a qualitative, narrative inquiry method design also allowed this researcher to actively participate in the research process, yet refrain from personal biases that may have influenced interpretation and the construction of meaning through an active interaction with participants. Jean Clandinin (2013) states that “as narrative inquirers, we become part of participants’ lives and they a part of ours” (p. 24).

One to one interviews with participants allowed me to capture real-time data in a more personal setting. Butin (2010) states that “research has to be focused, transparent, meaningful, and valid” (p.29), so therefore gathering measurable data through the interview process will allow the research to be analyzed so that the findings are comprehensible. This form of research methodology revealed aspects of the topic that may not have been anticipated by this researcher or revealed through group interviews. By conducting face-to-face interviews, participant body language and expressions were noted, as well as the opportunity to ask follow-up questions.
Qualitative research is based on open-ended queries using in-depth questioning to uncover the thoughts and feelings behind an interviewee’s initial response. It applies insights and learning to the research process.

**Participants**

Through the use of purposeful sampling, I interviewed six Black males ranging in ages 26 through 28 who were members of the first graduating class of the Urban Assembly Academy of History and Citizenship in 2008. Purposeful sampling is a research approach that involves selecting individuals for a particular study where participants are expected to provide meaning to the research problem and central phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Patton (2002) refers to purposeful sampling as the process in which individuals are elected based on their unique perspectives about central issues that are important the research study.

Interviews were voluntary and conducted with participants who graduated from the same single-sex high school. All participants had either attended a two or four-year college after high school graduation. Through open-ended interview questions scholar-graduates who pursued a college education after high school and those scholar-graduates who opted for a career path after graduation presented a different lens into post-secondary choices based on personal or professional experiences. Keeping in mind the limitations that may have arisen based on narrow research questions and a small sample size, it was my intent to interview those black male scholar-graduates who were not only familiar with the failures faced by their peers on the secondary level, but those who can attest to the services needed to assist with success in low-achieving, urban school settings.
As Black male student-scholars who graduated from an educational system historically designed as discriminatory and with manifestations of racism – both implicit and explicit – the use of qualitative research and the voice of the study participants offered stories of positive student achievement and successful outcomes. According to Giorgi (1997) phenomenology is the lived experiences that belong to a single person. By capturing the individual’s experience through a phenomenological lens, the researcher is required to “eliminate everything that represents a prejudgment or presupposition” (Moustakas, 1994, p.27). This approach gave me the freedom to explore the experiences of these young men through their eyes and words.

**Participant Selection and Recruitment**

Twenty-two members of the first graduating class of the Urban Assembly Academy of History and Citizenship in 2008 were contacted to serve as study participants. The remaining fifteen were unreachable through social media outlets. Out of the twenty-two solicited participants, thirteen initially responded and agreed to participate. As time drew near to conduct the interviews, two participants decided that they did not feel comfortable sharing, and five never followed up to schedule an interview after initial contact and a second request to participate. According to Crewell (2012), it is important to have participants that are comfortable with sharing ideas and are not hesitant to speak. Since the school closed in 2014, I only wanted to interview the first graduating class representatives because they witnessed and experienced the school’s growth and development from its conception. They also represented the highest graduating class statistics and their experience as the first attendees and graduates of this school were relevant to my research. Therefore, the six study participants were selected to participate in the study on a voluntary, non-restrictive basis.
Initial contact of recipients took place via searches on social media sites to establish identity. Participants were recruited through social media outlets such as Facebook and LinkedIn, and through social groups such as Instagram and Twitter, where former students who attended and graduated from UAAHC have been actively engaged. The initial contact served as a brief overview of the research study and to stimulate interest. Then through a personal email requesting participation in the research study, participants were sent a targeted email specifically asking for consent to be used as a research subject.

Having served as proposal writer and founding teacher of Urban Assembly Academy of History and Citizenship for Young Men, I had previously developed relationships with former graduates through Facebook and other social media platforms (Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn) post-graduation. Additionally, I served as a former Advisory facilitator for some of the participants being recruited, so not only had an academic relationship developed while in school, but as adults, a more sociable and confidential interaction was developed post high school graduation. Once recruited, this researcher established interview dates to conduct face-to-face video interviews. The video conferencing application Skype was utilized as an interview medium based on participant accessibility and computer compatibility.

**Data Collection and Storage**

The time commitment for interviews with participants ranged between 60 - 120 minutes. Initially, each participant agreed to participate in two interviews, if necessary, but since significant data was obtained during the initial interview, a second round was unnecessary. After securing approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) in accordance with the local requirements, audio recorded data was collected and transcribed for this study. All interviews took
place to record responses to semi-structured, open-ended questions, since both the researcher and the research subjects had to work together to collaborate on this dialogic relationship. All participant interviews were audio recorded and took place via Skype due to the participants’ accessibility, computer compatibility, and preference based on their schedules. School transcripts, standardized test scores and grade point averages were not be collected, as participants provided a self-report of their experiences in the identified single-sex school, and how those experiences helped shape their individual decision to pursue higher education, a selected career path or otherwise.

Since interviews were conducted via electronic application, storage of the transcript was digitally recorded and stored on my home computer that was password protected. Interviews were then labelled using the participant’s chosen pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. The voice recordings were then uploaded and electronically transcribed via Rev.com, a confidential transcription service used for professional purposes. Additionally, copious notes were taken during each interview to be sure I recorded gestures, emotions and facial expressions to add to the commentary of each interview.

Data Analysis and Coding

First and foremost, participants’ narratives were presented individually for this researcher to be provided with the “story” of each individual as they communicated that story in response to each interview question. Major events and perspectives regarding each participants’ experience in school and their life after, in relationship to how they perceive their school experience was also considered during the analysis process. The use of narrative coding was essential in this
process, as it provided a more personal experience with each individual participant (Saldana, 2013).

After the presentation of each participant’s “life story,” as they portrayed it to me, all of the interview transcripts were carefully analyzed through first and second cycle coding with the intent of identifying common and discrepant themes from across the interviewees. A full immersion into the data began to take place, as I poured through the various notes and responses of each participant, reading through each transcript keenly. I used various methods of extracting key data by highlighting chunks of responses and color coding those responses to match emotions and gestures that emanated when a question was posed.

First cycle coding consisted of a combination of Descriptive and In Vivo coding, which helped to provide an inventory of different themes and experiences that were shared by the participants. Coding is an effective method that investigates common themes pertaining to an identified group of participant’s emotions, values, conflicts, and other subjective qualities of the human experience (Saldana, 2013). As noted in Saldaña (2013), first cycle coding is used to initially summarize segments of data, while second cycle, or pattern coding, is a way of grouping these segments into small categories or themes. Through an iterative process of initial first cycle and then second cycle coding, I was able to not only condense the amount of data into more manageable pieces, but it provided assistance with identifying a small set of common, recurring themes. This process of coding will assist the researcher in identifying common themes in direct response to the research questions (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 86).

As described by Saldana (2013) in The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers, “Qualitative codes are essence-capturing and essential elements of the research story, that, when
clustered together according to similarity and regularity (a pattern), they actively facilitate the development of categories and thus analysis of their connections” (p. 8). Using this as a guide, the first and second cycle process that was utilized allowed for the data analysis to occur during coding.

**Trustworthiness**

Creswell (2013) presents various validation strategies that can be used by qualitative researchers when assessing the accuracy of findings and establishing credibility. For example, participants should be given the opportunity to fact-check and/or make changes to transcripts for clarification in order to maintain accuracy and authenticity. Creswell (2007) and Moustakas (1994) suggest allowing research participants the opportunity to read the transcription of their interview upon its completion, giving the participants the opportunity to clarify their responses. Each participant was given the opportunity to review their transcript to eliminate any discrepancies.

Since the nature of qualitative research tends to be subjective, it is often criticized for its absence of traditional validation and verification methods. Conducting qualitative research in an area in which the researcher is familiar raises several issues and ethical consideration (Creswell, 2007). For example, my knowledge of the urban public education system and experience working with Black and Latino males in a single-sex setting allowed me to gain the trust of the participants in the study. To gain the trust of the participants and their willingness to support the research, the purpose of the study was explained before and during the data collection process. Embedded in qualitative research are the concepts of relationships and power between researchers and participants. The desire to participate in a research study depends upon a partici-
pant’s willingness to share his or her experience. Each of the six participants were willing to participate in the study not only for informational purposes, but to be able to share their stories with an audience that may have never entertained the idea of validating their experiences in their high school environment. Patton (1990) recommends full disclosure of the purpose of the study when conducting participant interviews and observations.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

As established in the recruitment process above, a series of protocols were implemented to protect the identity and confidentiality of the subjects. Prior to the interviews, participants were given an overview of the research study and given the opportunity to understand the purpose, risks, benefits, and overall goal of the research. Consent was obtained from all subjects before any data was collected. Participants were also given the opportunity to opt-out of the study at any time, as well as informed about any incentives for participating. No participants selected to opt-out or had any questions or concerns about their role or my role in the research study. Since the participants and I had previously established relationships during their years in high school, they did not feel pressure or discomfort in sharing their experiences and stories.

I ensured the participants that I would be the only one to have access to the interview responses and materials, and that the data would be stored on my personal computer. Anonymity was maintained through the use of pseudonyms that each participant selected and descriptors to ensure confidentiality (Creswell, 2007).
Chapter IV: Summary of the Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of six Black male students who attended and graduated from an all-male, urban high school in the Northeast. This chapter will present the data compiled by the researcher during the study. An introduction to the purpose of the research study will then be followed by a description of the interview protocol used for participants. The researcher will then provide a brief narrative that will build on the organization of information, informing theories, and analysis of data. The data was key in the compilation of information needed to unveil the various factors that presented themselves as positive motivation for the Black male scholars interviewed for graduation at the end of their four years in the all-male, urban high school of this study.

This study was conducted and developed using Narrative Inquiry as the research methodology in order to examine the contributing factors that led to the academic success of Black males who graduated from a single-sex, urban public high school focusing on character development, cultural identity, and the development of civic and community responsibility. In addition, the research also set out to expose the residual effects these experiences have had on their post-secondary academic and personal pursuits. First year graduates were interviewed once for over an hour, allowing the researcher to interpret meaningful patterns and themes that were uncovered during and after each interview by utilizing each participant’s shared experience. The following research questions served as the guiding force in the evolution of this study and the data analysis that follows:
1. What do graduating students from an urban single-sex high school with a focus on developing their students' "strong sense of their African heritage, brotherhood, and civic responsibility" attribute to their successful graduation from the school?

2. How do graduating students of an urban single-sex high school with a focus on developing their students' "strong sense of their African heritage, brotherhood, and civic responsibility" perceive their experience as having impacted their identity, subsequent educational decisions, and lives after graduation?

**Context**

The carefully crafted profiles showcased here are the result of responses received during interviews with each individual who spoke to the various influences and “takeaways” at a single-sex urban high school focused on educating and developing young men of exemplary character poised for academic success. Each participant expressed a sense of hesitation, doubt and uncertainty when they first enrolled in the single-sex school requiring a dress code and an environment that was non-traditional. However, as their individual stories unfolded, each interview revealed a mature, well-spoken young man who stated that they truly benefited from the overall experience. They cited teachers who exposed them to a learning experience that they had never experienced before - an opportunity to think independently, discover more about their culture and the positive male images that are rarely portrayed in their communities - and the need to have a meaningful presence in the lives of their children, families and their communities and citizens beyond their neighborhood. The researcher believes that the pressure most young Black and Latino males face in urban areas force them to build an attitude of ignorance in and out of the schools in their communities. The gentlemen that participated in this study were exposed to four years of bond-
ing with male teachers and faculty members, daily practices of self-respect and of others in a nurturing environment and opportunities to succeed in some of the most adverse situations where those “attitudes” were dismissed and redirected to a culture of “brotherhood” and community.

With each interview conducted, it was this researcher’s intent to identify and examine the structural interventions that led to the academic success and personal development of six Black first year graduates of an all-male, urban high school whose mission was to “nurture, educate, and graduate young men who are civic-minded, critical thinkers, skillful problem solvers, and of exemplary character” (original school pamphlet).

The Young Men

Below I present a brief vignette of each young man who participated in the study. Then below I present a thematic analysis of key themes from across the six men in relationship to each research question.

George: Moving from boys to men. George was one of the most shy and humble young men I interviewed. He is a father of two and not afraid to share how his high school experience ultimately shaped the man he is today. The 26 year old openly shared how he and his peers “matured and grew because of [the all-male high school]; it was an amazing school.” Even though George did not graduate from college, he attended a four-year college straight out of high school. He says he ultimately decided to leave after two years because “it wasn’t fun for [him] anymore.” With only one and a half more years to go before attaining his Bachelor’s degree, George says his high school experience is what gave him the most fulfilling educational experience. As he shared his story, I watched his shoulders broaden when he spoke of how the school
helped him to be more independent and to “carry himself with confidence.” It was a school that “was made to help us transition from boys to men.”

When George’s mother decided he should attend the all-male school high school, he questioned her decision by asking, “how was an all-male school going to give [him] what [he] needed?” Once he saw the other guys adhering to the “dress code,” it all became “weird,” but he eventually fit in. Always the low-key one in class it was hard for him to start conversations with his peers, but he was a star on the basketball court. It helped him make friends. He admits to not thinking he would like the all-male setting at first, but “seeing other males not having a problem with it [the dress code, also].” All of the experiences helped him “grow as a person” and want to interact with others.

Academically, George has always been “stronger” than his peers. He graduated Salutatorian and credits the school…the teachers and faculty, as well as his peers…for the chance to shine. George states that “teachers were more like family” and they are still around for him and his peers. The experiences outside of the school such as college tours and football games, and the Million Man March in Washington definitely prepared him and helped him change how he carries himself to this day.

Richard: Umoja means unity and unity means Brotherhood. At 27 years old, Richard has been through more than the average 40 year old. Growing up in a single-parent household with a mother who worked a menial job to make ends meet, Richard was often left to do things on his own. So when he speaks of learning how to “tie a tie” and seeing professional Black and Latino men at the frequent school assemblies, he speaks of understanding that “everything was for a purpose.” He listened to the guests when they spoke to the class and saw that “minorities
like us” could actually make it. The school pushed him to stay active in the community and do the opposite of what the guys he used to hang out with would do - get out of the city and learn something new. Even though Richard attended a community college not far from home right after graduation, he left after a semester since his mom was sad and depressed because of his absence. He stressed that this was his one regret - leaving school; “I never should have left,” he says with a heavy sigh. Eventually he enrolled in another school closer to home but admits to not knowing what he wanted to do, that was until he went into the criminal justice program at his university and became an auxiliary officer. This was his way of taking care of the community like the teachers at his high school took the time out to take care of him and his peers. They wanted to “see us succeed” and he sits back comfortably in his chair as he fondly remembers those early days of high school.

Things didn’t work out with college because he got into a legal situation - “a mistake” - yet, he still holds true to looking out for his brothers in the community by helping friends out with jobs and taking them out of the city. The battle between his reality of eventually becoming a father and helping his mother out manifested itself in a way where he is still dealing with the “aftermath.” The setback never tainted his dreams because his fondest memories of high school and the bonds that were built with the teachers and faculty who were “honest,” dedicated and who took their “personal time” to keep him and his peers on track help him stay focused on being a better man. “You’re supposed to better yourself, try to educate yourself to make an impact on somebody else’s life,” he says firmly. He credits the school with showing him the way to impact others and open their eyes to the rest of the world.
**Erik: Preserving the legacy.** One of the most vivid and in-depth interviews was with Erik, a 27-year-old father of two and faithful preserver of the urban public all-male high school’s legacy. Growing up with both mother and father having a strong influence on his educational decisions and how he carried himself, the initial days of school in the all-male setting were uncertain, but he remained. His undying loyalty to the school is evident in his immediate reflection of the various experiences he and his fellow classmates encountered - the college trips, advisory groups, music class, etc. He said he never thought he would be getting “college-ready” in Freshman year. Being able to explore music and make a CD as a class wasn't in his wildest dreams. With a half-grin, Erik states, “we had lots of freedom” and were able to explore who they were by teachers and a faculty that taught them to “learn different ways to do things.” He recalls everyone being a “family,” especially in the beginning; they moved as cohorts named after historically black colleges and universities (Hampton, Morgan, Tuskegee and Morehouse). While taking the same classes together and the experience of being in an all-male environment they were able to focus on themselves and classwork. The opportunity to have “open speech” in classes helped them navigate their way through manhood with the many Black and Latino males they saw on a daily basis. Having teachers and faculty that “made [us] think everyday” and challenged them to do something new everyday was an experience he was not familiar with. At the school scholars were able to learn about themselves “through [our] ancestors; within a community.”

Erik recounts the many activities and programs that were offered to scholars in the first class, but did not continue throughout his four years. “We ALWAYS did something” he says while reflecting on the culture of the school. The school was housed in a building with other
smaller theme-based schools, but Erik feels his high school was the most unique because other schools didn't have “family feasts,” Exit Projects, drumming to signal a change of classes, or a “Scholar’s Ball” (the end of year “celebration” where families came together to honor the accomplishments of the young men). Throughout our interview he often reminisced about the “beginning” - when the “foundation was laid” - and the many ways he and some of his peers made it “their own.” The core staff built relationships with the first class that can never be replaced and he feels those moments will stick with him and his “brothers” the rest of their lives. He was so dedicated to the school and what it stood for, that he often volunteered at high school fairs and open houses throughout the city.

The most profound statements Erik made were when we discussed how the mission and focus of the school went “rogue” after the 3rd group of incoming freshman. With the initial mission being chiseled away with each new class, cohorts were eliminated because administrative changes caused a “shift” in the foundation. Erik believes those changes were things that could have been fixed, and maybe those were “positive” mistakes instead of negatives. Taking away advisory class prevented them from just having someone to share what they were experiencing at home. He makes it clear that if he had not learned certain things at the all-male high school, he would not be the man he is today. He humbly shared that none of his high school experiences left him, even with the support and guidance from his parents, the unique school experiences exposed him to knowledge that he now passes down to his own daughters, and that in itself is an opportunity that many of his friends will never be able to understand.
Marcelo the Great. A self-proclaimed scholar and hard worker, Marcelo explains how he came about arriving at the high school with candor and reverence. Coming from private and parochial school environments for his early grades, Marcelo enrolled in the all-male high school after he was denied acceptance to a few specialized high schools in New York City. Since his grades were mediocre and his choices were limited, his mother decided that it would be the best fit for him. He was not excited about the whole dress code and “culturing of young African American men” mission of the school, but once he was in school he says it didn’t take long before the school “started to influence” him. Early conversations with administration helped to show support of the scholars and explain just what the school intended to do with the young men of color. He learned that their goal was to care for and nurture in a way other schools wouldn’t, to coach and uplift, to instill a “sense of pride” so that the cycle of being broken is eliminated. Marcelo recalls one administrator telling him, “you’re the key and it starts with you.” That was the beginning of the change in his opinion and his development into the man he is today.

The charismatic 26 year old shows deep gratitude and “appreciation for the staff and faculty” that helped him develop strong work habits, how to treat people, and who showed him and his peers how they must do things differently in their community than what they were accustomed to seeing. According to Marcelo, the educational component of the school’s curriculum was wrapped around so many other things - the Million Man March, Saturday school, college trips, and candid conversations with the Black male administrators and staff that he became attached to throughout the years. One administrator had a talk with him in his junior year that he says was a wakeup call. He had been blessed with a “natural talent” that could easily be a disservice to him if he didn’t check his behavior and apply himself because the way he just “skated
by” getting good grades would be his downfall. He recalls not really listening to him then, but years later the words resonated, playing in his head over and over as he moved through adulthood.

Marcelo points out that he was not like many of his peers in that he travelled more, he kept his grades up, and he saw the initial vision of the school being chipped away by teachers who eventually changes the landscape of the school and became part of ”the family.” He knew there were teachers who “genuinely cared” and then there were others who “couldn’t relate”; teachers who were willing to “sacrifice” their time and personal life in order to make sure they were reaching their scholars; and teachers who were going to teach the same lesson to the ‘A’ student as they did with the ‘F’ student. He now understands the value of learning about history and culture, because no matter how “nasty our history may be,” it is the “good part of our history” that the school wanted them to know so that they were prepared to be the change agents of the future.

**Marley: All Black Everything.** After being “bored with school” most of the time in middle school, 26 year old Marley was ready to be around other young men that looked like him while learning more about his history and culture. He recalls the brand new high school’s orientation meeting where the faculty announced that the freshman class would be going on “college trips to historically black colleges and universities” - this is what got him hooked and got his mother’s attention. Most of the schools he previously attended were predominately white, so being in a place where he could be surrounded by “well-educated Black men” that he and his fellow classmates could look up to made sense. He knew early on that those schools were “not necessarily designed” for people of color. The dress code of the school was another “change of
pace” Marley faced. In retrospect, he says it “built character” and it would eventually benefit him in the long run - dressing up every day wearing a button up shirt and tie - plays a part in his everyday appearance as an adult. He looked forward to the exchanges with some of his teachers because in his words, “they always looked out for the students no matter what.” He continues to say that the staff was reliable and around when the scholars “needed some assistance” and they were “good hearted individuals” who were generally looking out for their students. That was so rare for most students in other schools, so it was an aspect of the high school that personally stood out to him. These teachers were “just doing their job,” but it just happened that they did “extra stuff” without recognition or acknowledgement so that is something he remembers and holds true to his heart.

The sense of community and brotherhood that the high school was founded on was a part of their everyday routine. He notes that schools in urban areas don’t really “encourage black males to be responsible” for each other and for their community. The school’s mission was to “culturally enlighten the youth” and their focus of creating opportunities for “brothers to know where they came from and where they should be going” as to not fit the status quo, was something Marley and most of his peers were conscious of. The faith he had in the school early on slowly dwindled away during the years because of a “weak curriculum,” “watered down work,” and a selection of mediocre literature that was not challenging enough or appealing to the class. And even though he attended college straight out of high school, he feels the school “did not prepare” him enough for college. Coming from a highly educated family, he was influenced mostly by his family and he had high expectations for his college career. According to Marley,
his high school was not fully equipped to meet his needs post-graduation and since going to college was not an option, his initial dream to attend an HBCU failed to manifest itself into a reality.

**Jeptha: The heart of a warrior.** Malcolm X crossed my mind a few times while I sat and interviewed 28-year-old Jeptha about his experience at the urban all-male high school. He shares that the overall mission of the school spoke to him and his identity by targeting a certain demographic, unlike the specialized high school he originally applied to. Jeptha says he didn’t get support at home with the high school selection process so failing to prepare for the specialized high school exam led to his opting for enrollment in the school. When he saw the black, well-dressed male administrators of this all-male high school at an open house he felt a “familial” pull and immediately enrolled. Being raised by his mom, he never had a father in the home so being exposed to another version of what “black males are supposed to look like,” he knew the school was just for him. The coursework that was presented to the freshman class were “life changing experiences” for him. He excitedly explains how the music industry course where his class was able to create a CD was his first example of “sharpening the sword” because of the mental stimulation it expelled; it was creatively driven and he posits that it was “crucial” to him finding himself.

The non-traditional school setting with teachers and faculty that felt like family was a place where Jeptha reflects back on as an environment that “meant the world” to him because he learned to be an independent critical thinker. He believes most would argue that the school didn't teach him anything, but they would be wrong because he knew it was a place where you got information to “pick up and fill in the blanks.” The overall experience was deeper than the “superficial history and citizenship” that most have traditionally learned. His firm stand on how Amer-
ica has taught black males to hate themselves is exactly what the school tried to dispel by teaching the scholars that they could change the trajectory of what was expected from them. The absence of women helped the scholars develop into WHO they were without trying to make an impression. The staff worked effortlessly to help them all reveal their “potential” while “teasing out the positive.” Jeptha knows the work was purposeful and intentional, therefore the work that he is doing today is a testimony to what he encountered during his four years at the all-male school.

He went to college immediately after graduating and then dropped out to pursue other interests and traveled a bit. That’s when he got into some legal trouble and served time in prison. Once released from prison he got back on track and started a “life shift” by participating in an array of programs and initiatives designed to build up the community and young men of color. Jeptha says things would be different - “for the worse” - if he had not attended the uniquely designed school. In a sense, the school saved him and enlightened him all at once.

**Thematic Analysis**

The following analysis is a direct reflection of each interview held with participants who described their experiences in an all-male high school that was centered around culture, identity and character development. A relationship between the two research questions and compelling emerged through the transcripts and a presentation of the following themes are discussed below:

1. A Family-like Environment with Caring and Relatable Teachers who encouraged their critical thinking;
2. Exposure to History and Culture in order to build a Brotherhood of Young Men who were Respectful and Proud of their heritage;
3. An introduction to College Life - life beyond high school as it relates to their Community Awareness and Responsibility; and
4. How all of
the experiences impacted their Adult Life. The two research questions that launched the emergence of the following main themes with this research study are as follows:

**Research Question 1:** What do graduating students from an urban single-sex high school with a focus on developing their students' "strong sense of their African heritage, brotherhood, and civic responsibility" attribute to their successful graduation from the school? This researcher poured through the transcripts to identify relationships between the research question and the participant responses. The four common themes that emerged can be seen in Table A, and are discussed below.
Table 1

*The Four Common Themes Identified in Relationship to Research Question 1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A family-like environment – For most of the participants, the perspective of a “normal” family life at home was non-existent, but in school they were nurtured by adults who fed them, had their best interest at heart and treated them as family members.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers and administrators that cared, were relatable and looked like them – Their high school experience was the first time many of them had seen men and women of color as role models, let alone teachers and administrators who cared about their overall well-being.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A culture of brotherhood and unity – These young men were placed in an environment of their true peers and they were groomed to look out for each other and move together as a cohort of brothers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-pride and a cultural knowledge – The expectations of society on young men of color chiseled away at the pride these scholars organically had for themselves over the years, yet through cultural experiences at the school, they were able to re-evaluate and equate their value to the rest of the world.</td>
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*Family-like environment.* The participants in the study attributed one of the aspects of their high school experience that played a part in their academic success as being in a “family-like environment.” Concerned adults and “brothers” who nurtured them and events that celebrated the village, were important factors which assured each scholar that their best interest was at heart and there was a team of staff who were always going to be in their corner. With some classmates coming from varying home lives and family structures, the solid “village” and culture of the school served as a safe place to learn and mature with support. The subjects stated that this particular environment resulted in an increased desire to excel academically, reminded them of honoring the “family” and becoming a “unit.”
George’s greatest advocate was his mother who had a major influence on his demeanor and work ethic. He had no idea that his high school would offer him the same support and serve as a village during the four years he was in the school. He said that as time went on he knew “there were adults who cared about your well-being, who were gonna push you, who were like family that you could turn to.” His mom was a single parent raising him and his twin sister, so the family bond was close. Never realizing that a school, let alone a high school would be staffed with all people of color that would make you feel the same about you as their own flesh and blood, George said he was comfortable and safe where “you knew that there were people in your corner besides mommy.” He affirmed, “Teachers didn’t seem like teachers, they were more like family. At another school the teachers would not have those relationships. And the teachers are still there for you, no matter what.”

Marcelo echoed the same sentiment and found joy in saying that it was “hard to confine” the school to just “one word or sentence.” He characterized the school as “a family; very much a village.” That concept of family is one he could closely relate to. Growing up with seven siblings and being raised by strict adoptive parent, Marcelo received support from a big family and knew that the type of setting the young men were in was one that was “needed for raising kids” and that is what the staff was to many of the young men in the school. He was a product of private and parochial schools where the education was up to par, but the relationships and closeness were absent.

Erik revealed in his interview that he felt being in the first graduating class was like having an elite position. Since he attended traditional schools where fellow students and teachers “barely knew you,” it was important to be in an environment with other young men who “fought
and argued but could always come back at the end of the day to break bread.” Marley’s interview revealed the same sentiment about him and his fellow classmates being a “unit that was more of a tight, close knit community.” Richard’s mother worked often to make ends meet so at times he was left to care for himself, which also led to a lot of freedom and independence. Attending this high school left him with other adults to check in on him and being involved enough to “know our habits and everything.” At first he thought it was crazy but everyone “got to know each other on a personal level.” Spending four years with teachers and staff who were more than just concerned about whether or not homework was done was important to these young men. It let them know that it was safe to come to school and they would be nurtured and cared for by a “family” that was not biologically their own.

**Caring teachers and administrators of color.** Each participant that was interviewed expressed how being taught by educators who looked like them and showed unconditional care and concern, were crucial factors in their academic success. Many of the participants had not experienced having a teacher of color in grades K-8. Additionally, for many of the scholars, this high school experience was the first time being taught by a Black man, Black woman, or having one or more Black administrators. Each participant highlighted below, indicated how having direct access to Black male teachers and administrators on a daily basis provided a positive impact on their overall academic and professional success.

Jeptha was raised by a loving and affectionate mother who was unable to assist him in his high school pursuits, so he followed his friends and mimicked what they did. He didn’t grow up with a father and most of his family is a product of the war on drugs. He was always pushed to go to school but that was mostly it. He explained:
I pretty much had to orchestrate my whole trajectory up to this point. They gave me what they had in their tool belt, but that was basically it. There wasn’t that attention to detail internally. They made me look for the answers.

Jeptha also stated the school provided “a more substantive experience from the teachers - educationally, affectionately, just everything.” Expressing that the level of understanding he was met with and the encouragement that was received was because the teachers and staff “looked like us; they were able to see the potential in our “flaws.” Essentially, they could relate because they connected for various reasons, but mainly because they were “black like me.”

Like his other classmates that were interviewed, Richard explained how “it was a totally new learning experience, to be honest. I remember going to school and teachers wouldn’t really care.” He shared that his junior high teachers cared a little bit, but when he started getting attention from the staff and teachers at his high school they had another approach, “they actually wanted to see progress and success, and they actually took the time out and stop and tell you.” Those interactions made all the difference in the overall experience.

Marcelo’s transcripts revealed the entire essence of why being taught by caring teachers and having administrators of color was crucial. His explanation is honest, yet poignantly justified. An he shared:

I questioned whether the white teachers in my private school cared. Many teachers took a lot of kids under their wing. I felt like you guys were doing God’s work; you guys were attending to the kids that were focused on the wrong things and we related to you guys because we knew you cared. We knew why you cared as well.
A 2016 report released by the Education Department unveiled statistics that showed extreme disproportionality between teachers in American public schools with 82% white; 8% Hispanic; 7% Black, and only 2% of that being Black males (Department of Education, July 2016). Arguably, the need for more Black male teachers is evident and crucial to the academic success and personal development of young men of color.

**Black history and cultural knowledge.** The participants highlighted below expressed how learning about the history and culture associated with being a Black (and Latino) male in America perpetuated a negative image of them and their academic success in society. Marcelo made clear the school’s impact of history and culture on his classmates. He firmly believed that the educating of African-American and Latino men of color to their history, culture and academia was a “raising, bonding and building up of a family of young men that understood their value.” It allowed them to understand the impact that those negative portrayals have played in the systemic failures of young men of color and how the school’s mission aimed to change that. It was important that they weren’t judged and were given a little more TLC just because of the families they came from. Marcelo affirmed that most schools just don’t do that. He states, “The school was like, I can relate to you, this is who you are as an African-American man, historically.”

Marley, Erik, Richard and Jeptha all concur with Marcelo through their individual transcripts. They believe that the school’s overall mission of educating young men of color about manhood and Black history were significant to how they developed and matured, as well as who they are today. Marley’s perspective shows that the school was spot on with culturally enlightening the young men just by allowing them to “know where they came from and where they should
be going.” Erik felt that the entire culture of the school was different because “other schools in the building weren’t doing that.”

Richard’s take on the importance of the history and culture component was that it gave the students a sense of where they came from and where they were going, and in his neighborhood guys that looked like him weren’t going anywhere. They were indirect influences on each other. He wanted to shift the path that he and many of his peers were predestined to take according to history. Learning that those who are selling drugs, working minimum wage jobs and shooting rivals is not normal and does not have to be one’s future. He praises the school for showing him and his fellow classmates a better way by “owning a business, educating yourself and making a positive impact on somebody else’s life.” He sums it up by stating:

The school showed us that we really have to be two steps, three steps ahead of a lot of people to be able to achieve something better in life. As [Black and Latino men] we got to prove ourselves double, triple, and that was something that helped me build my character.

Each interview revealed a different perspective of the same mission and overall objective, yet they all managed to benefit in the end. By experiencing Black history and culture every day in school compared to what society perpetuated and their communities portrayed, each participant firmly believed that their overall appreciation of who they were changed the way others viewed them.

**Research Question 2: How do graduating students of an urban single-sex high school with a focus on developing their students' "strong sense of their African heritage, brotherhood, and civic responsibility" perceive their experience as having impacted their**
identity, subsequent educational decisions, and lives after graduation? This researcher poured through the transcripts to identify relationships between the research question and the participant responses. The four common themes that emerged can be seen in Table 2, and are discussed below.
Identity and self-respect. All six participants stated that the experiences shared between the school and the student body influenced the way they conducted themselves throughout the years. The participants attested to how being exposed to successful Black males introduced them to a greater sense of respect and self-worth. Each one highlighted a particular event or experience that embraced the male identity and the development of Black men in America. From learning how to tie a tie to following a dress code of button-down shirts, pants and shoes, these participants explained how being professional and having manners were key to respecting themselves so others would follow.

Richard did not grow up with a father figure so going to an all-male school gave him the opportunity to learn “self-love” from other males who looked like him. Experiencing daily ac-
tivities with other males allowed him to begin seeing himself as a man. Marley is currently a salesman for a major retailer, so appearance is everything. He says having a professional appearance in high school on a daily basis has manifested itself into the man he is how he carries himself today. Jeptha’s interview revealed the dark truth of America’s treatment to men of color. He stated:

As far as identity and black manhood, America teaches us to hate ourselves. That was them teaching me to hate myself, so that's what I'm supposed to do. Yeah. That being said if I didn't have that knowledge of self… that's what the school taught us. They knew about systemic racism. You know what I mean? It influences how I learn and view the world today.

Initially, the school had the students (scholars, as they were called) move from class to class in cohorts named after historically black colleges and universities. The rationale was so they would be able to lean on each other and “look out” for one another. By having the same teachers and classes, relationships in “the village” were built. Erik recalls how by the third year the cohort model was non-existent. The then juniors would go to different classes but would be together at different times during the day. Even though they weren’t in the same class they were still able to mesh together and found ways to bring it all together. Many of the gentlemen from the first graduating class are still close today, participating in activities for their children or just male-bonding events. Marcelo was in a position in high school where he was still exploring his identity and did not project his sexual preferences to anyone. He expressed how much that love and care meant to his class:
The biggest thing I can say is you guys held us and cherished us so dearly and showed us so much love to make sure that we knew we were loved. So we grew some self-respect and so we started to act right and we started to be different because we now have self-respect and we now see that there's more out there for us. So we're paying attention to what we do here and now because there's more than just here and now.

**Varied cultural and community practices of the school.** For most of the young men interviewed, their high school experience was the first time being in an all-male environment with teachers and staff that were people of color. Each stated how the school placed high standards on being a positive image in their respective communities in order to understand their worth in society. Regular assemblies and visits from prominent men and women of color in politics, education and music were a main component of the cultural aspect of the school and it reinforced the belief that those young men could be anything they wanted to be.

Marley, Richard and Marcelo strongly expressed how the school pushed them to learn new things and stay active in the community. They knew the school was diligent in pushing all scholars far from the “status quo” of typical Black and Latino youth in society; every experience was strategically planned to show them how they could better themselves. These young men learned and became more conscious of the fact that there was more out there than just the corner and “nothing just revolves around the block.”

Marcelo puts it all into perspective when addressing cultural awareness:

Everyone in the school - the teachers and all - were like ‘this is the stuff I want you to know, however nasty our history may be, however glorious, this is the good part of our history I want you to know about. This is the stuff I want you to know and I want you to
understand that you are going to be the change. I want you to know all of this. I want you to be exposed to all of this. So I want you to know how important you are. I want you to take all this information, go out there and make change. Be the change.

*Exposure to college life experiences.* College was not on the radar for most of the participants interviewed when they began their high school years. A few of the young men stated how the trips to various colleges were something they looked forward to each year. From freshman year, it was regular practice for scholars to go on day and overnight trips to various colleges in the northeast and southeast. It was this type of exposure that sparked interest in college and all the possibilities higher education offered.

Almost every participant clearly stated that visiting historically black colleges and universities was not common practice in other schools, yet it was mandatory in their high school. Richard said he never thought about college until he attended the school. He stated that he was not planning on going to college before he went to high school and went on his first college trip to three HBCU’s. Those trips opened up a whole new world for him and his classmates. The college football games appealed to George from the beginning because as an athlete he was interested. His freshman year was the first time he ever experienced “college life.” Erik mentioned in his interview that his family spoke of colleges, but it was mainly the local colleges around them. “It wasn’t Hampton, or Morgan State, or Morehouse. It wasn’t those type of things so it wasn’t what I was expecting. I never knew there were all black historical colleges.”

It was this early exposure and conversations about college life that sparked an interest in many of the young men during their freshman year of high school. Ultimately, everyone interviewed enrolled in and attended college. One graduated from a four-year university, one
dropped out and re-enrolled in a four-year college after serving time in prison, and the other four attended a two-year college, but dropped out before obtaining an Associate’s degree. Out of those four, one has re-enrolled in a two-year college. Each one had a reason for not completing, but the main point they stressed is that they beat the status quo by graduating from high school, going to college and experiencing what many in society thought they never would achieve.

**Impact on adult life.** The high school was designed to help young men of color navigate their way through high school and be prepared for life after those four years. The staff and faculty changed throughout the years, but the foundation had been laid with the very first class - teachers and administrators of color, assemblies and events that celebrated Black (and Latino) manhood, courses designed to meet the needs of young men who would be viewed upon by society as failures, and the celebration of the “village.” These were all factors that culminated into the ultimate high school experience for Black (and Latino) males who would not always be catered to in public schools. Each participant featured below explains how attending this urban all-male public high school served as a major influence on their decision to go to college and the ultimate choices they have made as adults.

Richard, Jeptha, George and Erik explained how their overall high school experience was pivotal in their ultimate decision to attend college, “get out of the hood” and make something of themselves. Richard highlighted the assemblies as a major influence because it allowed him to “see minorities like us and people who actually made it.” Even though he did not finish college he credits the school for giving him something new to witness. He says,

> It was everything put together piece by piece that made that whole experience something new and fully different to me. To be honest, it changed the way I think of my
whole life to this date; the way I carry myself, the way I speak when I'm in front of certain people, everything.

Jeptha explained how the four years at the high school was “a life-changing experience for me.” A number of the courses were designed to cater to the growth and creative development of the young men. One course, in particular, was the music industry course where the young men were given the freedom to create music - from production to rapping, to designing CD covers. There were microphones, keyboards, etc. For Jeptha, this was an opportunity to create music and it was his favorite class because allowed many to sharpen their writing, speech and musical skills. As he put it:

So basically there was a physical component to the class in terms of sharpening [your] sword, so to speak. That warrior condition of the sword, it was mental stimulation and it was physical stimulation. That was my best experience. Everything I'm doing right now is a reflection of the experience of what that high school gave me. Granted, I feel like it was very non-traditional, which is to my liking, but you know the average person would be like, "They didn't teach you anything." It meant the world to me. You've got to pick up and fill in the blanks of what they gave you.

For George and Erik, the transition from boys to men that occurred during the four years was most crucial to them becoming the men they are today. Both attended two year colleges and never finished. Both have nothing but praise and think it was “an amazing school” because it exposed them to things they never knew. They matured and grew up. They learned to call each other “brother” and women “queen.” According to Erik, a foundation was laid with the first class that has stuck with them. They carry themselves a certain way, they speak to people re-
spectfully, they are kind and loving to the women in their lives. They both work directly with the public, so knowing how to address customers and carry themselves a certain way reflects what they learned in high school. Both have daughters and they are very involved in their lives.

Erik’s grandmother passed away while he was in college and he had a tough time recovering from her death. Unfortunately, the school did not prepare the young men for death of a loved one, but luckily Erik’s support system - his biological family and his school “brothers” - helped him get back on track. He credits his four years in high school as the best years of his life. They both shared the same sentiment in their interviews that the school changed a lot of people because they believe the original mission and vision of the school definitely happened.

Summary

Being taught by teachers who genuinely cared, in a family-like environment, having freedom and creativity in classes that were taught by people of color, and learning that surpassing the status quo of society’s expectations of what it means to be a Black male in America were all genuine factors in the academic successes of each participant interviewed. Despite encountering various obstacles relative to family structure, home life and overall adolescent development, every participant seemingly turned their unique high school experience into a positive, life-shifting journey. The common themes that emerged from the research revealed a haunting reality - public schools are failing young men of color and backsliding on their commitment and responsibility to adequately educate this group of citizens.
Chapter V: Discussion of the Findings

Revisiting the Problem

With respect to Black males, the outlook for academic success continues to remain bleak based on the data presented in the latest Schott Foundation (2015) Black Male Graduation Rates (p. 9). However, through the use of gender-based programs, culturally responsive educators, and school environments that allow for a creative curriculum and a commitment to Black male adolescent development, there is hope. The Schott Foundation revealed in their Black Lives Matter: 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males (Schott Foundation, 2015) that the estimated graduation rate for Black males in 2012-2013 was 59%. The majority of states with the highest Black male graduation rate are those with low enrollment of this demographic, according to the report. In other words, states such as Maine, Idaho, Arizona, South Dakota and New Jersey (p. 10, Table 1) have the least amount of Black males enrolled in schools which has resulted in higher graduation percentages. Three states in the Northeast (Connecticut, New York and Pennsylvania) have a 21 percent point gap between the graduation rate of Black males and White males (Schott Foundation, 2015, p. 9). In the Afterword of the 2015 Schott Foundation biennial report on public education and Black males, Pedro Noguera states that political, business and education leaders have given up on the under-education of Black males and have essentially disposed of it as a “Black problem” (Schott Foundation, 2015, p. 52). The failure to equitably educate young men of color is indeed an American epidemic. It is the researcher’s hope that inquiry into this systemic problem will unveil the hindrances and barriers these young men have encountered and continue to encounter, as well as possible solutions to increase the retention rate and graduation level of Black and Latino males from two and four-year colleges.
This study examined the contributing factors that led to the academic success of Black males who graduated from a single-sex, urban, public high school in the Northeast region of the United States, focusing on character development, cultural identity, and the development of civic and community responsibility. In addition, it was through their voices that the research set out to expose the residual effects these experiences have had on their post-secondary academic and personal pursuits - whether they chose a professional career or pursued a college education.

Six males served as the study participants, all former students and graduates of the same high school. Each participant was a first year graduate of the newly formed, all-male high school and either attended community college, four-year college or chose a career path post-graduation. Their participation in this qualitative, narrative study was significant in this research, as they were members of the first graduating class that represented the highest graduation rate in the school’s history. The research study was guided by the following questions:

1. What do graduating students from an urban single-sex high school with a focus on developing their students' "strong sense of their African heritage, brotherhood, and civic responsibility" attribute to their successful graduation from the school?

2. How do graduating students of an urban single-sex high school with a focus on developing their students' "strong sense of their African heritage, brotherhood, and civic responsibility" perceive their experience as having impacted their identity, subsequent educational decisions, and lives after graduation?

Discussion of Major Findings

Each of the six participant stories were closely reviewed and analyzed to reveal detailed themes outlined in Chapter IV. Some themes emerged more frequently, as they offered clear in-
dications for school systems when developing curriculum to meet the needs of Black males in urban school settings. Black males face a state of crisis due to consistently low performances on most standardized assessments and failure at the attainment of a college degree.

After an analysis of the transcripts and review of the themes in relation to each research question, four attributes of the school were identified across the interviewees as having made a significant impact on their experience while at the school and beyond. Those are presented below in Table C and discussed more fully below.

Table 3

*Identified Attributes of the School that had an Impact on the Interviewees while at the School and Beyond*

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Attribute</th>
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<tr>
<td>Being educated by people of color, mostly males, contributed to an increased self-confidence and view of positive people of color.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Being in an all-male setting allowed for bonds and relationships to be established with peers, as well as exposure to a community of leaders and role models.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of self through cultural experiences at school and in the curriculum provided a historical and cultural context to being a young Black male in America.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being in a family-like environment helped build a culture of academic success and provided a foundation for the importance of meaningful relationships.</td>
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**Being educated by people of color, mostly males contributed to an increased self-confidence and view of positive people of color.** Most participants shared that their high school experience was unique and most fulfilling because they were being taught and led by men and women of color, something they never experienced prior to their freshman year of high school. They had been accustomed to being taught by White teachers, mostly female, who they per-
ceived not to have as much interest in who they were and what was going on in their lives. Marcelo, for example, shared how his previous teachers who were White, “didn’t relate to us; I didn’t know if they cared.” Marley added how the presence of Black teachers was critical to his academic success because, “being surrounded by very well educated Black men all the time gave us someone to look up to.”

Other study participants proudly stated that having teachers who looked like them - same gender and race - was empowering and provided a major impact on their academic success and personal development. Richard attributed the dedication of staff and the commitment to excellence to his success. He recalled how staff would be honest and give perspectives on avoiding jail, researching for papers, becoming a man, having good hygiene, taking care of the physical and nutritional aspects of the body, etc; any and everything that could actually go right, and wrong, for a person of color; “it took a lot of dedication from the faculty members and what a lot of other people put in to get us to actually succeed.”

Most importantly, the researcher discovered the value and importance of the relationships that were developed between the scholars and their teachers. By being able to connect on a genuine, personal level, teachers were able to play a significant role in the academic success of each participant interviewed. Participants expressed how many of the relationships developed with teachers of color, particularly males, made them feel supported and cared for, and they aspired to be like the models they saw on a daily basis.

**Being in an all-male setting allowed for bonds and relationships to be established with peers, as well as exposure to a community of leaders and role models.** Numerous study participants revealed that they found the strong male bond in their school allowed them to expe-
rience growing up and maturing because of the unyielding connection between their peers and the men in the school. They all admitted to not wanting to attend the all-male school while several shared that their behavior would be considered rebellious. Richard explained how he was “a little bit hesitant on the first day because they had a lot of rules and procedures that I wasn’t really used to at that time. I couldn’t get the understanding of being in an all-male school.” He said he was resistant to the dress code and he did not look forward to school the first few months and “was really giving people a hard time.” Most of the participants coming from a single parent, female dominated household, were there because of what their mother wanted. Marley explained how not being around females “was the nail in the coffin for my mom.” He stated that his mother felt an all-Black, all-male high school would probably be the best educational opportunity for him.

Through the study’s student responses, it was discovered that most of the men interviewed did not have male figures at home, or that there was an absence of a strong male presence. Jeptha revealed how he was raised mainly by women and “didn’t see a lot of men growing up.” He continued to explain how he believed the world had more women than men but was presented with a different world at school. Erik addressed the frequent opportunity to “focus on ourselves, our classwork; [male teachers] would come into the classes sometimes, and we were able to talk about certain things that maybe some other places don’t get to talk about, because it’s not broken down…we was able to understand life as a male, life as a man”.

A great debate continues to exist when it comes to the effectiveness and need for gender-based schools. In the case of young, Black males, learning in an all-male environment allowed
them to be comfortable, freely express their emotions and escape the notions of society’s image of “the Black male”.

Knowledge of self through cultural experiences at school and in the curriculum provided a historical and cultural context to being a young Black male in America. Many of the participants felt the creative and non-traditional classes gave them a view of themselves and how the world viewed them; they made historical connections to manhood and had opportunities to discuss topics that were not normally addressed in "traditional" school settings. Jeptha, who discussed being incarcerated and how it breaks your self-image down, confirmed this misconception of Black manhood and their historical success. He stated, “You’re supposed to die in prison, even if you don’t die. That’s the way it’s designed, to snatch your soul. [Being in prison] really taught me to take pride in being a Black man”. He continued to share how his experience in a non-traditional music class gave him and his peers an opportunity to produce, market, engineer and perform original music that they created in class.

A major component in the overall academic achievement and success of African American male students is their self-perception and motivation to learn. Based on the majority of participant responses, a curriculum that promoted cultural identity and development effectively contributed to academic success and development. Erik shared how his friends in other schools were not “getting what [we] were getting”. Books like Down These Mean Streets (Thomas, 1997) and The Pact (Davis, Jenkins, Hunt & Page, 2002) gave students an opportunity to explore male writers of color. A trip to slave plantations not far from their school and watching a very tall classmate lie down in a slave ship to demonstrate the tight spaces slaves were forced into allowed them to relate literature to tangible, real-life, historical experiences. Participants also noted
that learning about their history, the negative stereotypes associated with the consciousness of Black males, and the successful achievements of their people, allowed them to surpass the negative and beat the status quo; it reversed the notion that Black is not smart.

The cultural competence of the school’s administrators and faculty was noted in each participant interview. Most of the participants recalled the “excellence” that they saw demonstrated by many of their teachers, during Saturday school, through guest speakers, and through school events, such as the Scholar’s Ball and the Rites of Passage ceremonies. These were events that celebrated the accomplishments of scholars during the school year and the transition from each grade level; each event represented a move from “boyhood to manhood”, according to George. Therefore, developing a curriculum that spoke to young Black men came with ease. Each participant divulged how the school’s transition of classes was signaled by the sound of an African drum played by one of the male administrators. There were times when guests would visit and either participate in the drumming or speak to classes of the young men on a range of topics from manhood, hip-hop music, politics or simply growing up in “the hood”.

**Being in a family-like environment helped build a culture of academic success and provided a foundation for the importance of meaningful relationships.** Most of the participants noted that this model was most beneficial to their growth and development because they were surrounded by teachers and administrators who cared about them as people. Further, participants saw their school as a safe zone. The relationships built during those four years continue today, with former teachers, staff and classmates remaining in contact. Many urban school systems tend to operate uniquely in culture, climate and instructional practices. Most of the participants indicated that the school setting became more of a family environment where everyone
motivated each other, collaborated with and worked through issues together. Richard recalled an event that occurred when a teacher was arrested for defending students against the cops. The gang presence in and around the school was evident on a daily basis and at times, there was a heavy police presence. One teacher put himself on the line by defending a student who was being harassed by the police. Richard said he had “never seen no school, no teachers, no principal in my lifetime so helpful for somebody like that. We all ended up going to court for him and everything.” These are the types of issues and concerns that a family will bond and unite for; they were concerned and showed unified support during a challenging time for a teacher and the school.

Urban school districts have a tendency to hire later than wealthy suburban districts because of a lack of attraction to teachers and fewer resources available to thoroughly evaluate incoming teachers (Eckert, 2013). Many times there are teachers in classrooms that do not understand the culture of the school or the needs of the students. Based on responses from several of the participants, the school tried to ensure, especially in the beginning, that classrooms and support services positions were filled by as many people of color as possible. The growth of the school and the change in organizational structures created another experience during the third year. Younger, White, more inexperienced teachers who were “disconnected”, “distracted” or “were added because the number of students increased”, took away from the overall experience for such a uniquely designed school.

Marcelo excitedly shared the benefits of being in his high school and yet, is saddened by the fact that it closed its doors. He shared, “no one else will be able to experience what I did because someone else is going to need it. It would save somebody, somebody’s kids, future father.
It was a huge resource.” So whether staff was feeding those scholars who did not have breakfast or lunch, making the extra time after school to go over homework, or creating environments that were safe to learn, participate and develop, each participant gained something valuable from the connections made during their high school years. They were part of a unit, a family structure that showed love, support and care for a population that needed it most.

**Summary.** Overall, each participant indicated how their academic and personal success was nurtured by a caring faculty and staff of individuals who mirrored their physical and cultural images, as well as made them feel as though they belonged to a family. The relationships and connections established during their four years in high school with other young men that carried the same burdens and stigmas was diminished through the use of a carefully crafted curriculum designed to highlight the positive history of the Black man. Each participant made reference to just how critical positive images of people of color - males, in particular - can lead to academic and personal success beyond high school.

**Relating the Findings to the Theoretical Framework**

**Social Identity Theory.** Social Identity Theory provides a foundation for understanding the development of self-esteem and how the cognitive and non-cognitive behaviors of individuals connect to their membership within their particular ethnic group. Tajfel and Turner developed Social Identity Theory in 1979 (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and posited that SIT helps explain intergroup behaviors; it is a source of understanding one’s own sense of identity in and belonging to the social world. In 1988, Hoggs and Abrams expanded the theory and argued that the group(s) an individual belongs to can serve as a significant source of self-esteem and pride. This
self-concept can either create positive or negative self-image that amplifies the status of the individual.

Each of the participants interviewed shared their single story and how it was developed based on the experiences of attending an urban, single-sex, culturally responsive high school with dedicated teachers and staff. For example, when Marcelo spoke about the way teachers would not let scholars sit in the back of class and not participate. He felt the teachers were “going to get you together” because everyone looked alike and everyone was expected to do well, not just the kids who were “good students” and doing well. The mission of the school was to show the achievements each young man could accomplish regardless of what they were facing each day in their communities, at home, and based on society’s image and expectations of them.

Jeptha explained how effective the school was by cleverly presenting historical and cultural information in a vague manner, most time forcing the scholars to figure things out on their own based on the experiences faculty and staff provided. Each assembly that featured a Black man or woman who defied the odds or a trip to a historically black college or university, served as a link that would contradict the identifications of Black men and Black culture.

McLeod (2008) expanded the concept of SIT by assessing that it utilizes three mental analysis and comprehension processes: social categorization, social identification and social comparison. According to McLeod (2008) social categorization will help an individual identify one’s self, which will eventually lead to social identification. Social identification aids in the identification of individual characteristics, as it explains how an individual acts, thinks and conforms to his or her associated group. This was evident in almost all of the participant interviews, as each one revealed how they have incorporated facets of their high school experiences into
their adult lives. One example of this is how George credits the school for transforming Black boys to men. He spoke of the confidence the school instilled in him and his peers, and the impact it has had on him to carry himself a certain way - with pride and independence. Erik’s interview revealed just how the young men were able to “explore who they were” so that they could learn about themselves and what is expected of them in their communities. By having scholars travel in cohorts, he believes the school set the platform for them to address issues of what it was to be a young Black man in America and how that association will play itself out in their adult years.

Social comparison distinguishes between social groups and examines their differences. In this study, social comparison was not evaluated or analyzed. Social Identity Theory does a number of things when it comes to individual behaviors, attitudes and actions. It mainly focuses on how an individual’s social group identity is embedded into society. It also discerns how the world views how an individual acts and responds to society.

**Cognitive development theory.** In addition to Social Identity Theory, Jean Piaget’s (1964) theory of Cognitive Development played an indirect part in how each participant acquired, processed and stored information (Blake & Pope, 2008). Each young man explained how the classroom and school-wide experiences provided a positive learning environment for them to identify with being a Black male, surrounded by peers and educators that looked like them, and who was provided examples of educated and respected men of color. Piaget introduced the Cognitive Development theory in 1964, explaining that children learn and develop, not only by environmental factors, but also by the interactions, action, behaviors and mental processes of what and how they were taught. These interactions and the positive effects it has had on the study participants is best described by Marcelo when he speaks of the overall mission of the school and
the “culturing” of young Black men that took place. He stated that the exchanges and experiences influenced him and his peers to break the cycle of indifference associated with being Black males. The pairing of both theories added to the understanding of how all participants beat the status quo by graduating from high school and eventually attending a two or four-year college.

**Relating the Findings to the Literature Review**

Much of the literature related to all-male schools, experiences with teachers and culturally responsive environments are directly related to the findings of this research study.

**The conspiracy theory.** When discussing Black male identity and academic development, Malik Henfield (2012) states that, “Black males have been repeatedly reported to be criminals, sexually charged, unintelligent, unconcerned with family, and prone to violence.” He goes on to state in his research that it would be accurate to imply that Black males could be “the most stigmatized members of our society.” (Henfield, 2012, p. 181). Jeptha addresses this concept in his interview when describing how the Black family is predominately run by women, and how he grew up without male figures in his life - the school provided another version of society’s narrative. He saw intelligent, positive male images on a daily basis that showed Black men were not necessarily an “endangered species”.

Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu (1985) unveiled the concept of academic inferiority and how it manifests itself mostly in the classroom while conducting research on the education of the Black male child. He states that it stems “from historians, politicians, academicians, and writers who have provided the “theoretical” justification for White supremacy (Kunjufu, 1985, p. 2) Both scholars have identified the systemic structures to “destroy black boys” by attempts to subjugate and malign anything positive about Black males so that they will grow to pose less of a danger to
a White dominated society. Additionally, Kunjufu (1985) predicted that by the year 2000 there would only be approximately 30% of the Black male population out of prison, with a college degree, not in Special Education, employed and alive. Richard takes pride in making it past Kunjufu’s prediction. With a four-year old daughter to care for, he states that the character education he received in high school prepared him to teach her about her roots all while referring to members of his community as “kings” and “queens”. Marley also recounts the unwavering efforts of the school to educate and empower young men of color to have a clear understanding of who they were, culturally and historically, and how it helped build a strong community of responsible and conscious scholars.

Similar to Henfield (2012) and Kunjufu (1985), Michelle Alexander (2010) addresses the re-emergence of a “new Jim Crow era” that currently exists in our educational systems. As a social justice issue, it presents a barrier between equitably educated Black males and those that end up segregated from the educational system, eventually becoming victims of the United States penal system. She stretches the human mind to fully engage in a confrontation with the systemic racial discriminations faced by men of color in the United States.

Having one participant in the study that served time in prison, Alexander’s assumptions and his experience validated the connection between the school system and the systemic racism that exists. Jeptha was fortunate enough to turn his prison sentence into a positive learning experience when he was released. He attributed much of his knowledge and experience with successful Black men as a positive factor in his turnaround. Underachievement is defined as a discrepancy between one’s ability and performance. Therefore, if society continues to accept the divisive methods of institutions that fall “short of promoting and structuring the intellectual devel-
opment of students and socializing young people for their roles and responsibilities in society” (Davis & Jordan, 1994, p. 571) an entire demographic of young people will continue to fall between the cracks.

**Single-sex schools.** In 1991, Dr. Amos Wilson offered an explanation as to why single-sex schools developed, specifically for Black males and critical for their physical, emotional and cultural growth. In his book, *Understanding Black Adolescent Male Violence: Its remediation and prevention* (1991), he explained that the all-male school (or program) designed with meeting their psychological, sociological and academic needs can be best addressed in this gender-specific environment. Erik clearly makes this connection in his interview when he shares how he believes being in an all-male environment allowed the long men to focus on being themselves without distractions. By being given opportunities to speak openly and freely in class or in advisory groups, allowed them to share experiences and help each other work through issues they would be facing individually or in their communities. This environment helped him and his peers navigate the nuances of Black manhood on a daily basis.

Most of the research on all-male schools is limited by a lack of attention to how assumptions about gender, such as what boys need and their development, influence the decisions to separate young men and determine the choices in teaching and learning practices, as well as classroom management techniques (Fergus, Sciurba, Martin & Noguera, 2009). Some proponents believe it can be empowering and build character, as noted by many participants in their interviews. When a school is dedicated to helping young men become men and respect women, it is building an environment of cultural values and building one’s self-concept.
Researchers and scholars Edward Fergus, Pedro Noguera and Margary Martin (2014) set out to study seven, single-sex schools that opened between 2003 and 2007 across the country. They found that the “good intentions” of developing gender-specific schools “may not be enough to generate real solutions” (p. 3). In their book, Schooling for Resilience: Improving the Life Trajectory of Black and Latino Boys (2014), they explain how the increased creation of single-sex schools across the country to amend the deficiencies and reverse the course of failure for most Black and Latino males has been successful for some, but not for others.

**Culture, climate and character development.** Based on participant responses, schools that create a community and environment where students want to learn is essential for success. According to Fergus, Noguera & Martin (2014), schools that make a “deliberate effort to create climates that they hoped would be supportive and conducive to learning” (p. 95). Those environments are the ones that have the greatest impact on students. Each study participant recalled how being called “scholar” by everyone in the school helped establish a scholarly environment early on. Marcelo reflected on the work habits established and the “value of learning” that took place over the four years. There was a dress code that consisted of a dress shirt, tie, dress pants, belt and dress shoes. If scholars were unprepared or lacking in their attire, there was a supply of belts, shoes, ties, etc always on hand to provide to the young men. This subtle way of building character was easily identified in Marley’s interview when he spoke of how the routine dress of shirt, tie, pants, shoes and belt continues to play itself out in his adult life.

“Those elements within a culture to which individuals and groups attach to a high worth are called *values*” (Banks, 1997, p. 80). Dr. James Banks (1997) argued that values, beliefs and attitudes are learned from the groups in which an individual is socialized. The young men in this
research study learned very specific values, customs and behaviors based on cultural experiences in and out of the classroom. The school was developed with the urban, Black and Latino male in mind and fostering a curriculum that speaks to their needs, as well as how they mature and grow are paramount in their self-concept and overall maturation as men.

**The achievement gap and the black male child.** Across the country, young Black males rank the highest in drop-out rates, suspensions, expulsions, poor test scores, low GPA’s, special education placement, and underrepresentation in gifted education programs (NCES, 2005; Whiting, 2004, 2006.) The narrow portrayal of Black males can have a potentially negative impact on how young men of color make meaning of themselves with respect to their race and gender (Henfield, 2012). Additionally, there is a barren field of educational literature devoted to the Black male child.

Even though Marcelo, Marley and Erik fully benefitted from the cultural and historical experiences of the school, they all expressed how the mediocre curriculum and incomplete college-readiness program was one of the “cons” of their high school. They credit some dysfunctional staff and a dismantled academic structure for the school’s deficiencies. Though all participants went to college after graduating from high school, Marcelo, Marley and Erik did not feel as if they were fully challenged academically because staff was not as prepared to teach more rigorous material.

The need to bridge the achievement and opportunity gaps are common, complex issues that many in the education system grapple with on a regular basis, and building a cohesive community of teachers and learners can be even more challenging. Educators must be trained to be culturally responsive to the needs and responsibilities of educating young men of color in urban
schools (Lynn, Bacon, Totten, Bridges, & Jennings, 2010). In addition to preparing educators to be culturally responsive in their lessons and in school-wide activities, Dr. Tyrone Howard (2016) also includes a strong bond with family and community engagement in schools to address and ameliorate the issues around learning in a collective manner (Clark, Zygmunt & Howard, 2016).

The Schott Foundation continues to demonstrate, through data, why opportunity and achievement gaps continue to exist for Black males (2015). In traditional school settings, Black males are disciplined more than their White male peers with more suspensions, continue to be “locked out of opportunities for academic achievement” (pg. 7) and classified as students with disabilities more than any other demographic group. This was not a major concern for the participants of this study. Discipline and academic labeling was never fully addressed or explained. There were issues between scholars and detention for being late or not in dress code, according to Richard, but the young men were mostly able to ameliorate those problems through open discussions with staff who would call scholars in the morning to wake them up or through advisory meetings every day. The dress code problems were easily resolved because the school had extra clothing available for those that were in need. According to Tyrone Howard (2014), Black males in American school systems are entrapped by the perils of hardship and failure. Howard attempts to unleash a battle cry of shifting the paradigm to the way Black males are understood and seen in American society (Howard & Banks, 2014).

Equity in education. The question of equity in urban schools with regards to the education of Black and Latino males is a, “hot topic” in the educational field. School systems are unable to address the needs of this population. In addition, an educational alternative has yet to be provided. When John Dewey (1916) encouraged educational empowerment and emphasized that
our goal as educators should be to produce citizens who think critically rather than obey. Further, he encouraged the nation to offer opportunities for equal education to help students make the best of their natural talents, leading to self-improvement and empowerment; he indirectly spoke to the state of the Black and Latino male in the American public education system that would take place for hundreds of years. Advocates of fair and equal education such as scholar and educator, Jonathan Kozol (2005), deflate the previous notion of equity in education originally proposed by John Dewey in his visceral novel, The Shame of The Nation: A Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America (2005). He claims that the American public education system is continuing to fail students of color by continuing a process of segregation and apartheid schooling decades after the landmark Brown vs. Board of Education ruling of 1954. And to no end, students from poor urban districts are suffering.

**Black teachers and black male students.** Milner (2012) conducted research that validates the narratives of the study participants. Over recent years, the hiring and retention of African American teachers has declined, which counteracts the increase in a diverse, multicultural student population. African American teachers are often viewed negatively based on perception. They are “diverse and bring a range of views and instructional practices into the classroom” (p. 27). The research reveals that through relationship building, promoting self-pride and responsibility, the teacher studied was able to empower her students and “she refused to” let them fail while demonstrating what the roles and responsibilities of teachers in urban school settings require. Marley’s primary education years consisted of being taught primarily by White women, yet when he attended high school, his first exposure to men and women of color in the classroom and as administrators gave him encouragement and realistic people to look up to.
Dr. Carter G. Woodson’s (1933) warning to America about the sub-standard education Blacks were receiving is a wakeup call to urban education. He foreshadowed the “brainwashing” going on and how Blacks were being influenced to become inferior members of society. This is, in a sense, exactly what is currently happening in urban public school systems across the country. Kunjufu’s “conspiracy theory” (1985) is in direct correlation to Woodson’s concept. There is also a tendency for Black teachers to have higher educational expectations for Black students, which in turn increases the educational engagement and aspirations of Black students. Programs to recruit qualified urban teachers of color are necessary to combat many of the pitfalls young Black males are subjected to in the public school system (Aragon, Culpepper, McKee, & Perkins, 2014). Dr. Kunjufu (1985) suggests that those qualified teachers of color remain in their positions, when hired, in order to nurture and encourage the child.

In reality, Black male teachers can serve as powerful role models, but they cannot fix the problems minority students face simply by being Black and male (Emdin, 2016). Dr. Christopher Emdin, Associate Professor at Columbia University’s Teachers College states that the misconception of Black male teachers as role models will help Black boys succeed in school is a “cop-out” because schools are failing students due to the effects of poverty, inequities in resource distribution and the criminalization of Black men (Emdin, 2016). Kunjufu (1985) suggests otherwise; the hiring of more black male teachers should become the norm because “in order to be a black man you need to see a black man” (p. 24).

**Summary.** The findings from this study are supported by the literature. Social Identity theory allowed the researcher to understand both the cognitive and non-cognitive behaviors, as well as the influences of Black males in relation to their membership in Black culture. An indi-
rect connection to Jean Piaget’s theory on cognitive development assisted with the comprehension of the different ways humans, children in particular, acquire, retain and develop knowledge. It is evident through the participant responses, that the high school they attended allowed them to develop academically, socially and emotionally through a student-centered, cultural curriculum, as well as through interactions with teachers, peers and other adults in the school setting. The literature review helped highlight and provide a historical context and overview of Black males in urban public schools.

**Limitations of the Study**

Rudestam and Newton (2007) define study limitations as “restrictions in the study over which the researcher has no control” (p. 90). There were a number of limitations to this study, one being sample size. Participants were interviewed based on a limited pool of prior graduates from the same high school. A total of 37 Black and Latino young men graduated from the participants’ high school, yet only six participants fit the study criteria and were willing to participate in the study. If a larger sample size was possible, the researcher believes the study would have provided a more in-depth set of responses.

Even though each participant was familiar with the researcher as a member of the school’s faculty and administrative team, there may have been some hindrances with how comfortable each subject felt with sharing details of their recalled experiences. As one of the original proposal and planning team members of the school, the researcher interacted on numerous occasions with each participant while they were students. Some participants may have been reserved with their responses as to not offend the researcher and the significance of her role as a Black, female teacher and administrator.
Significance of the Study

This qualitative, narrative study adopted a reflective voice of life as a Black male high school student in an all-male, urban high school setting. The participants shared personal recollections of the academic experiences while attending the same secondary school dedicated to nurturing, educating and informing Black and Latino males. They explained how the school utilized historical, educational and cultural experiences rooted in their rich heritage to explore what it means to be a Black male in America, and how they can beat the status quo by graduating and eventually going to college or pursuing a career path. The researcher hoped that the information gathered through this study would raise awareness for what it was like to be a Black male in an urban school system. It is evident through previous research and the lived experiences of each participant that the public school system has not traditionally provided the cultural, historic and personal development needed for this marginalized group’s academic success. The findings from this study will be shared with faculty, staff, administrators, and any relative agencies with the intention of strengthening support services for Black male students in urban school settings.

As previously stated, research and literature often focus on the academic deficiencies of Black males, rather than creating solutions to promote academic success and high achievement. This study has great significance, as it takes the focus from deficiencies to success for Black males.

Implications and Recommendations

Based on my experience as a classroom teacher and administrator in urban public schools, as well as from the findings of this study, I have developed the following recommenda-
tions that may be implemented in any school system that educates a diverse population of marginalized students.

**Hire more teachers of color in urban schools.** By modeling attitudes and behaviors of academic, professional and personal success the young Black male has access to tangible role models who personify positive characteristics of high self-esteem and self-concept. Ultimately, urban educators must work to improve achievement amongst African American males in urban schools settings, collectively and individually. Programs to recruit qualified urban educators is necessary to combat many of the pitfalls young men of color are subjected to in the public school system (Aragon, Culpepper, McKee, & Perkins, 2014). In my opinion, too many of the teachers placed in high poverty schools are less experienced and lack the knowledge and training necessary to teach in school districts serving the high poverty/high minority populations. Daniel (2009) confronts the same issues of schools being staffed with ill-prepared teachers who lack the knowledge and experience necessary to educate “diverse groups” of students. Additionally, a recruitment to employ more teachers of color, particularly males, should be utilized by urban school districts to fill the void of this particular group of educators in urban classrooms. Their presence is essential and effective, as shown in previous research.

**Train teachers in Culturally Responsive Teaching methods.** As teacher education programs begin to train novice teachers to understand and infuse a culturally responsive component to their curriculum, the implication of including a social justice component may assist with readiness and receptiveness to teaching students of other cultures and backgrounds (Whipp, 2013). When educators are trained in culturally responsive teaching they are informed and more aware of the social and psychological influences that may deter student success, particularly
marginalized and oppressed students, and subsequently they are consciously able to address the influences and combat them as much as possible. Teachers who participate in a pre-service training must continue to elicit lessons and activities that are interesting yet skills-focused, particularly due to the increased mandates of high-stakes testing.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2001) or Culturally Responsive Teaching (Gay, 2000) is an approach to teaching that recognizes, values and honors the unique cultural, social and interpersonal experiences of students (cultural capital). Both terms are used interchangeably, as they are both grounded in the display of a teacher’s cultural competence. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) is also an alternative approach to teaching methods where teachers infuse student culture throughout the entire teaching and learning process (Siwatu, 2011). Culturally Relevant Pedagogy is an effective tool to utilize and embed in the urban public school system particularly to bridge the achievement gap between marginalized students, particularly those of color, and their non-color peers.

Overall, the research conducted revealed that teacher programs should be encouraged to take the necessary steps to prepare educators for culturally responsive teaching and build upon their competence and confidence in their abilities to deliver culturally responsive teaching methods. If a more fair representation of diverse teachers are required, train them to connect, identify and build rapport with this population of young men.

**Critical race theory and institutionalized oppression.** Critical Race Theory (CRT) pinpoints the focus on the effects of race and racism in public school systems. CRT is a theoretical framework that lends itself to “studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism,
and power… It not only tries to understand our social situation, but to change it” (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001, p. 6).

This is where the conspiracy theory intertwines with the *Permanence of Racism* that has manifested itself in the American educational system. The legacy of racism in this country has caused infinite problems with educating African-American students. Critical Race Theory (CRT) focuses on the effects of race and racism while addressing the “supremacy” of Whites, and its ultimate goal is to bring forth a change that will implement social justice. Critical Race Theory is grounded in five distinct tenets that each address the issue of race and racism in educational settings: *Counter-Storytelling, the Permanence of Racism, White-ness as Property, Interest Convergence and Critique of Liberalism* (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). By specifically concentrating on “the permanence of racism” as the foundation for the discrimination that exists in American public schools particular to knowledge production and the absence of culturally relevant pedagogy that plagues many schools, predominantly in urban districts, Critical Race Theory “dares to look beyond the popular belief that getting rid of racism means simply getting rid of ignorance” (Harris, 2001). CRT came into existence to question the relationships between power, race and racism. It is used in education to “understand issues of school discipline and hierarchy, tracking, controversies over curriculum and history, and IQ and achievement testing” (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001). Critical Race Theory is a movement to understand and change our social situations. Educational segregation will continue to exist as long as those in power continue to manipulate the educational system dominated by the powerless. Derrick Bell (1992), one of the founding fathers of CRT, asserts that racism is a permanent part of the American scene that will continue to surface in instances of inequality in the workforce, education, housing and various other forms
of marginalization. Understanding the permanence requires one to take a “realistic view” of the structure of society in America; understanding that racist hierarchical structures in politics, economics, the judicial system and society on the whole are governed by those who assert White privilege. Essentially, all others should be subjected to unjust and unequal treatment, particularly in education, due to their lack of “power and privilege”.

**Develop more single-sex programs or mentoring programs for young men of color.**

Recognizing that males, Black males in particular, have different learning styles and bring other experiences (cultural, socio-economic and historical) to the classroom, many schools with a population of predominately poor minorities (particularly Black and Hispanic) must be cognizant of these variances, and adopt strategies and supplemental programs to meet the needs of this population. When considering research concerning student self-concept and achievement in single-sex settings, it is suggested that segregation of the sexes has no effect on how well students achieve (Belfi, Goos, De Fraine, & Van Damme, 2012). There was no research available to truly support this suggestion regarding black males in urban public schools. By developing more same sex schools, even classes within co-educational settings, that focus on educating and preparing young black males to become educated MEN becomes attainable. These single-sex environments could enhance academic performance and achievement of Black males (Gordon, Iwamoto, Ward, Potts, & Boyd, 2009). Students who have a low-level of self-concept risk having lower grades, delinquency and the strong possibility of dropping out. When young black males are reminded of their possibilities and capabilities, a vested interest in academic achievement can be pursued. It is safe to conclude that the conspiracy theory does exist. However, the
issue needs to continue to be addressed in the educational system now so that fewer numbers of young black males will “opt out” of pursuing their educational right.

Under a policy that enforces a matrix of student achievement and success based on standardized test scores in Reading, Writing and Mathematics, many all-male Black and Latino schools are prone to close when compared to other schools that are not created for a particular population. This raises a question of why certain schools are closing versus others that continue to flourish. Future research utilizing Narrative inquiry may continue to shed light on the effectiveness of gender-based schools; questioning the teaching and learning strategies used in successful schools in comparison to failing ones may uncover exceptional teaching, equity in achievement and academic growth.

In conjunction with recruitment efforts, effective mentoring programs and meaningful relationships need to be established to assist with academic achievement and success which is extremely critical on the secondary level. As noted in Davis & Jordan (1994), “many Black males continue to lose ground academically and often give up altogether by dropping out of school” (p. 586). Their research suggests that disciplinary policies on the secondary level be revamped to minimize suspensions and remedial courses for an increase in student engagement and “behavioral outcomes”. When risk factors are minimized and this demographic is in a nurturing, non-hostile environment, the desire to learn is increased and the pursuit of education beyond the secondary level is magnified. Statistics espousing the differences between successful, educated young Black males in comparison to uneducated, unsuccessful young Black males is disturbing, and the numbers continue to point in a staggering direction.
Conclusion

By conducting this research, I can say that there is a solid example of how schools can best serve the needs of Black males in the urban public school system and position them for academic success. Through the voices of each scholar-graduate that participated in this research, their first-hand accounts of how the implementation of a curriculum geared towards the incorporation of the culture of young Black males in urban school settings can lead to academic success and personal growth, regardless of external factors can be achieved. It is also evident that the development of more same sex schools could, in fact, contribute to preparing these young men to become successful graduates beyond high school. With that, a more fair representation of teachers who connect, identify and are adequately trained to meet the needs of this population would prove to be effective in social connections and how this demographic pursues opportunities beyond preconceived notions based on educator prejudices. Additionally, the presence of more Black male teachers has had a significant impact on the young men involved in this study, and it is apparent that an environment that reflects the students being educated, is an environment of scholarly character.

If I had not been exposed to these young men in their freshman year, I would have never known the growth and development that took place beyond the four years in high school. I would have never witnessed how important early college experiences and family-like settings would play in the development of boys into men. Had I not participated in the writing of the proposal for this unique learning environment, I would have never understood the impact a culturally responsive curriculum could have on a group of students most in the education system have dismissed as “at-risk”. And I also would have never experienced the importance of a home-school-
community connection as a support system for this group of young men. Overall, the school had many areas to grow in, yet the initial seed was planted as the groundwork for developing young men who were civic minded, critical thinkers and skillful problem solvers of exemplary character.
References


Appendix A

Recruitment Email
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Subject Line: LaShaune Stitt Requests Your Participation in Research Study

Dear Scholars,

I am currently conducting a study for my doctoral thesis at Northeastern University and am seeking research participants. You all have made my acquaintance at some point while you attended the Urban Assembly Academy of History and Citizenship for Young Men (UAAHC), either as one of my classroom students, in my Advisory course, or one of the elective courses I taught. So as the first graduates of this unique high school, I would like to request your participation in a research study I am conducting.

My research is grounded in presenting the experiences of a scholar-graduate in a single-sex high school setting for Black and Latino males that focused on culture, identity and civic duty, and how these experiences impacted your decisions to either pursue a career or higher education. This study will focus on the successful completion of secondary education for Black males, as opposed to the failures and negativity that most studies focus on.

If you choose to participate in this study, I will be interviewing you about your overall experiences while attending UAAHC. The expected time commitment is between 60-120 minutes over the course of one or two interview sessions (either via video conferencing or phone).

If you are interested in learning more about this study, please email me at stitt.l@husky.neu.edu and include your contact information as listed below. I will provide you with additional details about the study once approval is received from the university.

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Thank you for your consideration in taking part in this study.
Respectfully,

LaShaune Stitt
Appendix B

Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program
Interview Protocol and Questions

Thank you for your interest in participating in my research. Before we begin the interview, please review the consent form and sign it if you agree to participate. The consent form provides a short overview of the study and the interview process. The consent form outlines what I will do to protect confidentiality. Please review the consent form carefully to make sure you are comfortable with everything detailed on the form.

Since this study is meant to focus on the successful completion of secondary education for Black males in a single-sex environment as opposed to the failures and negativity that most studies focus on, please provide honest responses based on your experiences. Additionally, I will be recording the interview, so please do your best to speak clearly.

We will begin the interview in a few minutes. This process will take between 60 and 75 minutes. I will ask that you share your experiences while attending this school. I encourage you to speak openly about the questions. There is no time limit for specific questions, so it is fine to go into detail with your responses.

The first few interview questions will be on your specific experiences at UAAHC, and then we will proceed to in-depth questions.

Do you have any questions before we begin the interview?

1. First, tell me. How is it that you ended up attending Urban Assembly Academy of History and Citizenship for Young Men (UAAHC)? How did you come to know about it and how did you come about deciding to enroll? Why did you enroll?

2. What were you hoping to get out of going to UAAHC that you would not have at other schools?

3. Tell me about your experience there. What do you remember? What was it like for you?
   • Were there particular experiences that you recall that had an impact on you? What were they? And what impact did they have on you?
4. How about teachers? What types of relationships did the teachers try to build with the students?

5. Do you remember the focus of the school? If not, that is ok. But, if you do, what do you remember it being?

6. If they remember the focus: Why do you feel a school that focuses on manhood and cultural identity is important to Black males in urban areas?

    If they do not remember the focus: So the focus of the school was to develop young men with character and a strong sense of identity, as well as building community. How is that in keeping with or different from what you experienced at the school?

7. How was attending an all-male high school beneficial to you?

8. How was your UAAHC experience different from previous “traditional” public schools you attended?

9. When you think about your academic success at this school, how do you see it as being the same as or different from your peers (a) in the school and (b) from other schools?

10. How did your experiences at Urban Assembly Academy of History and Citizenship for Young Men (UAAHC) impact your adult life?

    * What did you do after UAAHC?

11. Why did you do that?

    * How do you think your attendance at UAAHC impacted your educational and professional opportunities after graduation?

12. Do you think UAAHC prepared you for college? How?