#AMIMANENOUGH: BLACK MALE MASCULINE IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN THE DIGITAL LANDSCAPE OF TWITTER

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Dedication

“No one is standing in your way anymore. Not even yourself.” Maryam Hasnaa

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving family and friends. To the men who vehemently search for their inner peace. To my daughter, my life has been an example to show that greatness resides in You.
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Aubrey, I am done. Now we can play.
Abstract
This research study utilizes semi-structured interviews and qualitative content analysis to describe the racial and masculine identity development of Black men who make use of Twitter as a coping mechanism for external stressors. This phenomenon continues to build upon the previous understanding of *Cool Pose* by expanding Black men’s ability to emotionally and psychologically detach from external stressors (race and gender) in a digital setting. The purpose of this study is to investigate the multifaceted approach Black men challenge, reject, or accept their racial and masculine identity through tweets, images, and hashtags. The findings of this research indicate that Black men seek to define their masculine and racial identities for themselves. The pivotal point is through the experiences of five Black men in this research who acknowledges the intersecting identities that are direct opposition to the patriarchal club of masculinity. To combat the stressors of navigating their racial and masculine identities, the participants in this study utilized Twitter to cope by tweeting in lieu of diarying and creating digital communities.

Keywords: *Twitter, Masculinity, Digital Identity, Masculinity, Social Media*
"If the word integration means anything, this is what it means: that we, with love, shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it."

- James A. Baldwin

Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

The internet has become discursive in the aspects of performative linguistics and presentations, especially in the empowerment and discovery of racial, ethnic and masculine identities for Black men. For Black men, the journey to challenge, reject or accept the societal norms of hegemonic masculinity become a decision between rejecting membership in the Black community or denying their stigmatized identities and accepting the dominant ideals of hegemonic masculinity (Mathews, 2010). Scholars have diagnosed a Black male problem within the African American community, that have become hereditary for generations of Black men (Hall, & Pizarro, 2010; Jackson, 2018). The diagnosis has listed the symptoms as (1) concerns of invisibility within the United States; (2) a cultural clash of identity that is often constrained and stripped in pursuit of the American Dream; and (3) generational shifts that push and pull a central focus in different directions for solutions (Brooms, D. 2017). As a remedy, Black men have used, defined and undefined psychological defenses (Cool Pose) to cope with combating inadequacies from racism and failing to meet the standards of traditional [White] masculinity.

Research on masculinity and manhood with Black men has found their ideas of masculinity to be different from those of "traditional" White males (Mincey, Alfonso, Hackney, & Luque, 2014).

The historical interactions between Western populations (Whites) and those of African descent (Blacks) have seen a masculinity ritual of White male dominance (Hall, 2009). This exchange is a restrictive practice that inhibits racial authenticity in public and can now be seen
online as well. The dominant narrative behind masculinity frustrates some Black men and prevents them from expressing themselves fully and cultivating a healthy concept of masculinity. Alternatively, the dominant narrative of hegemonic masculinity ostracizes Black men from ever considering manhood to be an achievement through a masculine performance deemed within the guise of strong, unemotional, and provider. The documented nature of images of Black men has been constructed by the dominant media culture in an often intentional negative and distorted manner that extends beyond the U.S. borders (Parker & Moore, 2014). To match the technological advances of this current digital age, this researcher aims to analyze the experiences of Black men who utilize Twitter individually as a means to challenge, reject or accept Twitter's nuances of Black masculinity through their tweets, hashtags and images. With Twitter’s accessibility and simplicity of usage; redundant conversations of “Black male privilege,” “child support payments,” or the infamous “Who pays on the first date?” appear seasonally on the timeline. This research argues that actions of coping, specifically interactions (tweeting) and engagement (posting or responding to other tweets), enable Black men to “act” as an extension of Cool Pose. In American society, Black males are confronted with hegemonic cultural dominance and are forced to resist such social forces in developing healthy self-concepts (Parker & Moore, 2014). This research agenda centers the racial, ethnic and masculine development of Black men who, in this current climate, require a positive coping mechanism amid high unemployment rates, increased incidents of police brutality and media's attack on their image and bodies. Black men are continually plagued by the media’s depiction of their racial and masculine identities (Parker & Moore, 2014). Whether it be recurring plots of the disenfranchised star athlete (Michael Rainey Jr., Amateur), the protagonist/antagonist drug dealer who tries to save their community (Mahershala Ali, Moonlight) or the hyper-sexual romantic
The hyper-visibility of Black males’ bodies in the media continues to reaffirm dominate stereotypes of superior athletic ability, doing illegal transactions and using women only as sex objects (Majors, 2017).

Nonetheless, the Black community has fought vigorously to reclaim control of the Black male image and racial authenticity (Macias, 2015). Attempts of Black men challenging the more dominant negative narratives of Black male characteristics and masculinity can be viewed through an examination of the hashtag #BlackMenSmile (Burnely, 2017). On February 2, 2018, @Felonious_Munk tweeted "Today let's share some pics of #BlackMenSmiling. Like big goofy smiles. Happy (even if just for a moment) with life smiles." The viral hashtag started the blackest and most beautiful thing Twitter has ever seen (Judge, 2018), and increased interest in how Black men are using online outlets to cope with narratives they do not accept or challenge against their own. The images that followed painted a larger picture of who Black men are through the lens of Black men. Black men are queer; Black men are dancers; Black men are fathers; Black men are scholars. The list could continue, but this hashtag, like many others that are listed in this research, create a space for Black men to, "... see themselves how they truly are..." (Baldwin, 1963, p. 10). The images have, in the past, and still, do defy the narrative and limited scope of what it means to be Black male during any stage of life as understood by those outside of this exclusive group. So how does this insight and information help reconcile the perceptions of those outside of the group with the true identities of Black males to reach a universal acceptance of them merely being humans with a wide range of emotions and not a horde of aggressive, hyper-sexual, domineering individuals who are always acting just outside of legally acceptable standards or set to be the next number on a national team?

Problem and Purpose Statement
In an interview published by The Guardian, musician, director and comedian Donald Glover stated that "Black men struggle with masculinity so much. The idea that we must always be strong presses us all down; it keeps us from growing" (Fitzpatrick, 2011 p. 1). The purpose of this research is to generate liberation from the traditional definition of masculinity that inhibits Black men from liberating themselves and growing as Donald Glover hinted in the interview.

This inquiry theorizes about "masculinity reconstructed" versus "masculinity liberated," this researcher wants to liberate masculinity as a mean to convey the disenfranchisement, oppression, and imprisonment Black men often feel when they are denied the ability to express ourselves authentically (Daniels, 2013). The reconstruct of masculinity does not remove the complex Imperialist Capitalist White Supremacist Patriarchy society (hooks, 2010). While masculinity is socially conditioned, the rigid “without words for emotions” tend to be the most common features viewed across society and Twitter (Malinga & Ratele, 2016 p.104). While a few studies have already examined how rhetoric impacted racial authenticity and visual inequality of Black bodies through Twitter (Clark, 2014; Lee, 2017; Maragh, 2017), this is a premeditated probe to discover the coping possibilities for Black men as an extension of Cool Pose. This literature is not expected to replace any work completed through Cool Pose, but to identify the evolution of how Black men may cope. Simultaneously, this research will serve as a measure to define masculinity and Black masculinity separately, because definitions of masculinity differ according to an environment, institution or individuals (Levant & Richmond, 2007; Mathews, 2010).

Since Black bodies are hyper-visual in digital mediums, this researcher chose Twitter as the realm of this inquiry. Smith (2011) found that 25% of online Blacks used Twitter, compared to 9% of online Whites (Brock, 2012). On August 9, 2014, when Michael Brown Jr., was
viciously murdered by Officer Darren Wilson, images of Mike Brown body and the hashtags #MikeBrown and #Ferguson became a trending topic across the nation and the globe (Desmond-Harris, 2015). The #MikeBrown movement, the constant visual of his lifeless body, the racial rhetoric that was viewed in comments, and this investigator’s curiosity with Twitter as a possible coping mechanism prompted this researcher to investigate further. For Black users, coping on Twitter comes through verbal performance, linguistic resources and various modes of interaction with followers that are key for Black users to reaffirm their racial identities (Florini, 2014). A cultural capital that is common amongst Black Twitter users is "signifying." Signifying is the linguistic performance that allows for communication through various language demographics and multiple levels of meaning simultaneously (Florini, 2014). Black male Twitter users can relate to this practice and use it to engage with among themselves and with others as well. Black men also connect via hashtags that can be tracked to stay on top of discussions surrounding specific subjects. A hashtag can be attached to a single word, phrase, and group of tweets or images, thus allowing users to find more relevant tweets about a specific topic with a keyword search (Small, 2011; Clark, 2014). In addition to performative linguistic measures of tweets and the connection found with hashtags, images also can allow Black men to cope with the stressors of society. Through social media (i.e., Twitter), Black men can construct or see pictures that are conducive to supporting one another (Parker & Moore, 2014). The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) is to examine the linguistic sense-making that Black men use on Twitter to comprehend their racial, ethnic, and masculine identity. Understanding and constructing their own identities is one of the ways that Black men can take back control of their narrative. Pooling together common ideologies and aspects of their identities can help Black men establish a more acceptable interpretation of the varying degrees of their existence.
The Significance of the Research

The impact of slavery on Black men has caused them to be constrained to an “inferior” position within the black community and family (Johnson, 2013). Black men do not readily adopt this position as a whole demographic and many fights for their autonomy via social media outlets like Twitter. For decades, the media has exploited Black males to be depicted and re-advertised as athletes, entertainers, or thugs. The barriers experienced by young Black men are a diminishing result of 250 years of slavery, 100 years of state and federally supported segregation, and decades of a social dismantling of opportunities created in the 1960s and 1970s (Johnson, 2013). In the historical perspective, slavery systematically endorsed the genocide of African knowledge and memory of African roots toward Black men (Johnson, 2013). The United States racial structure has positioned people of color to lack power to direct their racial identities within the public consciousness of social media (Chan, 2017). Thus, interactions online recreate some of the cultural knowledge sharing that has been lost throughout the generations. The intersection of race, gender, and social media are becoming more prominent when society includes the impact of the sense of belongingness, expression and performance. Social media allows users to connect across various mediums to engage in authentic conversations (Potts, 2017). By analyzing conversations via Twitter outside viewers can see Black men as they interact within their demographic and with those not included in the same social group to even begin to dismantle the ideation that preconceived notions project.

Black online communities spend a fair amount of time working through the internal and external ideological constraints of being low-status Americans (Brock, 2009). While online community members regularly see images of hyper-masculine criminals, lavish-living in entertainment, and abusive display in relationships, the same audience members are hardly
provided with a counter-narrative of these pictures. Western history has shown the historical
assault of Black males by way of depicting them as hyper-sexual, entertainers, or athletic figures
(Pelzer, 2016). Since #BlackMenSmile has gone viral on Twitter, users have created other
hashtags, like #YouGoodMan, #BlackBoyJoy, and #AmIManEnough, to help establish a digital
space for Black men to connect, converse and cope (Turner, 2017).

The oppression and marginality faced by Black men have led to the coping mechanism
called Cool Pose (Al-Mateen, 1993). Intra-communal and societal norms often force Black men
to cope externally by selecting a socially accepted masculine image for themselves (Mincey,
Alfonso, Hackney, & Luque, 2015). These depictions shape how groups interact with African
Americans and shape their perception (Bailey, 2006). The theoretical perspective on masculine
identity development in schools and society has mostly been focused on White male students
with solutions that do not remedy Black men Western civilization has constructed a strict
concept of masculinity, painting the picture of strong stature, lack of emotions, and consistent
juggling of multiple relationships as a sense of dominance (Pelzer, 2016). Majors and Billson
acknowledge that Black male masculinity is depicted completely different with fashion, music,
walk, and coined the term Cool Pose initially and defined it as "poise under pressure and the
ability to maintain detachment, even during tense encounters" (Al-Mateen, 1993).

The societal pressures faced by Black males from both within and outside of their
community often force them to cope externally by selecting a masculine image that does not
truly align with who they are or how they see themselves (Goodwill, Watkins, Johnson, Allen, &
Mcleigh, 2018). Social Networking Sites (SNS) often present men with a preference of multiple
masculine identities for themselves. These varying male images are a defense mechanism to deal
with the numerous daily stressors that they face, such as microaggressions, police brutality, and
educational disenfranchisement (Parker & Moore, 2014). Much of this transmedia storytelling has portrayed Black men as uneducated providers. In the text, Majors and Billson (1992) note the oppression and marginality faced by Black males that lead to the coping mechanism such as Cool Pose (Al-Mateen, 1993). Author and activist bell hooks famously quote Cool Pose as:

"Once upon a time black male "cool" was defined by how black men confronted hardships of life without allowing their spirits to be ravaged. They took the pain of it and used it alchemically to turn the pain into gold. That burning process required high heat. Black male cool was defined by the ability to withstand the heat and remain centered…"

bell hooks

Over the last decade, Cool Pose has been formulated into two concepts: the “tough guy” and the “player of women” (Harper, 2004). The “tough guy” feels no pain and shows no emotions toward outside activity. Society has traditionally suggested that boys play sports and compete vigorously against each other (Harper, 2004). This competition and sports combination are exacerbated even more for Black males. Despite the generational removal from slavery, Black males still experience the struggle of personal comfort with personal identity (Tovar-Murray & Tovar-Murray, 2012). For many Black men, this "tough guy" image is simply a mask of hurt and ill-informed knowledge of how to handle life stressors instead of effective self-esteem and presentation methods. The "player of women" image includes the enticing depiction of having multiple girlfriends and sexual partners (Harper, 2004). Twitter and television consumers can vividly see various forms of media on Twitter that portray males surrounded by various women as they take on an athlete, rapper or drug dealer role (Siibak, 2010). The assumptions coincide with stereotypes that have been passed down through social conversations and tweets, thus shaping the negative representations in a torrential cyclical pattern that harms
the following generations in the same ways. These stereotypes, in turn, only highlight one aspect of an issue while completely ignoring other aspects (Hall, 2009). The focus of this study will be on the results of this lopsided focus on Black men and how they exude their versions of masculinity.

**Research Problem**

Black men often have difficulty coping in public places because of the contrast with their hegemonic and strict cultural understandings of masculinity, especially *Cool Pose* (Allen, 2016). With Twitter mirroring society's classism, racism and gender issues, the use of social media applications compounds Black men's ability to cope with stressors that exist in and out of SNS. The purpose of this IPA study is to examine the performative linguistics measures and racial, ethnic and masculine identity development of Black men who participate in or actively engage on Twitter. The research question used to navigate this phenomenon is “How do Black men make sense of their racial and masculine identity while engaged on Twitter?” The sub-questions are “How do Black men use Twitter to cope as an extension of Cool Pose?” and “How are tweets used to challenge, reject or accept the notion of masculinity?” At this stage in the research, the Black male masculine identity development has not been explored through interactions on Twitter, although this central phenomenon will be generally defined as #AmIManEnough.

**Definition of Key Terminology**

The following are concepts and terms employed throughout this research analysis.

**Black** - Showcasing the best parallel for "White" linguistically. Black was also initially designed to describe individuals who were progressive, forward-looking and radical (Smith, 1992).
Black Masculinity - The performative tenets used to gain the ultimate status of "manhood". Black men experience masculinity differently as a result of their multiple identities -- age group, sexuality, spirituality or socioeconomic status (Cooper, 2006; Pelzer, 2016).

Coping – The constant changing of cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal situations that exceeds or overwhelm and individual (Mayordomo-rodríguez, Meléndez-moral, Viguer-segui, & Sales-galán, 2015).

Digital Identity - An online social identity that comes into being by constructing online profiles used to represent individuals on a network in a social context (Bozkurt & Tu, 2016).

Hashtag - Composition of words or phrases without any spaces or punctuation that turns into a clickable reference link (Ben-Lhachemi, & Nfaoui. 2018).

Manhood - Multiple arenas and contexts, both within and beyond traditional notions of masculinity and male roles. It is a conceptualization of manhood that flows back and forth from margin to center, providing men with various tools to define themselves (Hunter & Davis, 1992).

Performative Linguistics - To say something is to do something; or in which by saying or in saying something (Robinson, 2003). Alternatively, as in the case of Claeys (2007), "performative sentences accomplish an act through the very process of their enunciation", or, stated differently, they 'carry out a "performance"' (Claeys, 2007 p. 6).

Race - a biological construct intended as a means of classifying different groups of people possessing common physical characteristics and sociocultural affinities (Wilson, 2003).

Symbolic Interactionism - Symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969) is twofold: (a) individuals interact with and assign meaning to the objects (e.g., people, things, ideas, experiences) in their environment, and (b) these meanings inform individuals’ beliefs about the world and shape their behaviors.
**Twitter** - an online social networking service in which users can read and post short messages of 280 characters or less called "tweets". Users can choose to follow other users, which allows them to read and respond to their posts (Macias, 2015, p vii).

This language is necessary to understand in moving forward with understanding the study and the outcomes.

The following section of this chapter will include a description and discussion of symbolic interactionism which will serve as the theoretical lens for this study.

**Theoretical Framework**

This research is grounded in the fundamental elements of symbolic interactionism as a means to address the figurative sense-making that individuals place on themselves and others (physical or non-physical) in a particular setting. Symbolic interactionism exists within three strains of conceptual building blocks of (a) symbols, (b) objects, and (c) acts and social acts (Hewitt, 2010). First, the nature of symbols within society is the result of the human reaction and their interpretation rather than their conditioned response alone. Next, symbolic interactionism provides a theoretical perspective for studying how individuals interpret objects and how this processing leads to specific behaviors (Benzie & Allen, 2001). Finally, the last major element of symbolic interactionism refers to the human agency as “active and willful ever-changing constructs of actions and social actions” (Stryker, & Vryan, 2006 p. 6). Benzie and Allen (2001) demonstrate that human agency is not dismissive of structural and cultural constructs (i.e., Blackness and masculinity); instead, symbolic interaction see the constraints as actions humans take into account daily. The use of this framework serves a dual purpose, as it will provide a negotiation through two lenses: Black masculinity and performative linguistic measures on
Twitter. Under the scope of this framework and the use of qualitative methodology, Black men are permitted to define their daily interactions by their racial, ethnic, and masculine identities.

The foundation of symbolic interactionism exists from the empirical world and is described as a ‘down-to-earth approach’ (Plummer, 2000) to explain a particular phenomenon within select groups or individuals. Participants within this study will also incorporate their interpretations of tweets, possible hashtags and images to further solidify Twitter as an extension in the psychological exemplification of *Cool Pose*. According to Burbank and Martins (2010), “the social interactions that occur with other people within society will shape behavior; creating an identity” (p.6). The negotiation between Black identity and masculinity effectively communicates and combats feelings towards these identities based on social engagements (Snyder, 2017). The basic premise of symbolic interactionism established by Blumer (1969) is a two-fold method where (a) individuals interact with and assign meaning to the objects (e.g., people, things, ideas, experiences) in their environment, and (b) these meanings inform individuals' beliefs about the world and shape their behaviors (Chan, J. 2017). Moreover, Black men do not just respond to objects, but Black men organize their responses to objects based on their thoughts; feelings; and other feelings as well (Blumer, 1986). Also, the attitude of the individual Negotiates with the symbol also drives the action of the resulting behavior (Blumer, 1986). Not everyone agrees that this framework can fully explain the identity issues of Black males or that symbolic interactionism truly exists. The next section introduces various critics of symbolic interactionism.

**Critics of the Theory**

One of the early criticisms of symbolic interactionism was the inability to clearly articulate a systematic theory of symbolic interactionism (Benzies & Allen, 2001). Since
symbolic interactionism conceptualizes the sense-making of individuals and their relationships with their environments, different theorist would employ the tenets in various teachings as causing inconsistencies until the instructions of Mead were compiled by Blumer (1937). George Herbert Mead is credited as the founder of symbolic interactionism through his work in social psychology. Mead believed that "mind" and "self" stem from ongoing social interactions that are the result of corporations with others (Stryker, n.d). Thus, as a former student, Blumer further explained that symbolic interactionism has three underlying assumptions that support the main two aspects: (1) people, individually and collectively, act on the basis of the meaning that things have for them, (2) sense for an individual emerges out of the ways in which other individuals respond to define things, and (3) human meaning is assigned and modified through interpretation that is ever changing, subject to redefinition, relocation and realignments (Blumber, 1969; Benzies & Allen, 2001).

Other critics would point to symbolic interactionism ineffectiveness to emphasize emotional and unconscious elements in human behaviors (memories, interests, and motivations) (Benzies & Allen, 2001). These critics on emotional and unconscious factors are minor in the analysis of the social sense-making and norms that are engaged continuously between two individuals. Stryker (1998) reinforced Blumer’s assertions by suggesting an understanding that requires the interactional context "web of relationships" that are embedded (Strkyer & Vryan, 2006). This research study looks at the performative linguistic measures of Black men while engaged with their followers, hashtags, and images. There will be revolving interactions that will center and examine emotional and unconscious elements found within, thus combining thoughts of critics and thoughts of Blumer and Mead to cover a wide area that gives birth to a hybrid explanation that helps define the multifaceted issues that Black men face when creating, and
sometimes reconstructing and reconciling, their online identity with the one they encompass offline to encapsulate their entire being.

Rationale

In the context provided by Blumer's extensive reiteration of symbolic interaction, this inquiry focuses exclusively on two tenets. The first is proposed as (a) meanings are derived through social interactions with others. As Twitter continues to grow at an exponential rate, it is reinforcing as a medium to bridge gaps for the sense of belongingness and interactions that dismiss distance, language barriers, and time zones. The ease of connectedness labors new questions for users as they take control of their ability to craft personality, expressions, and perceptions. Twitter is one of the most popular microblogging services and has over 200 million users and produces 110 million tweets (Qui, Lin, Ramsay, & Yang, 2012). The microblogging capability permits users to tweet small linguistic snapshots of their identities. Still, researchers would have to question whether these identity snapshots accurately portray the user or challenge and disconnect existence for the users. Another question that must then be asked is if this cognitive dissonance is the result of social interactions.

The second tenet used as a rationale in this study is defined as (b) meanings are managed and transformed through an interpretive process that people use to make sense of and handle the objects that constitute their social worlds (De ’Nooy, 2009). Through the ongoing process of engagement with followers and the use of Twitter analytics, research has found that sharing of everyday experiences and chit chat online helps people establish common ground and brings people together (Chen, 2011). Twitter analytics provide users with conversation tracking methods geared to linking users with their followers based on age, race, gender, and location. Likewise, by identifying the social identities of followers, Black men specifically, like any other
demographic, can craft their own experience. The nature of Twitter interactions depends on the content and community one subject himself to in order to be a member (Chan, 2017). One of the most popular Twitter sub-communities is Black Twitter. In a titled, (Tweet Away our Blues) Macias (2015) defined Black Twitter as an online community that shares a conceptual map and language for purposes that include being able to "communicate and collaborate to create a phenomenon that values positive Black self-identity" (p. 51). Clark's (2014) research on Black Twitter solidified the sense of belongingness and performative linguistics for Black online communities.

**Applying Theory to this Study**

The application of symbolic interactionism for this dissertation on Twitter and masculinity is unique because of the stylistic powers and rigid racial caste that are still present online for many Black users (Clark, 2014), specifically Black males. The problem of practice centers performance and presentation of Black masculine identities while utilizing Twitter and the particular methods of coping. Blumer’s (1969) discovery of symbolic interactionism reduces to three core principles of (a) meaning, (b) language, and (c) thought. Black Twitter is a large subculture community within the general Twitter platform that has continued to feed into Twitter's overall popularity and shifts the dynamics of digital activism by bringing awareness to injustices in the physical world. The meanings often cultivated from tweets are a result of users developing an online identity and actively tweeting (Chan, 2017). Even with the internet having easy access, there is still a lack of Black voices in professionally recognized media production and media research to reshape existing ideologies about race (Clark, 2014). Many existing hashtags hold a keen connection to an actual instance of discrimination toward a marginalized population. It is imperative to understand that Black Twitter is not for users of the African
diaspora, but rather for users who are continually marginalized and oppressed in various racial, gender, and ethnic identities.

Using the tenets provided by Blumer (1969:2-5), this research study can examine: (a) ‘Human actions toward things on a basis of meaning with these things' and (b) the use of meaning by the actor(s) that occurs through a process of interpretation' (De Nooy, 2009). The idea of surveying Cool Pose to identify strategies to help Black men in a physical setting that took place before the number of police brutalities against Black men flooded the news media (Valera, 2018). Since then, social media researchers (Clark, 2014; Lee, 2017 & Macias, 2015) has noticed how the media's perception and influence of Black men have once again shifted society’s view of the Black community, particularly Black men. The application of this theory coincides with Black men’s evolving definition of masculinity, the language that is often used to convey their masculine identities and the thought to carry out those meanings through tweets. Formally, Cool Pose was examined in the physical setting of urban neighborhoods, schools, and juvenile detention centers (Hall, 2009). This dissertation reaches above and beyond the previous studies of Cool Pose and critical display of literary works available to provide the necessary knowledge of Black men coping with external stressors. By using symbolic interactionism as a theoretical framework, this will allow future researchers to establish a plausible connection between Black Twitter's impact on Black men masculinity development through an examination of their response to tweets, hashtags, and images.

Summary

The evidence presented raises questions of efficiency and correct understanding concerning the methods used by institutions and societal systems to develop an effective coping mechanism for Black men (Patton, Eschmann, & Butler, 2013). In this text, this primary
investigator pointed to *Cool Pose*, Twitter, Black masculinity and communal language dialect as a direct correlation to the historical impact in the Black community. *Cool Pose* continues to deprecate the character and intrinsic motivation of Black males and has limited their understanding of racial, ethnic, and masculine development. The context of Black masculinity can be a complex struggle for Black males seeking full recognition of manhood, public agreement on the definition of honorable masculinity and love in a public forum (Patton, Eschmann, & Butler, 2013). The hashtags movement has been a tool for Black men to utilize in efforts of defining a level of "cool" for Black men. Prejudice is not erased by law, and likewise, invisible systems and unspoken assumptions have created a hostile education and societal system that still deny Blacks equal access (Johnson-Bailey, Ray, & Lasker-Scott, 2014). Men must come to realize the damage done to ourselves, our family, and spouses, and others in multiple aspects of mentality and physicality when we hesitate to define ourselves for ourselves, thus fighting the rhetoric that society tries to spoon feed us. We must continue to seek the difference between socialized male traits of what masculinity is or should be and embrace the spectrum that may exist both within ourselves and that found within others. Chapter 2 of this dissertation is a review of critical literature that supports the toxic perceived, yet the non-existent definition of Black masculinity and the performative linguistic nature used on Twitter to cope with the struggle of defying the aspects that do not line up with one’s individuality. Chapter 3 will then outline the research methodology used to guide this study (design and data collection).

**Chapter Two: Literature Review**

“Cool is an unexpected attitude catching the society off-guard and conquering defiantly with its own inimitable style” (Connor, 1995, p. xiii).
This chapter situates *Cool Pose*, masculinity, race, and social media as major tenets of the more extensive examination of Black men’s subjection to coping in a digital medium. This literature review also describes several sequential plots to connect emotional discomfort, performative linguistics and utilizing Twitter as a coping mechanism. The significance of this inquiry deals with the racial and masculine identity development of Black men who, in this current climate, need a positive coping space amidst society’s and the media’s attacks on their image and desire to be seen as a man. To illustrate the cultural history of *Cool Pose* this researcher utilizes the following sections to explore this unique phenomenon. To cope, many Black males have summoned their creative energies into developing a symbolic universe and have adopted different “poses” and “postures” to offset external stressors (Majors, 1989). The long-withstanding need for acceptance felt by Black men started with their captivity and Transatlantic journey to the Americas. The Transatlantic slave trade destroyed millions of Africans’ psycho-social and emotional understanding of their African language and culture (Laher, 2012).

The United States racial hierarchy has positioned people of color to lack power to direct their ethnic identities within the public consciousness of social media (Chan, 2017). More than ever, Black men are marketed in media advertisement as hyper-sexual, as animals; their bodies are circulating with images of mug shots or murders. The media statistics also highlight Black men’s inability to attain stable employment or degrees (Harris, Palmer, & Struve, 2011). In 2011, *Media Representation & Impact on the Lives of Black Men and Boys* researched mass media portrayals of Black men, and their results concluded that "print media, television, [and] the internet created barriers to the advancement within our society, while also making these positions seem natural and inevitable" (Donaldson, 2015, p. 1). The inevitable storytelling of hypersexual
Black men created a prevailing narrative that is a continuation of Black men not meeting the standards and strides of "manhood" (Connor, 1995; Pelzer, 2016). There is no escaping these images nor the conversation about being a Black man and achieving manhood. The detachment and dehumanization can still be detected in many Black communities today (Laher, 2012). Black men are continually plagued by historical and present media depiction of their racial and masculine identities. The Internet has not provided an escape for Black men from either race or racism and has painfully reminded society and the globe of the negative stereotypes in mainstream media (Brock, 2009; Daniels, 2013). While on Twitter, these conversations are repeated seasonally and etched in Twitter’s history with familiar hashtags or images.

Social media allows users to connect across various mediums to engage in authentic conversations (Potts, 2017). The authentic conversations also allude to the greater possibility of sustaining long-lasting relationships, avenues of social justice or change and educating through hashtag chats. These authentic conversations formulate the user’s self-identity, whether it be the true identity or a pseudo-identity (Bozkurt & Tu, 2016); the same goes for Black men who chose to connect and create a sense of belonging while online. The linear progressions of these online identities will be further explained in this chapter. Black online communities spend a fair amount of time working through the internal and external ideological constraints of being a low-status American (Brock, 2009). While utilizing Twitter, members self-identify into sub-communities such as #BlackTwitter, #BrunchTwitter, #AnimeTwitter or #Twitstorians. These sub-communities’ curates’ spaces for belongingness amid of digital oppression. The Internet has allowed race and racism to persist online in ways that are both unique to the Internet and parallel to centuries-old forms of oppression that reverberate offline (Daniels, 2013).
In the historical perspective, slavery systematically endorsed the genocide of African knowledge and memory of African rootedness towards Black men. There should be no surprise that slavery remains a historical moment in the socio-political and economic development of the United States (Laher, 2012). The reoccurring stories of everyday racism while online are moments away from being the next trending topic. Trolled stories such as President Obama’s tan suit, Tamir Rice death or the boycotting of John Boyega (Star Wars Episode VII) as a black Jedi; racism dominates online clicks and headlines. Throughout generations, Black men have continually developed coping methods to navigate the aftermath of slavery in attempts to be seen in the status and statue of a "man." Most recently, since the creation of social media, Black men actively touch base and develop masculine identities via social network sites; this perception directly influences and continues to build upon coping and identity development for Black men during everyday life. The reality of the matter is that everyone has a social network and digital identity with Web technologies (Bozkurt & Tu, 2016).

**Cool Pose**

This section introduces *Cool Pose* as the first strand of three linking themes for Black men to cope and express their emotional discomfort on Twitter. The sub-strands for this opening theme are deep roots of cool; cool — in its purest form a uniquely Black experience; and cool is ultimately about survival. The accompanying sub-strands reveal the deep-rooted connectedness to the lack of emotional management strategies used to navigate their surroundings (Jackson, 2018) and the dire need to survive (Hall & Pizarro, 2010).

**Deep Roots of Cool**

Many ways, *Cool Pose* is exemplified in Western civilization; however, this phenomenon has its origins in Africa. Anthropologist John Janzen has researched and traced *Cool Pose* back
to Africa as early as 2000-3000 BCE. Majors and Billson (1993), attempting to understand the broader psychology behind why Black males fail, their research concluded that Black men viewed coolness or Cool Pose as a "ritualized" expression of masculinity that involves speech, style, physical and emotional posturing. Black men’s attitude displayed coolness as being associated with their silent and knowing rejection of racist oppression; Black men fostered self-dignified expression of masculinity that was denied by mainstream expressions of “manhood” (Kirkland & Jackson, 2009). Cool Pose has a double meaning, first, it is the stylized mannerisms that many Black males use to demonstrate social competence as they convey a sense of racial-ethnic pride in their walk, strength in their varied stances, and control and the theoretical perspective on masculine identity development in schools has mostly been focused on White male students. Secondly, Cool Pose postures to be an excellent coping mechanism for some Black men that have learned to counter social inequality (Wright, 2009). These practices have produced limited alternatives for Black men to interact with others authentically and express emotional discomfort with everyday life.

Furthermore, Robert Farris Thompson, a history professor at Yale University, studied the narrative of Cool Pose in Africa. His research shows that Cool Pose started in Nigeria, it was assigned to anyone who was crowned king during the ancient empire; and the term Ewuare as assigned and it translates to "it is cool" (Hall, 2009). The adoption of Cool Pose from African roots was one of many traditions that were lost during captivity and replaced with limitations and stereotypes in route to manhood. Western civilization has constructed a strict concept of masculinity; painting the picture of high stature, lack of emotions and multiple simultaneous relationships as a sense of dominance. White society has socialized males in this country to be
masculine and expects them to live their lives accordingly; until now, this society has only provided White males to fulfill these roles (Majors, 1989).

In this case, Black men are cornered on many sides; Black men are excluded from the social, economic and the rightful journey towards manhood. While still battling this sense of abandonment, Black men regularly strive to prove themselves "masculine." Cazenae (1981) argued that "[being] a man in [the] American society still means achieving, accomplishing, having a job, and providing adequately for oneself and one's family" (Majors, 1989, p. 96). The systematic and institutional oppression that was birthed from slavery continues to deprive African-Americans and further restricts Black men from achieving and understanding what masculinity and manhood are. This cultural deprivation was not merely an oxymoron, critics charged; instead, the term perpetuated the tendency to ignore the relationship between social structures and social behaviors (Fultz, & Brown, 2008). To comprehend masculinity for Black men, the global community must grasp the intersection of many cultural and social practices with the African-American community and the plight with the Black Experience.

**Cool — in its Purest Form, a Uniquely Black Experience**

Majors and Billson initially coined the term *Cool Pose* and defined cool as "a way for Black males to express bitterness, anger, and distrust towards the dominant society" (Al-Mateen, 1992, p. 2). The societal pressures faced by Black men often force them to cope externally by selecting an alternative masculine performance and presentation. Downplaying their emotions, or at least suppressing feelings gives young men a sense of dignity (Jackson, 2018). This alternative image seeks acceptance by following the dominant cultural trends amongst Black men. These trends shift over time, but the effects are resounding within the African-American community in attempts for acceptance in society as a whole. An in-depth study conducted in 2016 interviewed
60 African-American middle- and upper-middle class mothers to examine their concerns with the controlling images of the “thug.” There is a striking correlation between the 2016 study and this research as it draws to the similar importance of images and emotional management. Mothers within the study encouraged their sons to “restrain their expressions of anger, frustration, or excitement lest others view them as aggressive or violent” (Dow, 2016, p. 179). In the next section, Marlene Connor’s depiction of Cool Pose is mentioned to bring additional exposure to this sensation.

Marlene Kim Connor outlines multiple distinct characteristics of “cool” in What is Cool? Understanding Black Manhood in America. For the synergy of this research study, three chapters that build on the experiences of Cool Pose: Street Cool (Chapter One); Middle-Class Cool (Chapter Three); and Electronic Cool (Chapter Four). Black men achieve manhood using rules they have established for Cool Pose (Connor, 1995). In urban communities, Street Cool is an accurate manner of life or death. It is uncontrollable compared to the other narratives mentioned in Connor’s book. Connor, (1995) emphasizes that “These streets are angry violent, dangerous, complicated, unpredictable and relentless. However, believe it or not, the streets are also fun, familiar, filled with adventure family, friends, and energy” (p. 20). The dual and complex nature of Street Cool leaves Black men seeking respect, but at the cost of fear and violence. This ongoing cycle is propagandized in media and movies via physical confrontations, brushes with the law, manipulation of authority figures, and finesse with women (Connor, 1995). The fear cuts as a double edge sword; first as not gaining credibility amongst the street members and being ostracized. While the sword exits, it is presented as the loss of family and friends, who shun sexually progressive environments that recycle the negative perceptions of masculinity, sexuality, and gender performance (Mathews, 2010). The coveted experience of Cool Pose
entices generations of Black boys to enter a course that will eventually dictate their existence. From the perspective of *Street Cool*, Black boys’/men’s existence is predicated on anger, aggression, and toughness. The impact of economics then births a new variation of *Cool Pose*.

Middle-class economics shifts the pendulum of the Black community by granting enough access to believe that middle-class Blacks are not like your previous generation of lower-class family members but still kept at a distance from reaching the class above *Cool Pose*. It is an adaptive psychological defense when you consider the new reality of Black men who enter the phenomena as middle-class Blacks. *Middle-Class Cool* contradicts the experience since *Cool Pose* came from the Black man’s struggle to survive on the streets (Connor, 1995). The war is envious because middle-class Black men are not in the streets for survival as many Black men who use this avenue to provide monetary means for their families or social acceptance. The role of emotional management in these environments illustrates the bonds in which working-class Black men often depend on to survive racism and social isolation (Jackson, 2018). A middle-class Black man enters the streets seeking the same acceptance through emptiness that money could never bring. Patterson (2006) argues that coolness is a dangerous pursuit for Black males; this deadly illusion of approval can end in self-sabotage and destruction (Kirkland & Jackson, 2009). The final variance of *Cool Pose* includes media (music, art, and film) to extend coping for Black men.

In the phase of *Electronic Cool*, Rap/Hip-Hop encapsulates the media in the progressive development of *cool*. At the turn of the early 1990s, Black America was divided, the inner-city communities were resentful towards the middle class because of their glorified escape from the ghettos, and the middle-class was still ashamed of the stereotypes that dominated the media. The origins of Rap began in the South Bronx as a poetic measure to express emotions without access
to equipment, instruments or studios. Rap was the voice behind *Cool Pose* during this decade and generations after that. Rap artists have withstood generations of silencing by the intentional labor of captivity and have continually used language as a medium to express a variety of cultural phenomena within the African-American community. Rap music granted artists the ability to symbolize many things, but one thing that should not go unnoticed is rap’s ability to exist without money. Once again, *cool* transformed itself into another form by turning cold. Dow (2016) explains that despite having additional funds, Black middle-class boys were not immune to a social system that require parents to police their behaviors, emotions, and appearance. Hence, the unmatched characteristics of *Street Cool, Middle-Class Cool, and Electronic Cool* resemble a foundational emphasis on survival.

**Cool is ultimately about Survival**

*Cool Pose* enables Black males to control their fear of not fulfilling expectations of manhood and maximize the appeal of their self-presentation (Hall & Pizarro, 2010). Depending on the social location of Black men, many may indulge themselves in surface or deep acting. Jackson (2018) further explains that in surface acting, the person is only acting as if he has a feeling — an outward presentation; while deep acting causes one to self-induce and hide the immediate feeling. As mentioned earlier, both performative measures of acting can be seen through variations of *street cool, middle class cool,* and *electronic cool*. The inward feeling suppresses the implicit emotion and deflects with no response, and the self-indulgent feeling embraces the emotions and acts out. As a result of being marginalized within broader society, Black men use these emotional strategies to counter a lack of power and alienation (Jackson, 2018).
Stereotypes based on these *Cool Pose* phases depict young Black males as delinquent and have dominated Western folklore and educational literature to the point of being valid (Hall, 2009). In (2013), HuffPost released an article that stated, “Many of these stereotypical, one-dimensional characters in film negate the broader and deeper experience of Black life and the lives of Black men in particular” (p. 1). These images projected are defense mechanisms to deal with multiple stressors that are faced daily and in turn lead, Black men to adapting contrasting coping mechanisms that will enable their survival (Hall & Pizarro, 2010). Books, articles, urban ethnographies, and even congressional hearings highlighted what was said to be the perilous situation facing Black male youth, often describing the collective group as "endangered" and "at risk" (Fultz & Brown, 2008).

Permanently, Black men employ *cool* as a survival technique to preserve their sanity and emotional stability. Unfortunately, much of the literature does not explicitly examine emotion management; instead, scholarship has presented ways Black men suppress vulnerability and present emotional indifference while excelling in academic atmospheres (Jackson, 2018). These repressed emotions and inability to communicate weaknesses have caused *Cool Pose* to formulate into two concepts (1) the "tough guy" and (2) the "player of women" (Harper, 2004, p. 93). The image of the "tough guy" feels no pain and shows no emotions toward outside activity. Society has traditionally suggested that boys play sports and compete vigorously against each other (Harper, 2004, p. 93). Despite the generational removal from slavery, Black males still experience the struggle of personal comfort with personal identity (Tovar-Murray & Tovar-Murray, 2012). This "tough guy" image, for many Black men, is merely a mask of hurt and ill-informed knowledge of how to handle life stressors to clasp useful self-esteem and presentation methods and not resulting to violence to settle qualms.
The "player of women" role includes the enticing image of having multiple girlfriends and sexual partners (Harper, 2004, p. 93). Social media consumers can vividly see across numerous social media sites, Rap/Hip-Hop videos, and new websites how various women are surrounding Black males as an athlete, rapper or drug dealer. The assumptions coincide with many stereotypes that have been passed down through social conversations. For Black men, they continuously receive messages on power and violence concerning how Black men interact with women bodies; specifically, Black women bodies. Scholars (Connell, 1995; Pleck, 1981; Kimmel & Messner, 2007) highlighted this perspective that assumed men’s aggressiveness toughness and competitiveness is learned and reinforced through social interactions. Coupled with the various forms of systems that support learning, education is also an indicator of learning Cool Pose version of manhood (Hall & Pizarro, 2010).

Harris, Palmer, and Struve (2011) observed the social construct of Black masculinity and gender role conflict amongst 22 Black men enrolled at a private research university. Their research continued the characterization of coping provided by (Harris, 1995; Oliver, 1989; & Harper, 2004), but this particular study infused emotional management and mental health into the analysis. After conducting a four phase’s interview process that included: semi-structured interviews and focus groups, the findings provided three outcomes. The first outcome was the “conceptualizations of masculinity” (p. 53). Again, Black men alluded to the performative measures as embracing the “breadwinner” concept (p. 53), a “good paying job” (p. 53) and “balling” (p. 53) post-college career. The second outcome presented in this study was “behavioral expressions of masculinity” (p. 54). Black men in this study felt that the seminal expression revolving around masculinity at the college stemmed from (a) leadership and student success in college, (b) homophobia and fear of femininity, and (c) engaging in sexist and
constrained relationships with women (Harris, Palmer, & Struve, 2011). These two outcomes ultimately emphasized the survival measure necessary for Black men to compete within their community at a predominately White institution.

**Conclusion**

The psychological defense of *Cool Pose* still enables Black men to maintain stability in the face of racism and other forms of social oppression from White power (Majors, 1989). This introductory section has established the foundational tenets that will be continually displayed through this literature review. This section has reviewed the first major strand of literature resulting from Black men’s inability to cope with the external stressors of life while effectively communicating their emotions. The scholars listed (Connell, 1995; Pleck, 1981; Kimmel & Messner, 2007; Harper, 2004; Harris, Palmer, & Struve, 2011) have continued to point to the work of Majors and Billson (1992) as the dominant strategy to identify the psychological methods of Black men to cope. The sub-strands have pointed to inextricable tie of *Cool Pose* to Black men and their survival. The dominant perspective in the media has emphasized how Black men conceal their emotions that could be perceived as weak (a violation in *the street cool*), a type of emotional invulnerability or cool emotional presence (Majors & Bilson, 1992; Jackson, 2018). *Cool Pose* illuminates the pathway toward masculinity, and it is through this valley that Black men begin our journey to identifying the necessary defense mechanisms that some Black men might employ while engaging with their audience on Twitter. Lastly, Black males may need self-esteem education even more than manhood education, for they must learn to value who they are in order to succeed, both as juveniles and as adults (Gillespie, 2005; Hall & Pizarro, 2010).
Social Identity

Tajfel (1987, 1981) defined social identity as “the given social context that provides category through which individuals, by learning to recognize linguistic or other behavioral cues to allocate themselves (or others) to category membership.” (McNamara, 1997 p. 562). In this research, the dualistic narrative of these two distinct social constructs (Blackness and masculinity) is separated because they produce different consequences. First, race is not biological; it’s a social construct (Onwuachi-Willig, 2016). Blackness or the Black identity as a social group reaffirms the common social identification of the African diaspora and the way people come to see themselves (in-group) (Stets, & Burke, 2000). Next is the self-categorization of masculinity as it relates to another social category. As for the (in-group) of men, masculinity serves as an indicator of the perceived similarities of being a man. At the intersection of masculinity and race, there is an accentuation of attitudes, beliefs and values, and behavioral norms that are stigmatized as relevant (Stets, & Burke, 2000). The problem at this juncture results in the caste structure of self-identity and social categorization. The next section goes into the specific self-identity marker of Black identity.

Black Identity

In modern times, Black identity is “emerging, changing, and complex” (Hecht & Ribeau, 1991, p. 503; Sullivan & Platenburg, 2017). Coupled with the advancements in society and technology, Black identity can be viewed on press and social media while being duplicated by non-people of color, particular White individuals (Daniels, 2013). In the same manner, the Black community has more opportunities to explore and express their identity development with the assistance of press and social media. This dissertation uses symbolic interactionism as the framework to navigate Black identity development, and this framework views racial identity as “one of many identities contained within self” which is important to the United States (White &
Burke, 1987, p. 311; Sullivan & Platenburg, 2017). To explore more of Black identity development in America, Winant (1995) emphasizes that,

Racial identity outweighs all other identities. We are compelled to think racially, to use the racial categories and the meaning systems into which we have been socialized… It is not possible for be “color blind,” for race is basic element of our identity... For better or worse, without a clear racial identity, an American is in danger of having no identity. (P.31-32)

Black men are heavily influenced by press and social media, and mass media outlets have portrayed Black males along a spectrum that can be described as implicitly stereotypical (Henfield, 2012). The increase of implicitly biased media makes it extremely difficult for Black men to develop healthy coping mechanisms while simultaneously developing a progressive concept of masculinity. Black male identities are a constructed blend of multiple identity characteristics (race, gender, ethnicity, religion, and class) (Jackson, 2012; Thomas 2016). By exploring the fundamental work of William ‘Bill’ Cross, the next section investigates the stages of Black identity development.

William Cross developed the seminal theory for Black racial identity development in 1971. Cross (1991) revision of this earlier framework indicated the fluid process of Black racial identity consisting of four or five sequential stages and explained changes with the process (Hocoy, 1999). The five stages are pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment. For added context, Black identity serves as an essential amplifier within this research as it examines stages 3-5 of identity progression and development. The stages are immersion/emersion, internalization, and internalization-
commitment; these stages measure multiple ways Black men conceal their emotional discomfort with their relatability towards masculinity. During the immersion/emersion stage, Black men seek outward expression of his African heritage through attendance of cultural events or change of clothing style (Endale, 2018).

Black men’s triad ordeal of sense making between their gender, racial, and masculine identity in response to racism contributes to their self-esteem (Mahalik, Pierre, & Wan, 2006) and thus, developing an effective coping mechanism. Next, the internalization stage depends on the success or lack of success that Black men have specifically with the immersion-emersion stage. If the stage is a failure, Black men will have an internal hatred towards White people stemming from systematic and intuitional barriers and if the stage is a success, internalization can be described as “inner peace and confidence in regard to racial identity” (Mahalik, Pierre, & Wan, 2006 p. 515). The culmination of these identity stages results in the commitment stage; in this stage, the difference is a healthy concept of racial identity and which is signaled by actions to dismantle oppression.

More than often, Black people begin with less awareness concerning their own Black identity and progress. Black men’s experience with racism in the United States has a direct correlation with anxiety, depression, and substance abuse (Burke, 1984 Outlaw, 1993); and low levels of self-esteem (Simpson & Yinger, 1985; Mahalik, Pierre, & Wan, 2006). On the other hand, utilizing the Nigrescence model (Cross, 1991) as a catalyst can help Black men to seek out history, art, music, and social media that represent the culture they never knew existed (Ritchey, 2014). In other words, Rogers, Scott, and Way (2015) believe that racial identity is often cited as one of the keys to promoting positive development among Black youth. In the same way, Rogers, Scott, and Way (2015) findings through a longitudinal mixed-method study of identity
development in all-Black high school agree that “racial and gender identity are highly central and positively regarded among Black males” (p.417).

**Masculinity**

The second tenet within this research centralizes masculinity as performance judged by men themselves and amplified by others. With the support of historical narratives such as slavery and the Civil Rights Movement, this section aims to pinpoint the internal struggle amidst men to define masculinity for the Black community. The section also highlights the blackballing of Black men who are assumed to be less masculine and labeled feminine. More recently, the concept of masculinity has been linked to host many health-related problems including: depression and physical violence (Harris, Wood, & Newman, 2015).

Masculine expectations, especially in a traditional patriarchal society, often force men to exhibit strength, aggressiveness, dominance over women and sometimes great superiority over other men (Milton, 2012). Numerous scholars, most notably Black women recall the perceptions of Black woman bodies and the dehumanizing effects of rape and predatory behavior as a result of men societal power over women (hooks, 1981; Collins 2004; Crenshaw, 2018). Masculinity is complex and varies across spectrums of racial and ethnic identities (Connell & Messerschmitt, 2005; Pelzer, 2016). In the boundaries of this research, this researcher seeks to differentiate between maleness and masculinity; the researcher defines maleness as the characteristics of the male sex and masculinity as the habits or traits that society considers to be appropriate for a man. Whereas, masculinity is a social construct that determines what a man should do and how a man should act (Van, 2017). With this in mind, this research examines the often forgotten but colossal difference amongst the racial lines of masculinity between Black and White men. Current and future scholars must be mindful of how traditional notions of Euro-American manhood have
influenced historical and fictional constructions of masculinity (Leak, 1998). Since the prescribed notions of masculinity have been cut from the cloth of Whiteness, Black men and their existence are viewed as the blemishes on the fabric. After all, the true blemish is Whiteness thirst for control and colonialism. Colonialism was a project to reflect the ethos of European standards that established gendered work situations through the gendered status of being a “man” (Malton, 2016). This portion of the literature review aims to evaluate relevant historical literature that identifies significant experiences of Black men that have led to their racial and masculine identity development.

Masculinity studies began in the 1980s with seminal works of *Men, Masculinity, and the Process of Sociological Enquiry* (Pleck & Pleck, 1980); *Men’s Studies Modified: The Impact of Feminism on the Academic Discipline* (Spender, 1981); and *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men’s Studies* (Brod, 1987) (Johnson, 2013). Connell's (1995) social theory of gender focuses on gender as a relational construct rather than a particular concept. As a result of this theory, Connell's definition of masculinity inserts a hierarchical relationship whereby hegemonic masculinity has become a widely utilized description for a configuration of masculinity that helps perpetuates the domination over femininity (Lusher & Robins, 2010). The dominance not only overshadows women, but hegemonic masculinity also extends to members of the gay, queer and Trans community. Some men strip Black gay men of their status as men and label them as effeminate (Mathews, 2010). Previously, the development of ethnic and masculine identity has only been examined in the physical space; instead, this review prefaces the impact of racial and masculine identity development for Black men in a digital setting. It is equally important to review slavery as a genesis for Black men’s emotional discomfort.

**Slavery’s Impact**
The historical sexual assault of Black men and boys is well known. Be as it may, it is still mostly unarticulated in research and documentaries. The rape of slave men has gone unacknowledged because of the current and historical tendency to define rape along gendered lines (Foster, 2011). Black men have collectively been emasculated because: (1) Slavery caused a situation where many Black men could not protect themselves or their families and (2) Economic oppression rendered Black men unable to provide for their families in a society where manhood and the provider role are inextricable (Bush, 1999). The standard scholarly interpretation of how slavery affected Black masculinity is perhaps best captured by the comments of one former slave, Lewis Clarke, who declared that a slave “can't be a man” because he could not protect his female kin from being sexually assaulted by owners and overseers (Foster, 2011, p. 445).

Slavery first began in 1629, when the Dutch introduced it to the American colonial establishment. Colonial Jamestown, Virginia, was the first establishment to start the lucrative productions of "cash crops" (Burris, 2015, p. 11). The racialized pace toward alienating Africans socially, politically and economically began to gather momentum (Laher, 2012). It was African slaves and their descendant that led the charge to furnish the robust labor market that created the New World economies and the first international mass demand for consumer goods (sugar, rice, tobacco, and cotton) (Davis, 2000). The Transatlantic Slave Trade systematically endorsed and shaped the ethnic demarcation, racial dehumanization, and genocide of African wisdom and memory of African rootedness (Johnson, 2013). The captivity of Black men has caused them to be constrained to an "inferior" function within the Black family.

Research has yet to examine slavery's relationship to racial disparities in poverty, despite slavery's inextricable link to race in the United States (O'Connell, 2012). The assumption of
inferiority began with the separation of Black men from their families, the public rape of black men ("breaking the buck" as it is the commonly referred) and use of Black men for entertainment or sport. Bias towards Black bodies has continued the criminalization and victimization of Black men without addressing structural problems shaped by slavery (Lee, 2017). Black male bodies have been defined as a threat throughout American history, all while being accepted in roles that serve and entertain White people. Black men were controlled and made to appear non-threatening (Ferber, 2007). Lee (2017) observed mainstream media bias towards Black Twitter, and her research consisted of a content analysis within corporate news media. The results of this research proved that the media represents social realities that are shaped by the history of colonization, slavery, and imperialism (Lee, 2017).

It is significant to understand the treatment of Black males during slavery and today. It is a fact that the U.S. is a patriarchal society that recognizes men as the natural leader of the head of the family structure (Bush, 1999). This immovable social order has chastened more Black males that do not fit within the heteronormative structure (hegemonic masculinity) than it has helped Black families and Black men in their racial-ethnic identity development. The performance of racial-ethnic identity for Black men results in the awareness of and being able to negotiate and navigate racism and discrimination positively while demonstrating ethnic pride in oneself and one's ethnic group (Wright, 2009). Since the blemishes of Black males perseveres, the quest to resume the place of high-quality fabric as in the ancient African empires and to display the pride that existed before slavery tends to lead to intra-communal conflict among other Black men who fight for the same place. During the last thirty years, the world’s understanding of American slavery has been extraordinarily enriched by numerous studies that fall in the first category of rigorous and sustained comparison of traditional masculinity (Davis, 2000). This enrichment still
presents gaps in the connectedness that has transpired since slavery and has shown up in other periods, such as the Civil Rights Movement.

**Civil Rights Movement**

The Civil Rights Movement for African-Americans began a period to re-identify themselves by growing a public image as an emerging social, political, economic and passionate population (i.e., *Revolutionary Cool*) Connor, 1995). The Black power movement activities during the late 1960s and early 1970s encompassed virtually every facet of Black political life in the United States and beyond, and yet the story of Black power is still primarily an unchronicled epic in American history (Joseph, 2009). The re-identification bought new depictions of the masculine Black male in the manner of prominent civil right figures like Andrew Young and Martin Luther King Jr., determined protesters and "strong" Black father figures. Black Power's common expression grew out of two distinct yet overlapping traditions that shaped Black political activism in the first half of the twentieth century; the New Negro radicalism of the 1920s and the subsequent freedom surges — democratic movements (Joseph, 2009).

Civil Rights and the Black Power movements continued to cultivate the image of Black males as dominant, Christian-oriented, heterosexual men, and these movements expressed performances of Blackness and masculinity in a new fashion as opposed to stereotypically emasculated models. In the Black Power era, Wednt (2007) describes Black Nationalists as consciousness, and the opposition to racial discrimination became a constitutive element of a new conception of Black manhood. The performance and presentation captured by Black males regained a position of status and influence. Historically, masculinity has been defined and measured on a hierarchy of gender norms; typically, heterosexual White males, and other males depending on race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation (Laing, 2017). On the other hand, it
continued to divide Black men among themselves when dealing with masculine expressions. The educational gains during the Civil Rights Movement also permitted young Black boys the opportunity to attend single-sex schools.

Goodkind (2013) argued that single-sex education, especially for low-income youth of color would minimize or climate distractions from the opposite sex and sexual harassment of girls. This stereotypical point invokes the hypersexuality of Black males (Laing, 2017). The Civil Rights Movement failed to acknowledge the various expressions of masculinity that could come in the forms of queer, gay or transgender. Yes, Black masculinity can be expressed from queer, gay or transgender in the very instant. However, society often homogenizes them as Black men (Walcott, 2009), causing them to receive some negative treatment. In 2017, Tony Laing interviewed eight Black male high school students to better grasp their understanding of masculinity and brotherhood at a single-sex school. From this study, Laing reported that “gender identity issues are significant issues in the lives of young men and are relational to their peers (Laing, 2017, p. 193). As emphasized in Laing (2017), the meaning of brotherhood and masculinity towards high school Black men has shown numerous ways the Civil Rights Movement fueled a new narrative of Black masculinity, and the resulting images were progressive. Despite the new images, the Civil Rights movement still denied the scattered experiences of Black men who did not identify as dominant, heterosexual or Christian.

During the Million Man March, Black gay men were forced to choose between the submitting of their homosexual identity to their racial identity in order to participate in the “racial uplift” (Mathews, 2010). It is rare for Black gay men to be embraced, and when society does embrace them, the interaction exhibits violent rhetoric, misogyny, and bravado by Black Power advocates (Joseph, 2009). The barriers experienced by young Black men are diminishing
results of 205 years of slavery, 100 years of state and federally supported segregation and decades of the social dismantling of opportunities created in the 1960s and 1970s (Johnson, 2013). Sociologist Michael Kimmel explained, "Violence, has long been understood as the best way to ensure that others publicly recognized one's manhood" (Wendt, 2007, p. 544). Black males are consistently placed in awkward positions to seek solace for both racial and masculine identity in their community. The consistent lack of acceptance transformed into much of the toxic masculinity that exists today and leads to violence in the forms of homicide and domestic violence.

The sudden increase of social media availability among Black males could cause extreme difficulty in both gender identity and performance (Potts, 2017) and lead to more violence. The impact of imagery is pivotal on Twitter and masculine development of Black males to creating acceptance and decreasing violence. Today's media is full of a performance-driven society, where social and cultural factors have created an "imaginary audience". This imaginary audience explained in Litt (2012) has created a mental illustration that people (Black men, in this instance) fantasize about future exchanges that happen or do not occur. I believe these exchanges ultimately question the masculine performance and presentation between Black men. The structural factors between men appear online and are a result of social and technological environments related to social media use that may influence the imagined audience and aid in identity development (Litt, 2012). Mathews (2010) observes the conflict between Black man and traditional masculinity by acknowledging the difficulty in accepting their stigmatized identity and challenging the status quo. In the next section, the researcher will explain how masculinity is viewed and conditioned among Black men.

**What is Black Masculinity?**
Collins (2005), Hooks (1981, 2004) and other scholars have stressed the importance of an analysis of Black identity that includes the junction of race, class, gender and sexual orientation. Prior theories and methodology of masculinity have been mainly focused on White men and their foxtrot with White privilege. Brooms (2017), argues that the continual plight of Black males deserves attention far beyond the statistical grid, which often does not provide an accurate narrative. Collins (2005) cites significant contributions which remind us that Black male identity is indeed complex and has "contrasting and competing forces that are played out in the annals of American society" (Brooms, 2017, p. 39). Scholars have modeled these results to include Black men, but the intricacies of race, gender and class made it immensely difficult for Black men to follow the prescribed practices within hegemonic masculinity (Cohen, 2008; Laing, 2017). The research presented primarily relies on the perspectives of Black males to provide a robust picture of their current thoughts, ideas, statuses and experiences (Brooms, 2017).

During the 1970s, there was an explosion of writing about "the male role", sharply criticizing role norms as the source of oppressive behavior by men towards others as toxic (Connell & Messerschmitt, 2005, p. 831). Dalley-Trim (2007), defines hegemonic masculinity as “the dominating or dominant form of masculinity which often claims the highest standard and exercises the greatest influence”, the standard of what it means to be a ‘real’ man or boy” (p. 201). Again, these relations focus on gender as a system of hierarchical relationships, directly addressing issues of power absent from theorization of gender, but deemed essential (Lusher & Robins, 2010). With no regard for performative linguistic and cultural barriers, the "real" man standard has been in question for generations, especially in the Black community. Many of the difficulties that Black men encounter are linked to a hegemonic masculine script (Wagner, 2015). These attempts have tried to depict a comprehensive picture, on the other hand, Black
males have expressed concerns of being "invisible" within the U.S. and, as a result, many of their needs are unmet (Brooms, 2017).

Similarly, a man does not understand himself to be Black until he interacts with another person who defines and treats him as a Black male (Mathews, 2010). History has shown countless times its values and beliefs toward someone being Black or of African descent. The interpretation of Black masculinity has transformed into a conglomeration of expressions, which includes race, gender identity/expressions, and geographical differences. Mathews (2010) examined Black men’s pressure to perform and conform to masculinity. In a study that included 30 students from both a Historically Black College/University (HBCU) and a Predominately White Institution (PWI). Results from this study concluded that (1) Black men are pressured to perform masculine behaviors to be accepted in dominant society, (2) Black gay men performed masculinity to separate themselves from the stigma of homosexuality, and (3) Performing masculinity is social currency to maintain a less stigmatized identity in the Black community (Mathews, 2010, p. 80). Brooms (2017) reports that (1) Black male identity remains in a cultural clash, and often is constrained and stripped, in pursuit of the American Dream; and (2) Black male identity is impacted by generational shifts that push and pull central foci in different directions. Since masculinity is a construction of social influence, Black men have long struggled with the expression of their maleness because of the sovereign impact of race. Black male bodies are increasingly admired and commodified in music and individual sports, but at the same, they continue to be used to invoke fear (Ferber, 2007). In logical sequence, one would have to ask, “What, then, is the nature of the portrayals of Black males in these new media vehicles, and how [does] this [compare] with portrayals in other media vehicles” (Bailey, 2006, p. 90).

Conclusion
Black male racial identity is not self-created, but rather it is based on perceptions of others and, through, time confirmed as stereotypes. As Johnson (2009) and Wednt (2007) points out, the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement failed to produce an inclusive counter-narrative to the detrimental effects of slavery. The concept has been employed in studying media representations for men, for instance, the interplay of sports and imagery (Connell & Messerschmitt, 2005). This feeling of invisibility describes how repeated racial slights may manifest into racially adaptive behaviors for Black males as they attempt to manage racism and emotions (Tovar-Murray & Tovar-Murray, 2012). Since masculinity and Blackness can be considered performative measures, the addition of gender demonstrates a particular kind of social role or disposition that is a mixture of present choices and past influences (Jackson & Hopson, 2011). More importantly, a critical shift in literature is necessary to analyze the methods employed by which Black men define their interpretation of masculinity and reclaim their identity. The previous sections of this literature review have covered Cool Pose and masculinity (Black masculinity); now, the final section introduces social media and Twitter.

**Social Media**

The final stand of this literature review incorporates the summation of Cool Pose (Cool as a unique Black experience, and Cool is survival) and masculinity (slavery and the Civil Rights Movement) to investigate social media as the vehicle to allow Black men to communicate their emotional discomfort. This section considers digital identity, Twitter, and Black men on social media as areas of extension regarding Cool Pose. Black men interactions on Twitter permits self-presentation through ongoing ‘tweets’ and conversations with others, rather than static profiles (Marwick & Boyd, 2011).

New Age Press
Offline involvement and engagement have changed how scholars view digital data over the last decade (Gross & Meriwether, 2016). According to the Pew Research Center (2018), 69% of the public utilize some form of social media. Notably, Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter and Instagram are amongst the most popular social media sites. Pew also found that there is a clear variance in the way people use these mediums: 68% of Facebook users and 24% of Twitter users engage with the platform daily, 26% of Blacks use Twitter, 70% use Facebook and 43% use Instagram (Fact Sheet, 2018). Twitter has become a popular site amongst the Black community often viewed as a family reunion during popular award shows (BET Awards, Oscars, Academy Awards) and movies. Historically, images and identities of Black men have been manufactured by the dominant media culture in an often intentionally negative and distorted manner that extends beyond the U.S. borders (Parker & Moore, 2014). The astonishing number of negative images of Black males outweigh the positive. In recent years, some researchers have credited social media — in particular, Black Twitter with propelling racially focused issues to greater national attention (Anderson & Hitlin, 2016). Sites such as Twitter may provide digital spaces for Black male users to reconstruct their identities and cope with greater control and some level of authenticity (Parker & Moore, 2014). Social interaction and connection have a significant influence on student engagement while establishing masculine and racial identity (Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2009).

Negative portrayals of Black men are often manufactured and projected through digital, print and academic scholarship, and they continue to perpetuate the various stressors that cause men to deter (Parker & Moore, 2014) psychologically. These online communities serve a range of purposes, from fostering a safe space for expressing and exploring racial identity to facilitating discussions and advocacy on racial issues (Tynes et al., 2011; Chan, 2017). One can
assume that seeing negative images reinforces adverse outcomes for Black males while also enhancing the dominant nature of masculinity. Likewise, social media content provided students with glimpses of their “possible selves” (Markus & Nurius, 1986), presenting the images of "what they might become, what they would likely to become, and what they are afraid of becoming" (Chan, 2017, p. 172). The limitation still carries the narrative of Cool Pose and hegemonic masculinity. In addition to formulating these online communities and establishing a digital identity, Black men also structure racial categories to reaffirm their racial authenticity (Florini, 2014) and create a sense of belonging. To further explain social identity in the digital realm, this researcher employs the works of Chan (2017) and Florini (2014) to describe digital identity.

**Digital Identity**

Ramelb (2016) describes identity as "the condition or character as to who a person or what a thing is; the qualities, beliefs, etc., that distinguish or identify a person or thing" (p. 5). The advent of social media coupled with identity has birthed the notion of a digital identity, or “the composite of images that individuals present, share, and promote for themselves in the digital domain” (Chan, J. 2017, p.164). Digital spaces have secured themselves as another avenue for African-Americans to discuss a variety of topics publicly versus in the seclusion of homes, churches, and barbershops. African-American social media users are twice as likely (68%) as Whites (35%) to say that at least one post they see on social media sites is about race or race relations (Anderson & Hitlin, 2016). Due to how racial groups are inequitably positioned within the U.S. ethnic structure, people of color often lack the power to direct how their racial identities are constructed within the public consciousness of social media (Brock, 2009; Senft & Noble, 2014; Chan, 2017).
Online identification on social media sites is expressed in three levels of real identity, pseudonymity identity and anonymity identity. Real identity is the complete depiction of an individual from the physical space to the digital area. While Pseudonymity identity is where an individual shows moderate levels of obscurity in their presentation in the digital domain, anonymity identity is the fullest extent of identity obscurity on social media. A valuable perspective to consider is the impact of posting on student’s self-identify development and the development of others (Miller, Parsons, & Lifer, 2010).

Black men examine posts or tweets and compare the images to their racial and masculine identity (Parker & Moore, 2014). Here, Parker and Moore (2014) conclude the second level of complexities for Black males in the digital space. First, Black men have their masculine identity challenged within their homes, relationships and places of worship. Then we find the struggle to present themselves acceptably among other Black men, women and the dominant White culture. Digital media studies often erase users of color, and the dynamics of race and racial identity online (Florini, 2014). In the previous sections, this investigator mentioned how individuals construct their ethnic identities across multiple social media platforms; next, the researcher specifically introduces Twitter. Current media studies have researchers exploring the performance-drive of social and cultural factors that focus on an audience's perception of others via Twitter (Marwick & Boyd, 2011; Lee, 2017; Jones, 2015). Marwick and Boyd (2011) first acknowledge that Twitter user’s imaginary audience perceptions are a combination of the writers broadcasting and networking members. With the addition of Lee (2017), Black user’s cultivation of Twitter has made it a space to redefine Black bodies, enforcing counter-narratives, testimonials; and organizing and building communities (p.7). The findings of the previous studies are visible with the claims of Jones (2015). Jones (2015) celebrates the fact that because
of Twitter’s informal nature, users tend to write as they speak, making it possible to glean useful phonological information (p.431) and examine the linguistic nature. In adverse situations of denial of either racial or masculine identity or feelings of being excluded, Black men would create a pseudo-image as a coping mechanism (Brock, 2012). The next level of digital citizenship is pseudonymity; pseudonymity is when users create a fake name that is utilized to represent their online contributions (Potts, 2017). The steep progression of identity denial online continues with anonymity; anonymity is the fullest level of true identity obscurity, and users are not sharing any identifying information (Potts, 2017).

**Twitter**

When Twitter debuted in 2006, it represented a new form of social media. By combining the simplicity of a Facebook-like status update, a 280-character posting restriction, and a more open platform, Twitter reinvented how we engage through digital conversations and advertise to audience members (Stroller, 2013). Since then, Twitter has gained more than 313 million active users monthly and 1 billion unique visits to sites with embedded tweets (Ben-Lhachemi & Nfaoui, 2018). While Facebook is notoriously known as a family-friendly atmosphere, Twitter is commonly reserved for college-age students and adults to roam uncensored, at any rate, anyone over the age of 13 can get a Twitter account. Twitter is a micro-blogging social networking website that allows users to craft tweets, engage followers and share the latest news. Social networking sites are defined as “web-based services that will enable individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection” (Pikas & Sorrentino, 2014, p.70). The virtual communities found on Twitter recreate line graphs and connect the dot between mutual friends.
Previous research has indicated that people inadvertently leave “behavioral residue” in their physical and virtual environments (Gosling, Ko, Mannarelli, & Morris, 2002, p. 381; Qiu, Lin, Ramsay, & Yang, 2012). Since the concept of digital identity allows users to select their most appropriate presentation and performance, Black men are afforded multiple identities that extend or enhance Cool Pose and coping. Directly, the measures of Twitter can be compared to a diary, and Black men are again using Twitter to express their emotional discomfort or deep acting and denying the existence of their pain. Since linguistics is the study of language and has produced influential theories on how language works (Robinson, 2003), coping has been established to be often the denial or transition of words to deflect emotional trauma. Twitter is situated as a form of everyday writings of men, not only reflecting cultural production, but also producing culture itself (Hansen, 1994; Miller, 1998; Williams, 1966; Humphreys, Gill, Krishnamurthy, & Newbury, 2013).

The connection and exploration of these manners add depth to the multifaceted ways Twitter remains boundless. Digital communication is interactive, especially on Twitter, which allows for synchronous exchanges through a variety of affordances (Evans, 2016). These interactions are similar, if not the same, to those between Black men on the streets, in barbershops, classrooms, sports arenas, and the Black church. The new vehicle to carry these interactions out is via tweets, images, and hashtags. Several scholars (Kunneman et al., 2015; Lockyer, 2014; Wikstrom, 2014; Pavalanathan & Eisenstein, 2015) have examined language use on social media, specifically in tweets and linguistics, as well as discourse acts (Evans, 2016) through hashtags. Hashtagging has become resourceful in categorizing tweets on Twitter. Using the hashtag (#) sign in front of words or phrases without spaces can direct audience members to specific information. Integration into social networks provides a sense of embeddedness in a
social system that enables individuals to receive feedback from others that lead to feelings of stability, predictability, and control over one's life (Guan, & So, 2016).

The surroundings of Black men have continued to perpetuate the stereotypes stemming from slavery and previous encounters. Societal biases continually feed into degrading Black men for their racial and masculine identities. In the education setting, this is especially true of Black males who are profiled as a contrary citizen of their racial-ethnic group regarding dignity and worth (Wright, 2009). Society has failed to check our positions toward Black men. Prejudice is not erased by law; invisible systems and unspoken assumptions have created a hostile education and societal system that still deny Blacks equal access (Johnson-Bailey, Ray, & Lasker-Scott, 2014). Men must come to realize the damage done to their mentalities, their families and their spouses, as well as others. Researchers must continue to seek the difference between socialized male traits of what masculinity is or should be and embrace the spectrum that may exist to include the experiences of Trans individuals (Bowleg, English, Del Rio-Gonzalez, Burkholder, Teti, & Tschann, 2016). Twitter has an inextricable link with brands, and this link makes it a valuable social platform for brand communication measurement (Rutter, Roper, & Lettice, 2016). In the following sections, the work of Macias (2015) and Florini (2014) are introduced with their investigation of Black women’s misogynoir on social media and the performance of racial identity online respectively to formally draw parallels to Black men’s coping in digital spaces.

**Coping in Digital Spaces**

Macias (2015) defended her dissertation using IPA by exploring Black women’s use of social media to combat misogynoir. Misogynoir is the interaction of anti-Blackness and resentment of Black women often internalized and engendered by Black people (Macias, 2015).
As a reflection of her study, this principle investigator sought to utilize similar methods to examine Black men’s coping methods exemplified with their use of Twitter. Jenkins (2006) recalls the narrative of Black men in society as "stereotyped as an animal and brute in the years of American enslavement to his current stereotypical image as a gangster and thug; Black men have maintained the stereotypical status of menace to society" (p. 139). In her study, Macias met with 12 Black women from the United States and Britain between the ages of 19-48. In her findings, Macias (2015) realized that (a) social media has an impact on oneself, (b) social media can be a safe space for one's marginalized identity, and (c) there is a formation of community through social media. Macias (2015) dissertation provided critical literature to recreate this research based on the second finding of (b) social media can be a safe space for one’s marginalized identity.

Furthermore, in the public discourse for moments of crisis, Twitter and other mediums of social media have been extremely informative in providing information (Brummette and Sisco, 2015). The reoccurring images of police brutality and the result of Black death (Mike Brown, Trayvon Martin, and Tamir Rice) has created heightened awareness around public moments of crisis. Thus, the instances of unjustified death, emotional silence, and trauma frequently felt by Black men during the navigation and learning of their racial and masculine identities could be described as shocking, unexpected, and terrifying (Patton, Sanchez, Macbeth, & Leonard, 2017). As a result of these instances and experiences, Twitter provides users the ability to communicate vivid accounts of the world, themselves, and others. In the following section, the researcher introduces language and race to the narrative of the online safe space evolution.

**Performative Linguistics**
Philosopher J.L. Austin is better known for this development of ‘performative utterance’; at that time, performatives sought to describe actions, such as making a promise or giving an order (Searle, 1989). Since the evolution of Austin’s early work philosophers ‘performative utterance’ is defined by Searle as “a performative sentence whom literal utterance in appropriate circumstances constitutes the performance of an act named by an expression in that very sentence” (p. 537). For example:

(1) Do not wear pink! (p. 537)

Is the performance of making an order, but is not performative, although the utterance of

(2) I think wearing pink is gay. (p. 537)

Is performative in the sentence and contains a performative verb in the first person.

The performative verb is the main verb in the performative sentence and names an act by the performer. Searle (1989) argues that “performative utterances are self-acknowledging in that the speaker cannot be lying, insincere, or mistaken about the type of act being performed” (p. 539), even in the manner the speaker is delivering false information. The example of these utterances is recorded through conversations with men regarding their acceptance or intolerance on performing masculinity (Mathews, 2010). Searchable conversations on Twitter renders a robust analysis as to how language is negotiated within particular social contexts (Zappavigna, 2011).

Twitter is the ideal market place to study linguistics as the asynchronous but fast-paced atmosphere that allows members to utilize language as a basic currency (Page, 2012). To grasp the transition of Cool Pose from the physical world to the digital, language and images are the primary means to explain this phenomenon. By examining language during this study, the researcher introduces linguistics. Linguistics is the study of language (Robinson, 2003) and
frequently the power behind tweets and expressing emotional discomfort in various forms of writing. An extension of this core research is identifying the proper language for masculinity that includes various experiences of Black men and plausible connections to explore levels of discomfort. Beyond the dehumanization of the African body, print and mass media has served in calculated ways to dismantle the African dialect (Thomas, 2016). Before the transatlantic slave trade, Africans utilized their traditional tribal language; even though after their capture a new tongue was forced upon them.

The authorized structure of language depends on the identity between the two speakers and their capital (Bourdieu, 1977). For Black men, the racial deficit continues as the African-American English Vernacular (AAEV) is automatically connected with minimal education and low socioeconomic status (Rivera, West-Olatunju, Conwill, Garrett, & Phan, 2008). While speaking “proper” is praised and inextricably connected Whiteness and success. The second fold of the research is liberating the AAEV and intentionally understanding how Black men use their language to cope through tweets. Identifying these measures alerts a trickle-down effect that captures the performative measures of tweets via Black men and their emotional discomfort to allow the new era of linguistics to emerge.

Linguistics in Action

Florini (2014) defines Signifyin’ as a “genre of linguistic performance (online) that allows users to communicate on multiple levels of meaning simultaneously” (p. 224). In this study, Florini examines the cultural tradition of language and race by archiving “Black Twitter” tweets across her timeline throughout one year. Clark (2014) defines Black Twitter as “a community – a space marked by shared language that users’ access for collaboration, communication and the development of a positive Black identity” (Macias, 2015, p. 140). The
initial examination of tweets produced numerous instances of signifyin’ as oral performance and allowed audience members to show their approval of tweets by retweeting them with their comments (Florini, 2014). In the like manner of Cool Pose, language on Twitter serves as one of the many identified coping mechanisms for Black men to distinguish themselves or a specific avenue to assimilate amongst the dominant group. This study concluded that signifyin’ allows Black Twitter audience members to actively perform their racial identities and create a space to reaffirm their Blackness (Florini, 2014). Both research studies aforementioned provide the groundwork to for this researcher to examine (1) Twitter as an extension of coping for Black men (Macias, 2015) and (2) racial and masculine identity development through tweets (Florini, 2014).

The world of Twitter supports over 35 languages and these forms of communication while online serves two purposes as it is both “spoken and written” (Scott, 2015, p9) Unlike general conversations in the physical setting, Twitter and other social media platforms represent unique communication channels. These exchanges allow users to harness language as a contributing cultural capital in support of their racial identity and differentiate between varying online sub-communities. In response the regional difference in linguistics, African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) can be identified with Twitter data and traditional dialect geography (Jones, 2015). This unique coupling of language and geospatial location allows Twitter users to embed linguistics as a means of coping.

Black Men and Social Media

According to Punyanunt-Carter (2008), communication research and theory suggest that mass media are vital for African-Americans source of information. Furthermore, visual self-presentation and performance of young Black males online are influenced by stereotypical
representations of masculinity or traditional gender identity constructions (Siibak, 2010). American society has too often made Black males confront hegemonic cultural dominance, thus forcing them to resist such social forces in developing healthy self-concepts within both traditional and new media culture (Parker & Moore, 2014). Social media platforms have become an incubator for online communities for a wide range of demographics, whether they are for schools, sports teams and social groups (Schuschke, 2015). Stereotypes of young Black men, especially those labeled as looking “older”, hypersexual, and deviant and those that come from low-income neighborhoods are entrenched in our society and social media (Carney, 2016).

Before the advent of social media, print media was highly influential in communicating and shaping societal perceptions (Gayle, 2012). Since its early establishment, the power of print media has always been produced under the auspice of truth. Previous forms of print media such as illustrations, journals, posters, and letters fail to compete with the Internet in its new power to disperse information to the masses (Gayle, 2012). The rapid news clips, briefings, and opt editorials on Black men continue to sensationalize their image and perception of masculinity (Valera, 2018). In the more recent news and media circulation, the murder of unarmed teenager Michael Brown continued the stereotypical mass media portrayals (Donaldson, 2015).

Pamela Valera (2018) examined the public perceptions of Black men’s “dangerousness against public’s willingness to accept an officer’s deadly actions as legitimate” (p.1). The public perception matters because Valera (2018) contests that “unarmed Black Americans are five times more likely to be shot and killed by police that unarmed White Americans” (p.1). In an earlier study, Wilson, Hugenberg, and Rules (2017) utilized photographs of White and Black male faces who were all the same height. Again, a careful analysis of Wilson, Hugenberg, and Rules (2017)
data reveals that “unarmed Black men are disproportionately more likely to be shot and killed by police because of their physical size” (p.75).

Gayle (2012) research demonstrates the harmful effects of negative stereotypes in the media towards Black men. This study consisted of eight participants to determine “How does pervasive negative stereotypes in the media affect the psychology of Black men?” (Gayle, 2012, p. 38). As a result of this study, 15 themes emerged and were grouped into three categories: Perceptions, Media, and Emotions. These categories provided valuable data for future clinical applications to validate the emotions of male clients, offer group interventions, and express their feelings towards racial stress. While these stereotypical images currently dominate the media’s narrative surrounding the image of Black men, there are various counter-narratives to combat these messages. In 2017, the National Association of Black Journalist launched the #InspireBlackMen project to “combat the blotter-to-mugshot images of Black male faces” (Dodson, 2017, p. 1).

Conclusion

In light of the development of social media, online communities have provided various opportunities for users to often interact in safe spaces to express and explore racial identity (Chan, 2017). After all, print media was the first form of mass stereotyping to depict Black men as cartoons to increase sales (Hall, 1993; Gayle, 2012). This section has reviewed the development of social media and its gendered and racial breakdown on Twitter. For Black men specifically, social media introduces the ability to signify race and masculinity through communication (Florini, 2014; Schuschke, 2015). This researcher has also identified the sphere of influence for Black men as Twitter shapes the racial authenticity and cultural understandings by digitally replicating parameters of Blackness online (Maragh, 2017). The cultural replication
of Blackness on Twitter and the birth of Black Twitter (Florini, 2014) would not exist if it were not for the multiple variations of digital identity presented in new digital scholarship.

**Summary**

This literature review examined the history of racial and masculine identity development for Black men in a digital space, harmful effects of slavery, re-imaging of the Civil Rights Movement, innovation of Twitter and impact towards Black masculinity. The evidence presented raised the question to the methods used by society to develop an effective coping mechanism for Black males to emotionally manage their internal feelings of oppression (Patton, Eschmann, & Butler, 2013). This researcher has pointed to *Cool Pose* as the original coping method and its historical impact in the African-American community. *Cool Pose* continues to manipulate the character and intrinsic motivation of Black men, all while limiting their understanding of racial and masculine development. The context of urban masculinity can be a complicated struggle for full recognition of manhood, public recognition of honorable masculinity and love in a public forum (Patton, Eschmann, & Butler, 2013).

The detrimental seeds planted at the birth of slavery and captivity are still sprouting during the twenty-first century. The effects of Black men being raped, stripped from the home of their families and excluded from the financial gain from cash crops has caused Black men to feel lesser. Their emotional stability and psychological health are at question during stressful situations; captivity has destroyed the emotional balance of Black men. The Civil Rights and Black Power movements tried to redesign the image of Black men but did not respectively include diverse gender expressions of masculinity. Both movements created the most significant separation before these modern times of Twitter; there are still strong beliefs from this moment that "less" masculine, queer or gay males were not involved. However, many prominent Black
male figures did identify as queer or gay. As a result, the emphasizing of racial pride, the connection between Civil Rights in the United States, has bruised and, at times, led to deliberately provocative protests by members of the LBGTQ community (Joseph, P. 2009).

The inclusion of the global and historical perspective of race and masculine identity development gives scholar-practitioners a path to trace its birth. The Civil Rights and Black Power movements continued with the heteronormative storytelling of the dominant notion of Black masculinity and refused to include other expressions. The issues of racial and masculine identity development are not left for Whites or women of color to fix, but it starts with Black men first. The depictions of Black men as athletes may also reinforce the traditional hierarchy by reifying stereotypes of their animal-like nature, emphasizing their sexuality, aggressiveness and physical power (Ferber, 2007).

One critical thought is to consider how both international contexts mesh together when global education and the response to educating Black or African males. As a Black man feels that his status is threatened, he may re-conceptualize who he is or re-evaluate others in the situation as either good or bad to reach a sort of internal equilibrium or identity congruence (Mathews, 2010). Often, transmedia stories conflict globally when stories are shown through media presentation, and it is then left to the citizens of that country to dissect the message. Black men also must do work within themselves to understand racial and masculine identity development. The events presented have defined a level of “cool” for Black men.

Researchers must continue to seek the difference between socialized male traits of what masculinity is or should be and embrace the spectrum that may exist. Masculinity is not what they are, but the qualities possessed that contribute to one’s character. The tactic of Cool Pose is for Black men to find a way to cope with their racial identity and the systemic barriers that have
been created. Since the stylized method varies, the sections mentioned above of this chapter influence *Cool Pose* to a different degree. Scholars consider the impact of mental health counseling for Black men and strategically implement other avenues to cope. On the premise of favorable outcomes, the more exceptional similarity that individuals perceive between themselves and the audience members of Twitter, the more strongly they would believe they possess similar capabilities to act, resulting in heightened self-efficacy beliefs (Guan & So, 2016).
Chapter Three: Research Design

A virus is currently spreading across social media, and the images of Black men are continuously being used in this pandemic. The contamination that’s spreading depicts Black men as violent, sexual, criminal, incompetent and uneducated (Jackson & Dangerfield, 2004). Black men are often faced with societal pressures, forcing them to cope with the inability to express emotional discomfort due to their masculine or racial identity externally by masking themselves with an alternative masculine image. The alternative images are a result of coping (Walters, 2017). These disturbing images also cause Black men to develop the ability to find positive coping methods in everyday life, therefore permitting me to conduct this research. Previous chapters have established a linear progression to this point. This chapter introduces the research methods utilized for examining Cool Pose for Black men who engage with their followers on Twitter.

The complexities of Cool Pose vary for every Black male; however, the commonalities exist between self-identity and perception through external outlets like friends, family, and social media. The purpose of this qualitative research is to identify the framework to analyze the racial-ethnic masculine identity of Black males who interact on Twitter. Maneuvering this phenomenon takes thoughtful and considerate detail to the intersecting social constructs of race and masculinity. The research questions that remain central to this research is (a) How do Black men make sense of their racial and masculine identity while engaged on Twitter; and the sub-questions are (a1) How do Black men use Twitter to cope as an extension of Cool Pose?; and (a2) How are tweets used to challenge, reject or accept the notion of masculinity? The selected research questions will allow the theoretical framework to explain the multitude of ways Black men utilize their tweets to cope with life stressors in a similar manner of Cool Pose. With the use
of the research questions as an overarching guide for this research, the next section precedes to expound upon a qualitative research analysis.

**Qualitative Research Approach**

Qualitative research focuses on participants experiences by communicating their interactions with a particular phenomenon and does not silence members of oppressed and marginalized groups (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Marcia, 2015). For Black male participants in this study, qualitative inquiry amplifies their voice concerning their racial and masculine identities through Twitter as a safe space and tweeting in search of authenticity. Also, by linking qualitative research with symbolic interactionism; qualitative analysis allows Black men to actively immerse with intimate interviews that are, at least to some extent, free to interpret the meaning of the interaction that they witness, providing variation in response to actions and events (De Nooy, 2009). Qualitative research serves as a critical reminder to allow the voices of Black men to narrate their experiences with the existing structures of masculinity, race, gender and social media during this study. Furthermore, a qualitative approach paired with symbolic interactionism could imply the notion that Black men coping methods now reach beyond the physical setting of *Cool Pose*.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) remind scholar-practitioners that qualitative research should observe a phenomenon with the participants in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret the meanings people bring to the phenomenon. This research study applies qualitative methodology and, specifically, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to examine Black male utilization of Twitter and their developmental understanding of masculinity and racial identity. The exploration of the phenomena allows Black men the creative authorship to disclose personal accounts of navigating their racial and masculine identities through their
tweets, interactions with followers, and images and hashtags in attempts to cope. To fully understand their experiences and capture the details through their eyes, this study explored the experiences of Black men by capturing and dissecting the conceptual meaning to approach the interest of theoretical framework.

The marrying of the qualitative research and symbolic interactionism begins with identifying the symbols of masculinity for Black men while on Twitter. Smith (2011) claims that phenomenology is the philosophical movement concerned with the lived experience and phenomenological coverage on the need to conduct a detailed examination of experience. Through this detailed examination of Cool Pose, the interviewing of Black men and conducting a content analysis on their communication with followers or viewing hashtags or tweets on Twitter, the symbols are made visible, and the marrying is fulfilled. For Black men, blogging, posting pictures or updating their statuses presents the opportunity to challenge, adapt or resist the concepts of masculinity through a method of diarying. Moreover, Twitter presents a digital coping mechanism to escape the harsh criticism of society by being a Black male and connecting with their often-scrutinized masculine identity. Twitter is a micro-blogging website that allows users to draft and post status updates up to 280-characters, previously limited to 140-characters (Ben-Lhachemi & Nfaoui, 2018). Twitter users can like, retweet, and quote other follower's tweets (or tweets seen on their timeline from non-followers) in attempts to develop agency and a sense of community. These performative measures will gain audience members and ultimately build an identity. This constructed identity may be personal, reflecting an emotional or mental state that the user wants the audience of strangers, family, and friends to see (Rambelb, 2016).

Next, this researcher utilizes the interpretivist lens to categorize hidden meanings in the mind of participants during the research process (Ponterotto, 2005).
Interpretivist Paradigm

Filstead (1979) acknowledges that a paradigm is a set of interrelated assumptions centering the social world, thus providing a philosophical and conceptual framework to study the world. The interpretivism paradigm concentrates on the inquiry by suggesting that *Cool Pose* affects every Black male differently, thus leading to different coping techniques as a result of their desire to express emotional discomfort. Proponents of interpretivism also emphasize the goal of understanding the “lived experiences” through interviews and detail recording of the interview sessions (Schwandt, 1994, 2000; Ponterotto, 2005). Next, for the semi-structured interviews, interpretivism is employed as a means to jointly create or co-construct meaning of interactive dialogue (Ponterotto, 2005). The co-construction enables the Black male participants and the researcher to navigate the lived experiences of their racial and masculine identities through qualitative analysis and relational content analysis of previously posted tweets. By identifying the emic distinction of *Cool Pose* for Black men, this research can examine symbols that also serve as functions of coping by way of language, fashion, and demeanor from analyzing tweets. Interpretivism is a paradigm that employs qualitative methods to understand the in-depth relationships between humans and their environment (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). Therefore, this study gathers the intimate developmental stages of Black men with their racial and masculine identities while engrossed in Twitter. These developmental stages often infuse stereotypical assumptions of race and hegemonic masculinity that silence Black men from expressing themselves. As part of the qualitative research analysis, the next section introduces Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as a psychological approach.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
Noon (2018) summarizes Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as an idiographic process that emphasizes detailed and in-depth examinations of how individual persons in their unique contexts make sense of a given phenomenon. IPA seeks to learn from each participant's individual story, and through an in-depth individualized analysis, a more informative understanding of participants' thoughts, beliefs and behaviors are attainable. Since masculinity has a rigid definition and diverse perspectives are left out of the conversation, participants’ experiences with defining masculinity is an active “restoration process” (Ricoeur, 1970, p.8; Noon, 2018) or Hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is the "practice or art of interpretation" (Dallmayr, 2009, p. 23) and involves the creative journey of identifying diverse interactions through the lens of participants.

As Black men traverse through life, instances, where Cool Pose is activated, varies depending on their interaction and their ability to psychologically detach or immerse themselves in various situations. IPA commits to an individual's cognitive, linguistic and physical being (Smith & Osborn, 2004). In this matter, Cool Pose encompasses similar characteristics of Black men’s cognitive, linguistic and physical beings and becomes more thought-provoking as Black men decipher which performative measure to apply when faced with emotional discomfort.

The concept of performativity informs Black men of their gender performance which can be impacted by the intersecting identities of gender and race (Chandler, 2007). The narrative articulates the value of invoking the use of IPA in educational research by defining the sampling size, data collection and data analysis. IPA is best suited for this research due to the added voice of Black men while connecting with followers on Twitter. In this digital medium, users can self-perform and present themselves online as either their actual self or a false narrative identity. Digital identity is an online social identity that is constructed using online profiles that are used
to represent oneself on a network (Bozkurt & Tu, 2016). Even while constructing an online identity, there are three distinct avenues of digital connections; true identity, pseudonymity and anonymity (Potts, L. 2017). In these avenues, this researcher suggests that the false narrative of developing an image that is socially acceptable online is equivalent to Black men invoking Cool Pose in instances of discomfort.

In order to grasp a deeper developmental understanding of IPA and the intricacies of Twitter, the works of IPA (2005), Macias (2015), Florini (2014) and Noon (2018) has been analyzed to ground the research this methodology and to connect Black men's racial and masculine identity development to Twitter. Smith (1996) is credited for providing psychologists the opportunity to learn from the insights of others during or after a specific encounter with a phenomenon, while IPA allows the participant to take the expert seat in retelling their interactions with the specific phenomenon (IPA, 2005). This seminal author introduced IPA as a "bottoms up" rather than a "top-down" to exploring interactions in the world (Smith, 1996, p. 20). The responsibility of the researcher is to reduce the complexities of the data through rigorous and systematic analysis (IPA, 2005). Therefore, the recommendation for IPA participant selection will be discussed in the following section.

Participants

The selection of participants for interviews must go through thoughtful consideration in correlation to the spectrum of identities that are represented in the African diaspora and that examine the intersection of being both Black and male. A multi-media approach across various platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, will be implemented while using the #AmIManEnough to track the engagement analytics. The analytic tracking allows the researcher, to understand better how the audience members are interacting with the posting based on profile
clicks, retweets, and likes. By adding the hashtag symbol (#) in front of any word or phrase without any spaces or punctuation is enough to turn it into a clickable link (Ben-Lhachemi & Nfaoui, 2018). This researcher interviewed five Black men during this study. Since three to six is the recommended size for research studies using IPA (Smith et al., 2009). The qualifications used to attract the participants are as follows:

- Currently lives in the United States
- An active user on Twitter
- At least 5,000 tweets
- At least 1,000 followers
- An active avatar
- Public Twitter profile

To be considered in this study, participants must identify as Black, cis-gendered, queer or gay male. According to the American Psychological Association (2015), a cisgender man is one whom internal gender matches and presents itself per, the externally determined cultural expectations of behavior and roles assigned to men. IPA is best suited to a data collection approach which will "invite participants to offer a rich, detailed, first-person account of their experiences" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 56; Noon, 2018).

This study began with a submission to the Northeastern University IRB in the winter quarter of 2019. There were ten participants that expressed interest in this study and five were willing to be interviewed. Four of the five participants self-identified as African-American or Black while one self-identified as mixed race (having one white parent and one Black parent).

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1 A graphical image that represents a person, as on the Internet (Avatar, 2018).
All participants resided within the United States and while the interview questions did not specifically ask for their geographical location, four of the participants mentioned their southern raising as a major emphasis of their racial or masculine identity. The average amount of tweets and followers between the five participants were 109,100 and 2,214 respectively. Three of the participants identified as queer, one identified as gay, and one identified as straight. The participants were notified that their Twitter usernames will be used for the purpose of this study. The participants will be mentioned by username from this point forward. Table 1 displays the username, total number of tweets and followers of each participant a more detailed describe will be in the findings section of (Chapter 4) of this research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Number</th>
<th>Twitter Username</th>
<th>Number of Tweets</th>
<th>Number of Followers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>@TendentiousG</td>
<td>54.5K</td>
<td>1,962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>@JTRoane</td>
<td>6,1K</td>
<td>2,409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>@VanDerek_</td>
<td>448.1K</td>
<td>2,909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>@Bennie_niles</td>
<td>15.7K</td>
<td>2,479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>@crea8ed2conQUEr</td>
<td>21.1K</td>
<td>1,313</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. List of participants

After the approval, this researcher conducted two individual interviews during the spring quarter of 2019. The first interview was semi-structured (Patton, 2002) and the second was a content analysis (Berelson, 1952) of tweets. Semi-structured interviews were chosen to allow the researcher to build rapport with the participants and steer the interview naturally (Patton, 2002). Semi-structured interviews also exposed the hidden meanings that are a result of interpretivism and select symbols. The content analysis within this research was method for making replicable
and valid inferences from data to their context, with the purpose of providing knowledge, new insights, a representation of facts and a practical guide to action (Krippendorff, 1980; Elo & Kyngas, 2008). This study uses an innovating and intentional snowball sampling (Browne, 2005) to recruit participants. Snowball sampling is a reliable methodology employed in studies where participants are few or involve a high degree of trust (Baltar & Brunet, 2012).

The use of semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions has investigated participants’ previous experiences of their racial and masculine identity development while gaining their trust through open-ended questions. The use of snowball sampling remained integral in IPA studies regarding the low numbers of participants needed. The participants were first recruited through the social media page @BlackMenSmile. The page has over thirty thousand followers, and the content of the page explicitly caters to Black men. This researcher decided to connect with this platform because of their commitment to self-love, resistance and transcending (BlackMenSmile, n.d.) and the familiar hashtag #Blackmensmile, which started a revolutionary phase of seeing Black men in various forms. Carlton Mackey of BlackMenSmile posted the IRB approved flyer on April 2, 2019, the image received seventy-six likes on Instagram. Instagram algorithm functions in a similar manner as Twitter. A “like” or “retweet” on Twitter refers to the algorithmic engagement and approval between users and brands (Burrow & Rainone, 2017). The following section outlines the procedures, data analysis, ethical considerations and credibility of the study.

**Procedures**

This section outlines the detailed research procedure section in chronological order by drawing attention to the data analysis, content analysis ethical considerations, credibility, transferability, internal audit, self-reflexivity and transparency, and limitations. The procedures
listed in this section was geared towards capturing the participant’s experiences through semi-structured interviews and content analysis of selected tweets.

An approved IRB recruitment flyer was sent to the Carlton Mackey of BlackMenSmile (Appendix 8) aimed to provide all interested respondents the proper contact information regarding the study. The BlackMenSmile paged posted the flyer on their personal page to recruit participants. After a one week; the researcher posted the same approved IRB flyer with a thread\textsuperscript{2} of information to recruit participants and successfully reached the goal of five participants. The researcher also included the hashtags #AmIManEnough, #trynagrad, #FirstGenDocs and #BlackMenSmile to broaden the reach of the message. The researcher’s personal Twitter account provided the greatest impression and engagement towards the secondary approach to recruiting participants for this study. Figure 1 captures the bio\textsuperscript{3} section and the number of followers\textsuperscript{4} of the researcher to recruit participants. The multiplatform approach between the BlackMenSmile profiles and the researcher’s personal Twitter account offers the highest reach and engagement amongst followers.

Figure 1. A screenshot of the Twitter “bio” and number of followers for the primary researcher. (2019, April 15).

\textsuperscript{2} A Twitter “thread” is a series of connected streams of thoughts from one person.
\textsuperscript{3} A Twitter “bio” is a brief public summary about yourself or business brand.
\textsuperscript{4} A “follower” is someone that will see your tweet updates.
The secondary search for participants received four retweets\(^5\) and three likes. Surprisingly, the IRB flyer received the most engagement from the Twitter thread. Figure 2 reveals the Tweet activity for the image. The IRB flyer had 2,487 impressions\(^6\), 207 total engagements\(^7\), and 167 media engagements\(^8\). To accurately record the data, the primary investigator used the Twitter analytic application Twitonomy, a Twitter analytics tool that captures, manages, and optimizes activities on Twitter (Rayson, 2014). Twitter also has an activity dashboard that records tweet metrics based on impressions, total engagements and detail expand ("About your activity dashboard", n.d.). The Twitter metrics served as a vital anchor in this study as they revealed visible images, tweets, and hashtags of Black men. By using these metrics, the researcher had access to the last six months of Twitter engagement data for each participant to accurately focus on the impression of user’s tweets and to record their interactions with their audience to cultivate identity. Additionally, this allowed the researcher to investigate how Black men might feel about the perception of their tweets based on the engagement of their followers, which could indirectly or directly affect their masculine performance.

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\(^5\) Twitter “retweets” are re-posting of messages.  
\(^6\) Impressions are the number of times individuals saw this tweet on Twitter.  
\(^7\) Total engagements refer to the number of times individuals interacted with this Tweet.  
\(^8\) Media engagements are the total number of clicks on your media counted across videos, images, and gifs.
The next step of recruiting took place on April 10th which was sending direct messages\(^9\) to Black male followers that fit the required specifications for the study. I sent direct messages to twenty-three Black male followers and the researcher received interest replies eight. These were Black men that I have recently engaged in conversation with on a regular basis through likes or retweets. Immediately after the Black men replied with interest, I asked for emails to provide the complete consent form to schedule interviews with all. One potential participant originally expressed interested in the study but was beyond the age limit of the study. The researcher began the first interview on April 10th and completed the final interview on April 15th. Three of the interviews were conducted via FaceTime and two of the interviews was by phone.

Finally, the utilization of FaceTime to conduct the interview was extremely critical to capture facial expressions, tone and body gestures. Allowing the participants to pick the setting of the interview and establishing an immediate relationship remained integral to this research. As a researcher, it was essential to recognize that while the interview questions are there to aid in

\(^{9}\) Direct messages are personal messages to Twitter users.
navigation through the interview, their role is not to restrict lines of conversation. The absence of a rigid schedule permits respondents to exercise greater control over the flow of discussions, thus promoting their free speech and immersion in the interview process (Noon, 2018). To record the interviews, the transcription service Rev.com\textsuperscript{10} was utilized to transcribe all interviews for full dictation and review. The coding software NVivo was also used to appropriately code all transcriptions. As an added precautionary measure, the researcher also edited each transcription to record and edit any verbal communications that might be left out.

**Data Analysis**

The data analysis method employed within IPA requires the researcher to examine each line-by-line analysis of claims, concerns, and misunderstandings of each participant (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, Noon, 2018). This method centralizes Black men in a detailed recording of their experience and removes the researcher’s biases towards the topic. In the same sense, this researcher believes focus groups would impede with Black men being vulnerable with their experience and personal interviews would suffice. The design of this is to cultivate a space where Black men can fully express themselves and direct their evolving experiences of Black masculinity. Noon (2018) recommends formulating semi-structured interviews that generally last at least an hour. These interviews would provide liberty to engage and tease out vital information regarding how Black men view their masculine identity while online. Also, it gives this researcher the opportunity to probe for more information and develop connecting themes. IPA research is generally most effective at the idiographic level and traditionally associated with the “individual” (Larkin, Watts, & Clinton, 2006).

\textsuperscript{10}www.Rev.com is a company that provides transcription, translation, and captioning services to clients.
As a result, IPA examines the first note taking for the transcription into three distinct comments to explore content and language usage. The first is descriptive comments; detailed comments focus on keywords or phrases which focus on the participant's thoughts and experiences. Next is linguistic comments; linguistic comments "explore specific language used by the participant" (Smith et al. p. 84; Macias, 2015). Finally, conceptual noting is the final interpretative step to secure the date at the conceptual level. The comments gathered from the semi-structured interviews will establish the first level of understanding of the development concepts of being Black, a man and tweeting about masculinity. Later, the primary investigator will request participants to submit seven to ten tweets depicting the performative narrative of masculinity that appear on a public timeline. In using content analysis for selected tweets, the researcher and participants can examine the different purposes for writing these tweets or the performative measures from those tweets (Humphreys, Krishnamurthy & Newbury, 2018) that leave Black men to challenge, accept, or reject the standardized notion of masculinity. This funnel technique enhances memory recalling as the investigator starts with open-ended questions followed by directive questions targeted to gain more insight from respondents’ interviews. Since analysis is often multi-directional, Noon (2018) developed a seven-step process to analyze data using IPA methodology effectively. The steps are as follow:

**Reading and note-taking.** The use of open annotated descriptions that are purposely situated to ensure distinctive voices are emerging from participants testimonies, rather than biases from the literature of the researcher. Rather than focuses merely on thoughts and observations; how participants explain their experience matters because Noon (2018) centers the deeper and distinctive voices of participants to help open annotate code.
**Notes to emergent themes.** After the more profound and distinctive coding, the researcher seeks to select bold themes from both interviews. Emergent themes serve as the foundation to connect to the theoretical framework and the initial confirmation or denial centering participant experiences (Noon, 2018).

**Connecting emergent themes.** As the linear process continues, the connection of bold themes immediately develops a hierarchical relationship with one another (Noon, 2018). Connecting these themes is the advanced stage of drawing similarities and furthering strengthening the participant’s experiences.

**Producing table of themes.** As the researcher separates the emerging themes from subordinate themes, the information is placed into a table or chart to track the analytic journey. The table is a compilation of relevant data with quotes or themes and page numbers (Noon, 2018).

**Continuing to the next case.** Noon (2018) insists that “examining each theme as an individual occurrence continues in the tradition of IPA and symbolic interactionism to expand upon marginalized voices” (p.79).

**Find a table.** In the conclusion of analyzing data, finding a table to capture all the information provided by participants will be a powerful tool to explain the findings of the research. Smith and Osborn (2008) emphasize that themes should not be purely selected prevalence but also on richness (p.79).

**Writing up the research.** During this final stage of data analysis for IPA, the researcher can select two methods to present the data. First, the researcher can select ‘results’ to contain emergent themes or ‘discussion’ to link the analysis back to literature (Noon, 2018).
It is essential to note that participants’ identifiable names will not be used in this study; however, their social media handles will be examined through the content analysis process. The often-intrusive IPA methodology involves the exploration of personal experiences, and these experiences can often leave participants to feel ashamed, angry or even emotional (Noon, 2018). Thereby, the tweets participants select will serve as the linguistic narrative of their racial and masculine identities.

Content Analysis

In this case, during the second interview, content analysis was conducted to analyze participants’ tweets that further explain their masculine identities. Historically, content analysis was traditionally a tedious and time-consuming process; whereas, with the advancements in technology content analysis are more accessible to identify socio- and psycholinguistics in race, gender, and media studies issues (Busch, De Maret, Flynn, et al., 2012). The linguistic narrative of each tweet reveals the manners by which Black men seek to cope or develop a sense of belonging with community members. By reviewing the tweets of each participant, the text is classified into much smaller content categories (Elo & Kyngas, 2008) to increase understanding. This method of relational content analysis is conducted to open code all tweets in the margins to provide a means of interpreting the phenomenon of Black men.

Ultimately the relational content analysis describes the socio-cultural setting of Twitter, the audience members that engage with Black men, and how Cool Pose is activated and coping beings. Online environments and especially social networks allow users to construct a digital identity take areas which are disembodied, mediated, and controllable, and through which other performances can be displayed to others (Bozkurt & Tu, 2016). Based on the connections made on Twitter, Black men can tweet to create a persona (presentation) or a fake self (pseudo-
identity) to express themselves and cope (Ramelb, 2016). In examining the participant's tweets and following the appropriate methodology of phenomenology, this investigator posed the research question #AmIManEnough: “How do Black men make sense of their racial and masculine identity on Twitter through tweets, hashtags and images?” to appropriately record the sense-making of racial-ethnic and masculine identities. The hashtag serves as the culmination of literature to challenge the notion of what it means to be a Black man and how one can perform masculine acts in various ways. The findings section will divulge all the information learned from the research, and it will be shared for everyone to see by viewing the hashtag. In addition to illustrating the performative identity, the next section considers all the valuable ethical considerations in protecting the participants in this study.

**Ethical Considerations**

Throughout this research, it is this researcher’s aims to maintain the highest ethical standard by (a) obtaining verbal consent from each participant and emailing copies of interview questions; (b) interviewing participants with public profiles; (c) reassuring to each participant that there is no confidentiality in this study as the researcher will use their public Twitter names; (d) requiring participants to sign informed consent forms for the usage of their tweets; (e) protecting their emotional wellbeing; (f) gather data in strict confidence; and (g) store all data in the researchers’ secured files. There is no monetary benefit associated with this work; however, potential benefits for others include: increased learning benefits towards a better understanding of racial and masculine identity development and an emotional benefit of exploring distress as a result of racial, gender, and masculine identities the research and the participants will not receive any gift cards. While it is unlikely discussing the barriers of masculinity would cause harm, the content analysis of tweets and answering of interview questions could lead participants to share
intimate stories that could result in traumatic experiences; hence, it serves as the primary investigators responsibility as the researcher to understand this role as an investigator seeking information and not a psychologist or therapist (Noon, 2018). Conversely, it is also necessary to inform participants and the reader of the validity of the research by examining the historical narrative and separating this narrative from the researcher’s positionality. Therefore, maintaining ethical considerations in protecting respondents, an outline for establishing credibility should also be considered and implemented.

Credibility

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis offers a method parallel with existential phenomenological paradigms and at the same time can link more extensive research literature in psychology (Shinebourne, 2011). At the heart of this IPA perspective (and hence at the core of any piece of IPA research) lies a declared phenomenological emphasis on the experiential claims and concerns of the persons taking part in the study (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). The core of this research aims to serve Black men who are often alienated from the conversation and inclusion of being masculine. To also liberate the gatekeepers who refuse to see masculinity beyond the traditional hegemonic narrative. With no regard for language and cultural barriers, the "real" man standard has been in question for generations especially in the Black community. Connor (1995) emphasizes that:

“To be a man in America you had to adhere to the rules of the white man. But those rules did not apply to the Black man’s life, and even when they did, adhering to those rules seemed to require a compromise few Black men were willing to make.” (Connor, 1995 p. 9).
Many of the difficulties Black men encounter is linked to a hegemonic masculine script (Wagner, 2015). The documentation of the treatment of Black males during slavery and today; it is the fact that the U.S. is a patriarchal society that recognizes men as the natural leader and the head of the family structure (Bush, 1999). This position is knowingly challenging for Black men as a result of racism. Kimmel (2006) defends the patriarchal privilege that does not extend to Black men. Kimmel explains that “racism tends to problematize masculinity of the “other” by declaring him – Black, gay, ethnic minority – to be simultaneously too masculine and not masculine enough” (p.71). This immovable social order has chastened more Black males that do not fit within the heteronormative structure than it has helped Black families and Black men in exploring and including multiple facets of masculinity. The performance of racial-ethnic identity for Black men results in the awareness of and being able to negotiate and navigate racism and discrimination positively and demonstrating ethnic pride in oneself and one's ethnic group (Wright, 2009). This ethnic pride often comes through the faults of navigating a failed system as a result of captivity and oppression from the transatlantic slave trade as a Black male that continues to navigate this system by continuously shifting emotional distress to adjust to everyday life. The following section recalls the personal discovery of this research topic and this researcher intentions as the researcher to identify and name his biases during this research study.

Transferability

Meanwhile, this investigator can see the intersecting layers of theories towards this problem of practice; and often running into the frustration of "filling the gaps." In this researcher’s earnest attempts, the objective of this study was trying to find something new by connecting larger themes in this discipline of race, gender, and digital media studies. Researchers have written extensively on masculinity generally in the sense of White men (Connell, &
Messerschmidt, 2005; Kimmel, Hearn, & Connell, 2005). Therefore, the principal investigator sought to understand the present gap in masculine identity development for Black men who see themselves highly visible in the digital medium arena but not depicted accurately. Murray and Male (2005) report that identity is the difference between substantive and situational selves (Cho & Jimerson, 2017). A Black man’s substantive self is his “self-defining beliefs and core values, while the situational self is anchored in context – whom we are when facing the expectations of others." Cho & Jimerson, 2017, p. 886). Likewise, there is even a larger gap in identifying the impacts of social media on racial identity development (DeWalt, 2010). Thus, the end goal of analyzing this phenomenon is to allow Black men to restore and desensitize the command narrative of Black masculinity in the digital world and retroactively change the narrative in the physical world. Theorist like Stuart Hall (1997) writes:

The problem… is that adding positive images to the largely negative repertoire of the dominant regime of representation increases the diversity of ways that “being black” is represented but does not necessarily displace the negative. (p. 274; Hughey & Parks, 2011).

Black masculine identities, like all other identity markers, are formed by those who embody the character, as well as by individuals outside of the group in question (Johnson-Bailey, Ray, & Lasker-Scott, 2014). This inquiry focuses on the performative linguistics and presentation of Black men who exercise Twitter as a means to develop their racial and masculine identity. As an extension of Cool Pose, performative linguistics, or “signifyin” (Florini, 2014), is a coping mechanism to deal with the stressors (Kirkland, & Jackson, 2009) of racism, police brutality and hegemonic masculinity. Through the in-depth examinations of these distinct and different digital presentations, this study builds a narrative to examine how Black men
psychologically and emotionally manage their emotions while online with detailed evidence that is explained in the internal audit section.

**Internal Audit**

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is idiographic in that it emphasizes detailed and in-depth examinations of how individuals in their unique contexts make sense of a given phenomenon, while also seeking the individual story (Noon, 2018). In the field of qualitative methodology and IPA studies, this researcher finds it imperative to leave a trail of evidence, so that future scholars can review the materials to seek a gap in this study or replicate it. The attempts to leave a trail starts with interviewing each participant in a space most comfortable to them. Through qualitative interviews, scholars or investigators can understand experiences and reconstruct events they personally did not participate in (Rubin, & Rubin, 2011). Since the researcher’s realm of interest is digital, this study rests upon conducting interviews via Skype, Google Hangouts, or FaceTime, and recording using a voice recorder, transcribing notes, and coding the tweets directly. This maintains consistency in evaluating Black men’s engagement while using social media applications and tracking Twitter analytics. Each participant must be willing to divulge their experiences about to their race, gender, and masculinity while using Twitter.

**Self-reflexivity and Transparency**

In search of literature focusing on positionality, Parsons (2008) presented a concise understanding of positionality as a concept that acknowledges the complex and relational roles of race, class, and gender and other socially constructed identifiers in being. The juxtaposition of race, class, and gender forces any practitioner to identify their biases towards the scholarship and their areas of interest. As an avid Twitter user, I own opinion on the matter of Black masculinity
and Twitter, yet I wanted to further examine other Black men’s thoughts toward the highly debated subject. My engagement in a multitude of Twitter conversation and began to notice how Twitter regurgitates specific discussions. Using this scope of positionality, I have examined my preconceptions as a researcher to analyze this inquiry centering the racial and masculine identity development of Black men on social media. As a Black man, I understand racial and gender identity as a single position on a spectrum of "Blackness" or within "the Black experience". The duality of my experiences as both "Black" and "male" has caused me to search for the most beneficial coping mechanism in any situation. While still evaluating multiple intersecting identities that require me to juggle reactions with everyday life; additionally, understanding and processing the multiple traumatic experiences I encounter regularly.

Researcher Background

I have studied this phenomenon and have a passion and interest in social media, utilizing Twitter. My upbringing follows the typical narrative written in scholarship (Kirkland & Jackson, 2009; Majors, 1989; Harris III, Palmer, Struve, 2011) and seen on the big screens (Baby Boy, Stomp the Yard, Antwone Fisher) (Taylor & Johnson, 2011). I was raised by a single mother who tirelessly worked to afford me a better opportunity than herself. My upbringing in an impoverished neighborhood that replicated the cycle of sports, drugs, and acceptance through the streets. My father was not emotionally present in my life, yet he was physically visible. He also failed to contribute to my understanding of performing masculinity and ultimately achieving manhood by distancing himself emotionally. I learned the lessons of masculinity through neighborhood coaches and mentors who taught me to perform explicitly. I was taught that “cool” was about style, walk, and talk—never comprehending that it later served as a descriptive phenomenon uniquely positioned for Black men amongst many things that Cool Pose has been
listed in this research as defense to ward off the ill effects of racial oppression and social
inequality (Coleman, 2005). My examination of my positionality found location and language
are the most integral parts of my core identities. Being raised in the South and on the cusp of the
borders of Virginia and North Carolina, I learned that my style of language and display of cool is
a culmination of Northern and Southern dialect.

Race
Living in the South has shown me the omnipresent of racism and the detrimental effects
that Western civilization routinely neglect. In the same manner, Daniels (2012) reports that the
internet has not existed without escape of race or racism, nor has internet studies proven to allow
race to be the central focus. Race relations in the United States has underlined the significant role
that race has played in structuring relations among different groups (Allen & Chung, 2000).
Understanding my racial identity was the first conflict causing me to pursue external coping
mechanisms. As mentioned before, racism in the southern United States in omnipresent and the
aftermath were vivid images of cotton, tobacco, and sugarcane. Before I could act on the
requirements or acceptable standards of being masculine, I sought to understand what
expectations society has placed on my racial identity. Since man’s gender is perceived to indicate
privilege status, Black men’s gender is often rendered invisible or assumed under race (Bowleg,
English, Del Rio-Gonzalez, Burkholder, Teti, & Tschann, 2016). Black men are alienated from
social institutions that are designed to prepare them to be productive citizens. The alienation
comes from access to equitable jobs, income, and education that are systematically and
institutionally reserved for Whites as a result of oppression.
Gender

R.W. Connell’s (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity refers to the dominant forms of masculinity within the gendered hierarchy, which often subordinates other forms of masculine identities (Laing, 2017). The rigid hierarchy reinforces the failed attempts to acknowledge that gender performance is fluid, contextual, and collectively created in social structures (Harris, Palmer, & Struve, 2011). The structure of masculinity has been framed through the lenses of White males who currently have access to the power which has marginalized communities’ lack. When one combines the politics of race, as mentioned earlier, with the politics of sexuality, Black men are faced with a double-edged sword when seeking masculine identity (Coleman, 2005). As a Black male, it is complicated to imagine my gender identity without first noticing the oppression faced by my dominant racial identity. In the mid-1980s gender terms and hegemonic masculinity emerged as the pattern of practices that allowed men's dominance over women to continue (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Through social influences growing up as an emerging adult, I learned performing masculinity to achieve manhood was ruling over women.

Masculinity

When masculinity is specifically addressed, it tends to monopolize in moral discourse, emphasizing how men express respectability and dignity within or despite their circumstances (Malton, 2016). Masculinity is centering traditional performances that ultimately achieve the status of manhood. If we were to visualize masculinity as quadrants of a graph, society often dominates and accepts three-fourths of the entire graph and neglect the last section. In my experiences, the dominant narrative surrounding masculinity has always ostracized some Black men that did not play sports, partake in multiple relationships, persons identified as gay or queer, and those prioritized their education. Thus, as a manner to cope, Cool Pose was developed and continually transformed into stylistic manners for Black men to confront with the lack of
acceptance and power within their community and reflect their marginalized status in American society (Harris, Palmer, & Struve, 2011). "A Black man has to be cool; he wants to be cool; because he wants to be a man" (Connor, 1995 p. 11). America will not see Blacks as a man because of this inferior standard to White men.

I felt it was not enough to grapple with terms and express myself through fashion, walking or talking in the physical world, but felt the need to explore a larger community and connect to more. In attempts to connect with some individuals and simultaneously survive the intersectional forms of oppression, I resulted in engaging with Twitter. These online communities serve a range of purposes, from fostering a safe space for expressing and exploring racial identity, to facilitating discussions and advocating on racial issues (Tynes et al., 2011; Chan, 2017). The interviews of the respondents and the examination of their tweets create relevant content to secure the belief that Cool Pose can exist in a digital medium. However, there are still numerous limitations to this study that could question the validity of the site, participants and scope.

Limitations

It is not the attempt of this research to neglect the experiences of Black men who pledge with other social media platforms; instead, this researcher intends to create a starting point for future studies. Characteristics of social media platforms have altered the size, composition, boundaries, accessibility, and availability due to our communication partners’ everyday interactions (Litt, 2012). There are social connotations behind each social networking platform, Twitter is commonly known as the "raw" platform allowing users not to censor themselves; Facebook has developed more of a family orientation and might distort how individuals perform due to family relations; whereas, Instagram displays individuals through the lens of how they
want to be perceived. This study also chooses not to alienate the transgender community nor non-gender binary individuals but persuades those individuals to join the conversation in future studies. Twitter will continue to grow and expand, and it will give researchers innovative ways to understand its users (Ramelb, 2016). Facebook will continue to facilitate a construct of social connectedness and affiliation within a social network (Sinclair & Grieve, 2017). As a culturally competent scholar-practitioner, I find this point necessary to mention these identities concerning future research that is vital to expanding the agenda of digital scholarship, progressive masculinity studies, and emotional management. The methodology, selection of participants, and data analysis would provide the guided course to establish a plausible connection between Black men masculine identity development and Twitter as a space of coping.

Summary

This chapter has served as the primary guidance towards this particular study and continues to build the body of literature for examining the engagement of Black men with their racial and masculine identities while using Twitter. Qualitative research is presented in everyday language and incorporates participants own words to describe a phenomenon (Ponterotto, 2005). During this interpretative research, a two-state or double hermeneutic process is involved where the participants are trying to make sense of their world, while the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world (Smith & Osborn, 2004). The duality of this journey between the researcher and the selected respondents ensures that when the researcher finish gathering data, the qualitative process will have answered the researcher’s question and have sufficient materials to produce an accurate report.
Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis

This chapter introduces the findings of this research study, which examined racial and masculine identity development of Black men who utilize Twitter as an extension of *cool pose*. This chapter also includes a brief description of each participant, so that readers can better understand how each voice is indispensable to this phenomenon. The analysis of transcripts and tweets provided three dominant themes and six sub-themes. The categories and subsequent themes are my masculinity, my way (maleness and performance); am I Black enough for you (location and multilayered identity); and existing in your own tweet (engagement and coping).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superordinate theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
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<td>My masculinity, my way</td>
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<td>Individual who identifies as a man</td>
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<td></td>
<td>All of my identities</td>
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<td>Stand my ground as a man</td>
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<td>Am I Black enough for you</td>
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<td>Multilayered Identity</td>
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<td>Existing in your own tweet</td>
<td>Just existing in your own skin</td>
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<td>Embracing who I am</td>
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<td>Seek out different people</td>
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<td></td>
<td>My twitter avatar</td>
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<td>Support my Black identity</td>
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*Table 2. Charted table of themes.*
Participant Descriptions

This research study was grounded in the interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA) that sought out the experiences of Black men who utilized Twitter as a method to navigate their racial and masculine identities in either physical or digital spaces. The following descriptions serve as introductions to the participants’ lives, their racial and masculine identities and the lens which they use to answer the interview questions and post tweets. While the participants were trying to make sense of their world, this researcher was trying to make sense of their experiences; thus, IPA is connected to hermeneutics and theories of interpretation (Smith & Osborn, 2004). The participants are in ascending order based on their number of tweets.

@TendentiousG (Participant 1)

@TendentiousG is from the Mississippi Delta\textsuperscript{11}. As a third-generation HBCU\textsuperscript{12} graduate, he has dedicated his career to educating others on the culture surrounding HBCU’s and their continued importance in today’s educational landscape. The content for his Twitter account is solely for Black education, Black institutions, and Black politics. He identified as a Black cis-gendered male who uses Twitter to support all dynamic of Blackness. @TendentiousG was recruited by direct message from the researcher’s Twitter account.

@JTRoane (Participant 2)

@JTRoane identified as a bi-racial Black queer male from Virginia. He attributed his exposure to his masculine identity from the violence he experienced as a young child. Since then, he continues to challenge the norms of masculinity through his academic work as a professor. @JTRoane was recruited by direct message from the researcher’s Twitter account.

\textsuperscript{11} The Mississippi Delta is the most southern place on earth that lies between the Mississippi and Yazoo Rivers.

\textsuperscript{12} The Historically Black College or University (HBCU) was established primarily for the serving of the African-American community.
@VanDerek_ (Participant 3)
@VanDerek_ is from Birmingham, Alabama. He identified as a Black gay male who currently works for a non-profit organization aimed at helping people with HIV/AIDS. He is a graphic designer and photographer who was diagnosed with HIV in 2014. A significant part of his identity came from his southern roots, sexual orientation and his experiences as a Black male with HIV. @VanDerek was recruited by a direct message from the researcher’s Twitter account.

@Bennie_niles (Participant 4)
@Bennie_niles is currently a Ph.D. student in African-American studies and the oldest of three boys. He identified as a straight, cis-gendered Black male. In his current studies, he examines gender and race towards Black women athletes. He learned about masculinity through sports and is currently going through an unlearning process from his childhood. @Bennie_niles was recruited by direct message from the researcher’s Twitter account.

@cre8ed2conQUEr (Participant 5)
@Cre8ed2conQUEr is the son of a Southern Baptist pastor. He identified as a Black queer male and shared that the church was a vital component toward his masculine identity development. He joined Twitter in 2009, when he started college as a freshman. His Twitter name came from a difficult time in 2011, and it means “I was created to conquer”.
@Cre8ed2conQUEr was recruited by direct message from the researcher’s Twitter account.

My masculinity, my way
In developing the interview questions, there were three sections posed to investigate Black’s men response to online or offline stressors that would initiate tweeting to cope. The three sections were racial identity, masculine identity and Twitter identity. These sections stemmed from the initial research question of “How do Black men make sense of their racial and
masculine identity while engaged on Twitter?" The first thematic finding from interviews centered on the various ways Black men sought to define masculinity for themselves. The participants challenged and rejected the patriarchal norms of masculinity, which were amplified when participants began to mention other social identities such as sexuality, religion and socioeconomic status. The analysis resulted in three themes that were placed into three categories. The following sections recall the experiences of each participant in relation to their masculine identity and concept of maleness.

**Maleness**

The second section of the interview protocol (see Appendix 3) centered the participants’ experiences with their Black masculine identity and the concept of maleness. The participants had to reflect on their immediate introductions with masculinity, the individuals who taught them about masculinity and their transition into manhood by way of maleness. In multiple instances, two participants expressed their lack of a definition when citing masculinity; specifically, Black masculinity. On numerous occasions, four of the participants were able to describe performative actions that passed as being either masculine or being seen as a male. In two particular interviews, @Bennie_niles and @JTRoane expressed masculinity in relation to femininity and patriarchal power respectively. Acknowledging the proximity of masculinity to the overarching system of patriarchy allows this research to target the cause of men attempting to be masculine rather than the effects of patriarchy.

The researcher asked participants to describe what it means to be masculine, and one of the recorded responses came from @Bennie_niles. His response showed the disconnect from the traditional thinking of masculinity. He replied, “I think masculinity is best understood as what it’s not. So, it is also understood as in relation to femininity. So, masculinity is everything that
femininity isn’t and vice versa.” Another response came from @JTRoane and talked about the complexity of masculinity between Black men and society. The initial response allowed the researcher to deconstruct masculinity and patriarchy, “I think masculinity is complicated and vexed thing when it comes to Black men in particular. Cause this society both, I mean, in relation to the history of it, excluded Black men from certain visions of patriarchal power.”

Noting the proximity of femininity to masculinity challenges the strict system that ostracizes the lacking performances of masculinity, resulting in performative actions of femininity as less than. When, in actuality, identifying the balance between femininity and masculinity results in better overall emotional and mental health. When men mask their true feelings to present an unemotional exterior, this results in the sense of pride and dignity. These statements were a few instances that participants provided as a counter-narrative to the stereotypes of Black masculinity. Other participants expressed their understanding of masculinity concerning hardness, not being seen as feminine and thugs with guns. There was also an underlying need to confirm the preconceived notions of masculinity and remaining in that stature. Any deviations from that path would result in questioning from relatives or friends and being kicked from the patriarchal club.

@TendentiousG responded with some stereotypical assumptions of being a man and how these performances are continued over generations without challenging the methods of passing on traditions, “Hardness is basically like I guess this constant ‘would you fold under pressure’, or are you emotionally sound, or are you like anything that would make you not feminine.” Also, @VanDerek_ confirmed the constant visuals from his youth with Black men in neighborhoods, magazines and now on social media. He reflected on these experiences and provided, “That’s
one of the words [Black male], when I was younger, you kind identified that with thugs and people who held guns.”

When participants were asked to recall their experiences of learning masculinity, the overwhelming response from three participants resulted in performative actions that were rooted in being helpful, loyal or committing violence. One participant expressed the physical damage of maintaining a masculine image through his walking stature. The incident started at daycare when the teacher suspected that he was gay. As a result, he physically challenged himself to walk differently in order to continue this masculine perception. The discomfort from walking differently since the age of seven still plagues his body now. His responses suggest that the ingrained understanding of masculinity and maleness is fully action-based on societal system norms and must continue at all cost; for those who refuse to yield to this system are punished and denied access.

@VanDerek_ indicated to the gendered generalizations of accepting the norms of masculinity. These performances are often gendered for straight males without considering how any gender or sexual orientation can perform these acts; “Being loyal. Having respect for others, other than yourself; other people that you know. Being helpful.” Also, the emotional disconnect mechanisms are passed down through the traditions of patriarchy and masculinity. @Bennie_niles recalls how he learned masculinity through football, “Men are tough, men are strong, men don’t cry.” Moreover, the emotional disconnect learned in sports also creates an avenue for violence. @JTRoane shared his experience of engaging masculinity through the violence that is associated with performing masculinity and abiding within that system of patriarchy, “I would say through violence, to be honest. I mean, a lot of it, that shit came through violence [learning masculinity].”
While two separate participants acknowledged the hegemonic actions of masculinity, they also noted the often-exclusive access to achieving manhood. Consequently, those who fail to meet the ascribed standards are often denied access to this ‘club’. Their denied entrance comes when masculinity rests in the premise of an imperialist, capitalist, white supremacist patriarchal society that excludes other identities in the search for power.

This concept of patriarchy led @TendentiousG to share his experiences on the comparative nature of maleness and masculinity to the likeness of a club. With this analogy, current and future practitioners are visually able to see the dynamics of patriarchy and the disciples of patriarchy as the gatekeepers:

But when it comes to being a man I think you have to say that you’re one. That’s definitely an important part of it. Then I think it’s important that other people identify you as that. It’s almost like joining a club or something, like it’s okay that you want that or you want to identify as that, but then other people that want it and identify that way have to say “oh yeah, I see you as that too”.

Similar to @TendentiousG, @VanDerek_ expressed his experiences with the challenges of performing as a “man”. In his experiences, his masculine performances never matched his authentic nature, so he was constantly seeking to earn the title of a “man”, “Being a Black man, you can be given certain things, but most of the time that I think we have to earn. You have to earn the title as a man.”

The participants’ interactions with masculinity and maleness served as the foundational outcry of regaining ownership of a foreign and violent concept. Each participant immediately paused and entered deep thought before explaining the symbols or sense-making and the endless choice of engaging in masculine activities and ultimately entrance into this exclusive club.
However, for four participants, their sexual orientation immediately voids their entrance into this elite club of patriarchy. As a club or system, patriarchy embodies a social system that defines what considered suitable and desirable for men and women to interact and react as a relationship between people. Black men who uphold the standards and participate within this club stand as gatekeepers, dictating who is allowed to enter.

The violence that @JTRoane felt pushed him away from wanting to enter the club and the prescriptions associated with being a “man”. Repeatedly, the role of a man is associated with being a protector, procreator and provider, yet this quote suggests, as a queer man, none of these prescriptions are necessary; “So, I don't hold onto that kind of affirmative, what it means to be a man is some kind of vision for the family or some other shit, 'cause I'm queer. That, none of that, a lot of that shit doesn't apply to me.”

The conceptual underpinnings of Black masculinity and maleness for participants in this study have left them in a vortex of battling stereotypes, undermining their identities, avoiding systems, unpacking and/or unlearning traditions that they have accepted; defining masculinity for themselves and walking fearlessly in it. The next section continues to explain how each participant strived to define or defy masculinity in their own way through various performances.

Performance

As the researcher continued to examine the transcripts and tweets of each participant, how Black masculinity and maleness often overlapped performance was exemplified. The duality of this research incorporates interviews and submitted tweets. The first explanation of resistance of masculinity as performance comes from @Cre8ed2conQUEr. He recalls his experiences of attending church and being required to dress a certain way. Through his church experiences, he noticed how Black men would act and dress while in church. Through his
internal examination, he also noticed how he no longer desired to perform the norms of masculinity. His visual resistance via Twitter challenged the image of masculinity, race and gender. Figure 3 is an image of @Cre8ed2conQUEr at the beach doing yoga poses. The linguistic narrative of this tweet adds another layer to queer males defying the systematic narrative of masculinity and dismisses the stereotype that the practice of yoga is exclusively feminine and predominantly White.

**Figure 3.** Yoga pose on the beach, challenging masculinity (Twitter, 2019).

As previously mentioned in the literature review, *cool pose* incorporates components of fashion, walk and talk into coping mechanism for Black men when faced with external stressors in opposition to masculinity or other social identities and norms. In this particular instance, @Cre8ed2conQUEr averted masculine standards by making room and adding an image of himself doing yoga in a digital medium to express his masculinity. He also challenged the influences of the church, the Christian value of men and the images of masculine Black men in clothing.

In continuing the tradition and upholding much of the imagery and many statutes of being a man, the church is a reiteration of patriarchal pillars. For example, @Cre8ed2conQUEr shared
what he religiously saw while in church, “Clothing is one of the most masculine things that I can think of, ‘How do you fit into society?’ And it's really the first presentation of masculinity is in the style of dress.

For the Black men in this research, their entrance into masculinity came at various performative measures. Until now, it was not only their performance that mattered, but the approval from others on their masculine performance mattered as well. The patriarchal system remains unyielding as performative measures of masculinity are often seen as gold standards of maleness, and, if not acknowledged, violence ensues.

As @Cre8ed2conQuer illustrated, the norms associated with performing masculinity comes from a historical list of hegemonic notions that have not updated themselves or changed gatekeepers. In similar methods, sports is also another vehicle that recycles traditions of performing masculinity. From his football experience, @Bennie_niles shared, “I think to be masculine can be, some might say to be strong, some might say to be dominant, some might say to be assertive, forthright, muscular; all these different things.” In addition to @Bennie_niles’s comments, Black men are also judged by other men in proximity to them. @TendentiousG talked about judging men on metrics that are important to him, “You could be the hardest person in the room, but then you don't take care of your business, and so for me that doesn't make you a man.” Similarly, @VanDerek_ provided an example of upholding these prescriptive performances, even as a single man, “So, I think being responsible, being a head of a household, even if you're not married per se, but a lot of things go into being a man.”

For Black men in this study, their performance of masculinity within the system of patriarchy continued the obsession with being viewed as masculine, until the participants noticed the damage done by conforming to these harmful sentiments. The birth of their resistance came
at the cost of exclusion or harm from other men. For instance, @JTRoane and @Bennie_niles both went in depth in describing their experiences with the unlearning and unpacking process when they would have abided with patriarchy and masculinity. These acts of resistance are critical measures in stopping violence against Black women, other men and members of the LGBTQ+ community; the resistance is also key to queering the concept of masculinity to make new expressions within the systematic performance.

The challenge of patriarchy and masculinity begins with internal reflection and examination on the internal emotional distress and the external violence to others. During his self-work process, @JTRoane mentioned the depth of inner searching, unpacking and unlearning that he would have to go through. He went on to say, “I continue to have to challenge that [norms of masculinity], even at the same time that I'm not trying to hold on to violent visions of masculinity.”

The socialization of men to conform within the parameters of masculinity became clear as Black men began to do their self-work and probe at ideologies they were raised on. A follow up shared experience came from @Bennie_niles:

Men do these different things, even from chores to, you know just how you behave. That was reinforced in school, in various ways on the playground, and it wasn't until I actually got to college where I actually started questioning a lot of this stuff; and felt the need to try to unlearn and unpack some of the things that I was previously told as a kid.

Summary

First, the initial thematic finding explained Black cis-gender men’s desire to define masculinity for themselves and gain the same access to the club of manhood set by Whiteness

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13 LGBTQ+ stands for members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer community.
and reinforced by other communities of men. Given that masculinity has been passed down, reinforced or shaped by patriarchy, masculinity is the route to maleness that is achievable but not desired if by way of violence. In no way should masculinity or maleness include violence or neglect the sexuality spectrum\(^\text{14}\) of identities. By allowing Black men to define their masculine identity, the internal community of men will combat the inherently patriarchal norm that White, straight, cis-gender males are owners of power and masculinity. By shifting the power dynamics, masculinity would no longer be an exclusive club, but rather a revolving door.

Secondly, the inseparable link between masculinity and performative acts weighs more heavily on the actions deemed as masculine rather than the individuals doing the acts. In this instance, it is essential to become aware of the linguistic disconnect between what is being said and actions to be carried out. With this in mind, the researcher noticed how the understanding of masculinity and the performatives are at opposites when sexual orientation is considered. The performative linguistics of masculinity cannot be gendered, as the gendered idea upholds the pillars of patriarchy. Instead, it is better to understand and define masculinity in its relation to femininity and the intersections between the two respectively. Figure 4 is a tweet provided by @TendentiousG that further explains the gendering of select masculine performative acts.

![Figure 4](image)

*Figure 4. Performance of masculinity is not gender specific. (Twitter, 2019)*

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\(^{14}\) Sexuality spectrum exists along a continuum with degrees of nonexclusively in between heterosexuality and homosexuality (Savin-Williams, 2014).
The next section introduces the second thematic finding of this study, as it relates to sense of racial identity.

**Am I Black enough for you?**

Participants in this study signaled a keen sense of racial identity, and two participants identified the intersectionality of their racial identity and sexual orientation. This theme remained pivotal when introducing the layered navigation that Black men must work through while showing up on Twitter and experiencing discrimination. The detailed experiences in this section reveal Black men’s desire to express their Blackness in their own authentic manner with the sub-themes of location and multilayered identity. Tweets are also shown in this section that hint to the final theme.

**Location**

The next section of interview questions focused on the participants’ understanding of their racial identity in relation to their environment in the physical and digital mediums. This researcher wanted to know which salient identities were most important, and if there were any noticeable differences in their racial identity offline and away from social media. All five of the participants saw their racial identity intertwined with other identities or as another layer for their most salient identity. For one participant, his Black identity was in constant connection to his White parent and his hometown. For another, his identity rested in the pride of his environment and cultural connections within the Deep South.

The first quote illustrates how @JTRoane struggled with his initial racial identity development in learning from mixed parents on the boarder of Northern and Southern states. In addition, @JTRoane conveyed the significance of his geospatial location and identity development. He responded, “I grew up in Virginia with a black parent and a white parent in an
area where there wasn't much kind of openness around non-black or non-white identities.”

Another rich experience came from @TendentiousG from living in the Deep South and having supportive cultural experiences surrounding him to reinforce his racial identity development. @TendentiousG’s quote reinforces the developing concept of the polylithic expressions of Blackness with location as a primary factor, “I guess I identify as black, and a lot of that comes from my upbringing. I was born in Mississippi, and in the delta in Mississippi, which is a very cultural region where blues and stuff comes from.”

**Multilayered Identity**

As these two participants saw their racial identity connected to their location, others saw their identity in relation to their sexual orientation. While the second theme centered their racial identity, this researcher noticed how often their experiences paralleled the overarching system of masculinity and the quest for manhood. For the queer participants, they presented a heightened awareness to the historical narrative of being both Black and queer.

As one of the four queer participants, @Cre8ed2conQUEr understood the historical narrative of queer community members and the juxtaposition of racial and masculine identity, religion and location. Many of the participants who self-identified as queer, voiced the tedious task of navigating social spaces as Black and queer. He stated:

So, my racial identity development I think is a lot different than others because I've known of black queer history makers growing up. And having a defined identity of being black and queer and understanding the scope that black queerness is its own identity really has just challenged my notion and understanding with interacting with people in general.
By having sexual orientation as the anchor of his identity, @VanDerek_ discussed how he also maneuvered his queer identity as a Black man. He saw his queerness as a major component of his image on and off Twitter; “I think my sexual orientation is a big thing for me.”

Geospatial location dictates how Black men in this study performed their masculine identity. As another participant from the South, @VanDerek_ continued to address his maneuvering as a queer Black male. He gave an example of the ordering of his identities and the ways it varies amongst men, “Being where I'm from, I would say being black is a big part of who I am and being me in general. Being black is a big part of who I am. I love being black. It's one of the best things about me; I will say it's the third best thing.”

Noticing this trend, this researcher questioned whether the elite club that existed for masculinity also existed for Black identity. Racial discrimination compounds the pressure to perform masculinity because Black men are taught that masculinity can be used as a tool to fight racism, and queer identified males are often left out of this battle. So, this led the researcher to assume that, for Black queer men, the barriers of an entrance that exist for masculinity is also present for their racial identity. Figure 5 describes how @Cre8ed2conQUEr was blocked on Twitter for explaining the intersectionality of being Black and queer.

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Figure 5. Race matters more than sexual orientation (Twitter, 2019).

As it pertains to the tenets of intersectionality, whereas oppression is not independent but multidimensional (the participants’ experiences and their tweets), the perceived privileges of

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15 Blocked on Twitter is being denied access to view tweets, follow or direct message another user.
Black men in the United States are negated when queer or gay identities intersect with race. The tweet above reveals that race relations remain central in the scope of dismantling social injustices, and other forms of oppression have to take a secondary route. Overall, scholars have failed to develop models that consider the intersections of social identities (e.g., Black, male and gay) and the ways they influence interactions with peers and family members.

**Summary**

The second thematic finding of this research provided knowledge of Black men seeking the equally vital quest to be seen as masculine; for their racial identity in addition to other social identity markers (i.e., sexual orientation) to be welcomed in this exclusive club that is governed by White standards. All participants were connected and expressed their security in the sense of their racial identity (internalization); however, security in one’s own racial identity in and of itself is often limited when considering sexual orientation for Black men. As the history of the Black Power Movement and Civil Rights Movement has shown the exclusion of gay and queer identities when combating a common goal, Black gay and queer men are forced to subvert their orientation for the betterment of the race.

The benefit of this model extends the once limited access to being seen as “Black enough” and “masculine enough”, which, in the end, decreased acts of violence to maintaining the rigid structure of masculinity. It is imperative to have a model that also centers the intersectionality of social identities to educate about how oppression impacts at different levels. This final theme examines how participants used Twitter to combat both instances of denied access within their racial and masculine identities.
**Existing in your own Tweet**

The final theme discovered in this research uncovers the participant’s active resistance through tweets and the culmination of the respective denials to be seen “masculine enough” and “Black enough”. Participants were asked to recall their experiences of engaging with audience members (followers) and if they ever used Twitter to cope. This theme provided the most synthesis, as submitted tweets provided the linguistic narrative to challenge the systematic notion of masculinity and identified the disconnection to performative acts. The sub-themes provided in this section are engagement and coping.

**Engagement**

The final section of the interview questions examined participants’ interactions with their followers on Twitter. The participants were asked to pinpoint the reason for joining the social network and their uses for it since joining. The responses from participants first revealed the age demographic shift from Facebook. Participants liked the exclusive access to Facebook when it was selectively for college-aged students. Upon many of their arrivals to college, participants felt the need to seek the same form of community engagement without parental guidance.

All the participants articulated the need to privacy from parents and the ability to remain connected to peers. Once the policy changed on Facebook and allowed non-college students, participants indicated the need for community among peers and privacy. To address this need, all participants reported their migration to Twitter.

Oh, it was in the phase where they started letting anybody on Facebook, so your parents and aunties and all of those people could get on Facebook at that period, and then everybody who were the original Facebook people, like between '05, '06, that range, maybe I don't know, but in there if you were in college then it was just
exclusive to college students, but then once everybody could be on there and it
didn't feel as exclusive anymore.

On the other hand, the newness of Twitter also attracted participants to join the
platform. The new platform presented the opportunity to engage with friends or connect
with new audience members (followers). This digital cultural shift from Facebook to
Twitter allowed two participants to reintroduce themselves in a digital medium.
@JTRoane said, “I was one of them people that was originally on Facebook when
Facebook came about like 2004, 2005. I joined Twitter probably 2009 because I heard it
was new. @TendentiousG’s response echoed the same sentiment in his response, “I
joined Twitter ... According to my profile, [and] it says 2014 or '15. But I was on Twitter
in 2009, and I joined because it was just something to do. I think Myspace had gotten old.
I was growing weary of Facebook.”

The desire to continually shift in trends with social factors proves the utilization of
Twitter for seeking community. As previously noted, the shift from Facebook to Twitter came at
the time when surrounding community members also begin to notice the change in social
categorization of entering college. Physical barriers limit the desire to remain connected;
however, with the usefulness of social media, long lasting friendships can continue. Even while
on Twitter, the commonalities that once bought individuals together still remain through seeking
followers and building digital communities.

“I joined Twitter my first year of Graduate School actually; and I joined it because, you
know, everybody was talking about how fun it was, how like, you know, wouldn't like it at first,
then you get addicted.” Not only did @Bennie_niles seek out a community upon entering
graduate school, he also sought out a community to cope with being one of few Black men in his
program. The experiences with this phenomenon and his evolving concept of masculinity will be explained later. This researcher again noticed how the participants sought the usage and engagement of Twitter as an extension of their physical identity. In particular, @VanDerek_ mentioned how being a Black man on Twitter allowed him to exist without any care. Figure 6 is a tweet posted by @VanDerek_, venting his disgust with respectability politics among Blacks who continue to seek acceptance from White individuals. Respectability politics govern the Black community as masculinity governs Black men; both instances are rooted within the imperialist, capitalist, White supremacist patriarchy society of today.

Figure 6. Resisting Black respectability politics (2015, March 17).

Beyond the continual fight to exist through multifaceted approaches that were previously mentioned in this research, participants also described their tactics to engage their followers by uplifting the Black community. As an HBCU advocate, @TendentiousG subscribed to tweeting and engaging other accounts that catered explicitly to #HBCUExcellence. His dedication to the HBCU culture was a vital part of his digital identity and remained integral in selecting other sub-communities to join. Beyond joining #HBCUExcellence, he mentioned how he is also a member of various other sub-communities.

The content creativity aspect of Twitter allows individuals to develop digital communities that reflect their interest. For @TendentiousG, his passion for Black culture guided him to create a supporting digital community dedicated to Black excellence. In discussion with him, this researcher noticed how the content development changes over time in respect to the
evolving individual. In cultivating his community, he stated, “I follow accounts that speak about black news, black institutions, and so forth, and I engage in conversations about black culture.”

Another example would be the meticulous accounts of denying the narrative that Black excellence does not exist within many areas of society. Again, the resistance and challenge of common stereotypes worked greatly to increase the visibility of Black success. For the Black men in this research, visibility remained a focal point throughout their explanation of experiences in maneuvering their racial and masculine identity within diverse spaces. All the thematic findings in this chapter hint to the high demands to be visible and present counter-narratives to many stereotypes visible as well.

This researcher noticed that queer individuals were hyperactive in recognizing the lack of access and exposure of Black men who did not perform masculinity in a standard manner. @JTRoane was comfortable in explaining his role in supporting the spectrum of Black folx

I try to support, spread information, spread all of that that's supportive of black women, other black queer folks, black trans folks. So, I really try to center ... And I'm an editor for Black Perspectives and so I try, again, even in that work, I try to center black women's experiences, black queer experiences, and all of that.

An additional layer for Black men existing in their own tweet was the ability to navigate Twitter in search of belonging and community. The next section examines Black men coping while on Twitter.

Coping

As this researcher examined the engagement tactics used by participants in this study, the researcher also noticed how coping online reflected the way individual members belonged to an

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16 Folx is a gender neutral term used to address a large group of people (Martin, 2018).
online social group (Tonteri, Kosonen, Ellonen, & Tarkiainen, 2011). The first mention of coping came at the deaths of Trayvon Martin, Eric Gardner and Philando Castle. As participants continued to recall the various ways they used Twitter to cope with either online or offline affairs, the researcher confirmed that, for Black men, Twitter can be used as a coping mechanism. The first instance of coping revealed the hypervisibility of Black death as images brought various sub-communities of Twitter together to mourn the death of Black men and women at the hands of the police. The deaths of Eric Gardner and Michael Brown, less than 30 days apart, spearheaded this solidarity. For example, in response to a question about coping on Twitter, this reply from @VanDerek_ illustrates how he sought Twitter to help cope with emotional distress.

Researcher: Have you ever used Twitter to cope because of an offline incident concerning your racial identity?

@VanDerek_: I will say that it has helped me cope with it. Especially during like the Trayvon Martin and Eric Brown and Philando Castile, all of that. I definitely know during those times my racial identity was very important. It was very important for all black people on social media during that time.

The second instance of coping mentioned in this section dealt with the isolated feelings when surrounded by White counterparts in academic spaces. In two separate interviews, participants mentioned going to Twitter as a source of relief from marginalized experiences that happened off social media. The first participant to mention his experience for coping was @Bennie_niles. As a graduate student, he went to Twitter to ask his followers if they had ever experienced moments of being marginalized in the classroom.
@Bennie_niles’s common experience as a Black body in this predominately White academic space escalated the feeling of detachment and created impostor feelings. As @Bennie_niles clarifies in his statement regarding an experience on a retreat, he also provides a solution:

I remember one time I was at a retreat for graduate students and I was [with] another one of my friends at a private Midwestern institution and I put out something jokingly [on Twitter], like me and my boy are two-thirds of the Black men in this room; and it's like a room of like a hundred people and there's only three Black men in the whole place.

The result of his experience in a physical classroom birthed another sub-community that catered to other graduate students who often go through the same experiences. The #TrynaGrad sub-community was birthed as an extension of coping that has facilitated numerous Twitter discussions and filled a gap within the physical media. By seeking to exist in his own tweet, @Bennie_niles noted the barriers that existed in the classroom for him and his friends were removed, and he gained a sense of belonging as a result.

The last mention of coping by participants came from @JTRoane, as he searched for belonging on Twitter while in a predominately White department. As a Black male in a department full of White women, he thirsted for conversations with Black intellectuals in a department where a diverse opinion was often absent. @JTRoane also described his ordeal as a marginalized faculty member in a predominately White department by stating, “I work in a very white department, white women's studies, if we being honest. And so I find community there where I can be with other black intellectuals that I know in real life and that I don't know in real life.”
Summary

The third and final thematic finding in this research exposed participants’ desires for visibility through their tweets. Twitter allows every user to create online communities that exist offline or create online communities that do not exist offline. Prior to the development of Twitter, participants mentioned their time occupying Facebook, yet after Facebook changed the requirements for accounts, this created a new opportunity for many college-aged students. As a result, the overarching dynamic of Twitter was a draw to the young adult and professional alike, as modeled in this research. For the Black men in this study, their usage of Twitter has filled gaps that were unsolvable as a result of limits of cool pose. Now, in attempts to cope with external stressors, Black men utilize Twitter through engagement, creating belongingness and tweeting through the same methods of journaling.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore how Black men make sense of their racial and masculine identities while utilizing Twitter. In this research, there was one central question and two sub-questions: (1) how do Black men make sense of their racial and masculine identity while engaged on Twitter; (1a) how do Black men use Twitter to cope as an extension of Cool Pose and (1b) how are tweets used to challenge, reject or accept the notion of masculinity? In the attempts to increase awareness surrounding effective coping mechanisms for Black men when handling external stressors such as navigating racial and masculine identity development, Twitter has provided space to fill the gap. The thematic findings introduced in this chapter proclaim that Black men can resist the generalizations of masculinity and chains of patriarchy. The definition of a Black man is a culminating mixture of social identities beyond, and in addition to, race.
The ability to cultivate personal thoughts from an individual’s Twitter account gives voice and authenticity to Black men desiring to define masculinity for themselves. This process also depicts a developmental growth and roadmap for audience members (followers) to pursue. The first finding of this research was my masculinity, my way; this demonstrated the stringent duties assigned with hegemonic masculinity and the exclusive access granted to men who give their oath to patriarchy. Also, Twitter’s usefulness has allowed each participant to define their evolving and developing racial and masculine identities to cope in multiple ways that were previously limited by physical boundaries. This phenomenon, as it was examined through the participants’ experiences and submission of tweets introduces a new definition for Black masculinity and identifies the systematic effects of patriarchy.

By keeping patriarchy central to this research, the researcher acknowledges the systematic approach necessary for liberation, as mentioned in Chapter 1. This researcher can now define Black masculinity as the performative expressions in relation to femininity for Black men who exist along the continuum of sexuality that accepts, challenges or rejects the patriarchal norms of masculinity. This definition is centered in the experiences of Black men who identify along the spectrum of sexuality; and Black men who have transitioned from accepting to rejecting a pre-defined masculinity. During this analysis, racial identity development remained essential in anchoring masculinity and social media performance. The second thematic finding resulted in exploring amplifiers of this social categorization. All participants alluded to the fundamental relevance of race. Therefore, this chapter has also identified how social identities (i.e., race, gender and sexuality) are amplifiers of masculinity. Moreover, the addition of social identities to masculine performance is the credit application or trustworthiness to the systematic club of patriarchy.
To conclude, the culmination of these layered experiences and performances are executed on Twitter. As an extension of physical dimensions, Twitter allowed each participant to remain true to their identity while continuing to resist and challenge the morals of masculinity. For all participants in this study, their need to prove their Blackness matched their need to perform as a man. By encompassing these systematic and social categorizations as a whole, the researcher was able to identify the different impact levels of oppression when it came to be accepted among the ranks of masculine men. All participants’ racial identity is a composition of geographical location, parental rearing, educational settings, sexual orientation, peer involvement and community building on social media.

The findings of this research are valid as they acknowledge the self-authorship employed by Black men in efforts to unlearn many rigid and violent benchmarks of masculinity; to define and perform a safe version of masculinity; awareness of intersectionality and identifying additional coping mechanisms for Black men. From the time of recruitment to the analysis phase, the population recruited remained consistent with the aim of this research. The transcripts and tweets were kept in a safe and sealed location and reinforced the ethical considerations of each participant while maintaining no confidentiality. In the next chapter, the research questions are discussed, and the recommendations for practice and future research are noted.
Chapter Five: Discussion and Implication for Practice

The first four chapters of this dissertation included an introduction to the study; the significance of the research; a literature review which centered masculinity and Black men; a description of the research methodology and an analysis of the findings. The focus of this study was to examine how Black men make sense of their racial and masculine identities while utilizing Twitter. This chapter will summarize each finding in relation to the research questions, literature review and theoretical framework while offering recommendations for practice, future research and implications. The findings sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do Black men make sense of their racial and masculine identities while utilizing Twitter?
   a. How do Black men use Twitter to cope as an extension of Cool Pose?
   b. How are tweets used to challenge, reject or accept the notion of masculinity?

My Masculinity, My Way

The initial findings of this research will be discussed in greater details in this chapter. The previous chapter used descriptive comments to present the findings. The first finding uncovered Black men’s desire for their masculine expression to be accepted by the rigid structure of masculinity. Previously defined by Isom (2007), maleness is defined as a performance that contains “a set of behaviors and abilities” that center on “physicality” something one does versus that character or nature of who one is (Moore, Bennett, Graham, & Hodge, 2015, p. 83). In this section, this researcher will provide a brief overview of each finding as it related to the research question to provide more significant analysis. Butler (1993) early scholarship on gender, performativity, and subversion implies that performativity is the repetition and citation of gender norms which compel some appearances of masculinity and femininity while prohibiting others
For Black men in this study, their racial and masculine identities were a virtual reflection (i.e. performance) of their physical identity. For them, it was a conscious decision to showcase their identity as an identical representation of themselves online. The answer to this question can be found in the thematic finding related to Black men’s resistance to the patriarchal view of masculinity and the limited view of blackness. Thus, Black men in their quest to be seen as masculine are often searching for their acceptance through White parameters (Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 2016). Their sense-making process comes through the discourse of challenging or rejecting the dominant narrative centering their masculine and racial identity.

Crenshaw (1989) coined the term intersectionality to bring awareness to the exclusion of Black women from White feminist and anti-racist movements. As a theoretical framework, intersectionality examines how multiple social identities of an individual (race, gender and sexual orientation) interlock with systematic oppression (racism, sexism and heterosexism) (Collins 1991; Crenshaw 1989; Davis 2008; Bowleg, 2013). The intersectionality of race and sexual orientation also amplified masculinity and as a result, this researcher noticed the limits of Cross’s model alone for masculine identity development (Johnson & Quaye, 2017). As seen in the findings of this study, Black men want to define their racial and masculine identities for themselves, and each encounter with a Black man or someone else introduces a different expression. Black online community members spend a fair amount of their time working through internal and external affairs due to their status as low-status Americans (Brock, 2009; Cisneros, & Nakayama, 2015). Both Black masculinity and racial identity are not monolithic in their various expression, yet society limits Black men to express themselves.
Literature Review Relationship to My Masculinity, My Way

The findings within this section are connected to how Black men sought to define masculinity for themselves while utilizing Twitter. The literature begins with *Cool Pose* as this researcher used this phenomenon to set the boundaries for Black men who experienced discrimination due to their racial or masculine identities or other social identities. In this study, this researcher formerly defined Black masculinity as the intersecting (age, sexuality, gender and spiritual) performative tenets that strive to achieve the coveted status of being seen as a “man” (Cooper, 2006; Pelzer, 2016). This revealing of status and access led this researcher to believe that masculinity often reserved for those who continuously act upon the White heteronormative systems and stereotypes (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014). For the Black men in this study, the need to cope came from social identities beyond race and gender. Sexuality presented itself as a vital determining factor for Black men to seek Twitter as a method of relief. The creative “postures” or “pose” that Black men have developed in the physical world also exist in the digital medium as a characteristic of their digital identity.

For all participants in this study, their digital identities mirrored their true identities. Potts (2017) described true digital identity as “a person’s real name, real demographics information, and real pictures” (p.31). The usage of their true demographics added to defining Black masculinity. Through the interviews and analysis of tweets, this researcher has defined Black masculinity as the *performative expressions in relation to femininity for Black men who exist along the continuum of sexuality that accepts, challenges or rejects the patriarchal norms of masculinity*. The performative expressions of masculinity are in contiguity with *cool pose*; as *cool pose* itself is a performative expression.
As the performative expressions of cool pose remain determining factors for the survival of Black men and entrance into masculinity, the ritual will continue to expose Black men to violence. Jewkes and Morrell (2018) support the notion that multiple masculinities exist and also acknowledge the violence toward and control of women, sexual risk-taking and the use of violence and expressions of toughness among men (Jewkes & Morrell, 2018). For the participants who identified as queer or gay, their identities lacked access to the masculine title and increased interactions with violence and isolation. The next section examines the literature review in relation to the Black experience.

Am I Black enough for you
The second finding of this research alluded to participants’ utilization of Twitter to cope as an extension of Cool Pose. This finding demonstrates that Black men continue to find innovative ways to cope with societal changes. Despite the difficulties, navigating a rigid system based on power and oppression, the list of plausible coping mechanisms for Black men continues to grow. As the technological advancements of Twitter and social media continue, Black men will continue to use this avenue to write their narrative. The answer to the second research question can be found in the thematic finding related to the categories of existing in your own tweet. Cool Pose is the physiological defense mechanism Black men employ in response to masculine or racial oppression. While on Twitter, Black men use their tweets to cultivate a community where they can establish a sense of belonging, connectivity and express their thoughts as if writing in a diary. For participants in this study, their need to cope came from situations that occurred in the physical medium and their response was to craft tweets to explain their discomfort.

As a result of Black men explaining their discomfort, audience members were able to reply to the tweet and start a conversation in attempts to comfort one another. A perfect example
came from @Bennie_niles and the invention of #TrynaGrad. As mentioned before, @Bennie_niles created #TrynaGrad as a platform to cater to the isolated feelings graduate students of color often experience within their academic programs. Impostor syndrome is successful at making students unable to develop their student identity while in the classroom (Chapman, 2017). The Impostor phenomenon (IP) refers to an individual’s beliefs that he or she is an intellectual fraud who will be soon exposed (Castro, 1985; Clance, 1985; Cisco, 2019). For many Black graduate students, the demands of a doctoral often make them question their qualifications, and Black doctoral students can exceptionally perform under stress and strain (McGee, Griffith, & Houston, 2019).

**Literature Review Relationship to Am I Black Enough**

The consideration of racial identity and sexual orientation from the participant’s experiences strengthens the concept of Queering Black Racial Identity Development (Johnson & Quaye, 2017). The underpinnings of cool pose center the performative creativity surrounding the Black experience. For the participants who mention their racial identity was most salient, their experiences with performing masculinity were less traumatic compared to those whom sexual orientation rested at the core of their identity, gay and queer community members have to create boundaries between themselves and others to combat homophobia and violence (Mathews, 2010). Previously, the literature review identified the Cross Nigrescence (1971) model of identity development as one of the core models devoted to understanding how Black men navigate their experience. This linear model served as a reference to help assess the impact of Black peoples’ relationship with peers (Ritchey, 2014).

Since then, this researcher accepted the limits of the Cross (1971) model and noticed how the other theories or models are better equipped for examining this phenomenon. First, the
queered model of multiple dimensions of identity (2013) and queering Black racial identity
development (2017) models are better suited for analyzing the intersection of race and sexual
orientation. Jones, Abes, and Kasch (2013) model capture identity as something liminal and
changeable based on the various identities people may inhibit. The Q-MMDI is more suitable
than the linear nature of Cross’s racial identity model that still centers whiteness as the
opposition to Black identity development (Johnson & Quaye, 2017).

Secondly, queer theory deconstructs identity categories as it places emphasis on sexuality
and gender (Sullivan, 2013; Jones & Abes, 2013; Johnson & Quaye, 2017). Within this theory
are four tenets that deconstruct the binary categories. The categories are heteronormativity,
performativity, desire and becoming. Heteronormativity reinforces the heterosexual standard
(Warner, 1999; Johnson & Quaye, 2017); performativity relates to behaviors and actions rather
than social identities (Butler, 1990; Johnson & Quaye, 2017); desire is the attraction and ways
people relate to each other; and becoming references the continuous process of identities formed
in fluidity (Jones & Abes, 2013). The participants’ experiences brought awareness to the
manifestation of power within systems of society, and these tenets allude to the deconstruction of
systems of power. The next section examines the literature review in relation to existing in your
own tweet.

Existing in your own Tweet

The answer to second sub-research question can be found in the thematic finding related
to developing their masculine identities and showcasing their identities through tweets. The
participants explained their masculine identity did not differentiate while not online. While
individual understanding of self and identity are interpreted by larger societies perception (Chan,
2017), the notion of resisting for Black men first came at their understanding by the violent and
separatist ways of masculinity. After this self-acknowledgement, Black men would cultivate a new narrative to promote self-healing and vulnerability. The underlying narrative for Black men in this research was to find various ways to express their authentic and vulnerable self. Thus, tweeting was linked to an avenue of authenticity and vulnerability to express areas of oneself that are often hidden.

**Literature Review Relationship to Existing in Your Own Tweet**

Racism is not the only thing that imprisons Black men achieving liberation in masculinity; intra-group power dynamics are also responsible for Black men killing each other (Ratele, 2013). The resistance of Black men to denounce the stereotypical images and performances of masculinity and gender identity constructs were highly visible from participants utilizing Twitter. This researcher’s interviews exposed Black men’s work to unlearn social behaviors norms of race and masculinity. While on Twitter, reinforcing racial authenticity took the shape of both assimilating and disassociating the parameters of Blackness. Black authenticity provides various forms of “cultural capital” (Bourdieu, 1986) especially in a world that deprives Black people access to influence, social, and economic mobility (Maragh, 2017). The researcher first noticed how it was more critical to disassociating the parameters, by doing this, Black men sought to insert their performative expression into the equation hoping for acceptance.

Expanding these parameters increasing the visibility of Black men across the spectrum while also keeping Black men alive. As a symbolic reference, mass and social media have presented Black men with adverse influences on identity behavior, attitudes, values, and perceptions (Malinga & Ratele, 2016). I also noticed that for Black men, the ability to create space for their authentic self encompasses courage as it would cause “temporary silence” or exclusion. For instance, if Black men were to stand up for women’s right or denounce the morals
of patriarchy and declare himself as a “feminist”, he would automatically be associated with hating men. It was during this moment the researcher noticed it is not every Black man’s aim to fit in with the collective, rather the ability to take a stance is key. Stance and identity are related functions, and taking a stance contributed to identity construction. The final section analyzes the research finding in relation to the theoretical framework.

**Research Findings Relationship to Theoretical Framework**

As the previous sections indicate, there are significant connections between the findings and the theoretical framework used in this study, Symbolic Interactionism. Symbolic interactionism grounds itself within three points, two of the points utilized within this research (a) symbols, and (b) acts and social acts. In this study, the symbol was identified as masculinity while racial and masculinity identity referenced the acts and social acts. This researcher investigated the symbolic meaning of masculinity for Black men, and for one perspective, the symbol of masculinity is often seen as hard, emotionless, violent, and sexual pervasive.

When Black men acknowledge these symbols, they are more inclined to perform in these ways. According to Blumer (1) humans act accordingly to other humans, physical objects, categories of humans, and ideals based on the meaning assigned to them; (2) meanings arise from interactions from others; (3) the sense-making process is accomplished through a process of interpretations. Performative expressions such as voice, facial expressions, clothing, and walk are central in developing meaning (Stryker & Vryan, 2006). As for *cool pose*, the reenactments over generations have developed such meanings that have interpreted as hard, silent, and violent towards women and other men.

This study emphasized the idea that Black men understand the symbolic meaning of masculinity and racial identity by utilizing Twitter to navigate the stressors of them both. The
sense-making concept was evident in themes one and two, where Black men resisted the dominant narrative of masculinity and racial identity in attempts to define both social identities for themselves. Additionally, symbolic interactionism supports the freedom of choice in human behavior albeit choice is often constrained by societal and cultural norms (Benzies & Allen, 2001; Handberg, Thorne, Midtgaard, Nielsen, & Lomborg, 2015). The development of counter-narratives as a way to resist societal and cultural norms remain pivotal in forming new meanings and shaping Black men’s future.

Conclusion

The core of this study was to examine the racial and masculine identity development of Black men who utilize Twitter to cope with societal stressors. The primary research question desired to identify the ways Black men make sense of their racial and masculine identities while using Twitter. In this study, the researcher employed an IPA approach to provide guidance through the participants’ experiences. The findings presented introduces a healthier way to perform and express Black masculinity while dismantling systematic patriarchy.

The roots of cool pose transformed from the social corners of the streets to virtual highways of the internet. The survival mechanisms once capitalized on by Black men are still the same, but the methods that Black men employ are vastly different. The reviews of literature aforementioned has provided new methods that Black men have tapped into on Twitter to navigate their racial and masculine identity development. From the participant’s experiences, this researcher can infer that Black men are cognizant of various expressions of masculinity; the distinct deliveries of racial identity and the intersections thereof.

Finally, the researcher ultimately strived to define Black masculinity which centered the experiences of Black men. By formally presenting a progressive definition for Black masculinity
in conjunction with the Progressive Black Masculinity framework (Mutua, 2006), this aids in uninterrupted deconstruction of oppression and systemic social systems. The findings also model the continued extensions of layered Black identities and the core self-work journey Black men must frequently engage in. The next sections provide recommendations for practice and future research.

**Recommendation for Practice**

There are several recommendations of practice based on the findings of this research. The researcher’s recommendations are as follows: identify models that examine the identity development of intersecting social identities, deconstruct the emotional suffering of performing masculinity, and compile a digital record of Black men challenging and resisting patriarchal masculinity. The intersections of sexual orientation, racial membership, gender, and religious membership manifest within, groups and forces men to prioritize different aspects of their identities (Marcus, 2015). The researcher’s initial recommendation based on the findings of this research would be to identify a developmental model that centers the intersectionality of social identities while seeking liberation from systematic oppression. As mentioned and assumed in previous models of identity development, the Cross’s model (1991) as well as many other racial identity development models’ centers whiteness in opposition to being Black. While for one participant, his parent was White; thus, his identity development was in constant interaction with Whiteness not as an opposition.

The second recommendation for practice would be to examine the common assumption that men should “suffer in silence” and not express any physical or emotional discomfort. The “suffering in silence” or emotional suppression is a common feature in depressed men who rigidly conform to masculine norms (Nadeau, Balsan, Rochlen, & Liu, 2016). As mentioned in
the thematic findings of three (existing in my own tweets), Black men need to express their
discomfort and seek community members for help. While on Twitter, the participants alluded to
tweeting their discomfort based on their racial or masculine identity and having their audience
members (followers) reply back with words of affirmation. Eysenbach, Torous, Lahti, Rice, et al., (2017) reported that Twitter is perceived as a safe space so users can discuss pressing issues
or mental health concerns openly without feeling judged by others. As the title of this
dissertation includes #AmIManEnough, this hashtag serves as the beginning of creating a digital
space for Black men to voice many of their frustrations with the ongoing development of their
identity.

The final recommendation of practice is to compile a digital narrative of Black men
challenging the shared beliefs of masculinity and racial identity. The process of counter
storytelling is useful to understand the historical and political power, privilege, and oppression of
marginalized communities in the United States (Zinn, 1994; Beatty & Salinas, 2016). While
social media provides an assortment of opportunities to share and spread messages. This
researcher finds it to be a necessity for Black men to have a reflection of themselves in the
media. The most considerable disadvantage for Black males is the lack of control in imagery and
the inconsistent ideology of masculinity. The previous images of Black men have notoriously
been identified under the limited lens of an athlete, thug, or entertainer. Using social media in
education can uncover interactive and information motives for its use (Neier & Zayer, 2015).
This review has also presented numerous efforts that institutions could help Black males cope
with masculinity. Technology can also provide a larger aspect of connecting with online
communities across various mediums. In research, technology has improved many classroom
interactions in creating new spaces for learning and bi-cultural experiences. By employing all of
these recommendations for practice, it will allow me as a researcher to conduct future studies that will yield optimal results.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the findings of this study, one recommendation for future research is to examine digital identity development across multiple social media platforms and include a global perspective. Apartheid in South Africa created and reinforced a hierarchy of race and gender with the consequence that white men and boys are the apex of society (Bhana, 2009). If a man does not abide by the traditional gender norms and show emotional vulnerability, not only is his self-concept at risk, but also his reputation in the eyes of other men may be comprised. The construction of masculinity does not hold the same meaning from culture to culture Kimmel (2006) defines American masculinity as not much relation to women but in relation to another male. For generations Black men have navigated an environment of hostile racial oppression, signifying offered a site of resistance and allowed for double-voiced and encoded communication (Florini, 2014).

In South Africa, scholars and practitioners know very little about the particular ways in which early childhood are given meaning to masculinities, in South Africa for example gender violence, particularly in areas of poverty and social depression, led to an examination of violent African masculinities (Bhana, 2009). The perception of masculinity varies in micro, macro, and global levels. The difficulty in viewing positive racial identity has stemmed from slavery in pictures, movies, and stories. Black males have been depicted as (1) criminals, (2) hyper-sexual or (3) athletes and rarely beyond these images. While in South Africa, have thus been particularly problematic in the context of the HIV and AIDS pandemic (Bhana, 2009).
Amongst the culture of social media users, Facebook has a family-oriented emphasis, Twitter presents news at your fingertips, and Snapchat reveals only a few seconds of an encounter. In each different medium, users can showcase every facet of their identity. While this study only examined Twitter, other platforms would cause different interactions with followers, and users will find a different method to cope. In another avenue, incorporating the finding of this research introduces new ways institutions of higher learning could market to perspective Black male students. With the technological advancements of social media and mobile devices, having information accessible to your fingertips at any time of the day at unimaginable speed eases the tension many first-year students might have when it comes to searching for answers about arriving at a new institution.

Access to new social media platforms and online information might address some of the existing disparities in access to information about college, providing students with a potentially unbounded source of information about college life, costs, and application requirements (Brown, Wohn, & Ellison, 2016). The corporate brand defines “what” the organization that will deliver and stand behind what they are offering by providing a rich heritage; values and priorities; citizenship programs; and a performance record (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012). Media selection, message timing, and content is crucial to the success of an advertising campaign, because individuals have a variety of communication choices, many businesses choose to use all of them with hopes of earning the attention of the public (Martin, 2015). The final section of this research summarizes the entire experience.

Implications for Personal Practice

This creative body of work has ministered more to me as a personal transformation than just a research study. I believe scholarly work serves two purposes, to challenge the scholar in
their personal beliefs and to move the academic needle by continuing to speak against social injustices and oppression. As a Black man who seeks to continue scholarly work tied to Black men, it was refreshing to see the multifaceted approach that Black men utilized to challenge and resist these instances of injustice and oppression. As a scholar-practitioner, this research felt personal in that the participant’s experiences allowed me to internally question and resist the notions of masculinity that I prescribed to in my everyday life.

The findings of this study bring forth necessary questions for Black men to search within themselves in regard to standing as gatekeepers to masculinity and ultimately patriarchy. The self-discovery journey of the five Black male participants in this study proves the level of consciousness of self, community and cultural to dismantle oppression in every facet. Each participant had a different entry of exposure to masculinity, and while navigating masculinity, each participant experienced violence and pressure to conform. These findings also bring forth the necessary steps for institutions of higher learning and organizations to stop circulating many dominate or limiting imagery in regard to supporting Black men in society.

As institutions of higher learning, current and future practitioners persist in creating programs that specifically target the enrollment, matriculation, and graduation rates of Black men. As various mediums of news and social media uphold the nostalgic imagery of slavery and criminal coverage, I employ that stakeholders on campuses do more than teaching the soft skills as well as dress for success, mentoring, and career preparation. I also challenge corporations to forsake in posting ancient mugshots of Black men, continue writing the deficit narrative and hereafter being the spokesperson for oppression and supremacy. In protest, I want to develop curriculums, create spaces and advocate for every Black expression that exists for Black men. I invite Black men, researchers and scholar-practitioners to do the internal self-work; to question
inward implicit biases; and in turn, cease from teaching Black men violence and submission in order to exist.

As society and technology continue to make strides in advancements, the inhabitants within various communities should model the same forward progress. The patriarchal club that was alluded to in this study must cease to exist as the foundation is built on male dominance. This dominance and chase of power have birthed disenfranchisement beyond Black men and a declaration towards liberation has no choice but to begin. I ask institutions and news outlets to show more than athletes, drug dealers, and entertainers in news coverages, but the spectrum of positive Black male images that exist.

For those in close proximity of Black men, I ask that these individuals also recognize that Black men have to do their internal work. The collective community can agree to work alongside other men, women, non-gender conforming, and marginalized populations to war against patriarchy. To our community members, spirit and body is not a rehabilitation center for Black men; it is a Black man’s control and choice to heal and stop oppressing himself and others. For Black men, this is only one route; one point of thought; and one fascinating body of literature of many that summons you to renew outlook on maleness, masculinity, and racial identity. This research is a plea to stop ignoring your emotions and suffering in silence; to end sacrificing your allegiance to an immoral institution of oppression, and to give up senseless acts of violence. The marathon continues for each of us. The final section of this research summarizes the entire body of literature.

**Summary**

The inclusion of the global and historical perspective of race and masculine identity development gives scholar practitioners a path to trace its birth. While on this path, the
researcher identified slavery’s impact on the performance and presentation of African-American males. The researcher also examined the impact of rape, heteronormative behavior and homosexuality. The western construction of masculinity differs within western civilization; the South African construction of masculinity also fluctuates. An important thought to consider is how both international contexts mesh together when you consider global education and the response to educating Black or African males.

The Civil Rights and Black Power Movement tried to regain the image of Black males but did not respectively include many gender expressions of masculinity. Both movements created the largest separation before these modern times of social media, there are still strong beliefs from this moment that “less” masculine, queer or gay males were not involved; however, many prominent Black male figures did identify as queer or gay. Finally, with the influx usage of social media, digital identity, and digital spaces are the new wave of interactions that Black males must overcome. The issues of racial and masculine identity development are not left for Whites or women of color to fix, but it starts with men first. Men must come to realize the damage done to themselves mentally, our family and spouses, and others. The community of men must continue to seek the difference between socialized male traits of what masculinity is or should be and embrace the spectrum that may exist. Masculinity is not what we are but the qualities we possess that contribute to our character.

This study provided an extensive examination of how Black men utilize Twitter as an extension of Cool Pose to navigate their racial and masculine identity development. Each participants’ narratives were unique to their gender, sexual orientation, age and geographical location. Also, there were numerous similarities among each participant when centering racial
and masculine identity. The findings presented in this research opens a new avenue to study Black men in various academic areas to combat the myriad of stereotypical storytelling.

All the Black men in this study sought to express their masculine and racial identity as many other Black men do, but these experiences were unique because they provided chronological diary of development for the participants. The utilization of Twitter is one of many vehicles to examine Black men and their development. The interesting factor of Twitter is the ability to present authenticity and cultivate a community around one’s digital identity. The findings in the research provided three thematic narratives to both tied to masculinity and racial identity. In no way should Black men become introduced to maleness by the way of violence. Nor should any woman or man be victims of masculinity for entrance in the club of patriarchy.

The essence of this dissertation remained grounded in the ability to search of the various ways Black men seek vulnerability, acceptance and a distinguished identity. The resistance of each Black male in this study paves a new path for Black men to seek as an option. In no manner was this dissertation another route that Black men should follow, the attempts of this research were to just show there’s more than one way. As bell hooks (2001) wrote,

“To heal our wounded communities which are diverse and multilayer, we must return to a love ethic, one that is exemplified by the combined forces of care, respect, knowledge, and responsibility” (p.4).

Black men, I love you.
Reference


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Judge, M (2, February 2018). #BlackMenSmiling Is the Most Beautiful Thing on Twitter Right Now -- and it's Trending Worldwide. Retrieved from


Mitchell, D. J., & Means, D. R. (2014). Quadruple consciousness: A literature review and new theoretical consideration for understanding the experiences of black gay and bisexual


Wendt, S. (2007). ‘They finally found out that we really are men’: Violence, non-Violence and black manhood in the civil rights era. Gender & History, 19(3), 543-564.


Appendix

Appendix 1

Signed Informed Consent Document

Northeastern, College of Professional Studies
Name of Investigators: Principal Investigator, Dr. Adriel Hilton, Student Researcher, Michael R. Williams
Title of Project: AmIManEnough: Black Male Masculine Identity Development in the Digital Landscape of Twitter

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
You have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share about Black male racial-ethnic identity development on social media. This research project focuses on the experience of Black men who engage with others (audience members) on Twitter to develop their masculine identity. Through this study, the researcher hopes to gain more insight into how Black men challenge, reject or accept Twitter's perception of Black masculinity. Hopefully, this will allow this researcher to identify ways in which we can better understand Cool Pose, Black masculinity development, and effectiveness of social media.

Who will be using and disclosing information about me?
The researcher, Michael Williams and the Principal Investigator, Adriel Hilton, will be the only ones with access to the tapes which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. Physical tapes will be kept in a locked facility and virtual materials will be stored in a secure, password protected google drive. Three years after publication, taped transcripts will be destroyed.

What will I be asked to do?
If you decide to take part in this study, the researcher will first ask you to recall your experiences and understanding of your racial and masculine development while on Twitter in an interview. Then during a second interview, the researcher will ask you to select between (7-10) tweets that depict how you carried out, challenged, or rejected the notion of masculinity.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?
The first interview will be via FaceTime, Skype or Google Hangout at a location of your choice. The initial interview will last between 45-60 minutes; in this interview you will be required to
answer 10-12 questions. The second interview with your (7-10) selected tweets will last the same amount of time 45-60 minutes.

**Will I benefit by being in this research?**
There are no direct benefits to this study however, potential benefits for others include: increased learning benefits towards a better understanding of racial and masculine identity development and an emotional benefit of exploring distress as a result of racial, gender, and masculine identities once the study is published.

**Who will see the information about me?**
If the participant’s identity WILL be matched to their responses: Participants will provide their Twitter user account names and (7) selected tweets that describe their experiences with their racial and masculine identity development on Twitter. **There is NO confidentiality in this study for any participants. All transcripts will be kept at home in a secured locked folder or stored in a secured cloud based online application. No videos will be stored of the participants during the duration of the study, all submitted tweets will be shredded, and the informed consent forms will be kept for a maximum of two years on the researcher’s good drive. Access to any materials will be limited to Michael R. Williams or Adriel Hilton. Three years after the conclusion of this study, all materials will be destroyed.**

**If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?**
Participation in this study is strictly voluntary, and participants may cease participation at any time. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time.

**What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?**
Participation in this research is not expected to result in harm to participants and there are no special arrangements made for compensation or for payment for treatment solely based on participation in this research.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact the student researcher, Michael Williams, 314.590.3538 or Williams.mich@husky.neu.edu or Dr. Adriel Hilton, a.hilton@northeastern.edu, the Principal Investigator

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**
If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, and Mail Stop: 560-177, 360 Huntington Avenue, Northeastern University, and Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@northeastern.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.
**Will it cost me anything to participate?**
There is no cost to participation.

*I agree to take part in this research.*

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Appendix 2

UNSIGNED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Northeastern, College of Professional Studies
Name of Investigators: Principal Investigator, Dr. Adriel Hilton, Student Researcher, Michael R. Williams
Title of Project: AmIManEnough: Black Male Masculine Identity Development in the Digital Landscape of Twitter

Request to Participate in Research

We would like to invite you to take part in a research project. This research project focuses on the experience of Black men who engage with others (audience members) on Twitter to develop their masculine identity. Through this study, the researcher hopes to gain more insight into how Black men challenge, reject or accept Twitter's perception of Black masculinity. Hopefully, this will allow this researcher to identify ways in which we can better understand Cool Pose, Black masculinity development, and effectiveness of social media. The study will take place in a virtual setting using the applications FaceTime, Skype, or Google Hangout and will take about 45-60 minutes. If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to discuss your opinions about your racial and masculine identity development while on Twitter. The possible risks or discomforts of the study are minimal. You may feel a little uncomfortable/embarrassed/sad/tired/from answering personal/sensitive/questions.

Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. You will be identified as an individual in this research project when you select (7) personal tweets from your account. There is NO confidentiality in this study. The decision to participate in this research project is up to you. You do not have to participate, and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may withdraw at any time.

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact the student researcher, Michael Williams, 314.590.3538 or Williams.mich@husky.neu.edu or Dr. Adriel Hilton, a.hilton@northeastern.edu, the Principal Investigator

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, and Mail Stop: 560-177, 360 Huntington Avenue, Northeastern University, and Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@northeastern.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

You may keep this form for yourself.

Thank you.

Michael R. Williams
Appendix 3

Interview Protocol

Introduction

I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University in the College of Professional Studies. I am conducting interviews about the racial and masculine identity development of Black men while utilizing Twitter. I also seek to examine if Twitter can be a means of coping.

Background – Racial Identity Development
1. Please tell me about yourself.
2. How do you identify your racial identity?
   a. What salient identities are important to you (race, gender, class, religion, etc.)
3. Tell me about your racial identity offline of social media
   a. How do you express your racial identity offline (i.e. Twitter)?

Meaning of Masculinity
1. What does it mean to be masculine?
   a. What does it mean to be a man?
   b. Does your answer of being a man differ when you consider your racial identity?
2. In which ways did you learn to be masculine
   a. How does your answer differ when you consider your racial identity as a Black man?
   b. What is it like to be a Black man offline (i.e. Twitter)?

Twitter Usage
1. Does your avatar (social media picture) reflect you in real life? Why or Why not?
   a. When did you join Twitter? Why?
   b. Which social sub-community if any do you belong to while on Twitter?
2. How do you portray your racial identity on Twitter?
   a. Does your racial identity online differ from your racial identity offline?
3. How do you portray your masculine identity on Twitter?
   a. Does your masculine identity online differ from your masculine identity offline?
4. Have you ever used Twitter to cope with your racial identity online?
   a. Have you ever used Twitter to cope because of an offline incident concerning your racial identity?
5. Have you ever used Twitter to cope with your masculine identity online?
   a. Have you ever used Twitter to cope because of an offline incident concerning your masculine identity?
Appendix 4

Tweet Content Analysis Interview

Instructions: To complete this remainder of the interview, please submit the following to Michael R. Williams, Williams.mich@husky.neu.edu

Submit 7-10 tweets that help describe your (a) racial identity, (b) masculine identity, or (c) both racial and masculine identity

Tag the tweet using the hashtag #AmIManEnough or screenshot the tweet and submit the tweet to me via email Williams.mich@husky.neu.edu

Schedule the second interview after submitting the tweets

If you have any questions or concerns during this phase, please contact me at Williams.mich@husky.neu.edu
Appendix 5

Email Invitation Letter sent from Williams.mich@husky.neu.edu

Dear [Participant]

Thank you for expressing your interest in this study. I am a doctoral candidate at Northeastern University in the College of Professional Studies examining the (1) racial and masculine identity development of Black men who utilize Twitter and (2) the usefulness of Twitter being an extension of Cool Pose; a coping mechanism to combat societal pressures. There is NO confidentiality in this study as the researcher will utilize your public Twitter username.

This email is to recruit your participation in my dissertation to complete the requirements in the Higher Education Administration program. I am eager to hear about your experiences as a Black man. I am inquiring you to engage in two interviews, these interviews will last between 45-60 minutes. Please reply back via email or by phone to let me know if you’re interested.

If you have any questions or to volunteer for this study, email me at Williams.mich@husky.neu.edu. Emails to any other email address must be deleted with no response per Northeastern University IRB.

Thank you,

Michael R. Williams

Ed.D. Candidate, Higher Education Administration

Northeastern University, Boston, MA

Williams.mich@husky.neu.edu

314.590.3538
Appendix 6

Letter to @BlackMenSmile

Northeastern University
20 Belvidere, 360 Huntington Ave. Boston MA 02115

{Date}

Dear @BlackMenSmile,

My name is Michael R. Williams, a doctoral candidate at Northeastern University in the College of Professional Studies’ Higher Education Administration Program conducting my research for my dissertation that examines Black men’s racial and masculine identity development while engaged in Twitter. I aim to understand how Black men use social media to challenge, reject, or accept the notion of masculine, while also understanding if Twitter could be an extension of Cool Pose.

My research study utilizes qualitative methods and interviews as the primary source of data. I am highly interested in conducting interviews with a diverse population of Black men, since your organization specifically targets this population, I am seeking your assistance in helping to identify potential Black men for this study. The interviews will cover racial identity development, masculinity development, and Twitter usage. The interviews will last between 45-60 minutes and each session will be to the comfort level of the participants.

Your organization @BlackMenSmile would have to post my approved IRB flyer on your Instagram page for a period of (1) one week. If any interested participants should direct message (DM) you please have them contact me at my email Williams.mich@husky.neu.edu.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at Williams.mich@husky.neu.edu or 314.590.3538.

This authorization covers the time period of xx to July 1 2019.

If you approve the posting of my IRB approved flier, please sign and return this letter by [insert date]

{Authorization Official signature}

{Contact Information}
Appendix 7

Debriefing Statement

Thank you for your participation in this research study. The goal of this study was to (1) analyze the racial and masculine identity development of Black men while engage in Twitter utilization and (2) examine if Twitter could be used as an extension of Cool Pose. In this study you were asked you recall your experiences of developing your racial and masculine identities. You were also asked you submit (7-10) tweets that depicted both identities online.

Your participation was greatly appreciated by the researcher involved and the data you provided could possibly help how Black men are portrayed in media and printed materials. The objective of this research is to provide liberation for Black men to freely express themselves.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at Williams.mich@husky.neu.edu or 314.590. 3538 or Dr. Adriel Hilton at a.hilton@northeastern.neu.edu.

Finally, we urge you not to discuss this study with anyone else who is currently participating or might participate at a future point in time. As you can certainly appreciate, we will not be able to examine directed forgetting in participants who know about the true purpose of the project beforehand.

Thank you!